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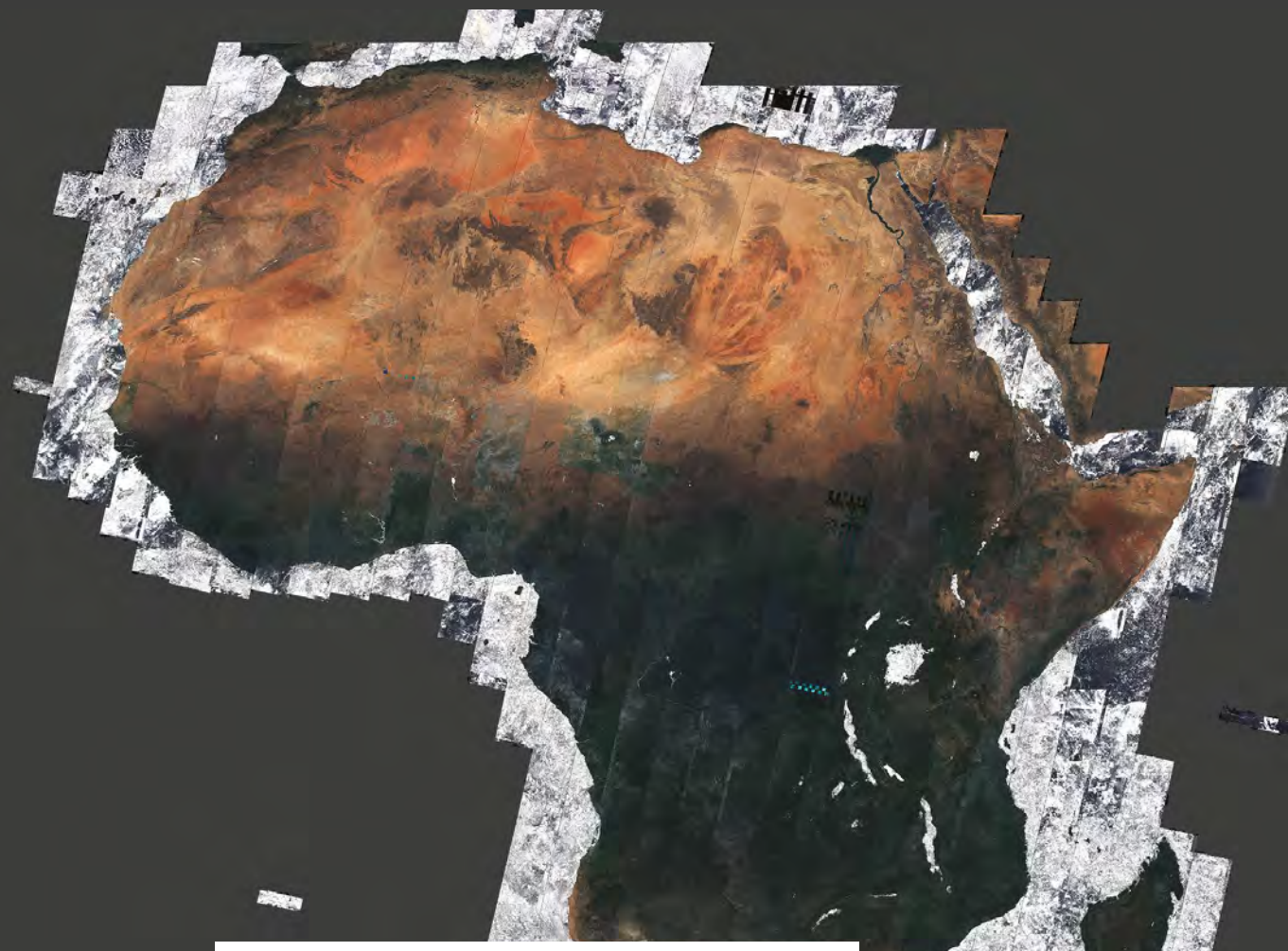

AFRICAN SPACES

The new geopolitical frontlines

Edited by
Giovanni Faleg

With contributions from
Eyob Balcha Gebremariam, Fergus Kell, Katariina Mustasilta, Luigi Narbone, Carlo Palleschi, Patryk Pawlak, Luca Raineri, Jeanne Ramier, Norman Sempijja, Alex Vines, Sean Woolfrey

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The editor

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global powers are increasingly scrambling to project influence in Africa, a continent that has in recent years gained new geopolitical centrality. Who these actors are and how they engage with African countries has been the subject of several analyses, including *Chaillot Paper* No 158, 'African Strategies: European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa' (published in June 2020).

The present *Chaillot Paper* asks 'where' the new scramble for Africa is taking place. It looks at emerging geopolitical spaces, defined as areas in which power relations among external players, state and non-state actors are constructed, and explores how the dynamics between these actors are reflected in practices of competition or cooperation. Space is not just a territory. It can encompass a broader range of 'non-national' and 'non-territorial' dimensions, such as cyberspace or a trade area, which have recently emerged at the forefront of geopolitics due to new information and communication technologies, economic and globalisation forces, as well as (real and virtual) social interactions. By moulding perceptions, new discourses and narratives can also reshape a space, which in turn influences countries' foreign policies and strategies.

The objective of this volume is to identify new priorities for strategic planning, resulting from the 'where' question formulated above. Eight spaces have been selected based on their potential to transform African geopolitics, due to their impact on power relations in the continent. They are divided into two categories. The first one (Part I of this volume) includes geographical areas that have acquired new significance and gained geopolitical prominence. The second one (Part II) covers functional spaces relating not to geography, but to activities, tasks or sectors, which have relevance insofar as they occupy a central position in social and political systems. Each chapter analyses a space, explaining what is changing, why, how new power relations are unfolding and what policy steps need to be taken to mitigate geopolitical risks.

Part I Contributions address the underlying question of how Africa's geography is reflecting evolving power dynamics:

> **Sands:** The regions North and South of the Sahara are being redefined as a space of connectivity, moving away from the conceptualisation of the Sahara Desert as a natural frontier akin to a 'dried ocean'.

> **Oceans**: Global rivalries are intensifying in two key geostrategic regional maritime spaces on opposing sides of Africa, which surround the continental landform: the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Guinea.

> **Cities**: Rapid urbanisation is putting cities at the centre of Africa's geopolitical dynamics, due to social pressures, economic transformations and political mobilisation originating within urban centres.

> **Peripheries**: Located on the margins of central state power and characterised as hybrid political and social orders, peripheries are key arenas of security dynamics due to the spread of violent conflicts, particularly the proliferation of Salafi-jihadist groups.

Part II of the volume covers functional spaces. Contributions address the question of whether these non-territorial arenas are set to replicate or overlap with challenges witnessed in the physical world.

> **Trade**: Africa's free trade area (AfCFTA) creates a continent-wide geopolitical space that reframes how governments, firms and citizens interact with one another in the economic sphere and influences how global partners engage with African countries.

- **Digital**: Because of a growing online population, digital connectivity plays a key role in African countries' economic and social development. Major powers contribute to shape the processes underpinning the transformation of the digital space in Africa.

- **Jobs**: In a crowded African job market, with high unemployment and a large informal employment sector as a result of the continent's 'youth bulge', geo-economic players are generating competitive dynamics to fulfil their strategic objectives. This is exacerbating the marginalisation of young people and social vulnerabilities.

- **Information**: Regional and global powers compete to control Africa's infosphere, the space where knowledge, information and narratives circulate. Some actors use 'sharp power' to manipulate information and influence citizens' perceptions for geopolitical gains.

Positive change within geographic and functional spaces can deliver stability outcomes, while keeping geopolitical rivalries in check and guarding against threats from predatory external players. The conclusion connects the dots between the different spaces, offering new guiding principles for a strategic relationship between the EU and African partners. It highlights the essential role of democratic and accountable African agency as the most powerful antidote against foreign interference, and the importance of inclusive and sustainable connectivity as an insurance policy against geopolitical fragmentation. The volume concludes by calling on African and European decision-makers to recalibrate their partnership in a multipolar world, shaping geopolitics instead of being defined by it.

INTRODUCTION

by
GIOVANNI FALEG AND LUIGI NARBONE

Unless I see (...), I will not believe
Saint Thomas

The new scramble for Africa [1], characterised by renewed interest in the continent by foreign powers determined to project economic, political and cultural influence there, has been a salient feature of the continent's geopolitical dynamics in recent years [2]. Rather than asking 'who' the geopolitical actors scrambling for Africa are [3], or how they interact, this *Chaillot Paper* asks 'where' geopolitical competition is taking place, why, and what are the implications for a stronger strategic partnership between African and European countries. To answer these questions, the paper looks at emerging geopolitical spaces in Africa. The latter are defined as the areas in which power relations, physical interactions and socio-economic dynamics among external powers, state and non-state actors are constructed [4], designating what is hostile *vs* what is friendly, what constitutes an opportunity *vs* what constitutes a risk, hence establishing practices of competition or cooperation.

A space is not just a territory delimited by physical or political boundaries [5]. It can encompass a broader range of 'non-national' and 'non territorial' dimensions, such as cyberspace, or the sphere of organised crime, all of which have gained prominence in geopolitical dynamics due to new information and communication technologies, economic and globalisation forces, as well as (real and virtual) social interactions. Today, geopolitics is affected by despatialising forces, which push power dynamics beyond the boundaries of geographical sovereignty embodied by the nation states [6]. Furthermore, geopolitical spaces are also a product of perceptions. Discourse influences perceptions and shapes the definition of new geopolitical spaces, which in turn determine countries' foreign policies and

(1) 'The new scramble for Africa', *The Economist*, 9 March 2019 (https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/03/07/the-new-scramble-for-africa).

(2) Faleg, G. and Palleschi, C., 'African Strategies: European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa', *Chaillot Paper* No. 158, EUISS, June 2020 (https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_158.pdf).

(3) Ibid.

(4) Critical geopolitics looks at space as variable, dynamic and evolutionary. It can be constructed or deconstructed by social, political, historical or technological processes. For a deeper analysis of the link between space and geopolitics, see: Spykman, N.J., 'Geography and foreign policy II', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 32, No 1, 1938, pp. 213-236; Abler, R., Adams, J. and Gould, P., *Spatial Organization: The geographer's view of the world*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971.

(5) See: Adamson, F.B., 'The changing geography of global security', in Gheciu, A. and Wohlforth, W. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018; Dalby, S. and O Tuathail, G. (eds.), *Rethinking Geopolitics*, Routledge, London, 1998.

(6) Luke, T.W., 'Discourses of disintegration, texts of transformation: re-reading realism in the new world order', *Alternatives*, Vol. 18, 1993, pp. 229-258.

strategies [7]. For instance, Morocco's growing trade and investment interests in West Africa consolidate the shared perception of a new strategic space, intensifying the North-South relationship and reducing the country's traditional involvement in North Africa. Projects such as the Great Green Wall and the Trans-African Highway Network can change the definition, perceptions and geopolitical relevance of the Sahelian-Saharan space. Up until the 1990s the quickest way to fly from one West African country to another was through Paris, a former colonial power. Recent changes and growing liberalisation and integration of the African airspace have altered that pattern, making it easier for people and freight to fly directly from Abidjan to Dakar [8]. Governments define spaces by attributing meanings and values through discourse. Peacebuilding spaces, for instance, have been portrayed as separate worlds with their own social, political and economic logics and norms [9].

Governments define spaces by attributing meanings and values through discourse.

NEW FRONTLINES OF GEOPOLITICS

This *Chaillot Paper* identifies eight spaces where geopolitical dynamics are at play in Africa, and which can be seen as the main arenas or frontlines of power competition in the continent. These spaces have been selected based on their 'transformative potential' for African geopolitics, meaning the capacity to define a new configuration of power and socio-economic relations in the continent, affecting the way actors cooperate or compete. The objective of this paper is to shed light on new priorities for strategic planning, resulting from two distinct types of spaces.

Geographic spaces: this category includes geographical areas that have acquired new significance and gained geopolitical prominence. The first one is the Sahara-Sahelian space, where the linkages between regions north and south of the Sahara have systemic implications for the whole continent. The second space is maritime, reflecting the growing importance of African oceans, in particular the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Guinea, for security and trade. The third one is the urban space, where the impact of cities as the 'centres' of Africa's (sustainable) development is set to increase. Finally, the fourth space is the one constructed and occupied by violent extremist groups, which claim control over parts of Africa's territory and have redefined the notion of 'periphery'. Analysis of these spaces addresses the underlying question of how African geography reflects evolving power dynamics.

Functional spaces: this category includes non-physical areas, where geopolitical dynamics are at play, spurred by new technologies, and by societal and economic drivers. A functional space relates not to geography, but to activities, tasks or sectors which have relevance insofar as they occupy a central position in social and political systems. The first such space is the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which defines a new space of continental economic integration, in contrast to the previous fragmentation of the continent into sub-regional blocs. The second space is online, and concerns the emergence of digital geopolitics in the continent, which has deep implications for state actors, as well as enterprises and citizens. Third, the job market, the

(7) Wendt, A., 'Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 46, 1992, p. 391–425.

(8) See: Jonga, M., 'African aviation – the wake-up call to a new era?', *Aerotime Hub*, 5 January 2021.

(9) Autessere, S., *Peaceland: Conflict resolution and the everyday politics of international intervention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014.

virtual space where employers search for employees and employees search for jobs, has also become an arena of geopolitical concern, particularly insofar as the interests of Africa's youth collide with those of foreign power players. The final one is the information space, a geopolitical space of knowledge, information and narratives, in which regional and global powers compete to gain influence, giving rise to the so-called 'battle of narratives'. Analysis of these spaces addresses the question of whether these four non-territorial arenas are set to replicate challenges witnessed in the physical world. The four functional spaces have been chosen because of their relevance shaping the foreseeable trajectories [(10)] of Africa's socio-economic dynamics.

2019 saw the highest number of conflicts in Africa since 1946.

WHY AFRICAN GEOPOLITICS IS CHANGING

The emergence of these frontlines is driven by powerful megatrends, such as population growth and climate change [(11)], and is partly the result of systemic pressures (e.g. the multipolar world) and exogenous shocks (e.g. the Covid-19 pandemic). But their evolution is heavily influenced by four trends that originated within the continent and gained prominence in recent years, each associated with geopolitical challenges.

First, sustained **economic growth** and transformation, which lasted for more than 20 years until the Covid-19 pandemic brought it to an abrupt halt. During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the demographic boom, coupled with economic restructuring, has led to a period of sustained economic growth for a majority of African countries. As a result, Africa's middle class has tripled to 313 million people, and represents today 34 % of the continent's population. Africa's middle class has been pivotal to educational, political and economic development across the continent and is strongest in countries that have a robust and growing private sector [(12)]. Barring prolonged negative effects of the Covid-19 crisis, the prospects of sustained growth are enhanced by the opportunities provided by the AfCFTA, which is set to increase trade between African countries, allowing for more exchanges of manufactured and processed goods, more knowledge transfers, and more value creation [(13)], and turning Africa into one of the fastest-growing regions in the world. However, growth is far from uniform throughout the continent, and diverging geopolitical and socio-economic dynamics as well as policy responses could result in deepening regional differences. This, in turn, may produce new economic divides and further fragment Africa's economic space, increasing vulnerability to geopolitical competition.

Second, negative **conflict trends** still plague several regions in Africa, modifying the contours of political spaces. Conflict-affected states have only incomplete control over their sparsely populated hinterlands and their capacity to provide basic services to local

(10) Faleg, G. (ed.), 'African Futures 2030: Free trade, peace and prosperity', *Chaillot Paper* No 164, EUISS, March 2021 (https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/african-futures-2030).

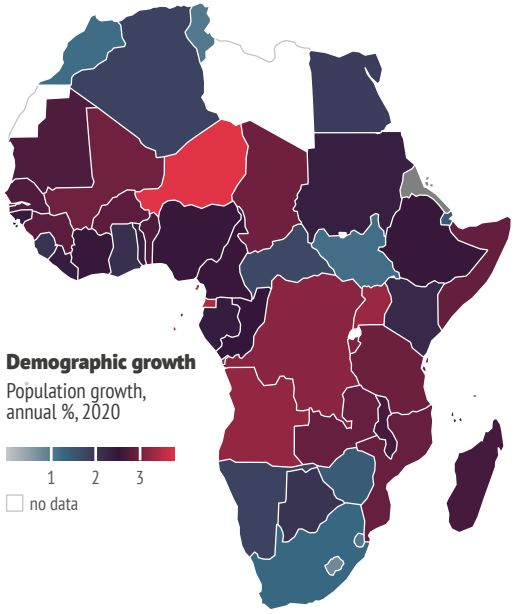
(11) For an overview of these megatrends and their effect on the African continent, see ibid, p. 21.

(12) The African Development Bank Group, 'The Middle of the Pyramid: Dynamics of the middle class in Africa', 20 April 2011 (https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/The%20Middle%20of%20the%20Pyramid_The%20Middle%20of%20the%20Pyramid.pdf).

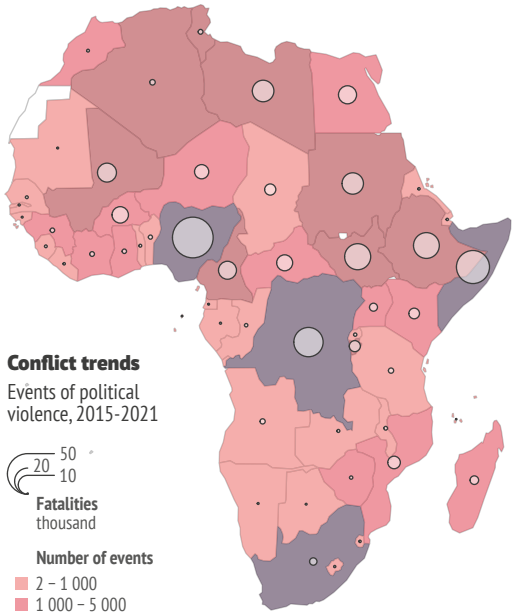
(13) Songwe, V., 'Intra-African trade: A path to economic diversification and inclusion', Brookings, 11 January 2019 (https://www.brookings.edu/research/intra-african-trade-a-path-to-economic-diversification-and-inclusion/).

Main trends

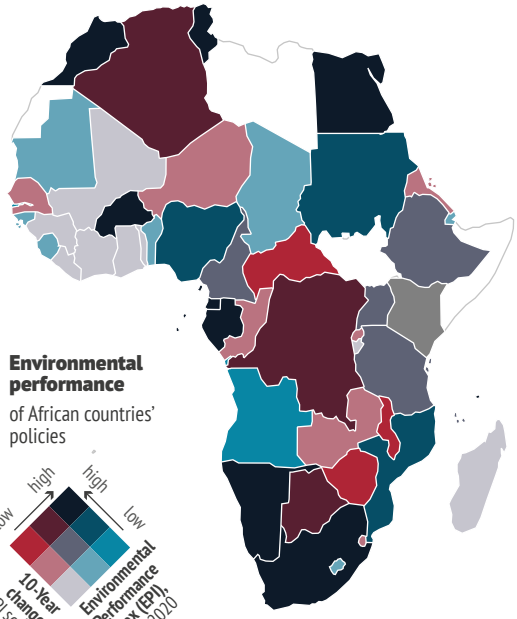
Four continental trends have gained prominence in recent years, driving geopolitical change.



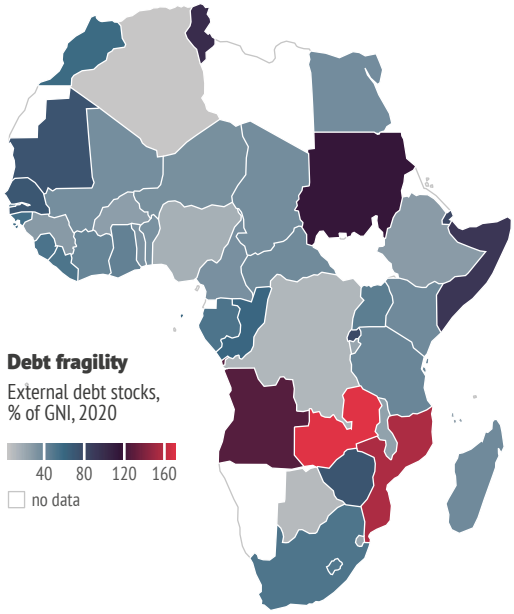
Data: World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2021



Data: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2022



Data: Yale University, *Environmental Performance Index 2020*, 2020



Data: World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2021

communities generally diminishes with the increase in the distance from the capital [(14)]. 2019 saw the highest number of conflicts in Africa since 1946 [(15)]. The continent counts 20 fragile or conflict-affected states and the new wave of civil wars that started in the early 2000s in central Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes tend to last longer and to involve multiple fighting factions, making negotiated settlements more difficult. These state-based conflicts share many common drivers, including legitimacy deficit of governments, a widening gap between the centre and peripheries, the armed contestation of state authority by non-state actors, and territorial integrity which is fragile or compromised – which may entail the presence of ungoverned areas. Conflicts turn frontiers into loci of power struggles, making it all the more difficult to break the conflict-cycles. The uneven distribution of population, resources, commodities, or strategic elements – deepwater ports for instance – has also led to selective targeting of specific spaces by external players for geopolitical or geo-economic purposes.

Third, greater **mobility and** enhanced **connectivity** are redesigning socio-economic spaces. These trends include areas such as digital transition, but also infrastructure development, urban mobility, rural accessibility, green energy and interurban connectivity. The spread of new technologies in Africa has increased transparency and accountability, boosted productivity and incomes, and helped the delivery of basic services, bringing countries and people closer together. Digitalisation may also provide an opportunity to leapfrog traditional development stages by creating new value-chains and access to far-away markets within the continent. Nonetheless, Africa's digital and physical infrastructure remains underdeveloped and the infrastructural gap is widening. The African Development Bank (AfDB) estimates that the continent's infrastructure financing needs will be as much as USD 170 billion a year by 2025, with an estimated gap of around USD 100 billion a year, which makes it challenging to provide Africa with the roads, dams, schools, pipelines, internet base stations and railways it needs. Filling this gap may make Africa more exposed to geopolitical challenges, such as over-reliance on foreign and private loan financing, creating the risk of debt traps, but also increase state fragility as governments cannot deliver on citizens' expectations. Without adequate infrastructure, Africa's capacity to protect its interest in maritime security, or support the blue economy, may also be undermined.

Fourth, **environmental degradation**, driven not only by climate change but also by factors such as rapid population growth, over-consumption, unsustainable management and depletion of natural resources, industrialisation, and also conflicts, has put pressure on African ecosystems. This has resulted in harm to habitats and wildlife with ensuing biodiversity loss, increased food insecurity, exacerbation of socio-economic deprivation and grievances, and the emergence of poverty traps for a large portion of the population living in rural areas who are dependent on natural resources for their own livelihoods. In turn, this also fosters increased pressure through intensified illicit and unsustainable use of natural resources (e.g. illegal logging, poaching, overfishing, animal trafficking, smuggling). There is substantial literature and evidence showing that this situation exacerbates drivers of fragility, conflict and violence, including by creating a fertile recruitment ground among the local population for extremist groups. Environmental degradation also comes with geopolitical implications,

Environmental degradation also comes with geopolitical implications.

(14) Herbst, J., *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in authority and control*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2014.

(15) 'African Futures 2030: Free trade, peace and prosperity', op.cit., p. 29.

such as for instance greater power competition for resource extraction processes. At sea, maritime habitat loss constitutes a growing security risk, as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing not only threatens the ecosystem, but also puts food security and regional stability at risk.

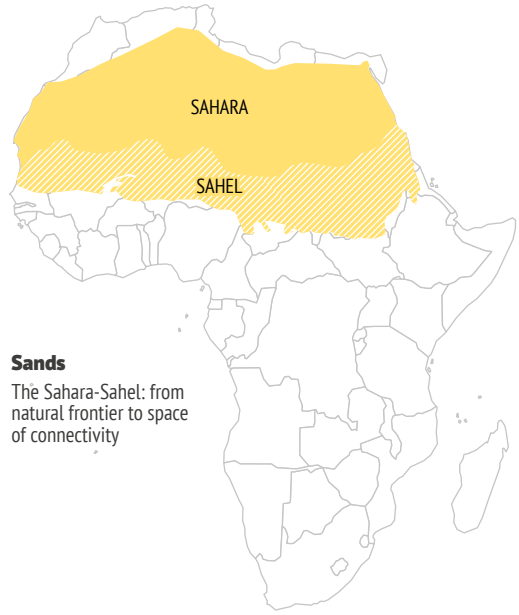
Against this backdrop, the next chapters account for the eight spaces that are fast becoming the frontlines of geopolitics. Each chapter is structured in three parts, explaining (i) how the space is transforming, describing observable change; (ii) why it is changing, what are the geopolitical drivers of transformation and the new power relations that are unfolding; and (iii) what are the policy implications for strategic planners seeking to mitigate geopolitical risks. Conclusions offer policy considerations for a stronger partnership between Africa and Europe, highlighting interlinkages between the different spaces, and showing the need for a coherent and integrated strategic approach.

