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Sub-Saharan Africa: Key Issues and U.S. Engagement

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Sub-Saharan Africa: Key Issues and U.S. Engagement

The 117th Congress may review U.S. engagement in sub-Saharan Africa (“Africa”) as it establishes budgetary and policy priorities and responds to developments in the region. Issues for Congress include the authorization and appropriation of funding for U.S. foreign aid programs and U.S. military activities in the region, and oversight of U.S. programs and policies. Major topics for congressional consideration may include

Economic and Development Issues. Economic shocks linked to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic have had a severe impact across Africa, triggering the first region-wide recession in decades. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecasted a regional contraction of 3.0% in 2020, Africa’s sharpest annual decline on record, amid a drop in global demand for key natural resource exports, trade and tourism disruptions, and the domestic impacts of lockdowns. Oil producers such as Nigeria and Angola have faced acute economic downturns, as has South Africa—home to the most confirmed COVID-19 cases in Africa by far. Economic downturns are likely to heighten significant development challenges across Africa, which ranks among the world’s poorest and least developed regions on a range of measures.

Governance and Human Rights. While some African countries have held multiple peaceful electoral transfers of power and recorded positive or improving human rights records since a wave of democratization in the 1990s, autocracies have become entrenched in others, using a variety of means to curtail civil society and opposition activity. Analysts also warn of “democratic backsliding,” or a deterioration of various dimensions of democratic governance, in some countries. Recent political transitions, some prompted by large-scale protests, have raised hopes for reform in several countries, but prospects for lasting governance gains remain fragile. The development of effective, accountable institutions remains limited in much of the region.

Peace, Security, and Humanitarian Issues. Security crises have emerged or intensified in several African countries over the past decade, triggering massive population displacements and humanitarian needs. Islamist armed groups, some linked to Al Qaeda or the Islamic State, have proliferated and expanded their presence in parts of the region, particularly in Somalia, the Lake Chad Basin, West Africa’s Sahel region, Mozambique, and Tanzania. Porous borders, corruption, and weak justice sectors have enabled transnational crime such as human trafficking, drug smuggling, poaching, and maritime piracy.

U.S.-Africa Policy and Engagement. U.S. engagement with Africa has long focused on responding to health challenges and humanitarian crises, advancing peace and security, strengthening democracy and good governance, and fostering economic growth, development, and U.S.-Africa commercial engagement. While maintaining many longstanding priorities of U.S.-Africa policy, the Trump Administration placed a heightened emphasis on countering Chinese, Russian, and other foreign influence in the region, increasing two-way U.S.-Africa trade and investment, and cutting U.S. foreign assistance to Africa. The Trump Administration also reviewed U.S. military engagement in Africa, resulting in the drawdown of some U.S. military personnel from the region and a reorientation of certain deployments. Analysts continue to debate the degree to which the Trump Administration’s approach toward Africa meaningfully departed from those of its predecessors.

The 116th Congress consistently appropriated foreign aid funding above levels requested by the Trump Administration and maintained a focus on areas of enduring congressional interest, including humanitarian crises and responses, human rights and governance issues, and U.S. military activities in the region. As the Biden Administration sets forth its own approach toward Africa, the 117th Congress may continue to consider similar issues as it weighs the appropriate balance between U.S. diplomacy, development, and defense priorities in Africa and draws on a number of tools to shape U.S.-Africa policy.

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This report provides an overview of select issues related to sub-Saharan Africa (“Africa” hereinafter) and U.S. policy toward the region.¹ It includes information on regional economic and development trends, governance and human rights conditions, and security concerns. It also discusses U.S. economic, diplomatic, and military engagement in Africa. This report does not extensively address U.S. foreign aid to Africa; for more on that topic, see CRS Report R46368, *U.S. Assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa: An Overview*. Other CRS products address in greater depth many of the topics considered in this report, as referenced in the text and footnotes below.

Introduction

With 49 countries and an estimated 1.17 billion people, Africa encompasses a vast diversity of social, ecological, economic, political, and security conditions.² Such diversity complicates and casts doubt on generalizations about Africa or African countries—such as narratives that portray Africa’s socioeconomic trajectory as unambiguously positive or negative.³ Moreover, many of the conditions discussed in this report are changing rapidly as countries in the region reckon with significant demographic, societal, and other shifts. Africa is the world’s youngest region—as of 2019, an estimated 62% of its population was under 25 years of age—and is rapidly urbanizing.⁴ Access to smartphones, mobile broadband, and social media is expanding across the region, revolutionizing the ways Africans engage with each other and with the world and bringing new opportunities for industry, public service delivery, political engagement, and social mobilization.

A number of African countries are beset by conflicts; Islamist insurgencies, some with ties to Al Qaeda or the Islamic State, have proliferated and expanded their reach in the region. Some countries face humanitarian crises, and nearly all are contending with stark development challenges. Yet several have ranked among the fastest growing economies globally over the past decade, and African markets have attracted growing foreign interest. Despite enduring state capacity shortfalls, many African governments responded rapidly to the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing on public health expertise developed in confronting HIV/AIDS, malaria, Ebola, and other disease outbreaks (with substantial donor support). Governments across Africa face demands for accountable governance, effective service delivery, free and fair elections, and personal safety, fueling a “tug of war between leaders and their publics,” according to a 2018 U.S. intelligence assessment.⁵ These dynamics, and African governments’ responses to them, are likely to continue to shape U.S.-Africa policy and congressional engagement with the region.

¹ In this report, unless otherwise noted, “Africa” refers to the 49 countries comprised within the jurisdiction of the State Department’s Bureau of African Affairs. This includes all Member States of the United Nations’ African Group except Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, which fall within the remit of the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.

² CRS calculation, using 2021 estimates from U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base, accessed January 22, 2021.

³ For a critique of these discourses—commonly known as “Afro-optimism” and “Afro-pessimism”—see, e.g., Pius Adesanmi, “For Whom is Africa Rising?” in *Who Owns the Problem? Africa and the Struggle for Agency* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020).

⁴ U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects 2019: Data Booklet*, 2019. On urbanization and associated challenges and opportunities in the region, see Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Africa’s Urbanisation Dynamics 2020: Africapolis, Mapping a New Urban Geography*, 2020.

⁵ U.S. National Intelligence Council, “Sub-Saharan Africa: Pitched Contests for Democratization Through 2022,” February 2018.

Economic and Development Conditions

Starting in the early 1990s, many African countries witnessed rapid economic growth, buoyed by high global prices for key raw commodity exports (such as crude oil, natural gas, minerals, and some agricultural goods) and increasing domestic demand.⁶ Across Africa, many countries experienced a growth of their middle class,⁷ expanded access to digital technologies, improved health conditions, and made other progress toward the U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).⁸ National outcomes varied widely, however, and poverty rates remained high compared to other developing regions. Following an economic downturn linked to the 2008 global financial crisis, a collapse in the prices of several export commodities (including oil and key minerals) caused regional growth rates to decelerate again in the mid-2010s, leading to recessions in some countries—though several non-resource-intensive economies, including Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Senegal, averaged annual growth above 5.5% between 2015 and 2019.⁹

Economic impacts of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) have triggered downturns or recessions across Africa. As of October 2020, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected a regional contraction of 3.0% in 2020, Africa’s sharpest annual decline on record, amid a drop in global demand for key African commodity exports, global trade and tourism disruptions, and the consequences of domestic lockdowns.¹⁰ Small, tourism-reliant economies (e.g., Botswana, Cabo Verde, and Seychelles) have faced acute downturns, as have Africa’s leading oil producers (including Africa’s largest economy, Nigeria, along with Angola and the Republic of Congo).¹¹ Southern Africa also has been hard-hit, as a severe contraction in South Africa—Africa’s second-largest economy, which has confirmed by far the most COVID-19 cases in the region—has dimmed sub-regional growth prospects. The IMF expects growth to slow but remain positive in some more diversified economies (e.g., Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Kenya).

In response to COVID-19-related shocks, African governments have reallocated budget resources and instituted economic stimulus measures (e.g., tax relief); some have initiated targeted aid for their most vulnerable citizens.¹² The World Bank and other international financial institutions, U.N. agencies, and private firms have supported such efforts. Many central banks have acted to increase liquidity. Yet most African governments lack sufficient domestic resources to cushion local economies and spur recoveries. The IMF forecasts a regional rebound to 3.1% growth in 2021, “a smaller expansion than expected in much of the rest of the world, partly reflecting limited policy space to sustain a more expansionary fiscal stance in most countries.”¹³

⁶ See, e.g., Steven Radelet, “Africa’s Rise—Interrupted?” in International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Finance and Development*, June 2016.

⁷ On the concept of the middle class in Africa, see Claire Mercer and Charlotte Lemanski, “The Lived Experiences of the African Middle Classes: Introduction,” in *Africa* (90:3), 2020, a special issue centered on Africa’s middle classes.

⁸ The MDGs were a series of broad development goals agreed to by 189 U.N. member states in 2000. In 2015, the MDGs were replaced with the sustainable development goals, a non-binding list of 17 development and social equity objectives. See CRS In Focus IF10249, *The Post-2015 Global Development Agenda*.

⁹ IMF, World Economic Outlook database, October 2020, accessed January 25, 2021.

¹⁰ IMF, *Regional Economic Outlook. Sub-Saharan Africa: A Difficult Road to Recovery*, October 2020. This regional growth rate does not account for Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, or Sudan, which the IMF includes in its Middle East and Central Asia grouping.

¹¹ IMF, World Economic Outlook database, October 2020.

¹² IMF, “Policy Responses to COVID-19,” accessed January 25, 2021.

¹³ IMF, *Regional Economic Outlook. Sub-Saharan Africa*. As above (see Footnote 11), this regional growth rate does not account for Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, or Sudan.

Key Development Challenges in Africa

Economic Issues

Africa ranks among the poorest regions on a per-capita basis and by other measures. Poverty rates vary widely among countries and between urban and rural zones; some 80% of the region's poor live in rural areas, where roughly three in five Africans reside.¹⁸ The World Bank classifies two African countries (Mauritius and Seychelles) as high-income. Five more (Botswana, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Namibia, and South Africa) qualify as upper-middle-income; the rest are either lower-middle- or low-income.¹⁹ Several countries with comparatively higher per capita incomes exhibit high income inequality, including Namibia and South Africa—which share a history of racially based apartheid rule that has had lasting consequences for land and wealth inequality.²⁰ Other historical factors, including the transatlantic and other slave trades and colonial rule, also have had enduring legacies for Africa's economic and political development.²¹

Despite progress since the early 1990s, the region continues to face significant socioeconomic development challenges. Extractive industries that have helped to fuel high aggregate growth rates in many economies have created limited employment and relatively small gains in well-being.²² The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that as of 2016, roughly 89% of African workers and 96% of African workers aged 24 or younger were employed informally (including in smallholder agriculture), with few formal benefits or worker protections.²³

Inadequate access to electricity is a key impediment to industry: according to the World Bank, only 43% of Africa's population had access to electricity in 2016 (latest available), far below other developing regions.²⁴ Low per capita incomes and undiversified economies limit growth prospects across much of Africa. Efforts are under way to deepen regional integration, notably through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a pan-African free trade zone that formally took effect in January 2021.²⁵ Negotiations continue on critical commitments under the AfCFTA—the agreement will be implemented in phases—and full realization of the AfCFTA's possible benefits will require overcoming substantial non-tariff barriers and other impediments. Several other factors hamper Africa's economic potential (see **Text Box**).