Gulf of Guinea
Image: European Space Agency

GEOGRAPHIC SPACES

Geographic spaces

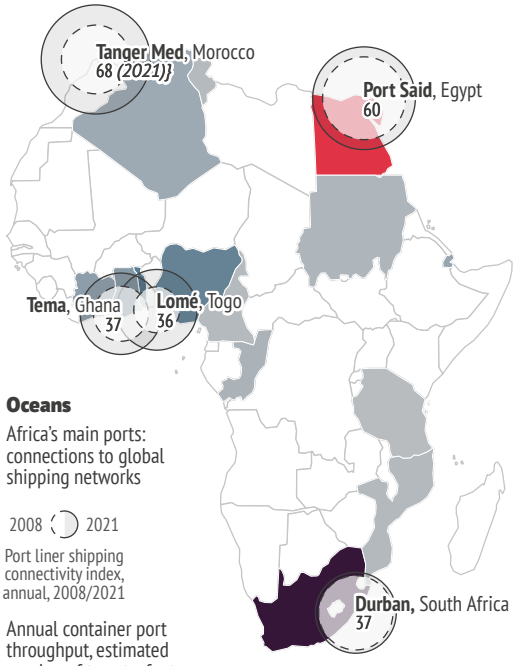
Four geographical arenas in Africa that have gained geopolitical prominence



Sands

The Sahara-Sahel: from natural frontier to space of connectivity

Data: North American Cartographic Information Society, 2012



Oceans

Africa's main ports: connections to global shipping networks

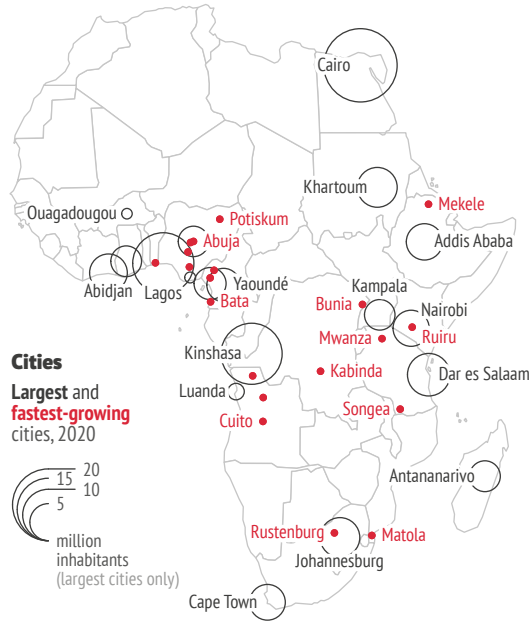
2008 2021

Port liner shipping connectivity index, annual, 2008/2021

Annual container port throughput, estimated number of twenty-foot equivalent units

1 3 5 million

Data: UNCTAD, Liner shipping connectivity index, 2021

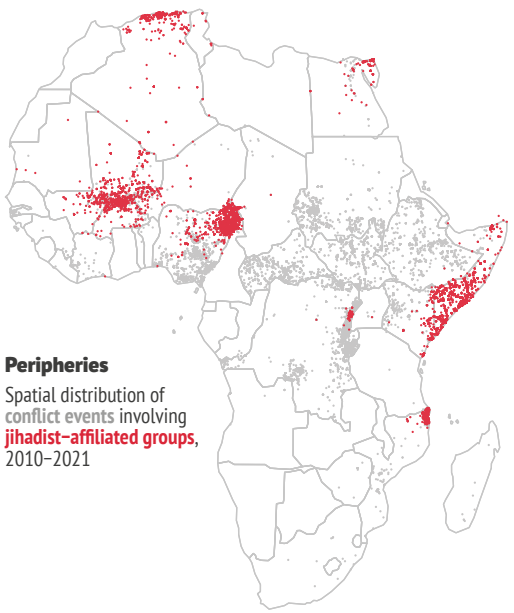


Cities

Largest and **fastest-growing** cities, 2020

15 20 10 5 million inhabitants (largest cities only)

Data: African cities research consortium, 2021



Peripheries

Spatial distribution of **conflict events** involving **jihadist-affiliated groups**, 2010–2021

Data: UCDP Candidate Events Dataset, 2019 and 2021

CHAPTER 1

SANDS

by
LUCA RAINERI

This chapter analyses how the regions north and south of the Sahara are being redefined as a space of connectivity, moving away from the conceptualisation of the Sahara Desert as a natural frontier akin to a 'dried ocean', separating two different Africas: a 'white' Africa to the north, linked to the Middle East and strongly oriented towards the Mediterranean region and the European neighbourhood; and a black, 'proper' Africa to the south. [1] It shows the security relevance of the transnational and international dynamics that are increasingly turning Africa into a unitary space, and explores the policy implications of this change. In particular, it argues that the EU should fine-tune its geopolitical approach and target its strategic investments to shepherd the transformation of the Sahara from a space of 'threat circulation' into a space of 'economic circulation', so as to help local states reap the benefits of increased connectivity.

The sands of the Sahara have quickly moved from the margins to the centre stage of geopolitics.

WHAT IS CHANGING

A long tradition of hegemonic worldviews and policy practices has forged the image of an African continent spatially fractured between two distinct regions: North and sub-Saharan Africa [2]. The allegedly limited interactions between them, and their gravitation towards spheres of influence outside them, were seen as driving the two regions apart.

Recent transformations, however, suggest that this spatial segregation of Africa is being eroded, if not eclipsed: cross-border flows of migrants, extremist ideas, smuggled weapons and criminal economies have increased dramatically across the region, alongside state fragility. The Saharan space is therefore no longer framed as a frontier buffering the interactions between two distinct security complexes [3], but as a connector of interdependent micro-regions [4].

(1) For a historiographic reconstruction, see: Aïdi, H., Lynch, M. and Mampilly, Z. (eds.), *Africa and the Middle East: Beyond the divides*, The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS), Washington D.C., 2020; Lecocq, B., 'Distant shores: a historiographic view on Trans-Saharan Space', *Journal of African History* Vol 56, No 1, 2015.

(2) Such a partition dates back to Greek and Arab cosmographies, has inspired colonial policies ('*politique des races*'), was sanctioned in the academic division of labour (orientalists vs. ethnographers) and eventually consecrated the institutional division between the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and sub-Saharan Africa regions within many UN and EU agencies.

(3) Buzan, B. and Waever, O., *Regions and Powers: The structure of international security*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003.

(4) McDougall, J. and Scheele, J. (eds.), *Saharan Frontiers: Space and mobility in Northwest Africa*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2012.

The sands of the Sahara have quickly moved from the margins to the centre stage of geopolitics, from the perspective of both Africa's sub-regions and international players. This change is the outcome of concurring transnational, international and regional dynamics.

WHY IT IS CHANGING

Transnational dynamics

The political earthquakes that sent shockwaves through North African countries – including Algeria in the 1990s, Libya in the 2010s, and the Arab Spring in 2011 – have had a destabilising impact right across the Sahara. Armed rebels and terrorist networks have become increasingly transnational, spilling over to the entire region. Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), for instance, developed from an outgrowth of Algerian jihadist formations, enabled the smuggling of weapons from Libya, and morphed with Malian rebels to seize the north of the country. Similarly, the diaspora of Algerian *mujahideen*, first, and subsequently of Libya's Islamic State cells, have considerably facilitated the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria [(5)]. Arms smuggled from Gaddafi's arsenals have been found in 16 different countries, fuelling conflicts as far away as in the Central African Republic (CAR) [(6)]. At the same time, Sudanese and Chadian rebels found a safe haven in southern Libya to stage attacks against the respective governments, fuelling *coup d'états* in both countries in 2020 and 2021.

The overall destabilisation of the region has contributed to making the trans-Saharan area a fertile ground for large-scale criminal enterprises, including inter-continental drug smuggling, trafficking of human beings, and extortionary protection rackets [(7)]. The steady growth in trans-Saharan migrant flows has increased sharply since the so-called Arab Spring in 2011. It is estimated that in 2016 more than 300 000 migrants transited through the Saharan town of Agadez on their way to Libya and, in some cases, to Europe. Local governments have proved unable, or unwilling [(8)], to decisively clamp down on the trans-Saharan smuggling networks which provide a key contribution to the integration and resilience of local economies. At the same time, the discovery of a particularly rich seam of gold stretching across the Sahara Desert has made the region an area not only of transit and circular migration, but also of inward migration, attracting tens of thousands of artisanal gold-miners around the rich gold deposits that have been discovered between Sudan and Mauritania since 2012. [(9)]

Education and religious scholarship, too, have become vectors of intense trans-Saharan connectivity. The provision of scholarships and religious training opportunities by North African countries, most notably Egypt and Morocco, to sub-Saharan students aims to hegemonise the claims to doctrinaire orthodoxy and control the spread of potentially destabilising religious discourses [(10)].

(5) Brigaglia, A. and Iocchi, A., 'Entangled Incidents: Nigeria in the Global War on Terror (1994–2009)', *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* Vol 10, No 2, 2020.

(6) Conflict Armament Research, *Investigating Cross-Border Weapon Transfers in the Sahel*, London, 2016 (https://www.conflictarm.com/reports/investigating-cross-border-weapon-transfers-in-the-sahel/).

(7) Micallef, M., Farrah, R., Bish, A. and Tanner, V., *After the Storm: Organized crime across the Sahel-Sahara following upheavals in Libya and Mali*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Geneva, 2019.

(8) Raineri, L., 'Human smuggling across Niger: state-sponsored protection rackets and contradictory security imperatives', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 56, No 1, March 2018.

(9) Chevrillon-Guibert, R., Gagnol, L. and Magrin, G., 'Les ruées vers l'or au Sahara et au nord du Sahel. Ferment de crise ou stabilisateur?', *Hérodote* No 173, 2019, pp. 193-216.

(10) See for instance: Werenfels, I., 'Maghrebi rivalries over sub-Saharan Africa. Algeria and Tunisia seeking to keep up with Morocco', *SWP Comment* No 54, Berlin, 2020 (https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/maghrebi-rivalries-over-sub-saharan-africa).

International dynamics

The transnational dynamics mentioned above have contributed over the past few decades to the Sahara becoming a space of major security investment by global and regional powers, which over time has resulted in enhanced geopolitical competition as the number of external players has grown [(11)]. This has acquired a regional dimension, contributing to consolidate connection points between countries and regions.

The European Union has made the Sahara-Sahel region the target of its first ever regional security strategy since 2011 [(12)] (further updated by the 2015 Regional Action Plan and the 2021 Integrated Strategy). Official documents highlight that the EU increasingly perceives the Sahara-Sahel as the southern edge of its (extended) neighbourhood, and therefore as a cornerstone of its own security. Aiming to tackle the transnational challenges of irregular migration, organised crime and terrorist networks, the EU has developed a complex security-and-development architecture to stabilise the Sahara-Sahel region, including an extensively staffed and funded common security and defence policy (CSDP) military mission – EUTM Mali, with 600 mandated staff and an annual budget of €16 million [(13)] – and extraordinary resources mobilised through innovative tools such as the EU Trust Fund for Africa (€5 billion pledged, €3.5 billion of which targeting the broader Saharan region), and the Alliance Sahel (€17 billion of financial commitments). Together, they articulate the EU's comprehensive response in the framework of a regional strategy that spans both sides of the Sahara, from Tripoli to Abuja, and from Nouakchott to Khartoum [(14)].

The EU increasingly perceives the Sahara-Sahel as the southern edge of its extended neighbourhood.

Converging with the EU's integrated approach, individual European Member States are stepping up their own efforts to stabilise the broader Saharan belt. Operation *Barkhane* – deployed across Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad – has been France's most ambitious (and expensive) military operation of the last decades. Germany and Italy are also strengthening their footprint by devoting an unprecedented level of diplomatic, economic and military resources to help Saharan countries (and, indirectly, France). Operation *Takuba* highlights the efforts of burden sharing and trust building that several EU Member States are willing to make by investing in security partnerships in/with Sahelian countries. And while *Barkhane* is set to be scaled down over the next few months, the trend of EU and Member States' engagement in the region remains upward.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States, too, has considerably increased its footprint in the region, building on the idea that poorly patrolled 'ungoverned spaces', including Saharan borderlands, provide a safe haven for terrorist groups to hide, thrive and recruit. With the 2002 Pan-Sahelian Initiative and the 2005 Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership, the United States set out to strengthen security partnerships with regional countries, and step up local armies' capacities to track down and eradicate terrorist cells,

(11) Cold-Ravnkilde, S.-M. and Lindskov, K., 'Disentangling the security traffic jam in the Sahel: constitutive effects of contemporary interventionism', *International Affairs*, Vol 96, No 4, 2020.

(12) European Union External Action Service (EEAS), 'Strategy for security and development in the Sahel' (https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/africa/docs/sahel_strategy_en.pdf).

(13) Tull, D., 'The European Union Training Mission and the Struggle for a New Model Army in Mali', Research Paper No 89, IRSEM, Paris, 2020 (https://www.irsem.fr/institut/actualites/research-paper-no-89-2020.html).

(14) 'African Strategies. European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa', op.cit.; Lebovich, A., 'Disorder from chaos: Why Europeans fail to promote stability in the Sahel', *Policy Brief*, ECFR, London, 2020 (https://ecfr.eu/publication/disorder_from_chaos_why_europeans_fail_to_promote_stability_in_the_sahel/).

under the coordination of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM). The rise of jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel has prompted the build-up of US direct intervention capacities. Niger, in particular, has become the hub of the United States' military presence in the continent, hosting special forces, sophisticated surveillance capacities, and attack drones targeting transnational flows of jihadist fighters and networks across the Sahara [(15)].

China, for its part, has dramatically scaled up its economic, diplomatic and security engagement across the entire continent, from Egypt to Angola and from Algeria to Ethiopia [(16)]. However, it is precisely in the broader Saharan space that China has proved particularly eager to demonstrate its renewed commitment to international peace and security. UN peacekeeping operations in South Sudan, Darfur and Mali harbour the largest Chinese military contingents abroad, suggesting that the stabilisation of the Saharan space is crucial to foster the global connectivity pursued by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The Saharan space also appears to provide particularly fertile terrain for the projection of Turkey's ambitious Africa policy. Saharan countries have become primary destinations of Turkish trade and aid. Turkish firms have considerably invested in the construction of critical infrastructures across the region, including the airports of Dakar, Niamey and Khartoum. Starting in 2020 Turkey has built up a firm military presence in Libya, and it has since boosted its diplomatic engagement with countries like Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal [(17)].

Regional powers

The changing political developments among local states, and particularly the behaviour of regional powers, also testifies to the growing interactions between North and sub-Saharan Africa. Facing diplomatic isolation in the 1990s, Algeria and Libya paved the way for North Africa's 'Africanist turn' proving instrumental in shepherding the creation of the African Union (AU). And in the 2000s, both countries invested in the stabilisation of the Saharan space by forging security coordination mechanisms with neighbouring countries, whether formal (Algeria) or informal (Libya). In 2017, Morocco rejoined the AU after a 33-year absence, culminating a long process of foreign policy reorientation towards Africa in Rabat, too. In an effort to countering increasing isolation in the Middle East, Morocco has greatly invested in leveraging transnational networks – religious, financial and cultural – to increase its own influence in the continent, and has become a privileged partner of several West African countries. In Egypt, the regulation of the Nile waters' regime has become an issue of existential importance in light of Addis Ababa's plans to build the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Managing the tense relationship with Ethiopia has become a top foreign policy priority, prompting Cairo's much greater involvement in the politics of the Horn [(18)].

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Interactions of a political, economic, cultural and security nature are growing at a rapid pace between North and sub-Saharan Africa,

(15) Berghezan, G., 'Militaires occidentaux au Niger: présence contestée, utilité à démontrer', *Note d'analyse du Grip*, Bruxelles, 2016.

(16) Taylor, I., *China's New Role in Africa*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2012.

(17) Armstrong, H., 'Turkey in the Sahel', International Crisis Group Commentary, Dakar-Brussels, July 2021 (https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/turkey-sahel).

(18) Gebreluel, G., 'Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam: Ending Africa's oldest geopolitical rivalry?', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol 37, No 2, 2014.

bringing the continent together. This process remains unachieved however. Transnational flows and geopolitical investments have considerably increased Africa's connectivity in the security realm, but the inadequacy of existing infrastructures prevents local states from reaping the positive economic benefits of Africa's growing integration. There is a serious lack of paved roads – let alone railroads – linking North Africa with sub-Saharan Africa; of pipelines to open up oil production in remote inland areas of the Sahara; and of power grids to supply Saharan towns and develop reliable communications with the outer world.

The unprecedented strategic significance accorded to the region could help marshal the resources to strengthen local states' foothold, and transform the Sahara from a space of threat circulation into a space of economic circulation. Next to more targeted investments, however, Africa's partners – and primarily the EU – need to adapt their geopolitical posture to the perceptions and ambitions of Africans. The EU's framing of the Sahara-Sahel as the external projection of its own southern border runs the risk of reinforcing the outdated trope of the Sahara as a frontier cutting Africa in two and the image of Africa as inherently divided, and of marginalisation as inevitable. The EU's perpetuation of spatial imaginaries that are seen as colonial could thus seriously undermine both the EU's contribution to Africa's development, and the overall acceptance of the EU in Africa. By contrast, the spatial vision that China strives to promulgate through its Belt and Road Initiative, whereby connectivity enables prosperity and unity, is much more likely to meet local demands, generate enthusiasm and amplify Beijing's soft power. If the EU wants to build a strategic partnership with Africa, then it should first and foremost treat Africa as one unitary space. That entails supporting, not combating, trans-Saharan mobility.

CHAPTER 2

OCEANS

by
ALEX VINES AND FERGUS KELL

A lack of domestic capacity and attention by African countries has meant that the African maritime domain has traditionally been saturated with external actors, both in the commercial and security sectors. Most vessels docking at African ports are foreign flagged [(1)], while prominent security crises, particularly of piracy and armed robbery at sea, have drawn in a broad-based international naval presence. Yet strategic priorities and changing threats are rapidly creating new dynamics in the continent, as on the one hand evolving global rivalries intensify competition over trade, military infrastructure and the security of key sea lines of communication (SLOCs), while on the other some African states gradually awaken to the significance of their maritime domain and cast aside the 'seablindness' of the past [(2)], reflecting a gradual and still incomplete awakening of African agency and engagement in the maritime arena. This chapter focuses on changes affecting two key geostrategic regional maritime spaces on opposing sides of Africa, which together surround the continental landform: the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) and the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) respectively.

WHAT IS CHANGING

Western Indian Ocean and Red Sea

The Western Indian Ocean region [(3)] rapidly emerged as a focal point for global maritime security concerns during the peak years of the Somali piracy crisis from 2008–2012. Threats to vessels operating along a vital global shipping route drew an unprecedented international naval force to the region, the result of a UN Security Council resolution [(4)] authorising operations within Somali territorial waters. China, India, Iran and Russia all launched independent missions in 2008, adding to multilateral deployments via the EU's Operation *Atalanta*, the

(1) African countries own just 1 % of global shipping fleets. See Hersi, A. and Sharamo, R.D.,'East Africa has yet to tap its full maritime potential', *ISS Africa*, 11 November 2020 (https://issafrica.org/iss-today/east-africa-has-yet-to-tap-its-full-maritime-potential).

(2) Prominent examples include South Africa, the Seychelles and Mauritius. See Rustomjee, C., 'Green shoots for the African blue economy?', Policy Brief No 132, Centre for International Governance Innovation, May 2018 (https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/documents/PB%20No.132.pdf).

(3) The African states within the WIO include Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa and Tanzania. See Obura, D., 'Reviving the Western Indian Ocean Economy: Actions for a sustainable future', WWF Report, 2017 (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/13692WWF2.pdf).

(4) UN Security Council, Resolution 1816, S/RES/1816(2008), 2008 (https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/627953?ln=en#record-files-collapse-header).

US-led Combined Maritime Forces and NATO's Operation *Ocean Shield*. Yet while pirate attacks in the region have been almost eradicated since their peak, with no successful incidents reported in 2019 [5], maritime-related engagements by external actors have both widened and deepened over the same period.

Recent years have seen notably more emphasis from external states on creating a regional footprint via the development of strategic maritime infrastructure points. Nearly a decade after its initial counter-piracy deployment, China established a naval base in Djibouti in 2017 and has invested heavily in constructing nearby Doraleh Multipurpose Port, Africa's largest and deepest port – at which the Chinese Navy is reported to have a dedicated berth [6]. India has moved to establish its 'string of flowers' network of naval facilities in the WIO, with reciprocal access agreements in place for French, Japanese and US bases [7]; a network of coastal radar surveillance stations, including in Madagascar; [8] and efforts to develop naval facilities on Seychellois [9] and Mauritian [10] islands. Russia has also sought to build up its maritime presence and negotiated for commercial and naval facilities in Sudan under the Bashir administration [11]. Several Western states have longer-term footprints in the WIO and Red Sea regions: the United States (since 2002), Italy (since 2013) and France (since 1977) have military facilities in Djibouti, while France regards itself as a dominant player in the WIO owing to its *département* territories of Réunion and Mayotte – the former hosting a Regional Operational Centre for Surveillance and Rescue.

Foreign Naval Presence

Horn of Africa

Data: European Commission, GISCO, 2022

(5) 'African Futures 2030: Free trade, peace and prosperity', op.cit.

(6) Melvin, N., 'The foreign military presence in the Horn of Africa region', SIPRI, 2019 (https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/sipribp1904_2.pdf).

(7) Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 'Ports and Partnerships: Delhi Invests in Indian Ocean Leadership', 5 December 2019 (https://amti.csis.org/ports-and-partnerships-delhi-invests-in-indian-ocean-leadership/).

(8) Vines, A. and Oruitemeka, B. 'Engagement with the African Indian Ocean Rim states', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 14, No 2, 2007, pp. 111-123.

(9) Revi, V., 'India's approach towards Seychelles in the Indian Ocean Region', Observer Research Foundation, 26 April 2021 (https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-approach-towards-seychelles-in-the-indian-ocean-region/).

(10) Ritzen, Y. , 'Evidence points to secret Indian navy base on Mauritian island', Al Jazeera Investigations, 3 August 2021 (https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/3/evidence-points-to-secret-indian-navy-base-on-mauritian-island).

(11) RFI, 'Sudan lawmakers to review Russian navy base deal: FM', 12 July 2021 (https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20210712-sudan-lawmakers-to-review-russian-navy-base-deal-fm).

Power dynamics between the Gulf states have also been projected into the African side of the Red Sea. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has sought to develop its own network of port facilities, including a base in the Eritrean port city of Assab, which had been closely linked to training and equipment for the conflict in Yemen but is now being scaled back; and 30-year concessions granted to UAE firms to manage and develop Berbera commercial port in Somaliland and Bosaso port in Puntland, Somalia[12]. Amidst mounting tensions with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, Qatar agreed a deal with Sudan in 2018 to jointly develop the port of Suakin[13] and moved to develop Hobyo port in Somalia in 2019[14] – but neither deal was finalised[15].

As these rival networks of strategic points for key SLOCs evolve, the African maritime space has become increasingly tied into broader dynamics of geopolitical rivalry stemming from the Indo-Pacific or Gulf regions. Within these rivalries themselves, the lines are blurring between traditional forms of 'hard' military infrastructure, the responses to newer maritime security considerations such as modern-day piracy or illicit trafficking, and economic ambitions for trade and commerce channels.

Gulf of Guinea

Piracy and armed robbery at sea is now the foremost issue influencing the geopolitical framing of the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) region off the coast of West Africa. Reported incident data indicates that it has overtaken the WIO as the world's global hotspot for attacks on ships, while pointing to attackers' increasing sophistication and violence[16] as well as a pivot towards kidnapping for ransom. In January 2021, the kidnapping of 15 Turkish sailors off the coast of Nigeria, in a raid in which one crewmember was killed, sparked global alarm over an unfolding crisis of similar proportions to Somalia[17].

There have been numerous attempts to draw parallels with East Africa's coastline over the last decade[18], but there are fundamental differences. Foremost among these is that there are far more relevant national jurisdictions involved, and incidents have tended to occur in territorial waters or within Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), as opposed to the wider WIO operating area of Somali piracy. Notably, there is also no comparable United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorisation for infringement of coastal states' laws in regional territorial waters, although Western navies including the US, France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom and Belgium have regularly deployed to the region in the last decade for training and joint exercises. Against the backdrop of rising global concerns, 2021 saw new deployments from less established players such as Russia and Denmark, which sent its first frigate to the region in November 2021[19].

(12) Plans for a deepwater naval base, also to be located at Berbera, were shelved: see Lons, C. ,'Gulf countries reconsider their involvement in the Horn of Africa', IISS Analysis, 1 June 2021 (https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2021/06/gulf--horn-of-africa).

(13) Alamin, M., 'DP World, China Harbour Vie for Roles in Sudanese Ports', Bloomberg, 2 March 2021 (https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-02/dp-world-china-harbour-vie-for-roles-in-sudan-s-red-sea-ports#:~:text=DP%20World%2C%20China%20Harbour%20Engineering,of%20the%20Red%20Sea%20coast).

(14) Reuters, 'Qatar to build new port in Somalia's Hobyo', 20 August 2019 (https://www.reuters.com/article/somalia-qatar-port-idUSL5N25G1PB).

(15) Freeman, C., 'Somalia's pirate coast to develop international ports', *The Telegraph*, 2 January 2021 (https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/01/02/somalias-pirate-towns-become-ports/).

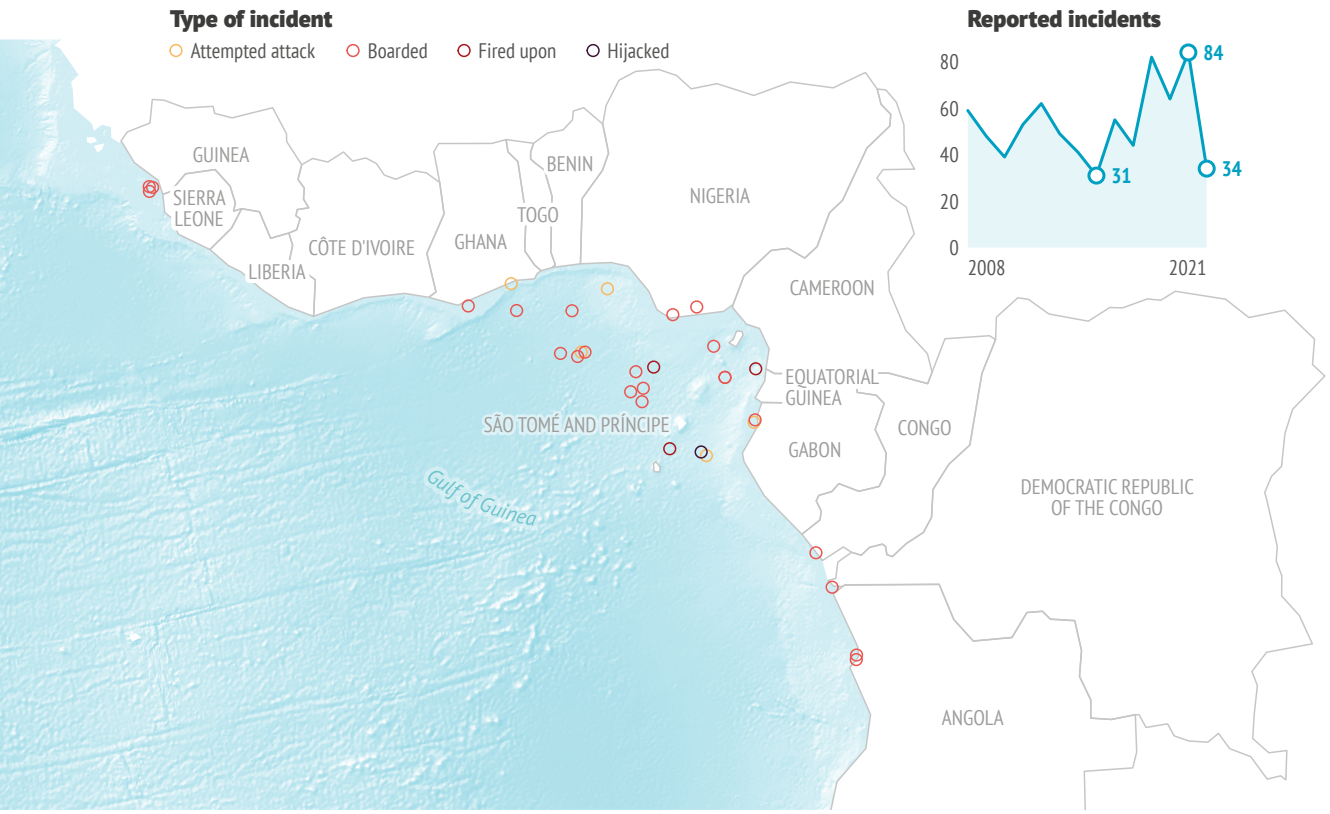
(16) Okafor-Yarwood, I., Walker, T. and Reva, D. , 'Gulf of Guinea Piracy: A symptom, not a cause, of insecurity', *ISS Today*, 10 February 2021 (https://issafrica.org/iss-today/gulf-of-guinea-piracy-a-symptom-not-a-cause-of-insecurity).

(17) Spicer, J. and Koca, I. , 'Pirates kidnap 15 Turkish sailors in attack on container ship off Nigeria', Reuters, 26 January 2021, (https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-turkey-ship-kidnapping-nigeria-idUSKBN29V0QN).

(18) Munson, M., 'Nigeria is not Somalia – Look for pirates somewhere else', War on the Rocks, 11 December 2013 (https://warontherocks.com/2013/12/nigeria-is-not-somalia-look-for-pirates-somewhere-else/).

(19) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 'Denmark deploys a vessel contribution in order to fight the pirates in the Gulf of Guinea', 16 March 2021 (https://um.dk/en/news/newsdisplaypage/?newsid=6da331b4-b01c-4781-857f-6aa2ab42ee12).

Reported piracy and armed robbery at sea incidents
Gulf of Guinea



Data: International Maritime Organization, 'Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS): Piracy and Armed Robbery', 2021; International Chamber of Commerce, International Maritime Bureau, 'Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships', Annual Reports 2008–2021'

WHY IT IS CHANGING

Western Indian Ocean and Red Sea

The surge of engagements in the WIO and Red Sea across both economic and security sectors likely reflects a growing awareness from external actors of the need for a more holistic approach to maritime security – one that integrates softer trade or commercial priorities with harder strategic considerations. India's Maritime Security Strategy of 2015 is a clear example of this more broad-based approach [20]. Such efforts are also a reflection of the region's critical position on global trade routes, both in terms of access to expanding African domestic markets inland as well as proximity to the Suez Canal [21]. With manufacturers increasingly operating 'just-in-time' models to circumvent stockpiling costs, supply chains are increasingly vulnerable to

(20) Mishra, A., 'India-Africa maritime cooperation: The case of Western Indian Ocean', ORF *Occasional Paper* No 221, November 2019.

(21) Jaganathan, J., 'Suez Canal blockage adds strain to global supply chains', Reuters, 26 March 2021 (https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-suezcanal-supplychains-idUSKBN2BI13J).

external shocks at key chokepoints on shipping routes [(22)].

Despite being marginalised by most analyses as passive localities subject to the influence and manipulation of larger global powers, African countries have also contributed to the changing maritime space through their own agency and competitive interests. Djibouti, for instance, has played up its strategic ambitions as a major transshipment hub for seaborne trade, providing China with a commercial bridgehead into Africa – as seen in its unilateral 2018 seizure of the Doraleh container terminal from the Emirati firm DP World [(23)]. Political transition and active democratic scrutiny – fuelled by technological innovation and the expansion of new media – has also influenced the maritime space, allowing young African populations to confront issues and drawing new port concessions or naval base agreements into domestic debates around national sovereignty. In Sudan, the ousting of longstanding leader Omar al-Bashir in 2019 led to the cancellation of a rumoured agreement for Turkey to develop Suakin Island in the Red Sea [(24)]; while another Bashir-era deal for a Russian naval facility remains under review [(25)]. In the WIO, the pact between India and the Seychelles for a development on Assumption Island was ultimately withdrawn due to pressure from opposition politicians and civil society, bolstered by a leak of classified documents on YouTube in 2018 [(26)].

Gulf of Guinea

The more recent framing of the Gulf of Guinea as a surging piracy hotspot owes much to official reports of attacks on ships. Yet different interpretations of the data on piracy incidents persist. Some regional governments have contended that rising attack numbers relate to improved reporting infrastructure and are not at odds with historic norms, fuelling perceptions of external 'meddling' in domestic maritime affairs [(27)]. This contrasts with the more alarmist narratives from both state and non-state external actors in the lead-up to the new naval interventions seen in 2021. Most notably, the Gulf of Guinea Declaration on Suppression of Piracy [(28)] by the Baltic & International Maritime Council (BIMCO) in May 2021 attracted over 350 signatory organisations, largely from maritime industry, calling for a stronger non-regional response. Both the Russian and Danish naval deployments were then involved in separate confrontations with suspected pirates in late 2021, with the Danish special forces firing upon and killing four individuals and capturing another four. The subsequent refusal of regional states to allow transfer of the detainees shows the challenge of aligning regional and international priorities in this contested space [(29)].

Despite receiving markedly less recognition, African-led efforts to boost maritime security capacity are also beginning to impact the GoG

(22) The blockage was estimated to have a cost to global trade of between USD 6 and 10 billion, see: Russon, M., 'The cost of the Suez Canal Blockage', *BBC News*, 29 March 2021 (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56559073).

(23) China Merchant Ports Holdings has retained a minority stake in the terminal. See: Paris, C.,'Djibouti rejects court ruling to hand back container terminal', *The Wall Street Journal,* 17 January 2020 (https://www.wsj.com/articles/djibouti-rejects-court-ruling-to-hand-back-container-terminal-11579296713).

(24) Jones, D. ,'Analysts: Ouster of Sudanese leader hurts Ankara's regional goals', *Voice of America*, 29 April 2019 (https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/analysts-ouster-sudanese-leader-hurts-ankaras-regional-goals).

(25) RFI, 'Sudan lawmakers to review Russian navy base deal: FM', 12 July 2021 (https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20210712-sudan-lawmakers-to-review-russian-navy-base-deal-fm).

(26) Scroll, 'Details of Seychelles-India pact to build military facilities on Assumption Island leaked', 8 March 2018 (https://scroll.in/latest/871259/details-of-seychelles-india-pact-to-build-military-facilities-on-assumption-island-leaked-the-wire).

(27) Larsen, J. and Nissen, C., 'Reconciling international priorities with local needs: Denmark as a new security actor in the Gulf of Guinea', Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Report No 8, 2018 (https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/197626).

(28) BIMCO, 'The Gulf of Guinea Declaration on Suppression of Piracy', 16 July 2021 (https://www.bimco.org/ships-ports-and-voyage-planning/security/gulf-of-guinea-declaration-on-suppression-of-piracy).

(29) BBC News, 'Denmark frees suspected pirates in dinghy in Gulf of Guinea', 8 January 2022 (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-59913513).

space. In June 2021, the Nigerian Navy and Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) launched a new 'Deep Blue' maritime security project: incorporating new equipment including patrol boats and air support, a 24-hour command centre and training initiatives. Although Deep Blue assets are not yet fully operational, the project adds to other recent procurements of maritime patrolling equipment by Angola, Cameroon, Republic of Congo and Senegal [30]. Legal strides have also been made, as in July 2021 both Togo and Nigeria secured prosecutions under the region's first anti-piracy laws. Changes in the GoG space therefore should not be purely attributed to rising external alarm, but to some regional states' increasing willingness to recognise the importance of their maritime sectors and to take ownership of counter-piracy measures.

Multilateral initiatives too have evolved since the establishment in 2013 of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, which established an architecture of maritime zones and coordination centres; and the G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (FoGG), which brings together international and regional partners. Yet the Yaoundé architecture is still not fully operational, and while the G7++ FoGG is a useful body for dialogue, a lack of financing and coherence between annual summits has limited its effectiveness on policy implementation [31]. April 2021 saw the announcement of a new Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum and Shared Awareness and De-confliction conference, a joint initiative between Nigeria and the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé that aims to coordinate across regional, international, civil society and industry actors. This forum remains in its preliminary stages and joins an already crowded field, but provides further evidence that regional players are willing to push for new entry points for dialogue and governance – a trend which is set to continue amidst proposals for a heads of state summit in 2023 to update the Yaoundé Architecture.

The Lomé Charter commits countries to develop strategic plans for the maritime domain and blue economy.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This analysis of two geostrategic maritime spaces reveals significant variance between their specific circumstances and challenges. As such, any recommendations arising from this analysis must be fundamentally premised by the importance of avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach to the African maritime domain. In the Gulf of Guinea, for example, alarmist comparisons with the situation in Somalia [32] have largely served to inflame tensions and risk undermining the long-term foundations for trust between local and international partners. The Danish defence minister's statement in March 2021 that 'if we are to get serious about managing security in the Gulf of Guinea, an international military presence is necessary' [33] provides a clear example of a paternalistic narrative positioning international engagement as the 'serious' response, thereby instantly creating tension with the increasing efforts of African states in the region.

Secondly, while both spaces have witnessed a significant proliferation of multilateral forums

(30) Decis, H., 'Gulf of Guinea: stepping up to the maritime-security challenge?', IISS Military Balance Blog, 17 April 2020 (https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2020/04/gulf-of-guinea-maritime-security-challenges).

(31) 'Reconciling international priorities with local needs: Denmark as a new security actor in the Gulf of Guinea', op.cit.

(32) Larsen, J.P., 'Shipping industry launch the Gulf of Guinea Declaration on Suppression of Piracy', BIMCO, 21 May 2021 (https://www.bimco.org/news/priority-news/20210517-shipping-industry-launch-the-gulf-of-guinea-declaration-on-suppression-of-piracy).

(33) Clowes, W., 'Danish vessel to fight piracy in most perilous shipping area', *Bloomberg*, 17 March 2021(https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-17/denmark-dispatches-vessel-to-west-african-gulf-to-fight-piracy).

and initiatives on maritime security, it is not clear that this has automatically translated to greater impact. The Indian Ocean Rim Association, which includes almost all littoral states around the ocean's edge, has since 2017 expressed its interest in signing a memorandum of understanding with the AU, but without success [(34)]. A similar predicament should not be allowed to befall the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum and Shared Awareness and De-confliction (GOG-MCF/SHADE): although its founders have stressed the need for active collaboration with the G7++ FoGG and other partners, it is not yet fully clear how this will function in practice. International partners involved in such processes, whether as members or observers, must work to promote cohesion and effective linkages across different multilateral groupings.

This analysis has also shown the significance of growing African agency and interests in the maritime space. While such processes are incomplete and uneven, they offer considerable opportunities, and efforts to broaden and sustain momentum in this field should be supported, particularly those relating to more effective domestic strategy building and mainstreaming. The 2016 AU Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (the Lomé Charter) commits countries to develop strategic plans for the maritime domain and blue economy – but only two countries have ratified the charter and dedicated and regularly reviewed national maritime strategies remain the exception rather than the norm.

Finally, despite this chapter's primary focus on geostrategic dynamics, it is vital that non-traditional maritime security challenges for African countries are seen as interrelated, rather than secondary, to geopolitical considerations or piracy. Overfishing practices and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing by foreign vessels – including from China, Russia and some EU states – continues to be hugely damaging to the livelihoods of coastal communities in the GoG, and can push individuals towards criminal networks engaging in piracy [(35)]. Similarly, reports of Chinese fishing vessels operating illegally in Djiboutian waters and using destructive deep sea trawling methods [(36)] suggest that less traditional maritime security concerns have not been given sufficient focus within the context of the 'base race' around the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. External actors including the EU must acknowledge their partial complicity and engage in honest dialogue with regional partners if such factors are to become more consistently integrated into maritime security responses.

To address some of these implications, the EU could propose a separate joint AU-EU maritime strategy as part of the continent-to-continent partnership, with a focus on support to revive the AU's stalled African Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) and Lomé Charter processes. Below the continental level, the EU should avoid adding new frameworks where possible but instead must invest in more effective strategic communication around its plethora of existing initiatives, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea – which in January 2021 was designated as a 'Maritime Area of Interest' under the EU's new Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) concept. The practical impact and benefits of the CMP for the region, beyond vague commitments to 'increase cooperation and partnership with regional states' [(37)] are still not fully clear and without clearer explanation and engagement with regional governments and populations, risk being caught up in

(34) Reva, D., 'Africa must stake its claim in the Indo-Pacific', *ISS Today*, 19 May 2021 (https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africa-must-stake-its-claim-in-the-indo-pacific).

(35) Okafor-Yarwood, I. and Bhagwandas, S., 'How illegal fishing harms Nigeria and what to do about it', *The Conversation*, 1 June 2021 (https://theconversation.com/how-illegal-fishing-harms-nigeria-and-what-to-do-about-it-160553).

(36) Mas, L., 'Chinese trawlers snapped fishing in Djibouti's protected waters', France24 Observers, 26 May 2017 (https://observers.france24.com/en/20170526-chinese-trawlers-are-photographed-fishing-djibouti%E2%80%99-protected-waters).

(37) European External Action Service, 'Factsheet: Coordinated Maritime Presences', 25 January 2021 (https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91927/factsheet-coordinated-maritime-presences_en).

recent tensions and perceived as an externally imposed agenda. To address such issues moving forward as deployments continue, the EU should consider employing the CMP concept as a fresh platform from which to establish dialogue with regional states on legal agreements or memorandums of understanding for the transfer of suspected criminals captured at sea.

CHAPTER 3

CITIES

by
CARLO PALLESCHI AND NORMAN SEMPIJJA

When analysing megatrends affecting Africa, it is clear that the future of Africa will be urban: there are expected to be 824 million urban dwellers in 2030, and 1.5 billion in 2050, in comparison to 548 million in 2018 [(1)]. This rapid urbanisation process [(2)] is quickly changing African politics, putting urban spaces at the centre of African transformations and reconfiguring geopolitical boundaries, putting more emphasis on social pressures originating within urban centres. This is mainly because cities are usually melting pots of people from different demographics and poorly managed urbanisation can result in revolts and an upsurge in crime. This chapter aims to account for this evolution, examining cities as both the space of political struggle and the driver of political mobilisation. It analyses the geopolitical consequences of conceiving cities as transformative spaces and draws policy implications for local and national policymakers, and for the EU.

WHAT IS CHANGING

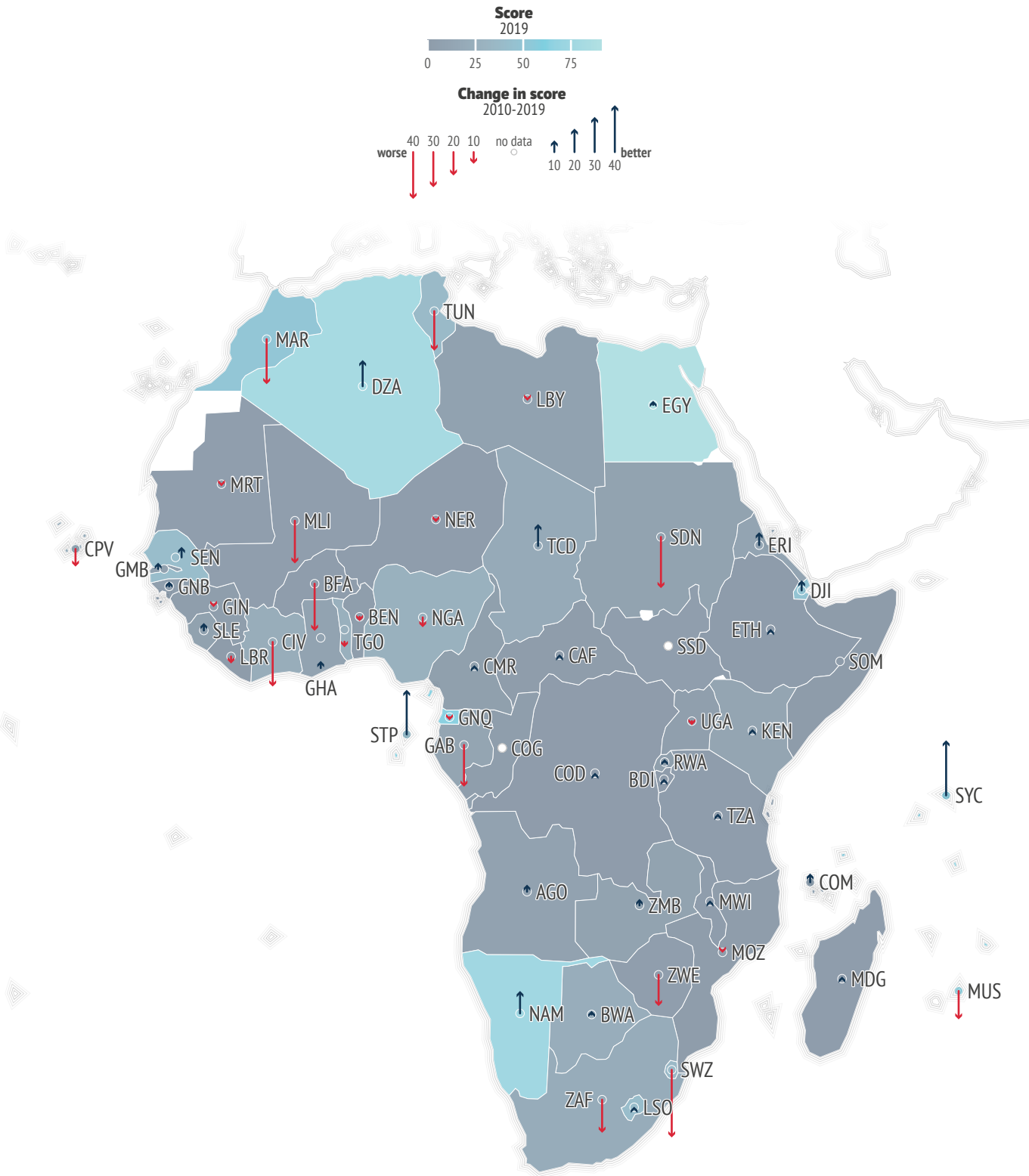
The dynamics of African urbanisation involves more than just numbers describing fast demographic growth. It is a contentious political process, which has resulted in a deep transformation of African cities: they have become not just home to more and more residents, but a geopolitical space where conflicting claims and grievances originating from key urban concerns, such as housing, infrastructure, participation and identity, coalesce, creating contested spaces, which could pose great risk to political and social stability. Indeed, due to the lack of spatial planning, African urban growth has gone hand in hand with the emergence of more slums, worse living conditions, and greater disparities, inequalities, and discrimination, paving the way for urban unrest and uprisings. In other words, due to unmanaged urbanisation, African cities are not only the physical arena where political mobilisation takes place, but have become themselves a driver of political mobilisation, which produces and reproduces contestation patterns over land, space, and identity, as well as access to urban services.

(1) United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 'World Urbanization Prospects – The 2018 Revision', 2019 (https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-Report.pdf).

(2) The region's 3.5 % urbanisation rate is the fastest in the world and over the period 2018-2050, 7 out of the 10 fastest urbanising countries will be in Africa: Burundi, Malawi, Ethiopia. Uganda, South Sudan, Niger and Rwanda. Source: Ibid.

Affordable urban housing in Africa

Number of households in urban areas that could afford the cheapest newly-built house by a formal developer given the lending terms available



Data: European Commission, GISCO, 2022;
Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2019

The chaotic growth of African cities has often failed to promote spatial integration, increasing the gap, and thus rivalries, between native urban dwellers and immigrant newcomers, as happened in the towns of Goma or Bukavu (Democratic Republic of Congo) [3] or in many South African cities, where xenophobic riots broke out in 2019. Slums are a salient feature of the African urban landscape, an issue often addressed through 'slum clearance' programmes, which have had the sole result of exacerbating grievances among inhabitants. For instance, between 2018-2020, there were 59 episodes of contention in Nairobi mainly linked to the demolition of illegal structures without the corresponding proper notice, triggering protests among urban dwellers who failed to find alternative low-income housing accommodation [4]. Another important field of contestation is that of urban land use and management: the house allocation process is often unable to cater for all eligible citizens and is therefore implemented on the basis of discriminatory criteria, such as ethnicity, nationality and party-political affiliation, breeding further tensions and conflicts among residents, as happened for instance in Durban (South Africa) [5] or in Juba (Sudan) [6].

African geopolitics is more and more shaped by urban dynamics.

Accounting for African cities as spaces of socio-spatial and political transformations is of paramount importance mainly for two reasons. First, urban pressures and tensions fuel citizens' grievances, triggering consequences at national level [7], and pressuring government representatives and opposition parties to take action. For example, the bread riots in Sudan led to the ousting of President al-Bashir in 2019 [8] and Mohamed Bouaziz's self-immolation in an act of protest in the town of Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia sparked the Arab Spring [9] that led to the collapse of regimes across the region. This means that the future of African politics also needs to be looked at through the lenses of urban governance. Second, African cities matter from a geopolitical standpoint because the configuration, control and production of urban space is inherently a conflictive process. African geopolitics is thus more and more shaped by urban dynamics: foreign powers have realised this and have consequently started increasing their footprint in African cities through investment, technical assistance and security cooperation in urban areas, making these spaces another chessboard in the new 'scramble for Africa'.