¹⁸ Luc Christiaensen and Ruth Hill, "Poverty in Africa," in *Accelerating Poverty Reduction in Africa*, ed. Kathleen Beegle and Luc Christiaensen (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2019); U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision*, 2019.

¹⁹ For FY2021, the World Bank defined high-income economies as having a gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$12,056 or more; upper-middle income a GNI per capita of between \$4,046 and \$12,535; lower-middle income a GNI per capita of between \$1,036 and \$4,045; and low income a GNI per capita of \$1,035 or less.

²⁰ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2019*, 2020.

²¹ For a review of the literature on these topics, see Stelios Michalopoulos and Elias Papaioannou, *Historical Legacies and African Development*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper no. 25278, November 2018.

²² U.N. Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), African Union, African Development Bank, and UNDP, *MDG Report 2015: Assessing Progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals*, 2015.

²³ Economic informality generally refers to work or production that occurs in small-scale enterprises and commercial settings, and is non-compliant (in whole or in part) with state regulatory or taxation requirements. ILO, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture (Third Edition)*, 2018.

²⁴ Moussa P. Blimpo and Malcolm Cosgrove-Davies, *Electricity Access in Sub-Saharan Africa: Uptake, Reliability, and Complementary Factors for Economic Impact*, World Bank, 2019.

²⁵ See CRS In Focus IF11423, *African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)*.

What Factors Hinder Economic Potential in Africa?

- **Infrastructure.** Much of Africa has limited, unreliable, and often poorly maintained infrastructure. These problems impose high production and transportation costs and delay shipments, and may be the largest impediment to the region's trade flows. The IMF estimated in 2016 that improving the region's infrastructure to average global levels could boost Africa's international trade by up to 42%.²⁶
- **Labor and Productivity.** Much of Africa suffers from a scarcity of skilled labor due to underinvestment in education, outmigration of educated workers, and the predominance of low-skill informal and agricultural sectors in many countries. By some estimates, smallholder farming provides 60% of all jobs in Africa.²⁷
- **Value Chains.** Many African countries depend heavily on exports of cash crops and other raw commodities, especially in the energy, mining, and agricultural sectors. Many countries in the region lack the technical expertise and capital investment needed to pursue value-added processing and production.
- **Economic Complexity.** Lack of diversification, demand, and economies of scale mean that African markets for finance, services, and goods used in production are limited compared to other regions. Such factors increase production costs and inhibit the growth of cross-sectoral linkages and industrial and manufacturing capacities. The ability to meet production quality standards demanded by global markets is often limited.
- **Regulatory and Legal Environments.** Governments often have provided inadequate enabling environments for private sector activity, including by failing to adequately enforce contracts or protect property rights. Corruption also remains a challenge. Inefficient cross-border trade procedures and a lack of trade regulation and tariff harmonization also impose trade costs, both within Africa and with other regions.
- **Political Instability and Uncertainty.** Political instability and conflict—as well as other sources of risk, such as foreign exchange volatility—undermine business climates and deter investment in some countries.

Human Development Issues

Africa has the highest fertility rates of any region, as well as the highest maternal mortality rates, accounting for roughly two-thirds of all maternal deaths worldwide in 2017.²⁸ The region's child mortality and stunted child growth prevalence rates also are the highest globally, as are rates of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. The WHO reported that as of 2016, Africa accounted for over half of all global deaths attributable to inadequate access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene services.²⁹ Ensuring access to quality schooling has been an enduring challenge, as has closing gender gaps in educational access and outcomes. Despite many countries' efforts to make access to basic education universal, nearly one-third of African children aged six to seventeen reportedly do not attend school.³⁰ According to U.N. estimates, some 60% of African men and 70% of African women aged 25 and older have had no secondary education.³¹ Armed conflict impedes learning in parts of the region; as of mid-2019, some 9,200 schools had closed due to insurgent threats in West and Central Africa, affecting more than 1.9 million learners.³²

²⁶ IMF, *Trade Integration and Global Value Chains in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 2016.

²⁷ Lutz Goedde, Amandla Ooko-Ombaka, and Gillian Pais, "Winning in Africa's Agricultural Market," McKinsey & Company, February 15, 2019.

²⁸ World Health Organization (WHO), U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA), World Bank Group, and the U.N. Population Division, *Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000 to 2017*, 2019.

²⁹ WHO, *Safer Water, Better Health*, 2019 update.

³⁰ Proportions of out-of-school youth are generally lower at the primary school level than at the middle and secondary school levels. See U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "One in Five Children, Adolescents and Youth is Out of School," February 2018.

³¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2019*.

³² UNICEF, "Education under threat in West and Central Africa," August 2019.

Food insecurity varies widely between and within countries. In parts of the region, armed conflict and population displacements (see “Peace, Security, and Humanitarian Issues”) have created acute food insecurity while impeding or rolling back development gains. The World Bank projected in June 2020 that 26 to 40 million more Africans could fall into extreme poverty due to economic shocks linked to COVID-19, in addition to the virus’ health effects (see **Text Box**).³³ Impacts may be particularly severe in countries already affected by conflict or weather extremes, such as Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and South Sudan.³⁴

COVID-19: Health Impacts in Africa

As of January 2021, confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths per capita in Africa were far below those in other regions, though Africa’s case counts were surging amid a second wave of infections that began in late 2020.³⁵ Recorded cases remained concentrated in a handful of countries, led by South Africa—which had conducted the most COVID-19 tests by far, and is the reported origin of a more rapidly transmissible variant of the COVID-19 virus.³⁶ Some experts have attributed Africa’s relatively low confirmed caseloads to the early implementation of robust containment measures by many African governments, some of which had recent experience in containing Ebola and other epidemics.³⁷ Social and environmental factors, including poor transportation infrastructure limiting domestic travel, also may serve to slow disease transmission in the region.

At the same time, low testing capacity and limited death registration rates across the region have raised concerns that official statistics may significantly understate the extent of the pandemic in the region, complicating appraisals of African countries’ efforts to combat the pandemic.³⁸ In several countries, testing for COVID-19 antibodies, an indication of past infection, has suggested higher rates of transmission than officially recorded.³⁹ Health experts also warn that the virus’ second wave could overwhelm some public health systems at a time when governments in the region are reluctant to re-impose economically costly containment measures.⁴⁰ Limited financial resources, infrastructure gaps, and logistical deficits, such as electricity and refrigeration shortfalls, pose significant challenges for mass COVID-19 vaccination efforts in the region. For more comprehensive discussion of COVID-19 and regional responses in Africa, see CRS In Focus IF11532, *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Impact in Africa*.

Governance and Human Rights Conditions

Since the early 1990s, many African countries have transitioned from military or single-party rule to multiparty political systems under which elections are held regularly. The consolidation of democratic institutions has been uneven, however. According to Freedom House, a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization, countries in West and Southern Africa generally saw major improvements in political rights and civil liberties between 1990 and 2017 (notwithstanding more recent backsliding, discussed below), while East and Central Africa saw stagnation or decline.⁴¹

³³ World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune*, 2020.

³⁴ FAO and WFP, *FAO-WFP Early Warning Analysis of Acute Food Insecurity Hotspots*, October 2020.

³⁵ WHO, “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Dashboard,” at <https://covid19.who.int/>.

³⁶ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Emerging SARS-CoV-2 Variants,” updated January 28, 2021.

³⁷ David Pilling, “How Africa Fought the Pandemic — And What Coronavirus Has Taught the World,” *Financial Times*, October 23, 2020.

³⁸ Ruth Maclean, “A Continent Where the Dead Are Not Counted,” *New York Times*, January 2, 2021. In response, some commentators have criticized the suggestion that large-scale COVID-19 outbreaks could escape notice by African governments and publics despite low official death registration rates in many countries. See, e.g., Mamka Anyona, “Africans don’t just live to die. A response to the New York Times,” *African Arguments*, January 8, 2021.

³⁹ Linda Nordling, “The Pandemic Appears to Have Spared Africa So Far. Scientists Are Struggling to Explain Why,” *Science*, August 11, 2020.

⁴⁰ Africa Center for Strategic Studies, “Analyzing Africa’s Second Wave of COVID-19,” January 5, 2021.

⁴¹ Jon Temin, “Democratic Governance in Africa: Three Key Trends,” *Freedom House Blog*, May 10, 2018.

The region's more robust democracies (e.g., Botswana, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa) have experienced multiple peaceful electoral transfers of power; journalists, civil society organizations, and opposition politicians in these countries generally operate free from legal restraint and state harassment. By contrast, governments in Africa's entrenched autocracies (e.g., Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of Congo, and Rwanda) curtail political freedoms and civil liberties, including by imposing legal and regulatory constraints on civil society and opposition activity, using security forces to disrupt political gatherings, and arresting critics and journalists. Activists and media personnel in some countries (e.g., Ethiopia and Cameroon) have faced arguably spurious criminal charges under expansive anti-terrorism laws. Recent political transitions have raised hopes for reform in several countries (e.g., Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC], Ethiopia, The Gambia, and Sudan), but prospects for enduring governance gains remain fragile.

Selected Challenges to Democratic Consolidation in Africa

“Presidents for Life,” “Third Termism,” and Entrenched Ruling Parties. In multiple African countries, heads of state have abolished, altered, or evaded constitutional term limits to remain in power.⁴² Authoritarian leaders in some countries (e.g., Cameroon, Chad, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda), have held power for decades, tilting electoral processes in their favor and stifling opponents. In several countries (Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea), leaders recently secured third terms after circumventing or amending constitutional term limits, sparking unrest that provoked state security crackdowns. In others—Burkina Faso (2014), DRC (2018), and Sudan (2019)—protests against long-serving incumbents' efforts to cling to power ultimately forced leaders to step down, notably after the military or regional leaders intervened in protesters' favor. In some countries where longtime leaders recently have stepped down (e.g., Angola and Zimbabwe), politics and governing apparatuses remain controlled by the same parties that have exercised power for decades.

Military Intervention. An August 2020 military coup d'état in Mali—which came amid rising armed conflict and Islamist violence, military casualties, ethnic tensions, flawed elections, and corruption scandals—has intensified concerns over democratic backsliding in West Africa. Some observers posit that events in Mali may be a warning sign for other countries facing similar challenges in the sub-region, such as Burkina Faso.⁴³ West Africa saw a wave of military coups or coup attempts in the late 2000s/early 2010s (in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger). In Sudan, many citizens initially celebrated the military's 2019 ouster of long-serving leader Omar al Bashir following months of anti-government protests, but longer-term prospects for civilian rule remain uncertain, as the military retains a role in politics under a transitional power-sharing arrangement until elections slated for 2023.

Insecurity. Armed groups threaten civic participation in multiple African countries. In several recent elections (e.g., in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic [CAR], Cameroon, Mali, and Niger), insurgents have used threats and attacks to impede administrative or voting processes. Islamist insurgents in the Sahel and East Africa and separatist fighters in Cameroon also have violently limited freedom of expression in areas in which they operate, even as governments have restricted human rights and civil liberties in the course of counterinsurgency efforts.