WHY IT IS CHANGING

The growing importance of African cities is the result of two complementary phenomena. On the one hand, African urban spaces have become the main arena of struggle,

(3) Büscher, K., 'African cities and violent conflict: the urban dimension of conflict and post conflict dynamics in Central and Eastern Africa', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 12, No 2, April 2018, pp. 193-210.

(4) Paller, J. W., 'The Contentious Politics Of Urbanization: Insights from Africa', American Political Science Association (APSA), Comparative Politics Section, 2020 (https://www.comparativepoliticsnewsletter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Spring-Newsletter-2020_7_Paller.pdf).

(5) Patel, K., 'Sowing the seeds of conflict? Low-income housing delivery, community participation, and inclusive citizenship in South Africa', *Urban Studies*, Vol. 53, No 13, pp. 2738–2757, 2016.

(6) McMichael, G., 'Land conflict and informal settlements in Juba, South Sudan', *Urban Studies*, Vol. 53, No 13, pp. 2721–2737, 2016.

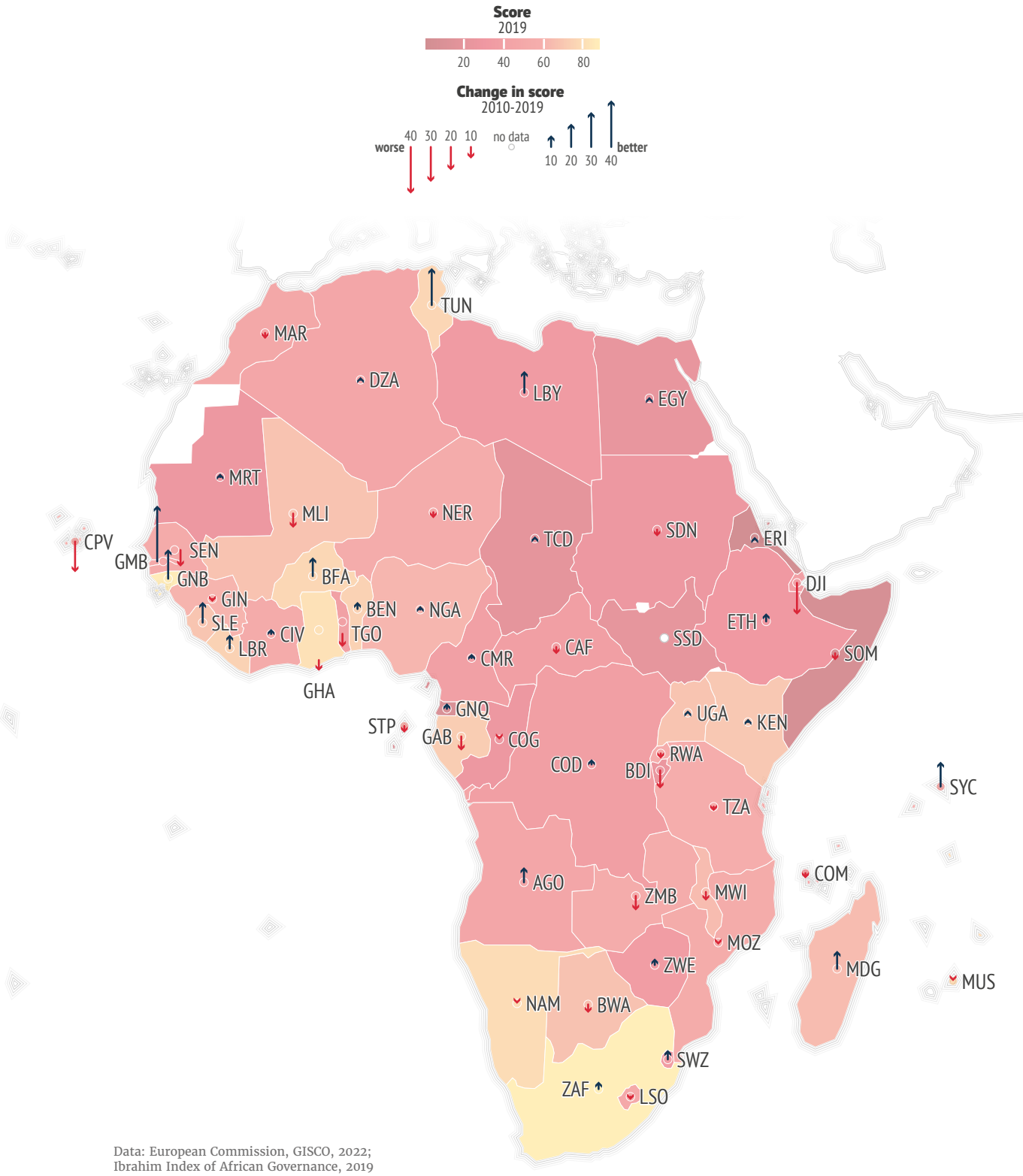
(7) Faleg, G., 'What If…Africa's urbanisation is not controlled?' in Gaub, F. (ed), 'What if…Not? The cost of inaction', *Chaillot Paper* No 163, EUISS, January 2021 (https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_163.pdf).

(8) Voice of America, 'Sudanese protest over bread and fuel prices', 28 January 2021 (https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_sudanese-protest-over-bread-fuel-prices/6201322.html).

(9) Lageman,T., 'Remembering Mohamed Bouazizi: the man who sparked the Arab Spring', Al Jazeera, December 2020 (https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/12/17/remembering-mohamed-bouazizi-his-death-triggered-the-arab).

Civic engagement and activism in African cities

The extent to which effective citizen complaint mechanisms exist and citizens have the right to petition and participate in civic engagement, as well as the extent to which cooperative associations, interest groups and civil society organisations are being consulted in policymaking



Data: European Commission, GISCO, 2022;
Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2019

while rural residents tend to be significantly less unsatisfied with their government [10], as demonstrated by the urban riots in Sudan sparked by rising bread and fuel prices [11] or the protests in Tunisian cities over economic hardship [12]. This trend can be explained by taking into consideration growing internet and mobile usage and the spread of digital platforms among urban dwellers. Social media has amplified civic networks and has facilitated interactions and communications among activists, without however removing one of the main basic needs of human beings, concrete social interaction and community engagement. There is therefore a dialectic between the 'space of place' (physical urban area) and the 'space of flows' [13] (the digital world), which interact and influence each other reciprocally through a relationship based on complementarity rather than competition. A clear example of this trend is the role played by social media and messaging services in organising #EndSARS protests in Nigerian cities against brutality by local police [14], or recently in many South African cities to protest against the jailing of former President Jacob Zuma [15].

On the other hand, as argued above, African cities are not only the arena of political mobilisation but also create opportunities for urban engagement, which, ultimately, hinges upon the concept of 'right to the city' [16], conceived as the right of people to change themselves by transforming the place where they live [17]. The inability of African cities to guarantee this right is the result of two complementary aspects: first, urbanisation in Africa, unlike other regions, has occurred without a corresponding structural transformation of the economy, and second, it has not been underpinned by sound spatial urban planning policies. The combined impact of these two problems has led to dysfunctional, chaotic and contested urban centres, whose layout not only replicates but also exacerbates socio-economic disparities, which are strictly intertwined with racial, ethnic, gender or caste divides. The lack of urban planning has prevented many urban centres from overcoming the legacies of colonial rule, as demonstrated by South African [18] and Namibian [19] cities, where apartheid-based urban segregation has been replaced by spatial polarisation rooted in socio-economic inequalities. In post-colonial Angolan cities, socio-spatial inequality has been translated into a clear segregation which reflects social and economic disparities [20].

Pressures originating within urban centres and the consequent need to uphold

(10) Harding, R., 'Urbanites across Africa are more likely to be unhappy with their government. Here is why', *The Conversation*, 24 May 2020 (https://theconversation.com/urbanites-across-africa-are-more-likely-to-be-unhappy-with-their-government-heres-why-139126).

(11) 'Sudanese protest over bread and fuel prices', op.cit.

(12) Al Jazeera, 'Protests erupt in Tunisia cities amid anger over poor economy', 17 January 2021 (https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/17/protests-erupt-in-tunisian-cities-amid-anger-over-poor-economy).

(13) On the concept of 'space of place' and 'space of flows', see: Castells, N., *Communication Power*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, pp. 34-35.

(14) Obia, V. A., '#EndSARS, a Unique Twittersphere and Social Media Regulation in Nigeria', *Media@LSE*, 11 November 2021 (https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2020/11/11/endsars-a-unique-twittersphere-and-social-media-regulation-in-nigeria/).

(15) Mwai, P. and Giles. C., 'South Africa Zuma riots: Fact-checking claims about the protests', *BBC News*, 16 July 2021 (https://www.bbc.com/news/57834755).

(16) The concept of 'right to the city' originated from: Lefebvre, H., *Le Droit à la ville*, Anthropos, Paris, 1968. It subsequently received considerable attention in urban studies.

(17) Harvey, D., 'The right to the city', *New Left Review*, No 53, September/October 2008, pp. 23-40 (https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii53/articles/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city).

(18) Turok, I., and Parnell, S., 'Reshaping cities, rebuilding nations: the role of urban national policies', *Urban Forum*, 2009, pp. 157–174; Strauss, M., 'A historical exposition of spatial injustice and segregated urban settlement in South Africa', *Fundamina*, Vol. 2, No 2, 2019, pp. 135-168 (http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1021-545X2019000200006).

(19) Morris, A, 'La déségrégation de la ville en Afrique australe: le cas des quartiers centraux de Johannesburg', in Gervays-Lambony, P., Jaglin, S. and Mabin, A. (eds), 'La question urbaine en Afrique australe: perspectives de recherche', Karthala, Paris, 1999. pp. 65- 79.

(20) Udelsmann Rodrigues, C., 'Angolan Cities: Urban (Re)segregation?', in Nugent, P. and Locatelli F. (eds.), *African Cities: Competing claims on urban spaces*, Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2009.

investments to meet urban dwellers' needs and reverse unmanaged urbanisation, have made African cities a locus for geopolitical competition. In fact, external powers, such as China, the United States or Japan, have increasingly put African urban areas at the centre of their political engagement with the continent, to address challenges linked to urban geopolitics and capitalise on the opportunities arising from urban development, while strengthening their leverage in these areas *vis-à-vis* other competitors.

In this regard, China, by taking advantage of the fact that it experienced a similar monumental urban transition, has strengthened its footprint in African cities, advising African municipalities, and selling infrastructures, critical information and communications technology (ICT), as well as smart-city packages. As indicated in the action plan on China-Africa Cooperation (2019-2021), China aims to support African countries in building 'smart cities' and enhancing the role of ICT in safeguarding public security in urban areas, as has happened for instance in Nairobi, where local police have developed a partnership with Huawei for an intelligent unified surveillance system [(21)]. Nevertheless, it is important to stress the potential destabilising effect of Chinese investments: indeed, while they have the potential to fill the infrastructure gap and change the urban fabric of African cities, in many cases, due to their top-down nature, they risk increasing spatial segregation and grievances stemming from poverty and inequitable access to services and resources, and thus exacerbating underlying political tensions [(22)].

China aims to support African countries in building 'smart cities'.

The urban dimension is also one of the main springboards for Japanese projection in the continent, especially through the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which has been increasingly active in the sectors of urban transportation, infrastructure planning, electric power grids and water supply, and waste treatment systems. For instance, JICA has supported the water supply system in Agadir (Morocco), the modernisation of the main avenue from Kinshasa airport to the city centre – which has been now renamed 'Boulevard Congo-Japan' – and the construction of a waste collection system in Khartoum. In all its projects, Japan has emphasised 'the quality of infrastructures', an element which has a clear geopolitical dimension, as it is the hallmark of Japanese engagement that Tokyo wants to showcase to differentiate itself from China's competing urban investments. Moreover, JICA has been engaged in formulating medium and long-term urban master plans for the cities of Dar es Salaam, Kinshasa, Mombasa, Nairobi and Nouakchott.

Washington has also started looking with greater interest at African urban spaces. During the election campaign, President Biden committed to an urbanisation initiative including partnerships with US cities, to support African cities in critical sectors such as energy access, climate change adaptation, transportation and water management. This city-oriented approach, which would represent a novelty for Washington as so far the government has spent more than twice as much on rural areas than urban areas in sub-Saharan Africa [(23)], aims to promote inclusive urban growth in Africa, and open up new opportunities for

(21) Ekman, A., 'China's Smart Cities: The new geopolitical battleground', *Études de l'Ifri*, Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri), December 2019 (https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ekman_smart_cities_battleground_2019.pdf).

(22) Paller, J., 'How Is China Impacting African Cities?', *Management and Organization Review*, Vol. 17, No 3, July 2021, pp. 636 – 640.

(23) Devermont, J., Moore, G., and Moss, T., 'The Great Cities Partnership', Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), April 2021 (https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/210416_Devermont_GreatCities.pdf?6NZTnb6JQczny_JfzKORstvuGbiVNHpJ).

the US private sector while balancing China's growing influence in urban areas.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The conceptualisation of cities as geopolitical spaces and frontlines of power competition has, at least, three remarkable policy implications for African policymakers. First, citizens have become and will continue to be the protagonists not only of urban but also of national political life. This means that the 'urban question' cannot be treated only as a local issue, but should be included in national strategies, attaching sufficient importance to urban areas as geopolitical spaces that foster political mobilisation and where power struggle materialises.

Second, to defuse competition between urban actors, it is important to conceive urban planning as a tool to promote inclusiveness, advance a justice-oriented emancipatory agenda, reduce social segregation and mitigate ethno-national divisions. In this regard, it is essential to invest in initiatives that promote spatial inclusion (slum upgrading programmes, access to urban infrastructures, provision of basic services, such as running water, electricity, and adequate sanitation) and combine them with social and economic measures. Another key aspect would be to clarify urban land and property rights as well as gather data and map African cities and boundaries, in order to have precise information on informal settlements which are home to the most fragile and segregated urban dwellers.

Third, these actions, to be effective, have to be underpinned by a bottom-up participatory process, in which citizens are proactively engaged in urban planning. In this regard, it is important to step back from massive urban renewal projects, while preferring a more localised and community approach that, in the context of African cities constrained by limited resources, could offer a respite to urban dwellers. This caveat should be borne in mind especially when it comes to assessing the potential downside of huge investments financed by external powers. Furthermore, policymakers could capitalise on the dialectic between the 'space of place' and the 'space of flows', by using digital platforms to intercept citizens' needs and allow them to participate throughout all the phases of urban projects.

Consequences are also paramount for the EU, which needs to pay due heed to the importance of African cities, both economically and politically. The EU could strengthen its presence in these spaces, 'urbanising' its policy towards the continent and considering urban development not just as a standalone sector but on the contrary as a fundamental dimension of its foreign policy [(24)]. This would result in a twofold advantage: on the one hand, the EU would be able to harness the 'transformative power' of African cities and thus support African partners in addressing urban dwellers' needs and giving substance to the 'right to the city'; on the other hand, from a geopolitical perspective, this would enable the EU and its Member States to compete with external powers, supporting an alternative, inclusive and bottom-up urban model. To achieve this twofold aim, the EU could establish a direct and permanent policy dialogue and structured partnerships with African cities, to identify common priorities, enhance African urban governance and strengthen city-to-city cooperation, as happened for instance with the Covenant of Mayors for sub-Saharan Africa, a good example of the EU effort to engage with local actors. In this regard, it would be crucial for the EU to uphold this fresh urban focus by leveraging the financial and economic tools it has at its disposal, emphasising urban programmes in development assistance, and improving, especially through the EU delegations in Africa, technical support, capacity building and technology sharing.

(24) European Commission Staff Working Document, 'European Union (EU) cooperation with cities and local authorities in third countries', SWD (2018) 269 final, 18 May 2018.

CHAPTER 4

PERIPHERIES

by
KATARIINA MUSTASILTA

This chapter analyses *peripheries* as increasingly vital spaces of geopolitics in the African continent. Beyond constituting geographical spaces of predominantly rural areas distant from the capital and other economic and political centres of the state, peripheries are here understood as social and political spaces: located on the margins of central state power and characterised as hybrid political and social orders. Peripheries have increasingly salient implications for national, regional and global security dynamics due to the spread of violent conflicts – and particularly the proliferation of Salafi-jihadist groups [(1)] – influencing such areas. The contested nature of these spaces and the ability of jihadist groups with their transnational linkages and networks to establish footholds in such spaces are key to the changes that are currently afoot. A shift in dealing with violent groups and the peripheries is needed to undermine the geopolitical power of the jihadists.

WHAT IS CHANGING

Conflict data demonstrates an expansion of armed violence in Africa, and particularly conflicts involving Salafi-jihadist militants. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP), the year 2020 marked Africa's 'bloodiest' year since 2014, with 30 active state-based armed conflicts [(2)]. Conflicts involving a jihadist group make up a majority of the conflicts, with altogether twelve countries across the continent dealing with such groups [(3)]. In the last two years alone five new conflicts, including the insurgency in northern Mozambique, have emerged in which a non-state actor affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) challenges the state [(4)]. In comparison, in 2010 only Algeria and Somalia were directly affected by jihadist armed violence.

Notably, while some of the jihadist violence in the continent takes the form of spectacular terrorist attacks in urban centres, the bulk of jihadist activities in Africa take place in spaces outside the political centres of states, namely in the so-called peripheries. Jihadist groups can be seen as composite revolutionary

(1) Salafi-jihadist militants or jihadist groups refers to groups affiliated ideologically with al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (IS) and Salafi-jihadism, based on an ultraconservative and fundamentalist idea of the true Islamic order and accepting broad use of violence to attain the ideal state. See Kepel, G., *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam,* I. B. Tauris, 2002.

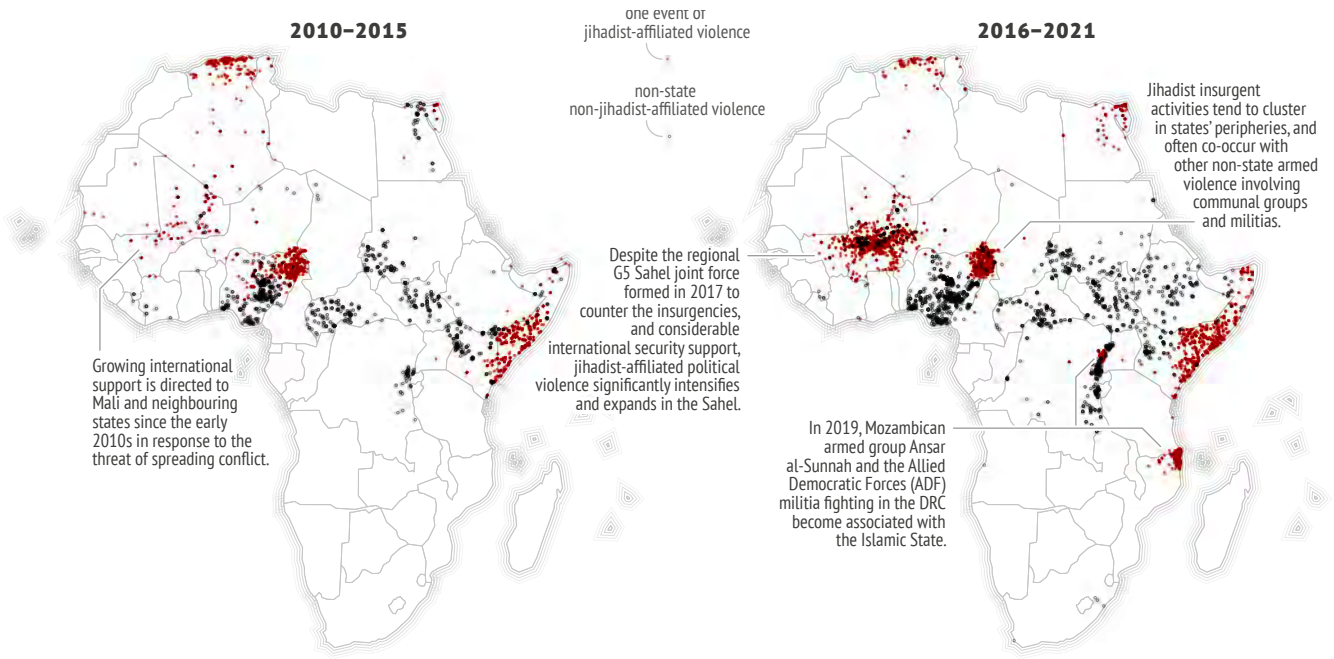
(2) Petterson, T., et al., 'Organized violence 1989-2020, with a special emphasis on Syria', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 58, No 4, July 2021, pp. 809-825.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Burkina Faso, DRC, Mozambique, Somalia and Tanzania; see ibid.

The spread of Salafi-jihadist groups

Spatial distribution of conflict events involving jihadist-afffiliated groups, 2010-2015



Data: UCDP Candidates Events dataset, 2019 and 2021; Natural Earth, 2021

insurgent groups that engage in asymmetrical conflict against the state (and other opponents), using various violent and non-violent tactics in the pursuit of totalitarian and religious-fundamentalist agendas [5].

The range of jihadist groups and factions per conflict context is also increasing. For example, in the broader Sahel-Saharan region, the last few years have seen the spread of local IS branches alongside the al-Qaeda affiliates, a phenomenon which has been associated with intensification of violence and an expansion of the geographical scope of jihadist groups. There are fears that jihadism could spill over to the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea [6].

The proliferation of jihadist groups tends to accelerate mobilisation of other types of violent actors, such as local militias. This *militiafication* has lately spread from Mali and Burkina Faso to Niger, following intensification of violence by the Islamic State of Greater Sahara (ISGS) [7]. Moreover, jihadist insurgencies invite increased state and international military attention in order to stabilise, and in some cases help state authorities regain control of, peripheries, which sometimes leads to considerable violence against civilians [8]. Initiatives such as the G5 in the Sahel or the deployment of troops under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to northern Mozambique indicate deepening subregional security cooperation in response to the shared threat

(5) Kalyvas, S., 'Jihadi rebels in civil war', *Daedalus*, Vol. 147, No 1, 2018, pp. 36–47.

(6) Bruijne, K., 'Laws of attraction: Northern Benin and the threat of violent extremist spillover', CRU Report, Clingendael Institute, 2021.

(7) Nsabia, H. and Duhamel, J., 'Sahel communal wars, broken ceasefires, and shifting frontlines', Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), 17 June 2021 (https://acleddata.com/2021/06/17/sahel-2021-communal-wars-broken-ceasefires-and-shifting-frontlines/).

(8) Ibid.

perception [9]. Competing endeavours undertaken by external players and/or their proxies in support for counterterrorism efforts have further complicated the geopolitical landscape and posed new challenges for different regional and international powers already present in Africa. For example, Turkey's increased presence in the Horn of Africa or the deployment of the Russian private military company Wagner in Mali have put pressure on EU counterterrorism efforts and security provision.

WHY IT IS CHANGING

Contested local spaces

Rather than the *absence of (state) governance* explaining the proliferation of jihadism in African peripheries, it is the increasingly *contested nature of governance(s)* that better captures the dynamics. Whether in central Mali or northern Mozambique, a hybrid governance system exists, characterised by a diverse array of institutions and actors, from communal land management regimes and traditional and religious organisations to local strongmen and state actors [10]. Nevertheless, the legitimacy and control of different governance regimes are contested within and between groups, and their limited deliverables are increasingly pressured by ecological and demographic changes [11]. This applies to the state as well: beyond technical capacities, the core of the dysfunctional state–periphery relationship lies in disillusionment with state institutions [12]. The disillusionment links to deepening inequalities and marginalisation of and within the peripheries – captured in the higher-than-average growth in inequality in northern Mozambique, for example [13]. Yet, it also links to tensions between the state's expanding regime in the peripheries and other local forms of organisation, for example in the realm of land use [14].

Jihadist groups can exploit these contested spaces where they can tap into a wellspring of (anti-state, anti-elite and inter-group) grievances and manipulate pre-existing networks and institutions. Accounts of the emergence of Ansaroul Islam in Burkina Faso and the Katiba Macina in Mali recall the group leaders' speeches centring on the political failures and corruption of the state elites, discrimination against local communities, and the 'recolonisation' of the country (in Mali's case) [15]. In northern Mozambique, it was the disillusionment of locally disenfranchised youth with the prevailing social order and the rift between them and their (religious) authorities that sowed the seeds of the insurgency [16]. Disputes over security and political governance issues between local communities allow jihadists to

(9) Lebovich, A., 'Insecurity in the Sahel: Europe's next fight against jihadism', *Commentary*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 5 February 5 2020; DW, 'Mozambique welcomes African forces to help tackle insurgency', 26 July 2021.

(10) Boas, M. and Strazzari, F., 'Governance, fragility and insurgency in the Sahel: A hybrid political order in the making', *The International Spectator*, Vol. 55, No 4, 2020, pp. 1-7; Mustasilta, K., 'Including chiefs, maintaining peace? Examining the effects of state–traditional governance interaction on civil peace in sub-Saharan Africa', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 56, No 2, 2019, pp. 203-219.

(11) Brottem, L., 'The growing complexity of farmer-herder conflict in West and Central Africa', *Africa Security Brief*, No 39, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 12 July 2021 (https://africacenter.org/publication/growing-complexity-farmer-herder-conflict-west-central-africa/.)

(12) Pérouse de Montclos, M.A., 'Rethinking the response to jihadist groups across the Sahel', Research Paper, Chatham House, 2021.

(13) Santos, R., Egger, E.M., and Salvucci, V., 'Horizontal and intersecting inequalities in Mozambique 1997-2017', Working Paper No 106, United Nations University, UNU-WIDER, 2021.

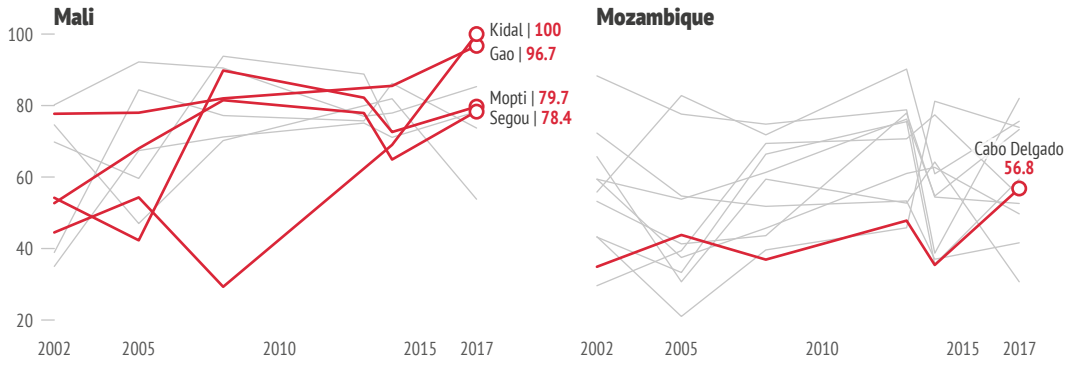
(14) Benjaminsen, T. A., and Ba, B., 'Why do pastoralists in Mali join jihadist groups? A political ecological explanation', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 46, No 1, 2019, pp. 1–20, 2019.

(15) Thurston, A., *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel: Local politics and rebel groups*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020.

(16) International Crisis Group (ICG), 'Stemming the insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado', Africa Report, No 303, 11 June 2021 (https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/southern-africa/mozambique/303-stemming-insurrection-mozambiques-cabo-delgado).

Mind the gap

% of respondents who think efforts by their governments to reduce economic inequality are insufficient



Data: Afrobarometer, 2022

step in and offer protection and dispute resolution services [17]. In the Sahel, for example, jihadist groups took the side of the pastoralists in conflicts over land use and engaged in alliance-building with them, while opposing and violently targeting the local agents in charge of enforcement of rules governing the exploitation of natural resources [18]. This exploitation of local conflicts for mobilisation fuels the *militiafication* process described above. The fact that seeking protection against other local groups or the state's forces motivates people to join jihadist groups also suggests that the problem derives from contested local (security) orders rather than the (mere) absence of them [19].

The transnational dimension

While African jihadist groups are locally rooted, insofar as they tap into and exploit local cleavages to mobilise (mostly) local troops in fighting (primarily) local states, their *transnational dimensions* have also shaped their spread and resilience. The Salafi-jihadist ideology, by definition, has a theoretically wide appeal as a revolutionary narrative as it disavows the notion of a secular state rather than the administration of a particular state [20]. This, under structurally vulnerable conditions, facilitates the spread of jihadist organisations. For example, while the rank-and-file fighters in Cabo Delgado appear more motivated by context-specific socioeconomic realities than by global jihadism, inspiration from and concrete transnational exchanges on Salafi-jihadist ideology have shaped the emergence and evolution of the group [21]. Relatedly, unlike ethnic separatists or armed militias formed primarily around natural resource competition, jihadist groups are not ontologically tied to any territory. Some groups (e.g. ISGS) have more explicit transnational orientations while others (e.g. al-Shabaab) have more nationalistic

Jihadist groups are not ontologically tied to any territory.

(17) Cline, L., 'Jihadist movements in the Sahel: Rise of the Fulani?', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2021 (https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2021.1888082).

(18) 'Why do pastoralists in Mali join jihadist groups?', op.cit..

(19) UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*, 2017 (http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/ downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf).

(20) 'Jihadi rebels in civil war', op.cit.

(21) 'Stemming the insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado', op.cit.

agendas [22]. Yet, even when nationalistic, the ideological agenda enables endurance: loss of territory can be coped with by regrouping elsewhere without a loss of political relevance and the validity of the violent jihad outlives the rule of any government. This provides a recipe for a geographically agile and durably resilient campaign.

Moreover, and beyond illicit cross-border trafficking in resources, the forming of transnational ties serves geopolitical purposes – both locally and for the global brand of jihadism. For a local militant group, becoming recognised as part of a global franchise is a means to accrue power and enhance local status (for example to attract fighters) in a competitive and increasingly connected local context. For the larger organisation, recognising viable local groups as part of the brand helps to maintain global momentum and competition against strategic opponents [23]. These intertwined local and transnational rationales also sustain fluid and geographically expanding rather than stable and static jihadist groups in Africa, as competition and fragmentation among local jihadist groups gets entangled in transnational affiliations and as the consolidation of a group's identity may require geographical movement (*vis-à-vis* other groups) [24].

Tactical agility

Finally, adaptive use of a wide tactical array of coercive tools (terrorist attacks, guerrilla violence, thefts, insurgency) and persuasive tools (alliance building, service provision, nationalistic/tribal rhetoric) based on the shifting local and strategic conditions, bolsters resilience. Specifically, performing as governance providers embeds the insurgent groups more firmly in the social fabrics of the areas of their influence. Ranging from protection of communities to management of land use, providing justice, and collecting various taxes, all major jihadist groups in the continent have engaged in some level of rebel governance [25]. Some groups – such as the JNIM factions in the Sahel – have also exhibited considerable pragmatism and flexibility in their interactions with civilians, for example allowing locals to appoint some of their local religious leaders and conceding in the face of collective resistance (e.g. refraining from imposing coercive rules) [26]. Notably, empirical evidence on the Sahelian groups demonstrates that entrenchment of their authority does not require stable territorial presence. In the face of heavy counterinsurgency pressures, JNIM and ISGS factions have adapted to govern from the shadows, including through indirect rule via local leaders [27]. Demonstrating how jihadist groups build on existing local governance networks, this strategy makes jihadist groups even harder to beat militarily, as the lines between insurgents and civilians crumble even further.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

For African states and their EU partners to mitigate and counter further expansion of

(22) Rupesinghe, N., Hiberg Naghizadeh, R. and Cohen, C., 'Reviewing Jihadist Governance in the Sahel', Working Paper, No 894, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2021; Solomon, H., 'Somalia's Al Shabaab: Clans vs Islamist nationalism', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 21, No 3, pp. 351-366, 2014.

(23) Warner, J., 'The Islamic State has 'provinces' in Africa. That doesn't mean what you might think', Monkey Cage, *Washington Post*, 7 June 2021.

(24) On such dynamics in the Sahel, see *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel,* op.cit.

(25) Ibid.; 'Reviewing Jihadist Governance in the Sahel', op.cit.; Ahmad, A., 'The long jihad: The boom–bust cycle behind jihadist durability', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, Vol. 6, No 4, December 2021.

(26) International Crisis Group, 'Mali: Enabling dialogue with the jihadist coalition JNIM', Africa Report No 306, 10 December 2021 (https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/306-mali-enabling-dialogue-jihadist-coalition-jnim).

(27) 'Reviewing Jihadist Governance in the Sahel', op.cit.

Salafi-jihadist influence in Africa, three key aspects are worth considering.

First, in the security realm, there is a need to shift focus from the aim of beating the jihadists on the battlefield to ensuring equal security from violence in the peripheries. Lessons learned indicate that, at best, military onslaughts on jihadist groups weaken them momentarily and pressure them to reorganise.[28] They do not eradicate the influence of jihadist groups in the peripheral spaces, nor resolve the security dilemmas on the ground. Beyond the narrow counterterrorism and counterinsurgency pressure on jihadist groups, security operations need to better consider the inter- and intra-communal violence that constitute the core security concerns of many communities. Relatedly, undermining the influence of jihadist groups requires zero tolerance for human rights violations by state-affiliated (including regional operations and paramilitary groups) forces. State-affiliated violence against locals is a recruitment tool for the jihadists. For the EU, this implies strengthening mechanisms to monitor and ensure compliance with international human rights law and building in this dimension in its training and equipping of partner security forces.

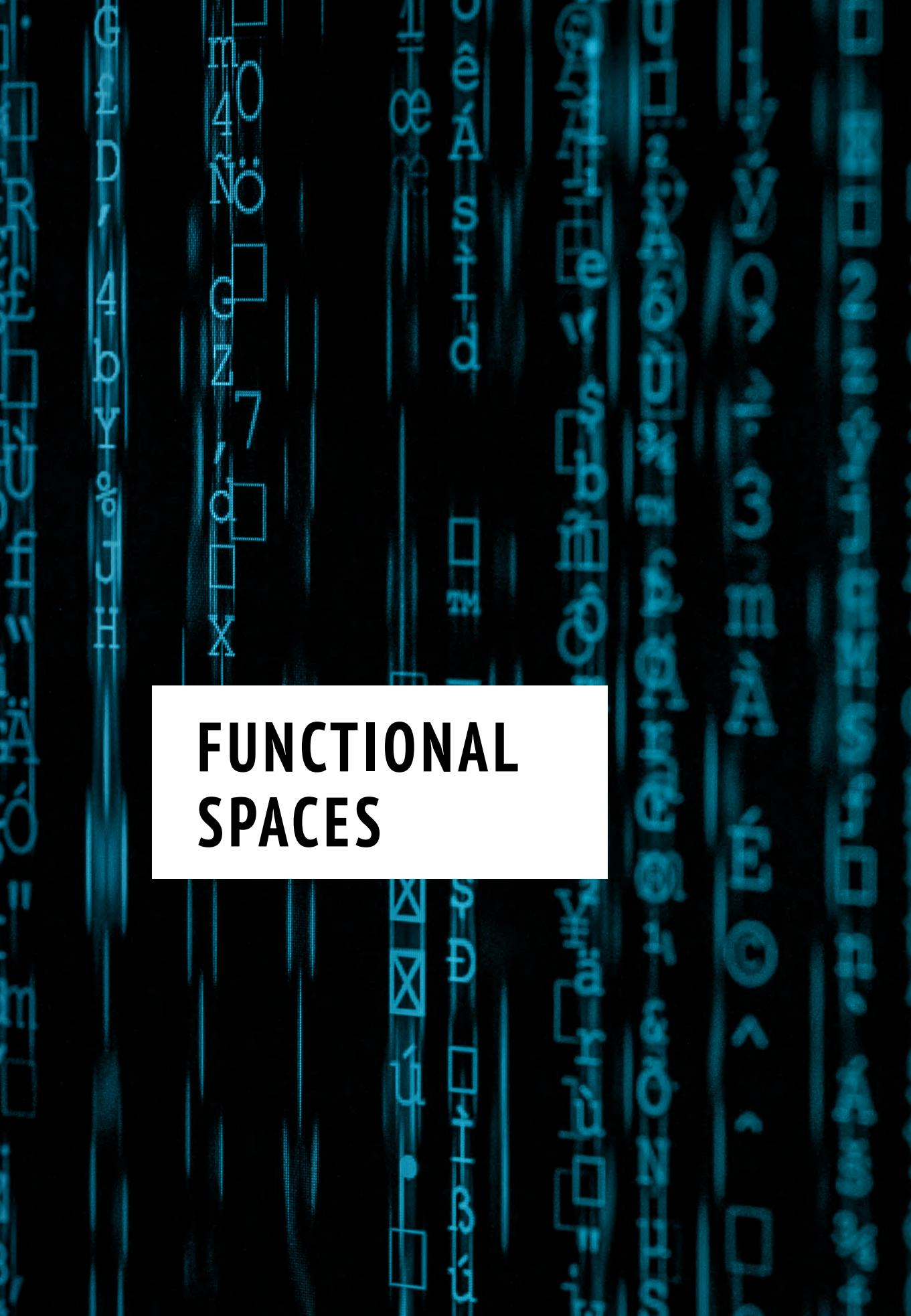
All major jihadist groups in the continent have engaged in some level of rebel governance.

Second, efforts need to be redoubled to tackle the political conflicts that the jihadist groups exploit in order to consolidate their influence. In the first place, this calls for investing in peaceful and sustainable resolution of the communal conflicts that are now left for the jihadists to manage. However, this also calls for a more nuanced strategy towards the jihadist groups: as discussed, the Salafi-jihadist ideology and their transnational affiliations set jihadist groups apart from other insurgent groups in some (important) aspects. Yet, rather than assuming homogeneity of aims and priorities among jihadist groups or different factions of a group, empirical scrutiny is needed to determine these. Instead of labels, analysis of the local legitimacy of a group and the type of governance services it provides needs to guide the tactics of political dialogue with the group.

Finally, the rhetorical emphasis on (rural) governance by African and European policymakers needs to translate into concrete progress in improving the socioeconomic prospects for young people, and their access to public goods and services, as well as natural resource management – particularly in adjacent regions and other areas vulnerable to jihadist groups. Yet, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the hybridity of governance institutions on the ground, and of the fact that a 'return' of the state does not automatically improve local populations' access to governance if the state authorities are considered oppressive and corrupt. A particularly important question regarding peaceful development is resolving conflicts over land and water resources in regions with pastoral and farming communities, which intrinsically also links to climate change policies. Here, the EU can contribute by making sure that its considerable support to climate change adaptation targets the needs of marginalised groups such as pastoral communities and is conflict-sensitive. Ultimately, the challenge is to implement policies that alleviate the political and socioeconomic marginalisation of these countries' hinterlands and of the people who live in these geographical peripheries.

(28) 'The long jihad: The boom-bust cycle behind jihadist durability', op.cit.

Depiction of a hacking attack.
Image: Markus Spiske/Unsplash



FUNCTIONAL SPACES

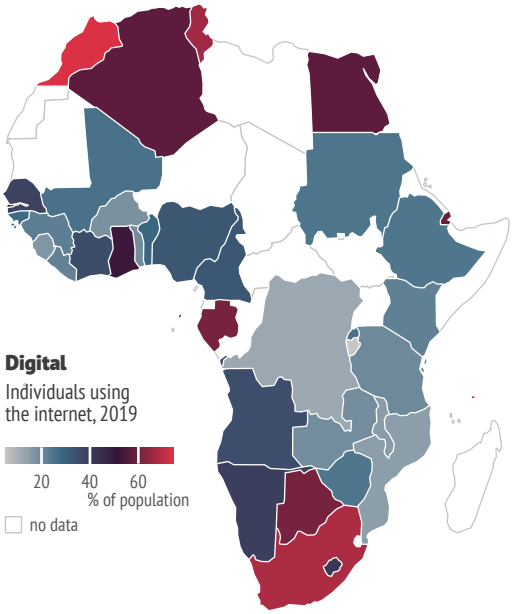
Functional spaces

Four non-physical arenas where geopolitical dynamics are spurred by technological, societal or economic drivers

Trade

Eritrea is the only African country not to have signed the AfCFTA

Data: TRALAC, 2021, Status of AfCFTA Ratification



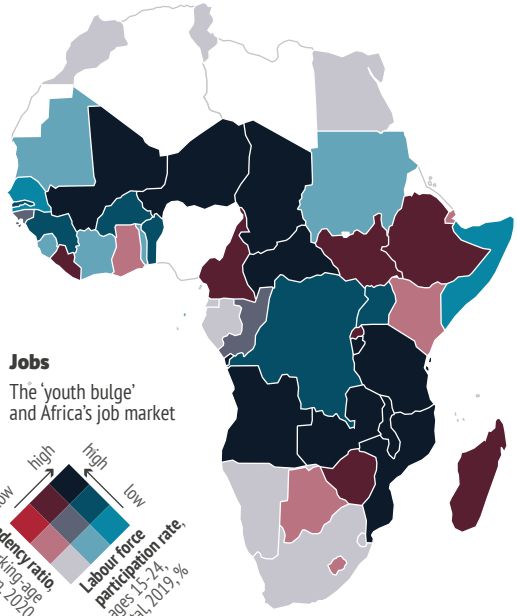
Digital

Individuals using the internet, 2019

20 40 60
% of population

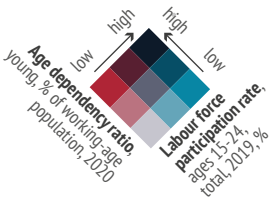
no data

Data: World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2021



Jobs

The 'youth bulge' and Africa's job market



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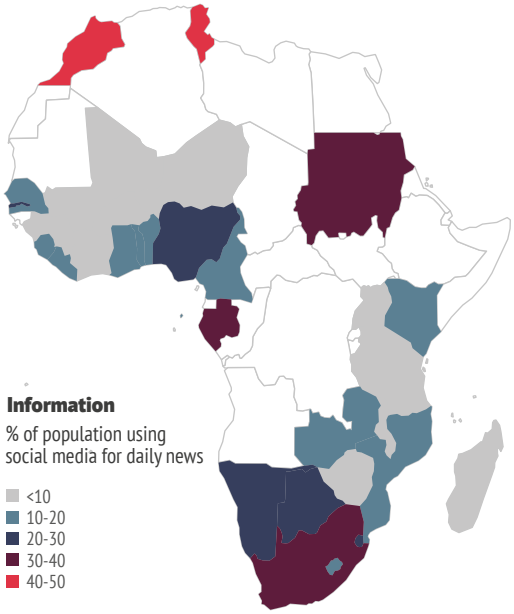
Data: World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2021



Information

% of population using social media for daily news

<10
10-20
20-30
30-40
40-50

Data: Afrobarometer, 2018

CHAPTER 5

TRADE

by
SEAN WOOLFREY

Against the backdrop of a global pandemic and the worst continent-wide recession in half a century [(1)], African states are embarking on an ambitious project of continental economic integration to boost Africa's socioeconomic development and improve the continent's position in the global economy. The establishment of the AfCFTA integrates Africa's national economies and regional economic blocs and lays the foundation for a continental market encompassing over one billion people. By removing barriers to trade and investment, the AfCFTA seeks to deepen economic ties between African economies and facilitate the free movement of persons, capital, goods and services throughout the continent. Africa's states are thereby creating a continent-wide geopolitical space that reframes how their governments, firms and citizens interact with one another in the economic sphere and influences how Africa's trade partners engage with the continent.

WHAT IS CHANGING

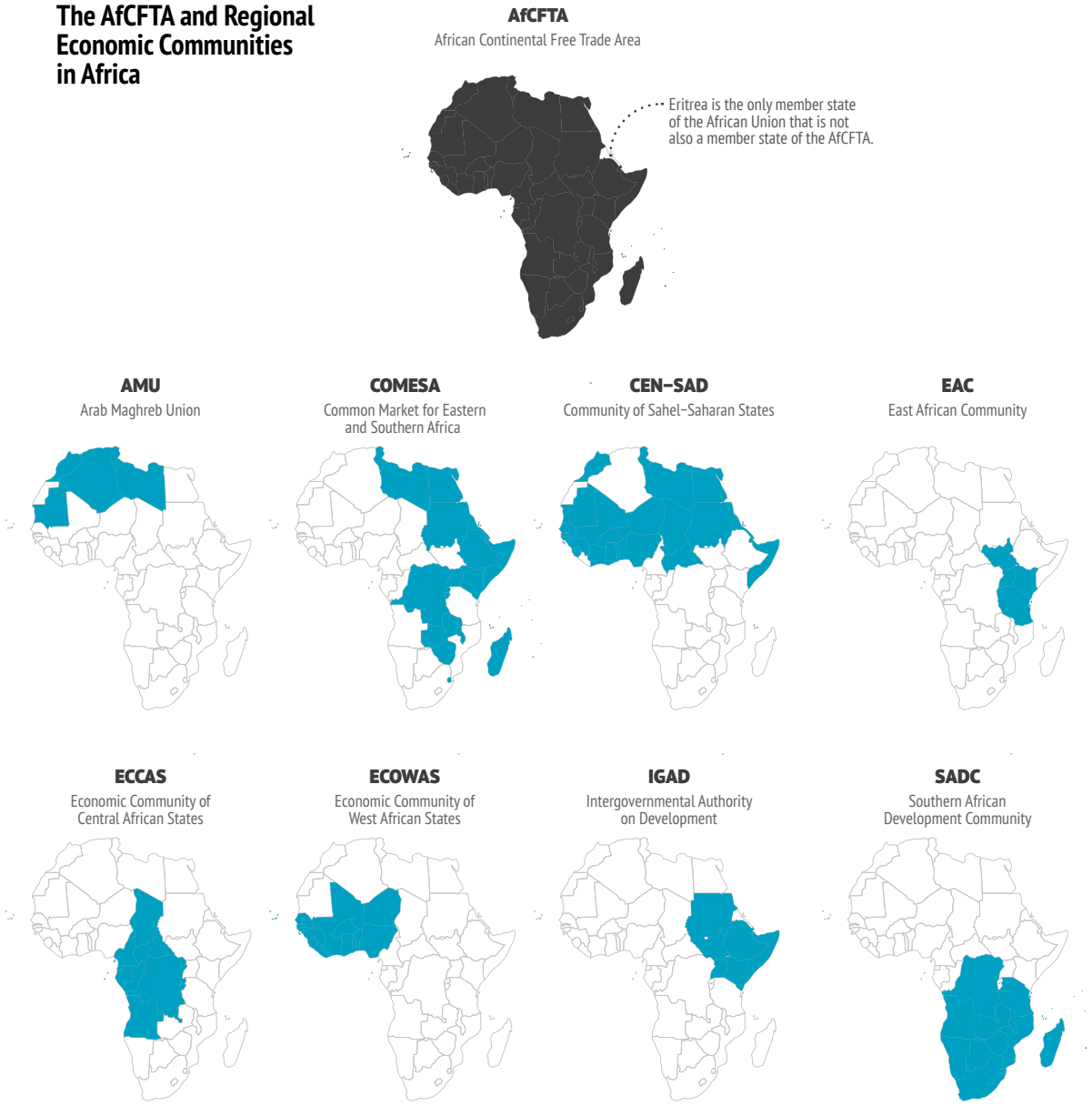
The AfCFTA represents a major step in ongoing efforts to resolve the fragmentation of Africa's economy. Colonialism left Africa fragmented into relatively small national economies, oriented towards producing and exporting a narrow range of primary (mineral and agricultural) commodities to Europe and other industrialised economies. Seeking to end this 'dependence' on foreign markets, African nations sought in the decades following independence to integrate their economies and boost intra-African trade as a way to promote 'collective self-reliance' and foster industrial and economic development [(2)]. This was to be achieved through the creation of sub-regional blocs – 'regional economic communities' (RECs) – that would establish free trade areas and, later, customs unions between their member states. Eventually these sub-regional customs unions would be integrated into a continental customs union, which would in turn evolve into the African Economic Community.

The results of this strategy have been mixed up to this point. Some RECs, including the East African Community, have established functioning customs unions, while others, like the Arab Maghreb Union, have been unable to launch regional free trade areas due to political tensions between member states. The removal of tariffs on trade within (most)

(1) African Development Bank (AfDB), *African Economic Outlook 2021 – From debt resolution to growth: The road ahead for Africa*, 2021 (https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/african-economic-outlook-2021).

(2) The Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa (1980) and the 'Abuja' Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (1991) laid out the blueprint for Africa's economic integration.

The AfCFTA and Regional Economic Communities in Africa



Data: European Commission, GISCO, 2022

RECs has contributed to growing levels of intra-African trade, but such trade still only represents about 18 % of Africa's exports [3]. Africa's market is also fragmented into regional trading blocs, as the vast majority of intra-African trade occurs between members of the same REC. For example, trade between Southern African Development Community members accounts for almost half (47.5 % in 2019) of all intra-African trade [4]. Relatively little trade occurs between African states that

(3) Author's calculation using data from ITC's Trademap database: https://trademap.org.