COVID-19.⁴⁴ Several African heads of state have invoked emergency executive powers in response to the public health crisis, with varying degrees of legislative consultation.⁴⁵ Some containment efforts have involved restrictions on political and civil society activity, and state security forces in some countries have been accused of human rights abuses in the course of lockdown enforcement.⁴⁶ COVID-19 also has hindered the conduct of elections: some

⁴² Joseph Siegle and Candace Cook, “Circumvention of Term Limits Weakens Governance in Africa,” Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), September 14, 2020.

⁴³ See, e.g., *The Economist*, “Burkina Faso Says its Poll Will be Valid, Whatever the Turnout,” September 3, 2020.

⁴⁴ See CRS Report R46430, *Global Democracy and Human Rights Impacts of COVID-19: In Brief*.

⁴⁵ ISS Africa, “The Dangers of States of Emergency to Combat COVID-19 in Africa,” May 26, 2020.

⁴⁶ Nic Cheeseman and Jeffrey Smith, “The Pandemic is Being Used to Erode Democratic Freedoms. Civil Society Must Fight Back,” *Mail & Guardian*, April 17, 2020; Katherine Jacobsen, “Amid COVID-19, the Prognosis for Press Freedom is Dim. Here are 10 Symptoms to Track,” Committee to Protect Journalists, June 2020.

governments have postponed polls, raising tensions in some cases.⁴⁷ In some countries (e.g., Cameroon and Uganda), the government has cited COVID-19-related restrictions to arrest or harass the political opposition.

Recent analyses have warned that some countries in Africa may be experiencing “democratic backsliding,” signifying a deterioration of various dimensions of democratic governance, such as political competition, electoral credibility, respect for freedoms of expression and association, and the rule of law.⁴⁸ Freedom House downgraded 23 African countries’ rankings in its 2020 *Freedom in the World* survey of political rights and civil liberties (see **Figure 2**). These included Benin and Tanzania—two countries once considered regional pillars of democracy that have seen vibrant civic spaces curtailed by authoritarian leaders—along with several countries, such as Mozambique, that face growing Islamist insurgencies. West Africa saw major setbacks in 2020: Mali’s elected president was overthrown in a military coup, armed conflicts threatened participation in elections in Burkina Faso and Niger, and the presidents of Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea effectively evaded constitutional term limits to secure contested third terms in office.

Figure 2. Freedom House “Freedom in the World” Rankings, 2020



Source: CRS graphic created using basemap from the Department of State; freedom rankings from Freedom House, *Freedom in the World* index, 2020.

In much of Africa, the development of accountable, functional institutions remains limited. Even some governments that regularly hold democratic elections exhibit few effective internal checks

⁴⁷ ISS Africa, “COVID-19 Further Complicates Holding Free and Fair Elections in Africa,” July 24, 2020.

⁴⁸ CRS Report R45344, *Global Trends in Democracy: Background, U.S. Policy, and Issues for Congress*.

and balances. In most African countries, the executive branch wields far more power than other branches of government, which often remain institutionally weak. Justice systems in many countries lack capacity or are blighted by corruption, which may corrode trust in courts and law enforcement. Security force abuses and a perceived lack of access to justice and protection may drive recruitment into extremist organizations and other armed groups (see **Text Box**).

Islamist Recruitment in Africa: Study of Key Drivers

A 2017 UNDP study based on interviews with former members of Islamist armed groups in Africa identified several risk factors for recruitment into such organizations.⁴⁹ These include residence in underdeveloped and politically marginalized areas, vulnerable family circumstances, religious motivations (including a fear of religious persecution), economic frustrations, and grievances toward the government. Seventy-one percent of voluntary recruits identified an adverse state action, such as the killing or arrest of a relative or friend, as the “tipping point” precipitating their decision to join an extremist group. According to the study’s authors, the role of state abuses as “an accelerator of recruitment” calls for scrutiny “of how counter-terrorism and wider security functions of governments in at-risk environments conduct themselves with regard to human rights and due process.”

According to the *Ibrahim Index of African Governance* (IIAG), an annual index of government performance in Africa, African governance generally improved between 2010 and 2020, but gains slowed beginning around 2015.⁵⁰ The 2020 IIAG also documented a “divergence in different areas of governance” across Africa, characterized by improving economic management and social service delivery alongside a deterioration in civil liberties, political participation, human security, and the rule of law. Africa ranked worst among all regions in the 2019 *Corruption Perceptions Index*, a survey of perceived public sector corruption by the independent organization Transparency International—though performance and trends varied across the region.

Human rights conditions vary widely across Africa.⁵¹ Some countries have maintained generally positive records in recent years but face enduring challenges such as high rates of gender-based violence, discrimination against sexual minorities and other vulnerable groups, labor abuses, or human trafficking. In Africa’s authoritarian countries, citizens may face arbitrary arrest, torture and other maltreatment in detention, and restrictions on freedoms of expression, assembly, and information. Abuses by African police forces came under intense scrutiny in 2020, amid massive nationwide protests against police brutality in Nigeria that drew global attention and support—with observers drawing parallels to protests in the United States against the use of excessive force by police against People of Color.⁵² Populations in conflict-affected countries may face severe human rights threats from armed groups as well as state security forces and state-backed militias.

Peace, Security, and Humanitarian Issues

Violent political crises, civil wars, and intercommunal conflicts have broken out or intensified in several African countries in the past decade. Islamist armed groups, some linked to Al Qaeda or the Islamic State, have proliferated and expanded their presence in some countries, particularly in Somalia, the Lake Chad Basin, West Africa’s Sahel region, and Mozambique and Tanzania. In parts of Africa, porous borders, corruption, and weak justice and law enforcement systems have enabled transnational crime networks to operate with relative impunity. U.S. policymakers have shown an enduring interest in curtailing such activities, which include human trafficking, drug

⁴⁹ UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and The Tipping Point for Recruitment*, 2017.

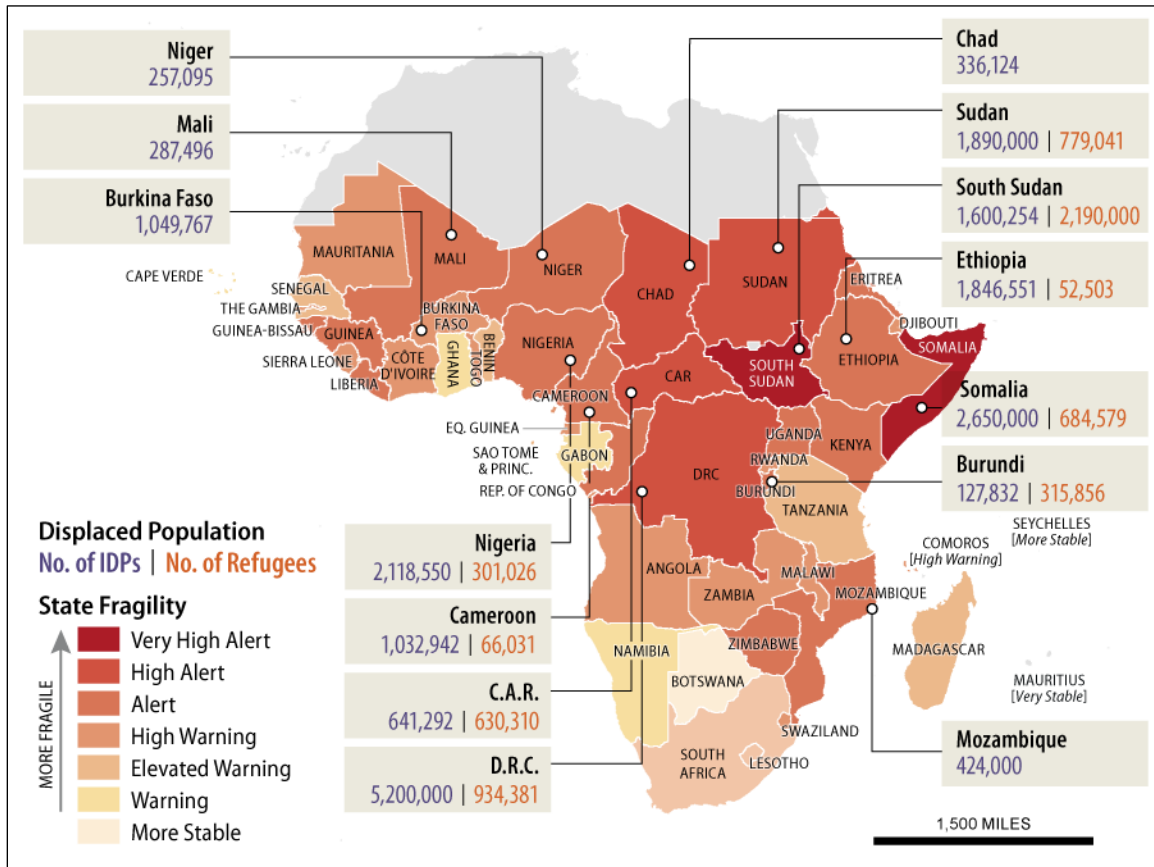
⁵⁰ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance*, 2020.

⁵¹ See, e.g., annual State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

⁵² See CRS Insight IN11525, *Nigeria: #EndSARS Protests Against Police Brutality*.

smuggling, oil theft, and poaching and other wildlife and natural resource crime.⁵³ Maritime insecurity, such as piracy, is another focus of U.S. engagement. U.S.-backed antipiracy efforts have helped reduce attacks off the Somali coast since 2013, but reported attacks have surged in the Gulf of Guinea, which now ranks among the world’s most insecure maritime zones.⁵⁴ Selected security challenges are discussed below.

Figure 3. State Fragility and Population Displacement in Africa



Sources: CRS graphic created using basemap from the Department of State. State fragility rankings from Fund for Peace, *Fragile States Index*, 2020. Displacement figures reflect estimates by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as of August-November 2020. The absence of displacement data on this graphic does not necessarily indicate an absence of displaced populations.

Note: Population displacement is one dimension of state fragility, which is complex and multifaceted. On links between displacement and fragility, see Yonatan Araya, “State fragility, displacement and development interventions,” in *Forced Migration Review*, vol. 43 (May 2013), pp. 63-65.

West Africa

The Sahel. In North-West Africa’s Sahel region, roughly spanning Mauritania to Chad, conflicts involving Islamist armed groups, ethnic separatists, communal defense militias, and criminal

⁵³ See CRS In Focus IF10601, *Transnational Crime Issues: Global Trends Overview*.

⁵⁴ See CRS In Focus IF11117, *Gulf of Guinea: Recent Trends in Piracy and Armed Robbery*.

actors have outpaced responses by governments while deepening local development, human security, and governance challenges. Mali has been mired in crises since 2012, when the state nearly collapsed in the face of a northern separatist rebellion, a military coup, an Islamist insurgent advance, and a regional drought.⁵⁵ Islamist insurgents and other armed groups hold sway over much of the country's territory, and a 2015 peace accord with northern separatists has not been fully implemented. In August 2020, as noted above, the military overthrew Mali's president, giving rise to a transitional administration that has pledged to hold elections in 2022.