(4) Author's calculation using data from ITC's Trademap database: https://trademap.org.

are not either members of the same REC, or neighbours.

The AfCFTA seeks to address this. It builds on economic integration and trade liberalisation within Africa's RECs by liberalising tariffs between the RECs, removing non-tarrif barriers to continent-wide trade and establishing a continental framework for the governance of trade-related issues such as investment, competition and intellectual property rights. In so doing, it is reshaping Africa's economic geography by paving the way 'for a continental market with the free movement of persons, capital, goods and services' [(5)]. The establishment of an area of free trade is a fundamental game changer for economic and political relations among its constituent countries, and creates the conditions for redrawing the place of the African continent in the global economy.

Other factors are also contributing to the creation of a continental market. One is the shift to greater freedom of movement for Africa's people, reflected in more liberalised visa regimes for intra-African travellers [(6)]. Another notable factor is increasing financial integration. In this regard, the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) and the AfCFTA Secretariat have launched the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) initiative to establish a centralised payment and settlement infrastructure for intra-African trade and commerce payments. More broadly several African headquartered banks have expanded their presence across the continent in recent years, rapidly becoming pan-African banks [(7)].

WHY IT IS CHANGING

Growth in e-commerce and the expansion of African multinational retailers and financial servies firms across the continent contribute to demand for continental integration. Nonetheless, the establishment of the AfCFTA is largely a political project in line with Africa's decades-long strategy to promote African unity and overcome the developmental challenges associated with small national markets. In this regard, four key (geo)political factors are driving AfCFTA implementation.

The first is a shared belief among African policymakers that intra-African trade can stimulate industrial development across Africa. Strong growth in African exports to China and other emerging economies in recent years has reduced Africa's traditional dependence on European and other 'Northern' markets, but has done little to alter the composition of Africa's exports. As with Africa's traditional export markets in Europe and North America, China and other emerging economies are largely interested in Africa's mineral and agricultural commodities. As a result, Africa's exports to the rest of the world continue to be dominated by these primary commodities. Intra-African trade, by contrast, is much more diversified, comprising a higher share of manufactured products [(8)]. With this in mind, and conscious of the opportunities provided by Africa's fast growing cities and economies, African leaders see increased intra-African trade as a means for the continent to break free from its commodity dependence and boost its manufacturing

African leaders see increased intra-African trade as a means to break free from commodity dependence.

(5) African Union, 'Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area', March 2018 (https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36437-treaty-consolidated_text_on_cfta_-_en.pdf).

(6) African Development Bank (AfDB) and African Union (AU), *Africa Visa Openness Report 2020*, Abidjan, 2020 (https://www.visaopenness.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/VisaOReport2020-R8_14dec20.pdf).

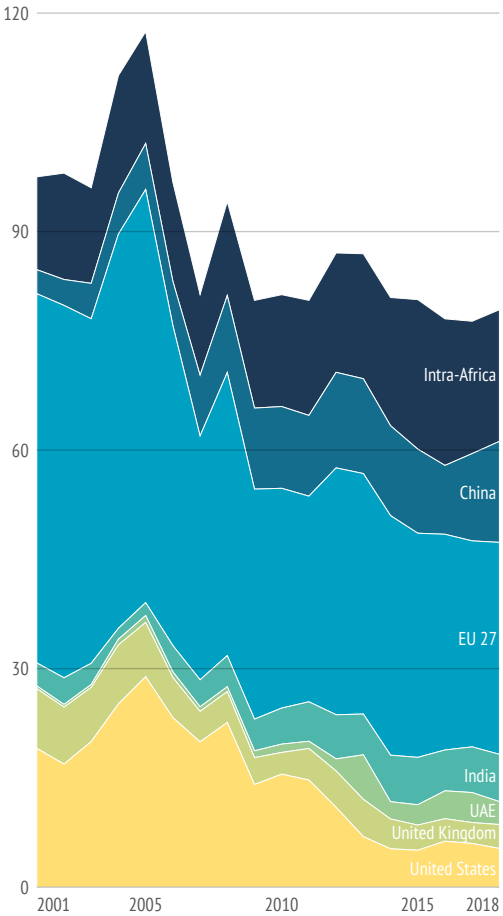
(7) Raga, S. and Tyson, J., 'Impact of pan-African banks on financial development in sub-Saharan Africa', ODI, London, 2021 (https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/ODI-DEGRP-ImpactPanAfricanBanks-Synthesis-Report-March21-FINAL040321.pdf).

(8) See Songwe, V., 'Boosting Trade and Investment: A new agenda for regional and international engagement', Brookings, 2019 (https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/BLS18234_BRO_book_006.1_CH6.pdf).

capacities, increasing it's geo-economic weight in the world.

Key exports

Share of total continental exports to key partners, 2001-2018



Data: trademap.org

A second key factor is the pivotal role played by Africa's continental institutions, whereby free trade can be a functional step forward towards greater economic and political integration, fulfilling pan-African ambitions. While African states are broadly united on the case for continental integration, much of the push for concluding and implementing the AfCFTA has come from Africa's continental institutions, particularly the African Union Commission (AUC). The latter played a pivotal role in the conclusion of the AfCFTA Agreement and in supporting its member states through the negotiations and early stages of implementation. The AUC also oversees several complementary continental initiatives that are crucial for the success of the AfCFTA, including the AU Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, the AU Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) and the Action Plan for Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT).

A third important factor behind AfCFTA implementation is the broadly supportive role played by Africa's regional powers. Africa's two largest economies, Nigeria and South Africa, have displayed a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the AfCFTA [(9)]. At times they have demonstrated strong leadership in negotiations, but Nigeria also wavered on signing the Agreement. Both regional powers have exhibited concern about the impact of a free trade area on their domestic industries, and both have lobbied for AfCFTA rules that align with their own industrial development objectives. Critically though, both countries have declared their broad support for the AfCFTA, and neither have sought to block the establishment of the AfCFTA.

A final crucial driver of AfCFTA implementation is the support provided by development partners, particularly the EU and EU Member States. European develpment partners have long encouraged and supported African countries and Africa's regional and continental institutions to adopt and implement an EU-inspired model of regional integration as a way to foster socio-economic development. Germany, for example, has provided financial and technical assistance to the AUC and other institutions, such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), to support the negotiations, build capacity

(9) See Woolfrey, S., Apiko, P. and Pharatlhatlhe, K., 'Nigeria and South Africa: Shaping prospects for the African Continental Free Trade Area', ECDPM Discussion Paper No 242, February 2019 (https://ecdpm.org/publications/nigeria-and-south-africa-shaping-prospects-for-the-african-continental-free-trade-area/).

for implementation and ensure sustainability concerns are addressed in the AfCFTA.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In reshaping Africa's economic geography and turning a collection of sub-regional markets into a single continental market, the AfCFTA generates economic opportunities and new competitive dynamics among Africa's regional powers, their firms and industries. But the establishment of the AfCFTA also has policy implications for Africa's partners. The economic opportunities presented by a large, integrated and fast-growing African market will intensify competition among external powers seeking to do deals in Africa. Indeed, the EU, historically Africa's most important trade and investment partner, recognises that 'Africa's potential attracts increased interest from many players on the world scene' and that the EU and its member states 'must adapt' the way they engage with Africa [(10)].

African states can leverage the interest of other global powers in an integrated African market.

For decades, the EU has engaged with North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa through geographically distinct channels. North African countries were engaged as part of Europe's 'Southern Neighbourhood', with economic relations managed under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership since 1995 [(11)]. Sub-Saharan African countries were engaged as part of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states under the Lomé Convention (1975) and Cotonou Partnership Agreement (2000), and more recently through Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and regional blocs of countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

With the establishment of the AfCFTA and signals that African states may seek in the future to negotiate with external partners as a bloc [(12)], the EU is adapting its economic relations with Africa to a 'whole-of-Africa' approach. In particular, the EU has reframed the EPAs and its free trade agreements with North African countries as 'building blocks' of the AfCFTA and has signalled its intent to seek a 'comprehensive continent-to-continent free trade agreement between the EU and Africa' that builds on the AfCFTA [(13)]. This long-term objective fits into broader EU efforts to establish a 'partnership of equals' with Africa.

Shifting the focus of EU-Africa economic relations from the sub-regional to the continental level is a complicated exercise that will take years, if not decades, to complete [(14)]. It will also likely lead to a rebalancing of bargaining power between the two parties, particularly if African states can leverage the interest of other global powers in an integrated African market. Nonetheless, making this shift could help cement the EU's position as

(10) European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, 'Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa', JOIN(2020) 4 final, 9 March 2020 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0004&from=FR).

(11) Dworkin, A., 'A Return to Africa: Why North African States are Looking South' ECFR Policy Brief, July 2020 (https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/a_return_to_africa_why_north_african_states_are_looking_south.pdf).

(12) See African Union, 'Decisions, Declarations and Resolution', Assembly of the Union, Thirty-First Ordinary Session, 1-2 July 2018, Nouakchott, Mauritania (https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/36130-assembly_au_dec_690_-_712_xxxi_e.pdf).

(13) European Commission, 'Communication on a new Africa – Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs: Taking our partnership for investment and jobs to the next level', COM(2018) 643 final, 12 September 2018 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0643&from=EN).

(14) See Woolfrey, S., 'What does the AfCFTA mean for an EU-Africa trade agreement?', ECDPM Briefing Note No 140, October 2021 (https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/What-does-AfCFTA-mean-EU-Africa-trade-agreement-ECDPM-briefing-note-140-2021.pdf).

Africa's most important trade and investment partner by addressing concerns on the African side that existing trade relations with the EU undermine Africa's integration agenda. If the EU continues to support AfCFTA implementation while successfully adopting a continent-to-continent approach to trade and investment relations, it and its member states will be well placed to share in the benefits of African integration.

CHAPTER 6

DIGITAL

by
PATRYK PAWLAK

Digital connectivity plays a key role in Africa's economic and social development. The vision presented in the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020-2030 is clear: an integrated and inclusive digital society and economy in Africa [(1)]. Whether it will materialise depends to a great extent on how Africa's digital space will evolve in the next decade. Digital space is defined here as a social, political and cultural environment resulting from decisions made about a digital ecosystem in a given territory, including information technology infrastructure and associated governance mechanisms. This chapter investigates the role that major powers play in the processes underpinning the transformation of the digital space in Africa.

WHAT IS CHANGING

Africa's growing online population and the importance of digital transformation for growth and development have increased Africa's focus on the access to information technology infrastructure across the continent.

To bring their population online and promote the growth of their economies, governments and private sector actors are investing in expanding the digital ecosystem across the continent and developing internet infrastructure: a broad network of internet exchange points (IXPs), undersea and terrestrial cables, satellites and wireless systems. Today, 21 of the 25 least connected countries in the world are in Africa [(2)]. Underdeveloped infrastructure increases dependence on international connections, exposes these countries to more frequent internet outages and ultimately undermines digital resilience. Data shows that countries with the most developed internet ecosystem such as Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria or South Africa score highest in the internet affordability indexes [(3)]. Fibre-optic cables have the potential to transform the continent and attract investment: Google has announced plans to build a subsea internet cable, Equiano, that will connect Lisbon and Cape Town, while Facebook is building the 2Africa cable intended to circumnavigate Africa with a capacity of 180 Tb/s by the time of its completion in 2024.

In addition, given that expanding mobile broadband penetration by 10 % would yield an

(1) African Union, 'The Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030)', 18 May 2020 (https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38507-doc-dts-english.pdf).

(2) Pazarbasioglu, C., Irigoyen, J.L. and Mehta, A., 'African leaders committed to building a digital economy', World Bank, 30 May 2018 (https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/african-leaders-committed-to-building-digital-economy).

(3) Economist Intelligence Unit, 'The Inclusive Internet Index' (https://theinclusiveinternet.eiu.com/).

increase of 2.5 % in GDP per capita [4], governments are prioritising access to mobile technology. Several countries have already set ambitious goals or started connectivity programmes: Senegal has set a target of generating 10 % of its GDP from the digital economy by 2025 and Rwanda is rolling out 4G and fibre connectivity to deliver e-government services to its citizens [5]. Some estimates suggest that the internet economy could contribute up to USD 180 billion to Africa's GDP by 2025 [6].

The evolution of Africa's digital space is changing not only how outsiders see the continent but more importantly how Africans themselves see their own place in shaping the global digital space. The growing share of African citizens in the world's online population and the new market opportunities that this creates imply a more central role for African states in shaping global conversations about the regulation of cybercrime, personal information, data governance or digital rights. In other words, African countries no longer see themselves as passive observers of those debates but rather as valued partners in shaping the economic and social dimensions of digital space.

What is often ignored, however, is *how* the means through which the digital ecosystem and connectivity are assured have an impact on *what* positions individual countries take on the international stage. For instance, how does the fact that China has built about 50 % of Africa's 3G networks and 70 % of its 4G networks [7] in the past 20 years influence national policies? The following section provides some insight into this question.

WHY IT IS CHANGING

Two factors help explain the changing digital cartography of Africa: the gap between the continent's expectations and current role in shaping global digital space (agency and aspirations) and competition between major powers who wish to influence Africa's views on the economic, social and political dimensions of the digital space (power competition).

First, Africa's digital space is changing as a result of a widespread perception in the continent that the West does not sufficiently appreciate African concerns and aspirations. African countries feel that they have often been treated primarily as recipients of foreign aid rather than as partners with agency. This, to some extent, is a natural consequence of Western countries' domination of the digital markets. However, this approach has over the years made big players in the West insensitive to Africa's needs and ambitions. This sense of resentment is now being instrumentalised in particular by powers like China and Russia to strengthen opposition towards the Western-dominated control over the internet which ultimately promotes a different vision of cyberspace than they do. They tap into and exploit those negative sentiments, while extensively investing in infrastructure [8], criticising Western approaches and pushing new narratives, policies and laws, as a way to challenge the existing model of internet governance. This is happening at the national, regional and global levels.

Africa's hunger for accelerating digital transition as the means to economic growth and development has resulted in power competition among major players placing Africa at the centre of a digital scramble. They use existing

(4) Katz, R. and Callorda, F., *Economic Contribution of Broadband, Digitization and ICT Regulation: Econometric modelling for Africa*, ITU, Geneva, 2019 (https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/pref/D-PREF-EF.BDT_AFR-2019-PDF-E.pdf).

(5) 'African leaders committed to building a digital economy', op. cit.

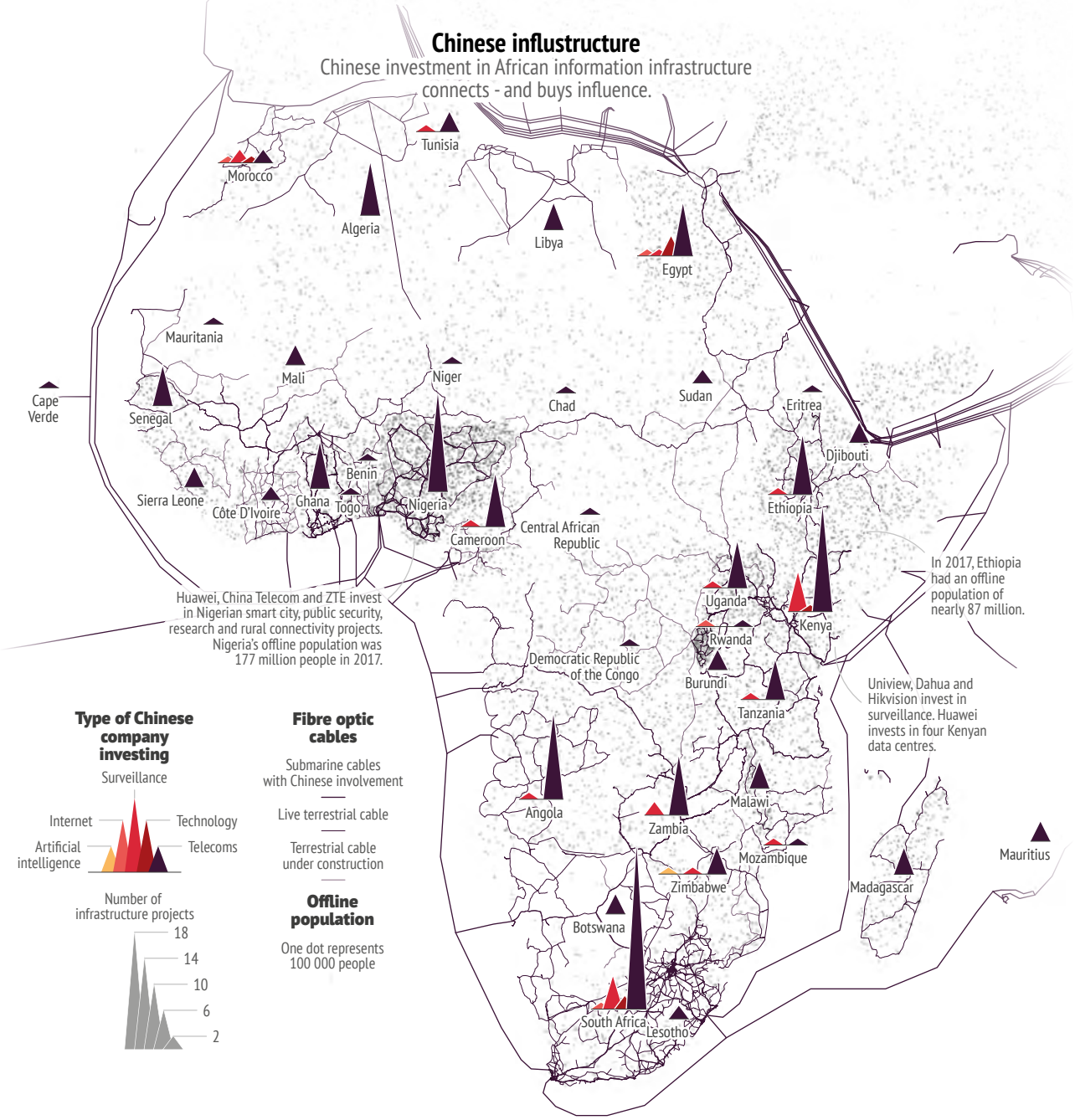
(6) International Finance Corporation, *e-Conomy Africa 2020*, 2020 (https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/publications_ext_content/ifc_external_publication_site/publications_listing_page/google-e-conomy).

(7) Hruby, A., 'The digital infrastructure imperative in African markets', Atlantic Council, 8 April 2021 (https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/the-digital-infrastructure-imperative-in-african-markets/).

(8) Ibid.

Chinese influstructure

Chinese investment in African information infrastructure connects - and buys influence.



Type of Chinese company investing

Fibre optic cables

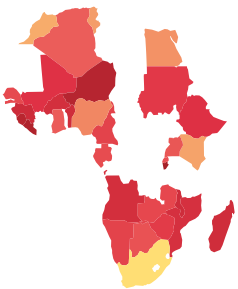
Submarine cables with Chinese involvement

Live terrestrial cable

Terrestrial cable under construction

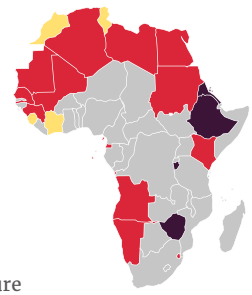
Offline population

One dot represents 100 000 people



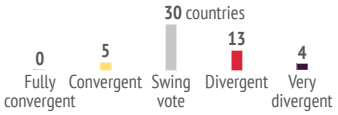
Geopolitics of inclusivity

The Inclusive Internet Index, compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit, encompasses metrics of availability, affordability, and content relevance, as well as the readiness of users, safety measures and policy. With digital inclusivity becoming a priority for the continent, the investment in digital infrastructure will only play a bigger role.



UN voting patterns on cybercrime

Investment in digital infrastructure is often used by external powers to exercise influence over political decisions at international level. Many African countries are still evaluating their national visions for cyberspace. But this window of opportunity for the EU may not remain open for much longer.



Data: European Commission, GISCO, 2022; ASPI, 'Mapping China's Tech Giants', 2022; NSRC, AfTerFibre, 2021; EMODnet Human Activities: 'Telecom cables (schematic routes)', 2017; Economist Intelligence Unit, 'The Inclusive Internet Index', 2021; International Telecommunications Union, 2022; directionsblog.eu, 'Tracking UN Voting Patterns on Cybercrime', 2022

dependencies or create new ones to achieve their political or economic gains. In an effort to win their hearts and minds, different players take divergent approaches to African countries. Russia aims to increase its imprint on the continent with narratives about sovereignty and non-interference that tap into African anti-colonial sentiment. Russia's proposal for the establishment of the UN Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security [(9)] was largely supported by the African states who perceived it as an effort to democratise the debate and place them on an equal footing with other big players (applying the one country-one vote principle). Furthermore, Russia's appropriation of the narrative about the need for capacity building won it the support of developing countries who saw it as an opportunity to accelerate investments on the continent. However, some authors have noted that Russia does not have a grand plan for Africa and its engagement remains purely opportunistic [(10)].

Africa has become a key battleground between two competing visions of internet governance.

China and Chinese companies use the narrative of economic growth and societal order through investment and partnership to tap into Africa's vision of progress and stability [(11)]. With Western investment in ICT projects diminishing over the years, Beijing has identified a clear opportunity to deliver new markets for tech 'made in China' [(12)] while at the same time strengthening political ties. The Digital Silk Road [(13)] projects in Africa – ranging from sub-sea cables, smart cities or establishing data centres – provide new digital infrastructure across the continent, with Angola, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe among the biggest recipients of the investment. The Export-Import Bank of China and other Chinese agencies are active across the continent, including in Cameroon, Kenya, Senegal and Zambia [(14)]. Such engagement is already paying off in political terms. China argues that the existing model of an open internet is inadequate to deal with certain technological needs and societal challenges, which is why it has proposed a new standard for internet protocol ('New IP'). Despite the warnings that the Chinese vision of a more state-controlled digital space might result in radically undermining the internet as we know it, the governments of Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, South Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe have already expressed their support for the 'new IP' in the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

(9) United Nations, *Final substantive report. Open-ended working group on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security*, 10 March 2021 (https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Final-report-A-AC.290-2021-CRP.2.pdf).

(10) Grissom, A.R. et al., 'Russia's growing presence in Africa: A geostrategic assessment', RAND Research Report, February 2022 (https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4399.html).

(11) Peng, L., 'ICT investment and partnership key to fueling Africa's digital growth' (https://www.huawei.com/en/technology-insights/industry-insights/outlook/mobile-broadband/wireless-for-sustainability/feature-stories/ict-investment-and-partnership-key-fuelling-africas-digital-growth).

(12) Nyabiage, J., 'China promotes "digital silk road" as solution to Africa's data needs', *South China Morning Post*, 26 December 2021 (https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3160525/china-promotes-digital-silk-road-solution-africas-data-needs); Hungerland, N. and Chan, K., 'Assessing China's Digital Silk Road: Huawei's engagement in Nigeria', LSE Ideas Digital IR, Working Paper 11/2021 (http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/112588/1/LSE_IDEAS_assessing_chinas_digital_silk_road_huaweis_engagement_in_nigeria.pdf).

(13) Greene, R. and Triolo, P., 'Will China control the global internet via its Digital Silk Road?', 8 May 2020, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 8 May 2020 (https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/08/will-china-control-global-internet-via-its-digital-silk-road-pub-81857).

(14) Tugendhat, H. and Voo, J., 'China's Digital Silk Road in Africa and the future of internet governance', China Africa Research Initiative, Working Paper 50/2021, August 2021 (http://www.sais-cari.org/s/WP-50-Tugendhat-and-Voo-China-Digital-Silk-Road-Africa.pdf); Agbebi, M., 'China's Digital Silk Road and Africa's technological future', Council on Foreign Relations, 1 February 2022 (https://www.cfr.org/blog/chinas-digital-silk-road-and-africas-technological-future).

In the face of this growing pressure from Russia and China, the EU and like-minded partners have stressed the need to preserve a global, open, free, safe and secure cyberspace as the core of the global digital economy in which the African countries are eager to build a stake. As the shapers of the internet, the developed economies like the United States, Japan or the European Union have played a central role in establishing the system for governance of cyberspace and the distribution of critical internet resources [(15)]. It other words, their main argument is that departing from these old, tested rules and principles would automatically put their economic growth and security in jeopardy. The growing importance of the digital domain in states' overall security, development and foreign policy has triggered additional focus on ensuring the long-term resilience of their digital infrastructure, resulting in exclusion of high-risk providers from their markets. The United States, Australia and Japan founded the Blue Dot Network in 2019 to promote quality infrastructure investment that is open and inclusive, transparent, and economically viable. It is a certification mechanism that promotes infrastructure projects that meet robust international quality standards [(16)]. Similarly, the EU's Global Gateway and a strategic approach to connectivity, including in the digital sphere [(17)], is a new strategy to boost smart, clean and secure links. With €300 billion of investment pledged under the Global Gateway, the EU hopes to deliver sustainable and high-quality projects that reflect the needs of partner countries and ensure lasting benefits for local communities [(18)].

It is also important to understand why these changes are happening now. The rise of China and Russia as competitors in the marketplace of ideas for the digital space, bolstered by their capacity to deliver political support or concrete technological solutions at competitive prices, has effectively ended the Western monopoly. The confluence of Africa's growing online community, its aspirations to play a more active role in global governance and the competition among great powers, has also provided a window of opportunity for African governments to increase the value of their support – both in terms of economic and political gains.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

With the world looking for global solutions to questions around the evolution of the digital space, Africa has become a key battleground between two competing visions of internet governance. China and Russia are at the forefront of promoting a state-centric vision of governance whereby information security and internal stability are a top priority. The EU and like-minded countries, on the other hand, seek to promote a decentralised approach to governance of cyberspace and digital domains which ensures that not only state interests but also those of citizens are adequately protected. The question that African countries need to confront is no longer *how* to close the digital divide and provide access for their citizens but more importantly *which* vision of the digital space they wish to pursue.

With the geopolitical competition between big players becoming increasingly confrontational, the stakes for Africa are high. The proliferation of Chinese technology on the continent might satisfy concrete connectivity needs in the short term but undermine the digital sovereignty of those states in the future. Even though the adaptation of Chinese 5G

(15) Geneva Internet Platform, 'Critical internet resources' (https://dig.watch/topics/critical-internet-resources/).

(16) US Department of State, *Blue Dot Network* (https://www.state.gov/blue-dot-network/).

(17) Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions - A Globally Connected Europe ', 10629/21, 12 July 2021 (https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10629-2021-INIT/en/pdf).

(18) European Commission, 'Global Gateway' (https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en).

technology or smart city solutions might deliver immediate results, the risks linked to potential abuse of such technology to exercise political pressure on governments exists [19]. As former Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull put it: 'The real question is not looking for a smoking gun but asking whether this is a loaded gun and whether you want to have that risk' [20]. Such a bottom-up approach whereby China develops and deploys the actual technology in the partner countries in Africa and thereby gains a strong foothold is difficult to counter as it requires not only political commitment but also concrete resources in terms of funding, staffing and expertise.

Furthermore, the choices that African countries make regarding their digital transformation have a lasting impact beyond the continent. With Africa representing roughly 28 % of the membership of the United Nations (UN), hardly any global decision can be made without Africa's vote. The support by African countries for the Russia-sponsored resolution establishing an Ad Hoc Committee to negotiate a new international treaty on cybercrime might result in an outcome detrimental to African interests. Several provisions of the draft treaty proposed by Russia are for instance contrary to provisions in the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Data Protection (the so-called Malabo Convention). Further support from the African countries for state-centric solutions such as the 'new IP' or cybersurveillance technologies would push them further from the Western countries and ultimately undermine the global nature of the internet as we know it with immediate global economic and political impact.

The choices that African countries make regarding their digital transformation have a lasting impact beyond the continent.

In the new world of geopolitical competition, power derives not from military might but from the capacity of an actor to leverage connectivity to build a robust network of meaningful partnerships. To become a valued player in the arena of digital and cyber governance, the EU's international engagement on those issues needs to evolve into network diplomacy: one that would effectively bind together different stakeholders – governments, the private sector and civil society organisations – and build on their respective strengths [21]. Such an approach implies three main steps. First, the EU needs to move beyond the state-centric paradigm of EU-Africa relations and invest in building alliances with non-state actors like the private sector, telecom operators, trade associations, civil society organisations, or research institutes. This would open additional channels for influencing policymakers across the continent and counter the bottom-up tactics of other players who do not share the EU's vision of cyberspace.

Second, the EU needs to do a better job in explaining its vision of digital space to the African partners. This implies recognising as legitimate African countries' concerns about the pace of their own digital transition and fears of being 'left behind'. The concept of a global open, free, safe, and secure cyberspace is often unclear – even for European audiences – and might result in undesired outcomes such as surveillance capitalism or cyber harm. It is important, therefore, that the EU uses more precise language that is grounded in well-established concepts of internet governance such as development, rule of law, rights, multistakeholder participation, decentralisation, or interoperability. In addition,

(19) Dou, E., 'Documents link Huawei to China's surveillance programs', *Washington Post*, 14 December 2021 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/12/14/huawei-surveillance-china/).

(20) Corera, G., 'Huawei: '"No smoking gun" in US's 5G dossier', BBC News, 14 January 2020 (https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-51112232).

(21) Pawlak, P., 'Navigating the EU's cyber diplomacy', *Directions*, 25 September 2020 (https://directionsblog.eu/navigating-the-eu-cyber-diplomacy/).

rather than investing exclusively in strengthening alliances with developed, like-minded countries, the EU should pay closer attention to South-South cooperation, which has increasing appeal in Africa, and propose innovative models for triangular cooperation with the EU. In practice, this could mean teaming up with African partners to launch a major international initiative that addresses the continent's and Global South's concerns, for instance a 'Global Digital Resilience Pledge'. Such an initiative would highlight the value of Africa as an important policy entrepreneur in the digital sphere.

Finally, the EU needs to adapt its diplomacy to the digital age. Despite the significant efforts made by the EU over the past few years to strengthen its footprint regarding digital and cyber projects in Africa, its impact has remained rather modest and the EU keeps punching below its weight. This results primarily from the fragmentation of competences and resources among the EU institutions which in turn limits the EU's situational awareness of what the African partners really want, what the EU already provides, and the gaps that still need to be filled. Therefore, the EU Cyber Diplomacy Network and the EU Cyber Capacity Building Board proposed by the EU Cybersecurity Strategy should be established as a matter of priority in order to allow a better use of the Union's diplomatic machinery, including the use of funding instruments and the engagement of EU delegations.

CHAPTER 7

JOBS

by
EYOB BALCHA GEBREMARIAM

This chapter identifies the job market as one of the non-physical spaces where competition for resources flourishes among state and non-state actors, resulting from Africa's projected demographic boom. The chapter argues that external powers have been actively constructing a 'marketised' image of African youth, which has contributed to, rather than mitigated, young people's marginalisation, vulnerability and exclusion. As the multipolar system emerged in recent years, more actors have begun scrambling for influence and exploiting resources in the African continent, including youth labour, resulting in a failure of the market to address the need for sustainable and inclusive development in the continent. The following sections show what is changing in the African job market as a result of the much-hyped 'youth bulge', and why/how geoeconomic players are shaping market dynamics and perceptions to fulfil their strategic objectives. The conclusions offer policy recommendations for a more sustainable relationship between Europe and Africa, one that will counter the marginalisation of young people and address market failures.

WHAT IS CHANGING

Africa's expanding young demography, growing middle class, and human capital have become essential features of the continent's global profile in recent years. Ten African countries, for example, are projected to experience at least a fivefold increase in their population by 2100. The growing middle class with higher purchasing power will reach 1.1 billion in 2060. Between 2019 and 2100, Africa's young population will increase by 181 %, whereas Europe's population will shrink by 24 % [(1)]. Two specific areas that exhibit changes in power dynamics due to these demographic shifts are the geopolitical relations between Africa and Europe and the relationship between Africa and transnational capital. [(2)]

Since the early 2010s, a positive depiction of Africa under the 'Africa rising' [(3)] narrative has put African youth at the centre of continental renewal and transformation, mainly because of their demographic dominance. This image played a vital role in positioning Africa as a source of resources while the world transitioned from a unipolar to a multipolar system. Consequently, the phrase 'Africa is the

(1) Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *Africa's Youth: Jobs or Migration?*, Ibrahim Forum Report, 2019.

(2) Transnational capital refers to 'functionally integrated business capital that transcends national borders'. See: Dent, C. M., 'Transnational capital, the state and foreign economic policy: Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 10, No 2, pp. 246–277 (http://www.jstor.org/stable/4177460).

(3) *The Economist*, 'The hopeful continent: Africa rising', 3 December 2011 (https://www.economist.com/leaders/2011/12/03/africa-rising).

youngest continent' has become the most common opening statement of studies and reports on African socio-economic and political issues [4].The underlying rationale that connects the demographic factor with the 'Africa rising' discourse is purely economic and driven by market interests [5]. The projection that the continent will host a quarter of the world's population by 2050, with an 'explosion' in the working-age population, means that Africa has come to be seen as a vast source of cheap labour and lucrative consumer market by traditional and emerging global powers alike [6]. China, India, Russia and Turkey have also capitalised on market-oriented solutions for Africa, primarily through state-backed interventions into African economic spheres [7]. Examples of how this translates into the market-driven narrative used by Western actors (USAID, DFID), and also key development players (The World Bank, African Development Bank) include the framing of young people as 'Africa's largest demographic asset', with a call to the international community to 'invest in African youth'. In this perspective, African young people's agency is subjugated to the logic and principles of the market, creating a dangerous gap between the interests of foreign powers and the needs of African youth.

Africa has come to be seen as a vast source of cheap labour and lucrative consumer market.

WHY IT IS CHANGING

The highly 'marketised' image of African youth as a demographic asset that can be turned into an economic dividend has been incentivised by strategies that aim for a quick return on investment. Hence, foreign engagements have been primarily about profiting from the available resources, creating market opportunities and enabling business actors. Such short-sighted approaches come at the expense of the socio-economic welfare of African people. Transformations in the African job market have been driven by three 'geopolitical traps' promoted by foreign actors, which have exacerbated, rather than addressed, youth employment challenges.

The first trap results from the paradigm of job creation. The global value chains (GVC) [8] model seeks to promote the integration of African young people into the global economy. The GVC model prioritises the needs of capital, i.e. accumulation and enhanced competitiveness, over the social needs and welfare of the young and predominantly female workforce [9]. In the GVC model, young Africans are inputs that need continuous skills development and disciplining under flagship programmes such as 'Decent Jobs for Youth' [10]. There is also an increasing trend of relocation of manufacturing from South-East Asia to African countries

(4) Fox, L. and Gandhi, D., 'Youth employment in sub-Saharan Africa: Progress and prospects', Brookings, 25 March 2021 (https://www.brookings.edu/research/youth-employment-in-sub-saharan-africa-progress-and-prospects/); '*Africa's Youth: Jobs or Migration?*, op.cit.; Gates, B., 'The world's youngest continent', Gates Notes – The Blog of Bill Gates, 10 September 2018 (https://www.gatesnotes.com/Africa-the-Youngest-Continent); World Economic Forum, 'The World's 10 youngest populations are all in Africa' 9 May 2016 (https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/the-world-s-10-youngest-countries-are-all-in-africa/).

(5) World Economic Forum, 'How can Africa cash in on its demographic dividend?'1 June 2015 , (https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/06/how-can-africa-cash-in-on-its-demographic-dividend/).'

(6) Meagher, K., 'The scramble for Africans: Demography, globalisation and Africa's informal labour markets', *The Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 52, No 4, April 2016, pp. 483-497.

(7) *The Economist*, 'Africa is attracting ever more interest from powers elsewhere', 9 May 2019 (https://www.economist.com/briefing/2019/03/07/africa-is-attracting-ever-more-interest-from-powers-elsewhere).

(8) Gereffi, G., *Global Value Chains and Development: Redefining the contours of 21st century capitalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018.

(9) Selwyn, B., 'Theory and practice of labour-centred development', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No 6, March 2016, pp. 1035-1052.

(10) Decent Jobs for Youth: https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org/commitment/258.

to take advantage of the cheap labour supply. [11]. However, since the livelihoods and well-being of young African workers are of secondary concern, such movement of transnational capital has failed to provide solutions to the 'deeply ingrained decent work deficits' in African economies [12]. Quantity rather than quality has therefore often been prioritised when it comes to job creation [13].

The second trap has to do with entrepreneurship. The latter has become a panacea for the wide range of problems African young people face [14], but without adequately addressing the diversity that exists among African young people based on their socio-economic status, gender, geographical location and other key variables [15]. Foreign aid agencies, transnational corporations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) contribute to and mobilise huge funds promoting youth entrepreneurship programmes across the continent [16]. In these processes, however, young people's employment aspirations and versatility are celebrated with limited attention to structural factors shaping African economies. The economic restructuring between the 1980s and the 2000s that significantly curtailed the capacity of African states, the undiversified and outward-oriented features of African economies, as well as infrastructural and institutional bottlenecks that hamper efficiency, are some of the structural causes of high unemployment, underemployment and jobless growth. As a consequence, self-employment is often the decision most African young people take as a 'last resort' [17], a survival strategy because of negligible opportunities for formal and stable employment.

The third trap is the normalisation of vulnerability and precarity. Young people feature predominantly in the informal economy across the continent, ranging from 56.4 % of the labour force in Southern Africa to 97.9 % in Western Africa [18]. In the past, informality in African economies was considered a problem [19]. Limited productive capacities, low levels of manufacturing, overreliance on primary export commodities and other systemic drawbacks contributed to the persistence of a large informal sector in African economies [20]. Calls to address the fundamental problems of African economies through transformative socio-economic policies largely went unheeded [21]. Such policies would necessarily require unorthodox measures that defy the neoliberal logic of the primacy of the market. Against this backdrop, records show that the mainstream economic approach among African elites and

(11) Altenburg, T. et al, *Exporting out of China or out of Africa? Automation versus relocation in the global clothing industry*., Discussion Paper No. 1/2020, Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, 2020.

(12) Gomis, R., Kapsos, S., Kuhn, S. and Leipmann, H., *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020*, International Labour Organization, 2020, p. 43 (https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2020/lang--en/index.htm).

(13) Barrett, P. M., and Baumann-Pauly, D. 'Made in Ethiopia: Challenges in the garment industry's new frontier', Centre for Business and Human Rights, NYU-Stern, May 2019, p. 17.

(14) African Union, 'Promoting youth entrepreneurship in Africa', *Policy Brief*, 2020; Oppenheimer, J. and Spicer, M., 'Creating employment in Africa', *Putting Young Africans to Work: Addressing Africa's youth unemployment crisis*, Brenthurst Foundation, 2011.

(15) Gebremariam, E.B. , 'Three points towards an effective IGAD regional youth strategy', *Horn of Africa Bulletin*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Life and Peace Institute, 2018.

(16) DeJaeghere, J. and Baxter, A., 'Entrepreneurship education for youth in sub-Saharan Africa: A capabilities approach as an alternative framework to neoliberalism's individualizing risks', *Progress in Development Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2014, pp. 61-76; African Development Bank, *Jobs for Youth in Africa: Strategy for creating 25 million jobs and equipping 50 million youth, 2016 -2025*, 2016; Digital Africa, 'Notre vision: le développement inclusif au travers d'innovations 'Made in Africa' (https://digital-africa.co/); German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 'Make-IT in Africa' (https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/57293.html); UNDP Africa, 'African Youth (especially women) entrepreneurship online portal' (https://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/about-us/AFIM/overview/YAS.html.

(17) Gough, K. V. and Langevang, T. (eds.), *Young Entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Routledge, 2016, p. 217.

(18) *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020*, 2020, p. 43

(19) International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends 2014: Risks of a jobless recovery?*, ILO, Geneva, 2014.

(20) Mkandawire, T. and Soludo, C.C., *Our Continent, Our Future: African perspectives on structural adjustment*, IDRC 1999.

(21) Mkandawire, T., 'Social policy in a development context: Introduction', in Mkandawire, T. (ed.), *Social Policy in a Development Context*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2004, pp.1-33.

global actors remained unchanged. Hence, the growing young population in Africa has had limited opportunity to contribute to enhanced productivity and structural transformation. Instead, African youth are now experiencing the 'intensification of vulnerable employment' [22] in the ever-expanding informal sector.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The outcomes of the above-mentioned geopolitical traps are visible in the economic marginalisation of African young people, their apathy towards formal political processes and inclinations towards protest activities and violence. 2019/2020 data from 18 African countries shows that young Africans are more likely to have at least secondary school education than their elders [23]. However, young Africans are also significantly more likely to be out of work or seeking employment [24]. For example, youth unemployment is as high as 49 % and 57 % in Botswana and Lesotho, respectively [25]. When it comes to political participation, young Africans between the ages of 18-35 are 'about twice as likely (34 %) to have skipped voting as middle-aged (19 %) and older (11 %) citizens' [26]. In addition to voting, African young people are also less likely to be members of political parties and to actively engage with local leaders at community level. In contrast, 'nearly one in five (18 %) say they participated in a protest during the past year' [27].

Clearly, the new 'scramble for Africa' has created market failures in Africa, insofar as youth policies do not sufficiently address work deficits and the vulnerabilities of African young people but are instead centred on broader geo-economic interests. Reversal of these intertwined discursive and political processes requires radical approaches that prioritise strong state capacity and policy measures [28] that target the structural bottlenecks within African economies.

The 'new scramble for Africa' has created market failures in the continent.

In concrete terms, policy solutions need to address the structural causes of traps that are generating vulnerabilities and exploitation. African states, on the one hand, need to reorient their approaches towards enhancing the productive capacities of their economies, which would require unorthodox economic policies and massive investment in social sectors to achieve economic transformation. Geopolitical actors, on the other hand, can also better collaborate on programmes and policies with long-term and broader impacts for the majority of African young people, orienting their approaches

(22) 'The scramble for Africans', op.cit.

(23) Afrobarometer, 'Africans say governments aren't doing enough to help youth', *Afrobarometer Dispatch* No 418, 2021 (https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ad418-african_publics_say_governments_must_address_needs_of_youth-afrobarometer_dispatch-11jan21.pdf).

(24) 34 % of young people compared to 22 and 15 % of middle-aged and elderly citizens in the 18 African countries surveyed.

(25) 'Africans say governments aren't doing enough to help youth', op.cit., p. 5

(26) Ibid: p. 10.

(27) Afrobarometer, 'Are African governments doing enough to help young people? Here's what Afrobarometer surveys reveal', 8 February 2021 (https://afrobarometer.org/blogs/are-african-governments-doing-enough-help-young-people-heres-what-afrobarometer-surveys-reveal).

(28) There has been a dearth of development interventions in Africa that have transformative potential and directly target structural bottlenecks in a bid to enhance productivity. Some historical accounts include the social policy regimes during the 'nationalist period' from the 1960s to the 1980s. Several scholars call for transformative social policy frameworks that transcend the narrow focus on reproduction, redistribution and protection and embrace the productive aspect. See: Adésina, J.O., 'Beyond the social protection paradigm: social policy in Africa's development', *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue Canadienne d'études du Développement*, Vol. 32, No 4, December 2011, pp. 454-470; Mkandawire, T., 'Transformative social policy and innovation in developing countries', *The European Journal of Development Research*, Vol. 19, No 1, June 2007, pp. 13-29; Adésínà, J. O., 'Social policy in sub-Saharan Africa: A glance in the rear-view mirror', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, Vol. 18, March 2009, S37-S51.

towards constructive cooperation, rather than self-interested competition for profit and resources. For the EU and its Member States, in particular, this means revisiting its existing policy frameworks on trade and development aid, in order to prioritise meaningful and sufficiently rewarding job opportunities for Africa's growing working age population. This should be the cornerstone of a fairer AU-EU partnership.

CHAPTER 8

INFORMATION

by
GIOVANNI FALEG

Like other parts of the world, Africa is witnessing the increased prominence of the 'infosphere', understood as a geopolitical space where knowledge, information and narratives circulate. In this space, regional and global powers compete to project influence, precisely as they would do in a real territory [(1)]. Some of those actors, particularly non-democratic regimes, increasingly use 'sharp power', a variant of soft power that uses information warfare tactics to influence foreign citizens, introducing doubts and uncertainty around official narratives and shaping opinions for political gains [(2)]. This chapter explores what is changing in the African information space, which countries using sharp power drive those transformations, and what are the main policy implications for the EU.

WHAT IS CHANGING

Rapid technological progress and digital transformations have increased the prominence and size of the information space by enhancing connectivity in the last decade, increasing the number of internet and social media users [(3)], and making information more accessible. This, coupled with growing number of information providers, has progressively made it harder for citizens to distinguish facts from 'fake news' and easier for malign actors to manipulate the public. A wider space for information to flow, therefore, goes hand in hand with the emergence of a new threat environment.

In more recent years, the growing interest of external actors in the continent has prompted them to find innovative ways to expand their influence in African countries [(4)] for (geo)political and economic gain, which has led them to rely more heavily on their information power. Meanwhile, political fractures, conflicts and fragility in certain areas, which have been

(1) Lonsdale, D.J., 'Information power: Strategy, geopolitics, and the fifth dimension', in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 22, No 2-3, pp. 137-157, 1999.

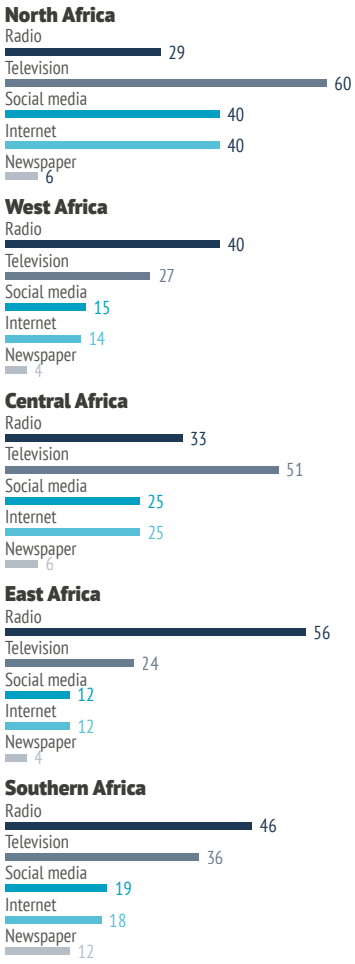
(2) Walker, C. and Ludwig, J., 'From "soft power" to "sharp power": rising authoritarian influence in the democratic world', in *Sharp Power: Rising authoritarian influence*, Report, National Endowment for Democracy, December 2017, p. 8 (https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence-Full-Report.pdf).

(3) Van Raemdonck, N., 'Africa as a cyber player', Digital Dialogue Report, EU Cyber Direct, January 2021 (https://eucyberdirect.eu/research/africa-as-a-cyber-player).

(4) *African Strategies: European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa*, op.cit..

Daily news media consumption by region

% of respondents from 34 African countries, 2016/2018



Data: Afrobarometer, 2018

aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic [5], have created fertile conditions for hybrid actors to use African countries as a testing ground for their tactics [6], making them more vulnerable to external hybrid threats.

All these developments have made Africa an important theatre in the 'global battle of narratives' [7], and one where influence and disinformation campaigns directly affect EU interests. In the infosphere, great powers and particularly non-democratic regimes project influence through information warfare tactics – including promotion of false or hostile narratives, information manipulation, disinformation, distraction, censorship, and hybrid tools – to influence foreign audiences for political gain, often at the expense of EU interests in the continent and globally.

WHY IT IS CHANGING

The battle of narratives unfolding in the African information space is driven by the growing interference of actors willing and able to project their influence in that space. Key among them are Russia, China and Turkey, who deploy their narratives to enhance their reputation and image and further their various interests in Africa, while fuelling anti-Western perceptions, by using their strategic and tactical capacities to project information power. Their activities represent the bulk of external interference in the African information space, and as a result contribute to shaping the dynamics of that space more than the activities of any other state actor. Russia, China and Turkey mobilise three common sets of narratives in Africa, concerning: (a) historical ties; (b) the consolidation of political ties; (c) the development of a mutually beneficial partnership.

A first narrative used by the three powers to woo African countries focuses on the historical component. Russia bases its narrative on historical ties, anticolonial discourse, the USSR's

(5) Mustasilta, K., 'From bad to worse? The impact(s) of Covid-19 on conflict dynamics', Brief No 13, EUISS, June 2020 (https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/bad-worse-impacts-covid-19-conflict-dynamics); Faleg, G. and Mustasilta, K., 'Salafi-jihadism in Africa: a winning strategy', Brief No 12, EUISS, June 2021.

(6) Faleg, G. and Kovalcikova, N., 'Rising hybrid threats in Africa', Brief No 3, EUISS, February 2022.