Burkina Faso has seen increasing violence since 2016, as Islamist groups—some with ties to the conflict in Mali, and to Al Qaeda or the Islamic State (IS)—have asserted control over parts of the country and carried out attacks in the capital.⁵⁶ Human rights groups have accused state security forces and state-backed militias of committing abuses during counterinsurgency efforts.⁵⁷ Islamist groups also are active in adjacent regions of Niger, a key Western security partner in the region, and have staged attacks in previously unaffected coastal West African countries.

The U.N. Security Council established a peacekeeping operation in Mali in 2013. Separately, France has deployed about 5,000 troops to the region under Operation Barkhane, a counterterrorism mission headquartered in Chad that receives U.S. logistical support (see “U.S. Military Engagement in Africa”). In 2017, the G5 Sahel—comprising Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad—launched a “joint force” to coordinate military operations in border regions. The United States and other donors have provided support for the force, but regional militaries have struggled to coordinate and sustain operations.

The Lake Chad Basin.⁵⁸ The Lake Chad Basin region adjoining Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad has faced a years-long insurgency by Boko Haram and an IS-affiliated splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (IS-WA, or ISWAP). The conflict has killed nearly 40,000 people in Nigeria since 2010, along with thousands more in neighboring countries.⁵⁹ U.S.-backed regional counterinsurgency efforts have episodically weakened the groups' strength and territorial control, yet both remain capable of staging attacks in northeast Nigeria and adjacent border regions. The violence has featured extensive human rights abuses by armed extremists as well as state security forces, and has given rise to a spiraling humanitarian emergency.⁶⁰

Central and Northwest Nigeria.⁶¹ Violence between farmers and livestock herders in Nigeria's central “Middle Belt” has surged in frequency and intensity over the past decade, claiming several thousand lives. In the northwest, such clashes have mounted in a context of escalating armed banditry, kidnapping, and ethnic vigilantism. Islamist extremist groups also reportedly have sought to establish themselves in the northwest, building ties with local communities and

⁵⁵ See CRS In Focus IF10116, *Crisis in Mali*.

⁵⁶ See CRS In Focus IF10434, *Burkina Faso*.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Human Rights Watch, “*We Found Their Bodies Later That Day*”: Atrocities by Armed Islamists and Security Forces in Burkina Faso's Sahel Region, March 22, 2019.

⁵⁸ See CRS In Focus IF10173, *Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province*.

⁵⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, “Nigeria Security Tracker,” accessed February 3, 2021.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Amnesty International (AI), *Stars on Their Shoulders, Blood on their Hands: War Crimes Committed by the Nigerian Military*, 2015; AI, *Cameroon's Secret Torture Chambers: Human Rights Violations and War Crimes in the Fight Against Boko Haram*, 2017; and Human Rights Watch, *They Didn't Know if I was Alive or Dead*, 2019.

⁶¹ See CRS Report RL33964, *Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*.

armed groups.⁶² In August 2020, the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command-Africa stated that “we’re seeing al-Qaida starting to make some inroads” in Nigeria’s northwest.⁶³

East Africa

Somalia.⁶⁴ Al Shabaab, an Al Qaeda affiliate, continues to wage an asymmetric campaign against the Somali government, African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces, and international targets. The group has killed thousands of Somali civilians since the mid-2000s and demonstrated its ability to stage attacks in the broader East Africa region—most notably in Kenya, which Al Shabaab has targeted in what it describes as retaliation for Kenya’s participation in AMISOM. In January 2020, an Al Shabaab raid on a Kenyan military base used by the U.S. military killed one U.S. servicemember and two Defense Department contractors.⁶⁵ Somalia also faces a threat from a small IS faction in the north. The United States has provided extensive counterterrorism support to Somalia’s government and AMISOM, and the U.S. military conducts airstrikes and other operations against Islamist militants in the country (see “U.S. Military Engagement in Africa”). Tensions between Somalia’s federal government and its member states have fueled local instability, undermining both the fight against Al Shabaab and the process of nation-building.

Ethiopia.⁶⁶ An armed conflict in the northeastern region of Tigray that began in November 2020 has displaced more than 2 million people and created a major humanitarian crisis, with roughly 4.5 million people in Tigray in need of emergency food aid as of January 2021.⁶⁷ Violence pits federal forces supported by militias from the neighboring Amhara region against forces loyal to the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which dominated Ethiopia’s ruling coalition for almost three decades. The conflict threatens to evolve into a protracted insurgency, amid reports of serious abuses against civilians.⁶⁸ The government has restricted access to Tigray by aid agencies, journalists, and human rights monitors. Neighboring Eritrea’s reported involvement in the conflict and rising tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan have prompted concerns of a regional conflict. The conflict in Tigray, alongside ethnic violence elsewhere in the country, threatens Ethiopia’s political transition that began in 2018 with the election of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

Sudan.⁶⁹ Sudan’s transitional government, which assumed power in 2019 after the military’s ouster of longtime leader Omar al Bashir, has pursued peace negotiations with insurgent groups in the western Darfur region and Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states, but instability continues to plague the country’s periphery. In August 2020, the government signed a peace deal with some rebel groups, but it has yet to reach agreement with two major factions. Continued violence underscores concerns about the government’s capacity to protect civilians after the departure of the U.N. peacekeeping mission from Darfur: under pressure from the Sudanese government, the

⁶² ICG, *Violence in Nigeria’s North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*, May 18, 2020.

⁶³ State Department, “Digital Briefing on U.S. Efforts to Combat Terrorism in Africa during COVID,” August 4, 2020.

⁶⁴ See CRS In Focus IF10155, *Somalia*.

⁶⁵ AFRICOM, “UPDATE: U.S. Statement on Manda Bay Terrorist Attack,” January 5, 2020.

⁶⁶ See Testimony of CRS Specialist Lauren Ploch Blanchard, House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, *The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia*, hearing, 116th Cong., 2nd Sess., December 1, 2020; see also CRS In Focus IF10185, *Ethiopia*.

⁶⁷ OCHA, “Ethiopia Humanitarian Bulletin Issue #1 25 Dec – 10 Jan. 2021,” January 10, 2021.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., U.N. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, “U.N. Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, Urges All Parties to Prohibit the Use of Sexual Violence and Cease Hostilities in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia,” January 21, 2021.

⁶⁹ See CRS In Focus IF10182, *Sudan*.

U.N. Security Council ended the mission's mandate in December 2020. More than 7 million people in Sudan were severely food insecure as of December 2020, according to U.N. estimates.⁷⁰

South Sudan.⁷¹ South Sudan's civil war has featured widespread sexual violence, mass killings, and other atrocities since erupting in 2013, just two years after the country's separation from Sudan. A study estimated in 2018 that nearly 400,000 South Sudanese had died as a result of the conflict, which has displaced at least a third of the country's population.⁷² A 2018 power-sharing deal between the government and some rebel groups has quieted some areas, but security gains are fragile, parts of the agreement remain unimplemented, and some factions have refused to sign the accord. Intercommunal conflicts also persist, spurred by political elites. Almost 6 million South Sudanese may face severe food insecurity, with tens of thousands at risk of famine.⁷³

Central and Southern Africa

Cameroon.⁷⁴ A separatist insurgency by Anglophone rebels in this majority Francophone country has drawn attention from U.S. policymakers since the onset of conflict in 2017. Government forces and Anglophone rebel groups have committed widespread violence against civilians, as attempts to negotiate a settlement have foundered. The Anglophone crisis has overstretched a Cameroonian military already contending with Boko Haram and IS-WA insurgencies in the country's north, where attacks on civilians reportedly surged in 2019-2020.⁷⁵

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).⁷⁶ Instability has endured in DRC since the mid-1990s despite extensive foreign assistance and international stabilization efforts, including one of the world's largest and longest-running U.N. peacekeeping operations. Tensions over access to land and citizenship rights, local disputes, criminal activity, and regional geopolitics, have driven conflicts—notably in the densely inhabited, mineral-rich east. In 2019, IS media outlets began to claim some attacks locally attributed to a Ugandan-origin armed group long active eastern DRC. Some 21.8 million people are acutely food insecure, including 5.7 million facing emergency-level food insecurity, and DRC has one of the world's largest internally displaced populations.⁷⁷

Central African Republic (CAR).⁷⁸ CAR has struggled to emerge from conflict and state collapse since 2013, when rebels overthrew the government. Armed groups control much of the country and continue to perpetuate widespread violence against civilians, much of it along ethnic and religious lines. In recent years, U.S. officials have expressed particular concern over a surge

⁷⁰ OCHA, "Sudan: Situation Report," December 17, 2020.

⁷¹ See CRS In Focus IF10218, *South Sudan*. See also Jon Temin, *From Independence to Civil War: Atrocity Prevention and U.S. Policy Toward South Sudan*, Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, July 2018.

⁷² This figure refers to "excess deaths" beyond what would have likely occurred absent war. See Cecchi et. al., *South Sudan: Estimates of Crisis-Attributable Mortality in South Sudan, December 2013-April 2018: A Statistical Analysis*, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), September 2018.

⁷³ OCHA, *South Sudan: Humanitarian Snapshot* (December 2020), January 12, 2021; *IPC Famine Review: Conclusions and Recommendations for Pibor County – South Sudan – IPC Analysis – November 2020*.

⁷⁴ See CRS In Focus IF10279, *Cameroon*.

⁷⁵ ACSS, "Boko Haram Violence against Civilians Spiking in Northern Cameroon," November 13, 2020.

⁷⁶ See CRS Report R43166, *Democratic Republic of Congo: Background and U.S. Relations*.

⁷⁷ IPC, "Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Acute Food Insecurity Situation July - December 2020 and Projection for January - June 2021," accessed November 30, 2020.

⁷⁸ See CRS In Focus IF11171, *Crisis in the Central African Republic*.

in Russian military, private contractor, and mining firm support for the government. Nearly 3 million Central Africans, roughly half the population, may require humanitarian aid in 2021.⁷⁹

Mozambique.⁸⁰ Since 2017, Mozambique has faced a mounting Islamist insurgency based in Cabo Delgado province, along its northern border with Tanzania. The group is known locally as Al Shabaab (no known ties to the Somali extremist group of the same name) or Al Sunnah wa Jama'ah (ASWJ, “*Adherents of the Sunnah*”). Islamic State media outlets have recognized the faction as part of its IS-Central Africa affiliate, under whose banner it has also claimed attacks in DRC (see above). ASWJ has targeted government facilities and personnel, local civilians, and workers engaged in natural gas operations partially financed by the U.S. Export-Import Bank. ASWJ also has staged attacks in neighboring Tanzania. Human rights groups have accused Mozambican security forces of extensive abuses during counterinsurgency operations.⁸¹

Peacekeeping in Africa

As of January 2021, five U.N. peacekeeping operations were under way in Africa.⁸² Under the U.N. system of assessed contributions, the United States is the top source of funding for U.N. peacekeeping globally.⁸³ The United States provides training and equipment to peacekeeping contributors through bilateral foreign assistance programs. The United States has also provided support to AMISOM, which the U.N. Security Council authorized but is not U.N.-conducted. AMISOM conducts stabilization and counterterrorism operations, primarily against Al Shabaab, an Al Qaeda affiliate. African countries play a key role in global peacekeeping: Rwanda and Ethiopia were the second- and third- largest troop contributors to U.N. peacekeeping as of December 2020; several other African countries consistently rank in the top 20.⁸⁴

U.S. Policy and Engagement

Successive Administrations and Congresses have pursued broadly consistent objectives in Africa: enhancing peace and security; strengthening democracy and good governance; promoting economic growth and development; expanding U.S.-Africa trade and investment; and responding to health challenges and humanitarian crises. Certain African countries have drawn consistent attention from Members of Congress and other policymakers, notably those afflicted by conflict and instability (including terrorist threats), humanitarian crises, severe human rights violations, or poor or deteriorating governance conditions. These include DRC, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, among others. U.S. policymakers have sought to deepen relations with regional economic powerhouses Nigeria, South Africa, and Angola, notwithstanding challenges and policy concerns in each case. Successive Administrations also have invested substantial diplomatic engagement and foreign aid in countries seen as regional leaders in security and development, such as Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, and Tanzania. The extent to which the United States should partner with and provide assistance to authoritarian governments in Africa to advance shared development and security objectives has been a frequent topic of debate.

⁷⁹ OCHA, “Central African Republic Situation Report, 30 Nov 2020,” November 30, 2020.

⁸⁰ See CRS Report R45817, *Mozambique: Politics, Economy, and U.S. Relations*.

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, *Mozambique: Security Forces Abusing Suspected Insurgents*, December 4, 2018; Amnesty International, *Mozambique: Torture by Security Forces in Gruesome Videos Must be Investigated*, September 9, 2020.

⁸² These operate in the Central African Republic (CAR), DRC, Mali, South Sudan, and Sudan (Abyei region). Another operation, in Darfur, Sudan, ended its mandate on December 31, 2020, and was replaced by a new U.N. political mission.

⁸³ See CRS Report R45206, *U.S. Funding to the United Nations System: Overview and Selected Policy Issues*.

⁸⁴ U.N. Peacekeeping, “Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations by Country and Post,” December 31, 2020.

U.S. Assistance to Africa

A separate CRS product, CRS Report R46368, *U.S. Assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa: An Overview*, provides more comprehensive information on U.S. aid to Africa, including funding trends, key policy debates, and selected considerations for Congress.

U.S. assistance to Africa primarily focuses on addressing health challenges, notably relating to HIV/AIDS, malaria, maternal and child health, and nutrition; in FY2020, 74% of nonemergency U.S. assistance for Africa went toward health programming.⁸⁵ Other U.S. aid programs seek to foster agricultural development and economic growth; strengthen peace and security, including through activities to build the capacity of African security forces; improve education access and social service delivery; bolster democracy, human rights, and good governance; support sustainable natural resource management; and address humanitarian needs.

The overall scale of State Department- and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-administered aid for Africa has remained relatively constant since the latter years of the Obama Administration, hovering around \$7.0-\$7.5 billion annually, excluding humanitarian aid and other funding allocated from global accounts and programs. Other federal departments and agencies administer additional aid funds for Africa. These include the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), an independent agency that provides large, multi-year grants to developing countries through a competitive selection process; the U.S. Africa Development Foundation (USADF), which provides small-scale development assistance; the U.S. Development Finance Corporation (see “Programs and Legislation Supporting U.S.-Africa Trade and Investment”) and the Department of Defense (DOD, see “U.S. Military Engagement in Africa”).⁸⁶

U.S. Support for Governance, Democracy, and Human Rights

Supporting democracy, human rights, and good governance (DRG) has long been a stated priority of U.S. Africa policy and focus of U.S. assistance to the region—though annual funding for such programs has been smaller than funds allocated in support of other U.S. goals in the region (e.g., promoting health outcomes). Key tools in the promotion of DRG include

Foreign Aid. State Department- and USAID-administered DRG programs seek to enhance democratic institutions, improve government accountability and responsiveness, and strengthen the rule of law. Activities include supporting African electoral institutions and political processes; training political parties, civil society organizations, parliaments, and journalists; promoting effective and accountable service delivery; bolstering anti-corruption efforts; and strengthening justice sectors. U.S. assistance also provides legal aid to human rights defenders and funds programs to address particular human rights issues, enable human rights monitoring and reporting, and support election observation. For more on U.S. DRG assistance, including funding levels, see CRS Report R46368, *U.S. Assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa: An Overview*.

Diplomacy and Reporting. U.S. diplomats often publicly criticize or condemn undemocratic actions and human rights violations in Africa, and raise concerns in private meetings with African leaders. Some Members of Congress likewise raise concerns directly with African leaders, with U.S. executive branch officials, or through legislation. The State Department publishes annual congressionally mandated reports on human rights conditions globally, and on other issues of

⁸⁵ CRS calculation based on FY2020 653(a) data.

⁸⁶ See CRS Report RL32427, *Millennium Challenge Corporation: Overview and Issues*.

concern, such as religious freedom and trafficking in persons.⁸⁷ Such reports document violations and, in some cases, provide the basis for U.S. policy actions, such as restrictions on assistance. The State Department and USAID also finance international and domestic election observer missions in Africa that produce reports on the credibility of electoral contests.

Sanctions. As of January 2021, Executive Orders (EOs) permitted the President to impose financial sanctions and/or travel restrictions on persons implicated in violating human rights or undermining democratic transitions or peace processes in several countries, including Burundi, CAR, DRC, Mali, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe.⁸⁸ As discussed below (see “U.S.-Africa Policy during the Trump Administration: A Wrap-Up”), the Trump Administration permanently lifted certain sanctions on Sudan that the Obama Administration previously had eased, and in 2020 removed Sudan from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list—a designation accompanied by a range of sanctions, including restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance.⁸⁹ Other EOs are global in scope but have relevance for Africa, such as the 2017 “Global Magnitsky” EO pertaining to global human rights abuses and corruption, which the Trump Administration invoked to impose targeted financial sanctions on a number of individuals and business entities in Africa.⁹⁰ The executive branch also has imposed U.S. visa restrictions on certain African nationals implicated in corruption or gross human rights violations pursuant to authority granted by Congress in annual State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations measures.⁹¹

Prosecutions. The United States has helped fund special tribunals to investigate and prosecute human rights violations in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and Chad. The United States is not a state party to the International Criminal Court (ICC), which in practice has prioritized human rights cases in Africa, though U.S. law permits the federal government to assist ICC efforts on a case-by-case basis. U.S. prosecutors also have brought charges against or convicted alleged perpetrators of human rights abuses in African countries, notably Rwanda and Liberia, often for fraud or perjury linked to nondisclosure of involvement in wartime abuses in U.S. immigration applications.

U.S. Military Engagement in Africa

U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) has a stated mission to work with African partner states to counter transnational threats and malign actors, strengthen local security forces, and respond to crises in order to “advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability and prosperity.”⁹² Its area of responsibility (AOR) comprises 53 countries, or all of Africa (including North Africa) aside from Egypt, which lies within Central Command’s AOR.⁹³ In the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, P.L. 116-283), Congress authorized \$277.9 million for AFRICOM operations and maintenance, exceeding a funding request of \$239.4 million.

In January 2020 testimony to Congress, AFRICOM Commander General Stephen J. Townsend stated that “about 5,100 U.S. service members and about 1,000 DOD civilians and contractors”

⁸⁷ See CRS In Focus IF10795, *Global Human Rights: The Department of State’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.

⁸⁸ EOs are available on the Federal Register at <https://www.federalregister.gov/>.

⁸⁹ See CRS Insight IN11531, *Sudan’s Removal from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List*.

⁹⁰ See CRS In Focus IF10576, *The Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act*.

⁹¹ See CRS In Focus IF10905, *FY2020 Foreign Operations Appropriations: Targeting Foreign Corruption and Human Rights Violations*.

⁹² AFRICOM, “About the Command,” at <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command>.

⁹³ Before AFRICOM became a stand-alone command in 2008, responsibility for U.S. military involvement in Africa was divided among European, Central, and Pacific Commands.

were active in Africa.”⁹⁴ A majority are stationed in Djibouti, which hosts Camp Lemonnier, the only enduring U.S. military base in Africa. Between 650 and 800 troops were in Somalia prior to President Trump’s December 2020 directive to relocate most of these personnel outside of the country, including to neighboring Djibouti and Kenya (see “DOD Posture Reviews and Drawdowns,” below); whether the Biden Administration will review that directive remains to be seen. As of September 2020, some 760 U.S. military personnel were deployed to West Africa—most of them to Niger, where they conduct a range of activities, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance flights from a new U.S. Air Force facility (discussed below).⁹⁵

Activities and Operations

Consistent with the Trump Administration’s orientation toward global power competition (see “U.S.-Africa Policy during the Trump Administration: A Wrap-Up”), AFRICOM’s *2020 Posture Statement* placed a high priority on countering malign Chinese and Russian influence in Africa.⁹⁶ It also reiterated several enduring Command priorities, such as protecting U.S. personnel and facilities and countering “violent extremist organizations” (VEOs)—generally understood to refer to Islamist armed groups. The *2020 Posture Statement* asserted that efforts to counter VEOs and build the capacity of partner militaries in Africa, two traditional focuses of DOD engagement, were now considered components of AFRICOM’s strategy to counter China and Russia.

Building Partner Capacity. The U.S. military generally seeks to build the capacity of African partner forces under a “by, with, and through” framework, which “emphasizes U.S. military capabilities employed in a supporting role, not as principal participants.”⁹⁷ DOD’s *2018 National Defense Strategy* prioritized efforts to support “local partners and the European Union to degrade terrorists” in Africa, while “build[ing] the capability required to counter violent extremism, human trafficking, trans-national criminal activity, and illegal arms trade with limited outside assistance.”⁹⁸ In addition to implementing some State Department-administered security assistance for African security forces, DOD also is authorized to engage in security cooperation under its own Title 10 authorities. The majority of DOD-administered security assistance for African partner forces has been provided under DOD’s “global train and equip” authority, which Congress expanded and codified under 10 U.S.C. 333 (“Section 333”) in the FY2017 NDAA (P.L. 114-328). DOD also conducts exercises, naval cooperation, threat-reduction, and other military-to-military cooperation with African counterparts under various statutory authorities, along with civil-military engagement in areas where U.S. forces are deployed.

The U.S. military has provided logistical support to French counterterrorism operations in the Sahel since 2013, when France deployed its military to Mali to halt an Islamist insurgent advance.

⁹⁴ Testimony of AFRICOM Commander General Stephen J. Townsend, Senate Armed Services Committee, *United States Africa Command and United States Southern Command*, hearing, 116th Cong., 2nd Sess., January 30, 2020. A November 2020 report by the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) for East Africa and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operations, covering July – September 2020, similarly stated that AFRICOM “had approximately 5,100 personnel in Africa” during the quarter, without providing detail on the number of DOD contractors active in the region. Lead Inspector General for East Africa and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operations, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress: July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020*, November 25, 2020.

⁹⁵ Lead IG for East Africa and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operations, *Quarterly Report*.