(7) Borrell, J., 'The Coronavirus pandemic and the new world it is creating', Statement by the HR/VP, Brussels, 24 March 2020 (https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/76401/eu-hrvp-josep-borrell-coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating_en).

support to the African liberation struggles, and the Cold War alliances. Thus, during the 2014 Russia-Africa Summit, Vladimir Putin stated: 'Our cooperation, rooted in the period of the joint fight against colonialism, is strategic and longstanding' [8]. Russia also taps into and exploits post-colonial resentment to fuel anti-Western sentiment and rhetoric centred on an alleged neo-colonialist agenda. In the Central African Republic (CAR), for instance, Russia deploys the narrative that 'the West is a coloniser' that is seeking to destabilise the country [9]. China also employs a set of particular historical narratives based on fifteenth century contacts between China and Africa, portraying China as peaceful and benevolent (as opposed to the imperialistic European expeditions driven by greed and expansionism) [10]. China also deploys narratives based on a common past under colonial subjugation through an analogy between the colonisation of Africa and the oppression of China by imperialist Western powers during the century of foreign invasion and national humiliation [11]. Though the concession-based domination of China bears little resemblance to the colonial conquest of Africa by the European powers, the common experience of aggression, humiliation and oppression is highlighted to create a bond of solidarity between China and Africa and helps Beijing counter narratives portraying China as a neo-colonialist power in Africa [12]. For its part, to establish its altruistic credentials, Turkey invokes the Ottoman Empire's relations with North and East Africa during the sixteenth and twentieth centuries [13] and reframes Ottoman history as one of benevolent hegemony [14]. Former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu thus explained the importance of Somalia for Turkey by stating 'We have inherited these [relations] from the Ottomans' [15]. Turkey also stresses that it does not have any colonial baggage and criticises European colonisation. Thus, President Erdoğan said that Turkey is 'not going to Africa to take [...] resources as Westerners have done in the past', instead Turkey is building a 'partnership based on mutual benefits' [16]. In addition, Turkish discourse makes an analogy between the colonisation of Africa and the demise of the Ottoman Empire, portraying the partition of the Ottoman Empire by European powers as an example of imperialism [17], in order to convey a shared experience of oppression by the West to appeal to African audiences.

China deploys narratives based on a common past under colonial subjugation.

(8) Troianovski, A., '"A New Message": Russia trains Its propaganda machine on Africa', *The New York Times*, October 2019 (https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/29/world/europe/africa-russia-sochi.html).

(9) Svoboda, K., Matlach, P. and Baddorf, Z., 'Russia's Activities in Africa's Information Environment (Case studies: Mali, Central African Republic)', NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Riga, March 2021, pp.20-26.

(10) Sverdrup-Thygeson, B., 'The Chinese story: Historical narratives as a tool in China's Africa policy', *International Politics*, Vol. 54, 2017, pp. 54–72 , p.61.

(11) Ze Yu, S., 'In Africa the Beijing Consensus is pushing Confucius over Plato', *LSE Blog*, 18 September 2019 (https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2019/09/18/africa-beijing-consensus-confucius-plato-education/).

(12) 'The Chinese story: Historical narratives as a tool in China's Africa policy', op.cit.

(13) Idriss, M.A., 'Analysis – Turkey-Africa partnership: A development-oriented approach', Anadolu Agency, 8 January 2020 (https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/analysis-turkey-africa-partnership-a-development-oriented-approach/1696640); Orakçı, S., 'Africa in Turkey's Foreign Policy: From absence to a notable progress', INSAMER, 25 September 2019, p.3 (https://www.academia.edu/40439747/Africa_in_Turkey_s_Foreign_Policy_From_Absense_to_a_Notable_Progress?pop_sutd=true).

(14) Enwere, C., 'The dimensions and challenges of Turkey-Africa political relations: A historical-analytical inquiry', *Turkish Journal of Politics*, Vol. 5, No 1, summer 2014, p.69.

(15) Donelli, F., 'Turkey's way for development: The Ankara Consensus', in *Turkey in Africa: Turkey's Strategic Involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa*, I.B. Tauris, London, pp. 99-129 (http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780755637003.0009).

(16) Akca, A., 'Neo-Ottomanism: Turkey's foreign policy approach to Africa', *New Perspectives in Foreign Policy*, CSIS, No 17, spring 2019 (https://www.csis.org/neo-ottomanism-turkeys-foreign-policy-approach-africa).

(17) 'Turkey's way for development: The Ankara Consensus', op.cit.

A second narrative common to the three powers focuses on close political ties and seeks to foster a sense of solidarity with Africans. The Kremlin aims to portray Russia and Africa as political allies. In CAR, Moscow contends that 'Russia has come to the aid of the CAR and empowers it' and that 'Russia brings peace to the CAR' [18]. China also deploys a set of narratives aiming to portray Africa and China as long-standing politically equal friends, belonging to the Global South community, cooperating and mutually learning from each other, and united in a struggle against the West's domination [19]. Chinese discourse also emphasises the notion of respect for African countries embodied in its support for non-interference and respect for sovereignty. Ankara also seeks to stress the closeness of Turkey and Africa, their similar cultural traits, the presence of religious bonds in predominantly Muslim African countries [20], and South-South solidarity. Thus, in 2020, President Erdogan declared 'We see the people of Africa as our brothers' [21]. The narrative also aims to portray Turkey as a virtuous power [22], relying on a humanitarian discourse and instrumentalising its 2011 humanitarian intervention in Somalia to enhance its legitimacy and criticise the West [23].

A third common narrative seeks to portray the foreign powers and African countries as development partners involved in a mutually beneficial partnership, which is contrasted with the West's conditional assistance and exploitation. Thus, Moscow's communication centres around empowering relations, based on mutual respect and equality, mutual benefits, and non-intervention [24], which legitimises Russia's involvement in Africa as a development partner, while serving to counter anti-Russian narratives regarding its ties with dictators and its exploitation of African resources. The Chinese Communist Party has constructed its African narrative upon the 1954 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence', which emphasise mutual respect for states' sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference, equality and mutual benefits, and peaceful coexistence [25]. Premier Zhou thus stated 'mutual economic assistance among the African and Asian countries was the kind of assistance between poor friends who were in the same boat pulling oars together' [26]. Turkey follows the same strategy. Former Turkish minister of trade, Ruhsar Pekcan, said: 'We're partnering with African nations for shared prosperity' [27] and Erdogan stated in October 2020 that Turks and Africans were 'destined to be partners' [28].

To disseminate their narratives and dominate the African information space, the three powers use several channels, instruments and techniques. To penetrate the infosphere, the foreign powers rely mostly on the media. Pro-Russian editorial slants are ensured by acquiring already existing media platforms, by creating new ones under the supervision of the

(18) 'Russia's Activities in Africa's Information Environment', op.cit.

(19) King, K., *China's Aid and Soft Power in Africa: The case of education and training*, Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2013, p.8.

(20) 'The dimensions and challenges of Turkey-Africa political relations', op.cit.; Özkan, M. and Akgün, B., 'Turkey's opening to Africa', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 48, No 4, December 2010, p.538.

(21) Ünveren, B., 'Turkey seeks to strengthen Africa relations with "benevolence"', Deutsche Welle, 4 February 2021 (https://www.dw.com/en/turkey-seeks-to-strengthen-africa-relations-with-benevolence/a-56452857).

(22) Langan, M., 'Virtuous power Turkey in sub-Saharan Africa: the "Neo-Ottoman" challenge to the European Union', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No 6) 2016, pp.1399-1414 (p.1400).

(23) 'Turkey's way for development: The Ankara Consensus', op.cit.

(24) '"A New Message": Russia Trains Its Propaganda Machine on Africa', op.cit.

(25) Chen, HP., 'China's "One Belt, One Road" Initiative and its implications for Sino-African Investment Relations', *Transnational Corporation Review,* Vol. 8, No 3, 2016, pp. 178-182.

(26) *China's Aid and Soft Power in Africa: The case of education and training,* op.cit., p p.6.

(27) 'Turkey's minister of trade: Turkey-Africa partnership will shape the future', *African Business*, 22 November 2018 (https://african.business/2018/11/economy/turkeys-minister-of-trade-ruhsar-pekcan-op-ed/).

(28) Schipani, A. and Pitel, L., 'Erdogan's great game: Turkey pushes into Africa with aid, trade and soaps', *Financial Times,* 18 January 2021 (https://www.ft.com/content/0e3cec2a-bd80-499c-a6ab-e5d1a1e768cf().

Ministry of Foreign Affairs or by increasing the presence of Russian media (like Sputnik and RT) in Africa. Since 2013, Russia and its state-run media have also increased their co-operation with African media outlets, signing partnership agreements agreeing to provide content, training, funding and broadcasting equipment. Between 2017 and 2019 alone, Sputnik and RT signed agreements with SAnews, Agence Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP), Radio-Télévision Nationale Congolaise (RTNC), AfricaNews and Eri-TV [29]. In CAR, Russia's involvement is particularly apparent: it has been providing financial support to at least five popular media outlets and ensured the weekly distribution of leaflets through local intermediaries paid by the Wagner Group in order to glorify Russia's actions and spread anti-French sentiment [30]. Similarly, in the last 20 years, and especially since the 2006 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China has massively expanded its media presence in Africa through infrastructure development, content production and distribution, direct investment and acquisition, training and education [31]. Beijing has cautiously invested in its state-owned media players (CCTV Africa, Xinhua News Agency, China Radio International (CRI), China Central Television (CCTV), China Daily), leading them to establish offices and launch local news sources on the continent [32]. A few examples of these efforts include moving Xinhua's overseas headquarters from Paris to Nairobi, the launch of Xinhua's China African News Service, the creation of CCTV Africa, and the launch of China Daily's African edition [33]. China has also engaged in media cooperation, offering free content to local news outlets and training to African media personnel, for example via the China-Africa Press Center's annual programme. In addition, Beijing has also established a significant foothold in Africa's telecommunications infrastructure, through a mixture of loans, investments and export credits, e.g. the 10,000 Villages Programme or companies like StarTimes, Huawei and Zhongxing Technologies [34]. Turkey has also sought to increase its media presence in Africa. The state-run Anadolu Agency (AA) has opened offices in Addis Ababa and Abuja, with plans to expand to Johannesburg, Mogadishu, and Khartoum [35]. Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) launched radio channels in Hausa and Swahili in 2014. Turkey has also expanded its cooperation with African media. In 2012, it organised the Turkey-Africa Media Forum and the 5th African Media Leaders Forum. Numerous international agreements have also been concluded with most African states, more recently with Guinea (2020) and the Republic of Congo (2020) [36]. Finally, Turkey has facilitated training of African journalists, for instance through AA's Correspondent Training Programmes or TRT's International Media Training Programme.

Turkey has also sought to increase its media presence in Africa.

(29) Madrid-Morales, D., Börekci, D., Löffler, D. and Birkevich, A., 'It is about their story: How China, Turkey and Russia influence the media in Africa', Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Regional Media Programme Sub-Sahara Africa, Johannesburg, 2021, p.123 (https://www.kas.de/documents/285576/0/How+China%2C+Turkey+and+Russia+influence+media+in+Africa.pdf/6594fc3e-f240-6aea-342d-92c8f90dbf43?version=1.2&t=1611811364948>).

(30) Dukhan, N., 'Central African Republic: Ground zero for Russian influence in Central Africa' Issue Brief, Atlantic Council, October 2020, p.7 (https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/central-african-republic-ground-zero-for-russian-influence-in-central-africa/).

(31) Wasserman, H., 'China-Africa media relations: What we know so far', *Global Media and China*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2018, pp.108-109.

(32) Wasserman, H., 'China's "soft power" and its influence on editorial agendas in South Africa', *Chinese Journal of Communication*, Vol. 9, No 1, 2015, p.8.

(33) Bailard, C., 'China in Africa: An analysis of the effect of Chinese media expansion on African public opinion', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 21, No 4, 2016, pp.446-453.

(34) Ibid, p.9

(35) Czerep, J., 'Turkey's Soft-Power Crisis in Africa,' PISM Policy Paper No 3 (173), Polish Institute of International Affairs, August 2019, p.4 (https://pism.pl/publications/Turkeys_SoftPower_Crisis_in_Africa).

(36) Ibid.

Closely tied to media presence and penetration, some of the foreign powers have sought to use information manipulation techniques to improve their position in the geopolitical competition taking place in Africa. Thus, China increasingly makes use of propaganda, information manipulation and disinformation in Africa to push back against claims of genocide and human rights abuse in Xinjiang [(37)], to challenge narratives on the coronavirus [(38)] and to defend its image and whip up anti-Western rhetoric. However, Chinese disinformation is no match for the large-scale and highly sophisticated efforts deployed by Russia to further its interests. Since 2012, Russia has systematically sought to influence foreign audiences in Africa and promote pro-Russian and anti-Western attitudes through strategic communications, information manipulation, disinformation, and low-tech surveillance. These orchestrated campaigns rely on Russian international media, traditional local media, social media pages, political consultants, think tanks, and on the actions of protesters during demonstrations. Russia's information manipulation activities have targeted Algeria, Cameroon, CAR, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, and Sudan [(39)]. The clearest example of a Russian disinformation campaign targeting Africa was uncovered by Facebook in October 2019 when it took down dozens of inauthentic coordinated accounts seeking to spread disinformation in eight African countries and promote Russian interests [(40)]. The reach of these campaigns was significant as the content had been 'liked' more than 1.7 million times [(41)].

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

African states will continue to use the infosphere and the unfolding battle of narratives to further their own interests.

African actors cannot be seen as just victims of exogenous pressures, but are players also actively leveraging the information space. For African leaders, the information space presents challenges and opportunities, which can be seen as instrumental to achieve political objectives, balance foreign influences, and contain hostile actors. The news that Mali might sign a deal with the Wagner Group [(42)], and the resulting strain placed on relations with France and European states, is a case in point. Similarly, African leaders' accusations that Europe practised 'vaccine nationalism' contributed to pushing the EU to boost its support under the Team Europe approach [(43)]. It is expected that African states will continue to use the infosphere and the unfolding battle

(37) Olander, E., 'Why are Chinese officials in Africa so active in messaging on Xinjiang?', *SupChina*, 3 February 2021 (https://supchina.com/2021/02/03/why-are-chinese-officials-in-africa-so-active-in-messaging-on-xinjiang/); Essa, A., 'China is buying African media's silence', *Foreign Policy*, 14 September 2018 (https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/14/china-is-buying-african-medias-silence/).

(38) Cook, S., 'Beijing's coronavirus propaganda has both foreign and domestic targets', *Perspectives*, Freedom House, April 2020 (https://freedomhouse.org/article/beijings-coronavirus-propaganda-has-both-foreign-and-domestic-targets); 'It is about their story: How China, Turkey and Russia influence the media in Africa', op.cit.

(39) The Soufan Center, 'Russian disinformation in an African context', IntelBrief, 7 November 2019 (https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-russian-disinformation-in-an-african-context/).

(40) France24, 'Russian disinformation campaign targeted Africa: Facebook' 30 October 2019 (https://www.france24.com/en/20191030-russian-disinformation-campaign-targeted-africa-facebook);

(41) 'Russian disinformation in an African context', op.cit.

(42) See: France24, 'Reports of Russian mercenary deal in Mali trigger French alarm', 14 September 2021 (https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210914-reports-of-russia-mercenary-deal-in-mali-alarm-france).

(43) See: Euractiv, 'EU commits to fund African vaccine hubs', 1 September 2021 (https://www.euractiv.com/section/africa/news/eu-commits-to-fund-african-vaccine-hubs/).

of narratives to further their own interests. In a fragmented world, African political élites are unlikely to accommodate external soft power influences simply because they are rooted in principles and norms, but will increasingly operate according to short-term needs and strategic imperatives. Implications for the EU, and more broadly the West, can be significant. Operating as a force for good in the battle of narratives, following the traditional paradigm of 'normative power Europe' [(44)], could in fact deliver limited impact in the African context, and actually reinforce anti-Western discourses and perceptions. Similarly, the EU's foreign policy objectives, such as building resilience [(45)] in third countries' states and societies, may be jeopardised by the rapid geographical expansion of transitional regimes, areas controlled by extremist groups, and fragility situations - where political interlocutors may pursue non-democratic agendas. This creates the danger of a checkmate scenario for the EU in the battle of narratives: short of reliable (i.e. democratic) interlocutors and with the intensification of hybrid threats in the continent, the EU may lose political access and become unable to fulfil its foreign policy objectives, providing systemic rivals with an opportunity to fill this vacuum. These examples point to the need to rethink the EU's strategic narratives, communication and tools, so as to stand firm on principles, but be pragmatic in actions, adapting discourse to the specificities of the context and developing a true capacity to deter and contain threats in the infosphere. As the paradigm of exporting democracy and rule of law is fading under multipolar pressures, with actors such as China, Russia and Turkey offering competing models to Western democracies, showing African partners a different narrative that can reconcile the interests of the political/economic élites and the populations towards 'sustainable common goods' such as public, digital and security services, and a new model of effective transnational governance of those, can perhaps prove a winning strategy.

(44) Whitman, R., (ed.), *Normative Power Europe: Empirical and theoretical perspectives*, Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics, 2011.

(45) European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 'A strategic approach to resilience in the EU's external action', Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, JOIN(2017) 21 final, 7 June 2017 (https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/join_2017_21_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v7_p1_916039.pdf).

CONCLUSION

by
GIOVANNI FALEG AND LUIGI NARBONE

At a time when the European Union and the African Union aim to recalibrate their strategic relationship in a multipolar world, this analysis of the spaces where power struggles take place can offer useful pointers for policy planners in EU capitals on how to engage with African counterparts. The 'where' question raised in the introduction sheds light on concrete areas where policy actions can make a difference to contain geopolitical rivalries; but it also helps to connect the dots, so as to identify new guiding principles for the partnership between Europe and Africa. First and foremost among these is the need to facilitate positive change within these spaces, which should induce stabilising effects. Both geographic and functional chapters offer concrete indications in this vein: in the Sahara, the need to shift from 'threat circulation' to 'economic circulation'; in the urban centres, the importance of moving from a 'space of place' to a 'space of flows'; in the new trade space, the transition from fragmentation towards integration; and also the imperative of reconceptualising the job market as a space of transformation rather than a space of exploitation. Two sets of strategic recommendations can help in achieving these objectives.

African agency is the most powerful antidote against foreign interference.

AGENCY

First and foremost, African agency is the most powerful antidote against foreign interference. As the chapters on trade, oceans and information spaces have shown, external powers have changed the way in which they engage with Africa. As a result of greater interest in projecting power and influence in the continent, competition between those external actors is on the rise. The latter can take various forms, more or less acute: from the United States' goal to counter Chinese influence in the economic sphere, to the hybrid threat posed (mainly, but not only, by) Russia, China and Turkey in the areas of disinformation and information manipulation, opposing Western narratives, etc. At the same time, African agency, meaning the capacity of African states to act, react, engage and defend their collective interests from external threats, is gradually emerging. We see it, for instance, in the maritime spaces, where the need to clarify and communicate littoral states' maritime strategies is becoming a growing priority; or through the increased leverage provided by the AfCFTA process; but also through the soft balancing of external powers in multilateral arenas. African agency in countering external influences will be pivotal to avoid African countries becoming embroiled in proxy confrontations between external powers using Africa as a battlefield. The US–China trade wars or the disputes between the Gulf states are good cases in point. Such agency will also be key to prevent Africa from falling into debt and fragility traps. For instance, in implementing the AfCFTA, African countries will also need to ensure that inequitable benefits generated by trade liberalisation do not further exacerbate political instability and insecurity across the continent.

For the EU, this means that Africa should be looked at from a power angle, going beyond

a 'partnership of equals' paradigm. The geopolitical centre of gravity will keep moving southwards, from the Mediterranean towards the Equator and eastwards to Asia and the Indo-Pacific space. A stronger and integrated African continent is the best ally Europe can have in the future geopolitical order and is also important as an essential economic partner to secure future prosperity. Likeminded African partners will be increasingly important for Europe in global forums, and also the *conditio sine qua non* to contain foreign influences which, directly or indirectly, affect European security.

But it also means that African people and societies should play a key role in accountable and transparent decision-making. African citizens aspire to self-sufficiency and autonomy as well as democratic, accountable and responsive governance. Citizens are ready and willing to take action in order to realise their ambitions. If they are to make effective use of their people's assets and capabilities, African decision-makers will need to increasingly engage with their publics by facilitating information sharing and genuine collaboration [(1)]. By expanding the space for African voice and agency in all domains, from problem-solving to policymaking, the power of citizen initiatives and engagement can be bolstered across the continent, and Europe should be prepared to support that against authoritarianism and undemocratic transitions.

Citizens are ready and willing to take action in order to realise their ambitions.

CONNECTIVITY

Second, boosting connectivity and integration in Africa is an insurance policy against geopolitical fragmentation, which at many levels would undermine the prospects for sustainable growth and prosperity. Here, the African continent is at a crossroads: connectivity ought to increase in the future, translating into inclusive access to digitalisation, sustainable infrastructure development, poverty and inequality reduction, access to better public services, improved governance or integration of previously disconnected spaces. On the other hand, failure to provide adequate investments and plans to boost connectivity may widen existing faultlines, creating or deepening cleavages across the geographical, functional and social spaces. This would exacerbate drivers of instability and conflict, for instance if the AfCFTA process struggles to take off and African countries remain dependent on external markets, or if population growth in urban areas is not matched with appropriate measures to avoid urban sprawl. Disconnection could also mean the emergence of two systems of governance in Africa, one by state authorities, and the other by self-proclaimed Islamic states or other armed groups which keep control of depopulated, contested peripheral areas that the government can no longer access.

For the EU, this implies that Africa needs investments and together with that a new form of conditionality. The latter could emphasise the reforms and policy actions in sectors that can enable functional spillovers towards greater economic interdependence among African countries, increased intra-African trade, resilient infrastructure development, a green growth agenda and smart public services solutions for a rapidly growing urban population, as well as burgeoning inter-continental economic integration and connectivity. Africa faces a huge financing gap to support its development agenda, aggravated by Covid-19. Innovative financing mechanisms are required to 'build back better', ushering in a future of inclusive growth, especially as the fiscal space in the continent has shrunk. Europe has the power to mobilise financial and political capital for

(1) Gyimah-Boadi, E. and Asunka, J., 'The future Africans want: when optimism is power', *Brief* No 14, EUISS, June 2021.

that purpose, as part of a new and truly ambitious inter-continental partnership, which can deepen and foster the geo-economic spaces and protect them from the predatory behaviour of other global powers.

As this *Chaillot Paper* has shown, African geopolitics is undergoing profound transformations, redefining the physical and non-physical spaces where power dynamics are at play. To adapt to those, the relationship between Europe and Africa should not just take a 'leap forward', but set on a fresh course, defining a new way to jointly shape the international order, instead of being individually defined by it.

ABBREVIATIONS

3G
Third generation *(of wireless mobile telecommunications technology)*

4G
Fourth generation *(of wireless mobile telecommunications technology)*

5G
Fifth generation *(of wireless mobile telecommunications technology)*

#EndSARS
#End Special Anti-Robbery Squad *(Nigeria)*

AA
Anadolu Agency

AfCFTA
African Continental Free Trade Area

AFRICOM
United States Africa Command

AU
African Union

AUC
African Union Commission

BIMCO
Baltic and International Maritime Council

CAR
Central African Republic

CCTV
China Central Television

CMP
Coordinated Maritime Presences

CSDP
Common Security and Defence Policy

DFID
Department for International Development (UK)

DRC
Democratic Republic of the Congo

EEZ
Exclusive Economic Zone

EPA
Economic Partnership Agreement

Eri-TV
Eritrea TV

EU
European Union

EUTM
European Union Training Mission

G7++ FoGG
G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea

GDP
Gross Domestic Product

GoG
Gulf of Guinea

GOG-MCF/SHADE
Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum and Shared Awareness and De-confliction

GVC
Global Value Chain

ICT
Information and communications technology

IP
Internet Protocol

IS
Islamic State

ISGS
Islamic State of Greater Sahara

JICA
Japan International Cooperation Agency

JNIM
Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims)

MENA
Middle East and North Africa

NATO
North Atlantic Treaty Organization

RECs
Regional Economic Communities

SADC
Southern African Development Community

SAnews
South African Government News Agency

SLOCs
Sea lines of communication

TB/s
Terabyte per second

TRT
Turkish Radio and Television Corporation

UAE
United Arab Emirates

UCDP
Uppsala Conflict Data Programme

UN
United Nations

USAID
US Agency for International Development

USSR
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WIO
Western Indian Ocean

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The ‘new scramble for Africa’, characterised by renewed interest in the continent by foreign powers eager to expand their influence there, has been a salient feature of Africa’s geopolitical dynamics in recent years. This *Chaillot Paper* asks the question: what are the emerging spaces where power competition is taking place in the African continent? It argues that a space today is not just conceptualised as a territory, but can encompass a broader range of non-territorial dimensions, such as cyberspace or the ‘infosphere’, which have recently gained prominence due to the emergence of new innovations and technologies.

Eight distinct spaces are identified which can be seen as the main frontlines of power competition in the continent. While the first section focuses on geographical spaces, the second section focuses on key ‘functional spaces’ – including the trade and digital sectors, the job market and the information space – and examines how new power relations and dynamics are unfolding in these domains.

The volume connects the dots between the different arenas of geopolitical contest, offering new guiding principles for a stronger strategic relationship between the EU and African partners.

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