⁹⁶ AFRICOM *2020 Posture Statement to Congress*, submitted as written testimony by AFRICOM Commander General Stephen J. Townsend to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

⁹⁷ AFRICOM *2018 Posture Statement to Congress*, submitted as written testimony by then-AFRICOM Commander General Thomas D. Waldhauser to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

⁹⁸ DOD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*.

Such assistance has included aerial refueling, aerial resupply, and intelligence sharing.⁹⁹ DOD currently provides logistical support under 10 U.S.C. 331, enacted as part of the FY2017 NDAA.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR). In recent years, DOD has deployed personnel to conduct ISR activities in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. In November 2019, the U.S. military commenced ISR flights out of Air Base 201 in the northern Niger town of Agadez, after multiple delays.¹⁰⁰ (The U.S. military also maintains a presence at a separate facility near the capital, Niamey.¹⁰¹) Congress explicitly authorized funds for construction of the Agadez facility, which was led by U.S. active duty military personnel.¹⁰² Media outlets have reported other U.S. ISR activities in the Sahel, but these have not been confirmed by U.S. officials.¹⁰³ In February 2020, under the Trump Administration’s “force optimization” effort (see below), AFRICOM ended a U.S. ISR operation based in Cameroon that involved up to 300 U.S. military personnel.¹⁰⁴

Direct Action. In the past two decades, the U.S. military has taken direct action, including airstrikes, against terrorist threats in two African countries: Somalia and Libya. (On Libya, which is beyond the scope of this report, see CRS Report RL33142, *Libya: Conflict, Transition, and U.S. Policy*.) In 2019 testimony to Congress, AFRICOM’s then-Commander stated that the Command had not been granted “offensive strike capabilities or [executive] authorities” outside Libya and Somalia, while asserting that any U.S. forces accompanying local forces on counterterrorism missions would have an “inherent right of self-defense and collective self-defense,” were they to be attacked.¹⁰⁵

Beginning in the George W. Bush Administration, DOD has conducted airstrikes in Somalia against members of Al Qaeda and Al Shabaab; in 2017, AFRICOM publicly stated that U.S. strikes also have targeted an Islamic State faction in the country’s north.¹⁰⁶ The tempo of U.S. strikes rose beginning in 2015, when President Obama broadened the justification for military action in Somalia, and rose again after President Trump further expanded the authority for such strikes in 2017. U.S. officials have described some strikes as having been conducted in “self-defense” of U.S., Somali, or AMISOM forces.¹⁰⁷ In response to allegations from human rights groups that U.S. strikes had killed civilians in Somalia, AFRICOM conducted a review in 2019, subsequently acknowledging that strikes had killed two civilians in 2018 (fewer than alleged by some human rights groups).¹⁰⁸ In April 2020, AFRICOM began publicly issuing quarterly civilian

⁹⁹ Murielle Delaporte, “US Military Support in Sahel: Allies At Work,” *Breaking Defense*, May 14, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ DOD Inspector General, *Evaluation of Niger Air Base 201 Military Construction*, March 31, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Lead IG for East Africa and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operations, *Quarterly Report*.

¹⁰² FY2016 NDAA (P.L. 114-92), Title XXIII--Air Force Military Construction, §2301 (b).

¹⁰³ Joe Penney, Eric Schmitt, Rukmini Callimachi, and Christoph Koettl, “C.I.A. Drone Mission, Curtailed by Obama, Is Expanded in Africa Under Trump,” *New York Times*, September 9, 2018; and Nick Turse, “U.S. Military Says It has A “Light Footprint” in Africa. These Documents Show a Vast Network of Bases,” *The Intercept*, December 1, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ CRS communication with AFRICOM, February 2021; White House, “Letter From The President-- War Powers Resolution Regarding Cameroon,” October 14, 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Testimony of AFRICOM Commander General Thomas Waldhauser, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *U.S. Africa Command and Southern Command*, hearing, 116th Cong., 1st Sess., February 7, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Jim Garamone, “Aircraft Attack Al Qaeda Haven in Somalia,” American Forces Press Service, January 9, 2007; AFRICOM, “Why the U.S. Military is in Somalia,” November 29, 2017.

¹⁰⁷ See, e.g., AFRICOM, “Update: U.S. Self-Defense Strikes in Somalia,” September 29, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ AFRICOM, “U.S. Africa Command commander-directed review reveals civilian casualties,” April 5, 2019. For human rights groups’ allegations concerning U.S. strikes in Somalia, see, e.g., Amnesty International, “Somalia: Zero accountability as civilian deaths mount from US air strikes,” April 1, 2020.

casualty reports.¹⁰⁹ Several Members of Congress have expressed concern over civilian casualties from U.S. strikes in Somalia and over the transparency of AFRICOM's resultant inquiries.¹¹⁰

Congress also has authorized DOD to provide support to “foreign forces, irregular forces, groups, or individuals engaged in supporting or facilitating ongoing military operations” by U.S. special operations forces to combat terrorism under 10 U.S.C. §127(e).¹¹¹ DOD generally does not publicly disclose the locations or scope of activities conducted pursuant to this authority.

Other Engagements. The U.S. military also conducts exercises with African military personnel and shares skills related to disaster and humanitarian response. Major exercises include Flintlock, a Special Operations Command Africa-led exercise focused on West Africa, and Obangame Express, a maritime exercise in the Gulf of Guinea. A small number of U.S. military personnel (25 as of December 2020) serve as staff officers in U.N. peacekeeping missions in the region.¹¹² Nearly every U.S. Embassy in Africa also hosts some U.S. military personnel, for example as part of a Defense Attaché Office, Office of Security Cooperation, or Marine Security Detachment. In 2020, the Trump Administration reportedly withdrew defense attachés from several embassies in Africa, as part of its stated effort to reorient resources toward global power competition.¹¹³

U.S.-Africa Trade, Investment, and Economic Cooperation

Africa accounts for a small share of overall U.S. trade and investment activity, making up roughly 1% of such U.S. global transactions in 2019.¹¹⁴ As it has over the past several years, the United States ran a goods trade deficit with the region in 2019 (totaling \$5.2 billion), importing \$21.0 billion and exporting \$15.8 billion (see **Figure 4**). U.S. exports are diverse, while imports are mostly primary products; crude oil alone accounts for one-third of imports, but the total value of U.S. crude oil imports from Africa has substantially declined as U.S. domestic oil production has increased. Apparel, a key product benefitting from preferential U.S. tariff treatment under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, see below), is the region's most significant manufactured export to the United States. Over half of U.S. trade with Africa is with the region's two largest economies, Nigeria and South Africa. U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) is also concentrated in a few countries, including South Africa, Mauritius, Nigeria, Ghana, and Tanzania. South Africa accounts for a large share of African FDI in the United States (\$4.1 billion in 2019).

¹⁰⁹ AFRICOM, “Civilian Casualty Report and Allegations,” at <https://www.africom.mil/civilian-casualty-report-and-allegations>.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Representatives Ilhan Omar, Adam Smith, Adam Schiff, Eliot Engel, André Carson, James Langevin, Terri Sewell, and Karen Bass to AFRICOM Commander General Stephen J. Townsend, May 6, 2020.

¹¹¹ Currently authorized under 10 U.S.C. 127e.

¹¹² U.N. Peacekeeping, *Summary of Contribution to UN Peacekeeping by Mission, Country and Post: Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troops*, data as of December 31, 2020.

¹¹³ Warren P. Strobel and Gordon Lubold, “Pentagon Draw-Down at U.S. Embassies Prompts Concern About Ceding Field to Global Rivals,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 1, 2020.

¹¹⁴ Trade data include only sub-Saharan Africa and are sourced from Trade Data Monitor. Foreign direct investment data cover sub-Saharan and North Africa and are sourced from the Bureau of Economic Analysis' Direct Investment interactive tables at https://apps.bea.gov/iTable/index_MNC.cfm.

potential, however, and may focus their investments in other regions thought to offer more opportunity and less risk. Economic governance challenges, the relative difficulty of doing business, and, in some instances, instability also may limit U.S. commercial interest in Africa.¹¹⁶

Programs and Legislation Supporting U.S.-Africa Trade and Investment

African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).¹¹⁷ AGOA (Title I, P.L. 106-200, as amended) is a nonreciprocal U.S. trade preference program that provides duty-free tariff treatment on certain imports from eligible African countries (38 were eligible in 2020). Congress first passed AGOA in 2000 in an effort to promote African development, deepen economic integration within the region, and enhance U.S.-African trade and investment ties. AGOA builds on the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which when authorized provides similar duty-free treatment on U.S. imports from developing countries worldwide.¹¹⁸ AGOA covers a wider range of products and has typically been authorized over longer periods than GSP. The Trade Preferences Extension Act of 2015 (P.L. 114-27) amended aspects of the program and extended AGOA's authorization for an unprecedented 10 years, to September 2025. AGOA also directs the executive branch to pursue reciprocal trade agreements, where feasible, with African countries, but such efforts have been unsuccessful to date (U.S. negotiations with Kenya remain ongoing, as discussed below).

U.S. imports under AGOA totaled \$8.4 billion in 2019; energy products, mostly crude oil, are the top imports under the program (see **Figure 5**).¹¹⁹ U.S. imports of non-energy products under AGOA grew threefold between 2001 and 2019, but remain concentrated among a few countries and products. In 2019, over half of the \$3.8 billion in non-energy imports under AGOA were from South Africa, which exports the broadest range of products, including motor vehicles, under the program. Kenya, Lesotho, Ethiopia, and Madagascar are other top AGOA beneficiaries and primarily export apparel products—the top non-energy export to the United States under AGOA.

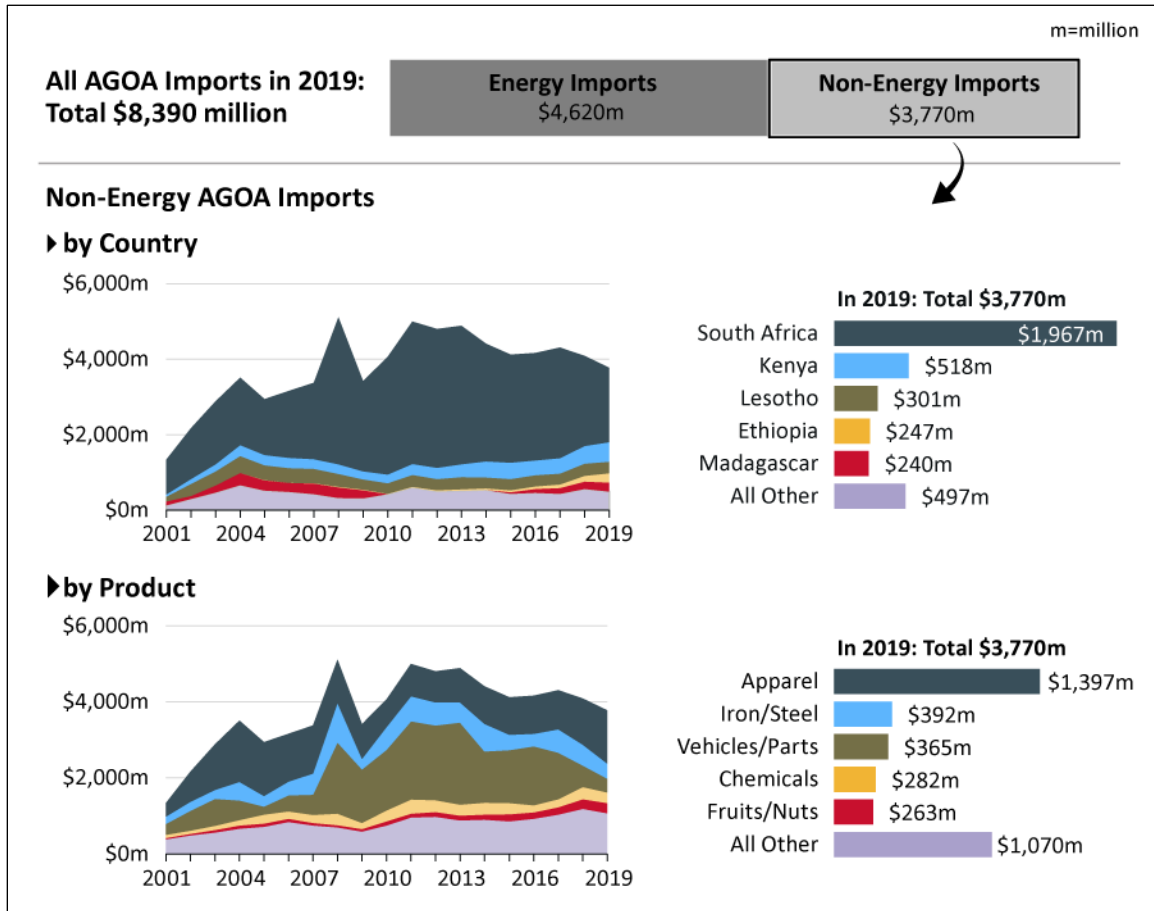
¹¹⁶ A majority of sub-Saharan African countries rank in the bottom tiers of the World Bank's annual Doing Business report, which examines countries' performance trends relating to the relative ease of doing business.

¹¹⁷ See CRS In Focus IF10149, *African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)*.

¹¹⁸ GSP expired at the end of 2020; as of this writing Congress had not passed legislation to reauthorize the program. See CRS Report RL33663, *Generalized System of Preferences (GSP): Overview and Issues for Congress*.

¹¹⁹ Data on U.S. AGOA imports are from the U.S. International Trade Commission at <https://dataweb.usitc.gov/trade-data-reports/sub-saharan-africa/trade-data>.

Figure 5. U.S. AGOA Imports, FY2019



Source: CRS with data from the U.S. International Trade Commission. Energy products defined as Harmonized Tariff Schedule chapter 27. Non-energy includes all other products.

Prosper Africa.¹²⁰ U.S.-Africa policy and engagement has increasingly focused on advancing U.S. business opportunities in the region, including with the goal of boosting U.S. commercial competitiveness vis-à-vis China.¹²¹ In 2019, the Trump Administration launched the Prosper Africa initiative, which aims to substantially increase U.S.-African trade and investment ties—including by establishing “deal teams” in each U.S. embassy in Africa to help facilitate private sector business transactions. Key goals under Prosper Africa include linking U.S. firms to trade and investment opportunities in Africa, enabling African firms to access similar prospects in the United States, facilitating access to U.S. trade assistance and other services, and fostering market-oriented regulatory and policy reforms. Trump Administration officials also described Prosper Africa as intended to counter China and Russia by “encourag[ing] African leaders to choose high-quality, transparent, inclusive and sustainable foreign investment projects.”¹²²

¹²⁰ See CRS In Focus IF11384, *The Trump Administration’s Prosper Africa Initiative*, by Nicolas Cook and Brock R. Williams.

¹²¹ For more on U.S. trade and investment initiatives in Africa, see USTR, *2020 Biennial Report on the Implementation of AGOA*, June 2020.

¹²² White House, “Remarks by National Security Advisor John R. Bolton on the Trump Administration’s New Africa Strategy,” December 13, 2018.

Prosper Africa is not a new foreign aid program, per se; rather, it seeks to harmonize the existing programs and capabilities of 17 U.S. agencies and departments involved in trade and investment assistance, financing, credit insurance, and economic development activities. Congress has given its implicit endorsement of Prosper Africa by requiring the Administration submit to Congress a spending plan for Prosper Africa activity in FY2021. President Biden has pledged to promote U.S.-Africa trade and investment, but as of early February 2021, his Administration had not stated whether it would maintain, amend, or discontinue Prosper Africa.¹²³

U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC).¹²⁴ Congress, with support from the Trump Administration, created the DFC in 2018 in the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act (BUILD Act, P.L. 115-254), which merged and amended the mandates of the former Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and USAID's Development Credit Authority to create a new agency. The DFC provides financing, direct equity investments, technical assistance, and political risk insurance for U.S. private investment in emerging markets. In its FY2020 report, DFC reported that 27% of its commitments (\$8 billion) were in Africa, the second-largest regional share.¹²⁵

Some Members of Congress have described the DFC as a tool for countering China's growing economic influence in Africa and other developing regions.¹²⁶ The DFC, by statute, has expanded authority and an exposure cap of \$60 billion (larger than that of the former OPIC), but its footprint in Africa may nevertheless be limited relative to Chinese development financing.¹²⁷ At the most recent China-Africa summit, in 2018, President Xi Jinping of China pledged \$50 billion in state-backed aid, loans, and trade credit for Africa alone over three years, and urged Chinese firms to make an additional \$10 billion or more of investments in Africa over the same period.¹²⁸

Trade Capacity Building (TCB) and Other Support. The United States provides TCB assistance (see **Text Box**) to help countries better engage in international trade, take advantage of the benefits of U.S. trade preferences, and encourage trade-led growth. Historically, three African trade hubs, established during the George W. Bush Administration, were a pillar of U.S. TCB efforts in Africa. While each pursued separate mandates, they all worked to increase regional export competitiveness, intraregional trade, and AGOA use. Two of those hubs, one in South Africa and one in Nigeria, are currently operational. The Trump Administration had planned to replace an East Africa trade hub with Prosper Africa-related support, and to establish a new hub in North Africa; whether the Biden Administration pursues these plans remains to be seen. The Trump Administration also continued its predecessor's effort to turn the trade hubs into two-way U.S.-Africa trade and investment centers aimed at boosting U.S. business activity in Africa.

¹²³ President Biden, "President Biden's Message to African Union Summit Participants," February 5, 2021.

¹²⁴ See CRS In Focus IF11436, *U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC)*, by Shayerah I. Akhtar and Nick M. Brown.

¹²⁵ DFC, *Annual Management Report for Fiscal Year 2020*, December 8, 2020, at <https://www.dfc.gov/sites/default/files/media/documents/DFC%20Annual%20Management%20Report%20FY%202020.pdf>.

¹²⁶ See, e.g., remarks by Representative Ted Yoho at the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, *Members' Day Hearing*, 116th Cong., 1st Sess., March 6, 2019.

¹²⁷ According to World Bank data, China was the largest bilateral lender to 32 of 40 low-income African countries as of 2020, with a total of \$64 billion in disbursed loans outpacing the World Bank (\$62 billion). Yufan Huang and Deborah Brautigam, "Putting a Dollar Amount on China's Loans to the Developing World," *The Diplomat*, June 24, 2020.

¹²⁸ Xinhua, "Full Text of Chinese President Xi Jinping's Speech at Opening Ceremony of 2018 FOCAC Beijing Summit," September 3, 2018; and Deborah Brautigam, "China's FOCAC Financial Package for Africa 2018: Four Facts," *China in Africa Research Initiative Blog*, September 3, 2018.

Trade Capacity Building

Trade capacity building (TCB) refers to a broad range of activities designed to promote and expand countries' and regions' participation in international trade. Core TCB activities help build or strengthen physical, human, and institutional capacities to help recipient countries facilitate the flow of goods and services across borders. Among other ends, they also seek to help countries participate in trade negotiations; implement trade agreements; comply with food safety, manufacturing, and other standards; join and comply with World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements; and increase economic responsiveness to trade opportunities through business and trade training. Such aid often is linked to other types of economic growth aid, but is generally accounted for separately, and often comprises a relatively small portion of overall economic growth assistance. Some aspects of MCC programs, including infrastructure development, are also considered TCB. Agency TCB funding allocations vary by year, but USAID and MCC are generally the lead funding agencies. Other agencies providing TCB include the Departments of State, Agriculture, Commerce, and Justice, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency.

Note: TCB may incorporate a wide range of additional types of assistance. For background on TCB and the roles of U.S. agencies and current TCB assistance flows, see USAID's TCB database, at <https://tcb.usaid.gov/>.

Other U.S. agencies support U.S. exports to Africa, including the Export-Import (Ex-Im) Bank and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA).¹²⁹ Ex-Im Bank provides loans, loan guarantees, and export credit insurance to help finance U.S. exports that support U.S. jobs, and includes a statutory requirement to promote increased Ex-Im Bank support for U.S. exports to Africa. USTDA seeks to advance economic growth by promoting development-related exports by U.S. businesses in overseas infrastructure projects. It funds feasibility studies and other project preparation activities, as well as other trade-expanding efforts. As a region, Africa typically accounts for the largest share of annual USTDA funding.¹³⁰

Other U.S. trade and investment policy tools in place with African countries include commercial dialogues; Trade and Investment Framework Agreements (TIFAs), or intergovernmental forums for dialogue on trade and investment issues; and bilateral investment treaties (BITs), which advance reciprocal commitments to facilitate and protect foreign investment.¹³¹

U.S.-Africa Policy during the Trump Administration: A Wrap-Up

In a late 2018 speech unveiling the Administration's policy approach toward Africa, then-National Security Advisor John Bolton identified three core objectives: expanding U.S.-Africa commercial ties, including through the pursuit of bilateral trade agreements; countering extremism and other forms of violent conflict; and imposing more stringent conditions on U.S. foreign aid and U.N. peacekeeping missions.¹³² In line with a general orientation toward "great power competition," Bolton's remarks—as well as other Trump Administration statements and policy documents—also placed a strong emphasis on countering Chinese and Russian influence in Africa.¹³³ Officials stressed their intention to pursue regional policy aims largely through bilateral engagement with African countries, as opposed to acting through multilateral bodies, such as the United Nations and African Union (AU).¹³⁴

¹²⁹ See CRS In Focus IF10017, *Export-Import Bank of the United States (Ex-Im Bank)*.

¹³⁰ USTDA annual reports; see also CRS In Focus IF10673, *U.S. Trade and Development Agency (TDA)*.

¹³¹ See CRS In Focus IF10052, *U.S. International Investment Agreements (IIAs)*.

¹³² White House, "Remarks by National Security Advisor John R. Bolton."

¹³³ See, among others, White House, *2017 National Security Strategy*, December 2017; White House, "Remarks by National Security Advisor John R. Bolton"; DOD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, 2018; and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Posture Statements to the Armed Services committees for 2019 and 2020.

¹³⁴ White House, "Remarks by National Security Advisor John R. Bolton."

Analysts debate the degree to which the Trump Administration’s approach toward Africa meaningfully departed from those of its predecessors. In some respects—such as its emphasis on countering China—the Administration appeared to reshape or reorder the priorities guiding U.S.-Africa policy and relations, though practical implications may be disputed (see below). At the same time, the Administration pursued other objectives for Africa broadly similar to those prioritized by its predecessors, including boosting economic growth, trade, and investment, enhancing peace and security, promoting economic development, and improving health outcomes. This continuity partly reflected congressional action. For instance, despite the Administration’s repeated proposals to cut foreign assistance to the region, Congress appropriated global foreign aid funds above requested levels, and allocations of U.S. foreign aid for Africa remained similar to levels reached in the latter years of the Obama Administration.

Political transitions in Sudan and Ethiopia drew particular U.S. diplomatic attention during the Trump Administration. Following the April 2019 military ouster of President Omar al Bashir in Sudan, the State Department established a Special Envoy for Sudan to support political reforms. Bashir’s ouster came at a time of improving U.S.-Sudanese ties, long strained due to the Sudanese government’s links to international terrorism and pervasive human rights violations.¹³⁵ In late 2020, citing reforms under Sudan’s transitional authorities, the Administration rescinded Sudan’s designation as a state sponsor of international terrorism (SST), which had carried restrictions on certain kinds of U.S. foreign aid, among other sanctions.¹³⁶ In Ethiopia, a key U.S. development partner notwithstanding U.S. governance concerns, political reforms under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed presented an opportunity to deepen ties. U.S. concerns over the Tigray conflict, however, as well as the Abiy government’s push to begin operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam over opposition from neighboring Egypt, have strained prospects for improved relations.¹³⁷

The Administration also established a new Special Envoy for the Sahel focused on overseeing U.S. engagement on violent extremism and other challenges in that sub-region. Other countries afflicted by insecurity or human rights challenges (e.g., DRC, Somalia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe) remained focuses of U.S. diplomatic attention, as did countries that play key roles in U.S.-backed development or security efforts (e.g., Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda).

Global Power Competition in Africa

In his 2018 Africa policy roll-out, then-National Security Advisor Bolton accused China and Russia of “targeting their investments in [Africa] to gain a competitive advantage over the United States” and engaging in predatory business practices in the region, citing opaque deal-making, exploitative lending, and self-interested extractive industry activity.¹³⁸ The Administration’s National Security Strategy portrayed Chinese influence as undermining Africa’s development “by corrupting elites, dominating extractive industries, and locking countries into unsustainable and opaque debts and commitments.”¹³⁹ In the political sphere, officials accused Chinese authorities of promoting authoritarianism in Africa—echoing fears among some observers that China seeks to export a model of authoritarian-led development to countries in the region (see **Text Box**).¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ For background on Sudan’s transition and U.S.-Sudan ties, see CRS Report R45794, *Sudan’s Uncertain Transition*.

¹³⁶ See CRS Insight IN11531, *Sudan’s Removal from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List*.

¹³⁷ See CRS In Focus IF10185, *Ethiopia*, by Lauren Ploch Blanchard; and CRS Insight IN11471, *The Nile Dam Dispute: Issues for Congress*.

¹³⁸ White House, “Remarks by National Security Advisor John R. Bolton.”

¹³⁹ White House, *2017 National Security Strategy*.

¹⁴⁰ In a 2020 U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) hearing, USAID’s Acting Assistant

Analysts debate the extent to which the Administration's engagement with Africa advanced its stated goal of countering China and other global competitors. Some observers have argued that derogatory statements about African countries attributed to President Trump, as well as the Administration's comparatively limited senior-level engagement with African leaders, proposed cuts to U.S. aid for Africa, and moves to reduce the U.S. military presence in the region (see below), served to undermine U.S. influence in Africa vis-à-vis other powers.¹⁴¹ Others qualified accusations of disdain or indifference toward Africa on the part of the Trump Administration, stressing continuities in U.S. engagement with Africa.¹⁴² More generally, many analysts and African leaders have criticized any zero-sum approach to U.S.-Chinese competition in Africa as misguided or counterproductive, arguing that African governments are capable of engaging with China without being exploited and disinclined to choose one foreign partner over another.¹⁴³

Chinese and Russian Engagement in Africa: Key Issues and U.S. Concerns

China's economic influence in Africa has spurred debate among U.S. policymakers over its potential impact on U.S. economic and foreign policy goals in the region. China overtook the United States as Africa's largest trading partner in 2009. Chinese firms have built infrastructure projects across Africa, often financed by Chinese state-backed credit and tied to the use of Chinese goods or services and, in some cases, access to natural resources. Such activities have expanded since 2013 under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and with a series of large-scale Chinese grant and loan commitments for African countries.¹⁴⁴ Chinese engagement in Africa has helped to fill infrastructure gaps and enable the rapid spread of digital communications in Africa, but it also has raised concerns regarding U.S. commercial access and competitiveness.¹⁴⁵ U.S. officials also have expressed concern that African sovereign debt owed to China may give the latter leverage over African governments, though analysts debate whether high levels of debt owed to China by some African states reflect a deliberate "debt-trap diplomacy."¹⁴⁶ Some observers also have raised alarm over Chinese political and ideological influence in Africa. According to one expert, "China has begun to actively promote ... its own development model, which combines political authoritarianism and economic capitalism, to prove to some African countries that economic development and political stability could exist without a democratic system."¹⁴⁷ These efforts have involved training for African political parties, engagement with African journalists to "promote media narratives favorable to Beijing and its model of state-directed journalism," and sales of surveillance technology to African governments.¹⁴⁸

Administrator in the Bureau for Africa Christopher Maloney stated that China "views Africa as a proving ground for its model of authoritarian governance [which] promotes corruption, a lack of human rights and environmental and social safeguards, increased authoritarianism and a lack of mobility for much of the population." Written statement by Acting Administrator Maloney in USCC, *China's Strategic Aims in Africa*, hearing, 116th Cong., 2nd Sess., May 8, 2020.

¹⁴¹ See, among others, Judd Devermont, "A New U.S. Policy Framework for the African Century," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), August 7, 2020.

¹⁴² See, e.g., Herman Cohen, "What Analysts are Missing about Trump's Africa Policy," *The Hill*, April 17, 2020 and John Campbell, "Trump's Africa Policy Is Better Than It Looks," Council on Foreign Relations, April 6, 2020.

¹⁴³ See remarks by Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta in Darlene Superville, Tom Odula, and Cara Anna, "Trump Administration to Open Free-Trade Talks with Kenya," *Associated Press*, February 6, 2020. See also Adva Saldinger, "African Leaders Question US Position on China at Investment Event," *Devex*, October 19, 2020.

¹⁴⁴ On the BRI, see CRS In Focus IF11735, *China's "One Belt, One Road" Initiative: Economic Issues*.

¹⁴⁵ Joshua Meservey, "Chinese Corruption in Africa Undermines Beijing's Rhetoric About Friendship with the Continent," Heritage Foundation, August 8, 2018.

¹⁴⁶ USCC, *2020 Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020. For a critique of the "debt-trap diplomacy" narrative, see Lee Jones and Shahar Hameiri, *Debunking the Myth of 'Debt-trap Diplomacy': How Recipient Countries Shape China's Belt and Road Initiative*, Chatham House, 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Testimony of Yun Sen, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Implications of China's Presence and Investment in Africa*, hearing, 115th Cong., 2nd Sess., December 12, 2018.

¹⁴⁸ Will Green, Leyton Nelson, and Brittney Washington, *China's Engagement with Africa: Foundations for an Alternative Governance Regime*, USCC Staff Research Report, May 1, 2020.

U.S. military officials, for their part, have expressed concerns about the strategic implications of China's evolving presence in Africa.¹⁴⁹ In 2019 testimony to Congress, AFRICOM's then-Commander stated that BRI participants in Africa "receive promises of development, defense, and cultural investments in their countries, further enhancing China's influence while challenging our own partnerships."¹⁵⁰ In 2017, China established its first overseas military base, in Djibouti—the site of the only U.S. military base in Africa, located on a key maritime chokepoint between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.¹⁵¹ China's engagement in Djibouti is part of a broader expansion of its military engagement in Africa. The Chinese government has pledged at least \$180 million in peacekeeping assistance for the African Union, and Chinese weapons sales to African governments have increased over the past decade.¹⁵²

Russia also has expanded its presence in Africa. Russian engagement generally has centered on arms sales, military training, intelligence exchanges, and access to minerals, notably uranium and platinum. It has signed military cooperation deals with a number of African governments over the past decade, although the terms and practical impacts of such deals reportedly vary.¹⁵³ In late 2020, Russia reportedly concluded a naval logistics basing agreement with Sudan; if established, it would be Russia's first naval base in Africa since the Cold War.¹⁵⁴ CAR, where more than 200 Russian military personnel and private military contractors (PMCs) have deployed since 2017, has been a focus of Russian attention.¹⁵⁵ Since 2018, Russian PMCs also reportedly have deployed to Sudan and Mozambique.¹⁵⁶ Several African countries have been targeted by disinformation campaigns by Russian agents, including some with reported ties to President Vladimir Putin.¹⁵⁷ The U.S. Treasury has sanctioned several entities in CAR and Sudan associated with Yevgeny Prigozhin—a U.S.-sanctioned Russian tycoon and Putin associate alleged to be a lead backer of PMCs in Ukraine, Syria, and various African countries.¹⁵⁸

U.S. Assistance to Africa

The Trump Administration expressed skepticism of U.S. foreign aid in general, and of U.S. aid to certain African countries. Officials described past U.S. aid to Africa as broadly ineffective and subject to diversion by corrupt elites.¹⁵⁹ In line with proposed cuts to foreign aid globally, the Administration repeatedly proposed dramatic cuts to the overall level of U.S. aid to Africa—in particular, to development and humanitarian aid. As a region, Africa regularly would have seen the largest absolute reductions in State Department- and USAID-administered assistance as

¹⁴⁹ Testimony of AFRICOM Commander General Thomas Waldhauser, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *United States Central Command and United States Africa Command*, hearing, 115th Cong., 2nd Sess., March 13, 2018.

¹⁵⁰ AFRICOM, *2019 Posture Statement to Congress*, submitted as written testimony by AFRICOM Commander Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

¹⁵¹ On Chinese activities in Djibouti and U.S. concerns, see CRS In Focus IF11304, *China's Engagement in Djibouti*.

¹⁵² Hong Xiao, "China boosts its peacekeeping role," *China Daily*, May 8, 2019. On Chinese weapons sales to Africa, see CSIS, "How Dominant is China in the Global Arms Trade?" August 25, 2020.

¹⁵³ *Reuters*, "Russian Military Cooperation Deals with African Countries," October 17, 2018; Paul Stronski, *Late to the Party: Russia's Return to Africa*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 16, 2019.

¹⁵⁴ Alexander Bratersky, "Sudan to Host Russian Military Base," *Defense One*, November 13, 2020.

¹⁵⁵ These personnel are reportedly training government forces to use weaponry that Russia has donated to CAR. Russian personnel also have reportedly been assigned to the CAR president's security detail, while others have established a presence in rebel-held areas. The unsolved August 2018 killing, in CAR, of three Russian journalists probing the activities of Russian PMCs raised new concerns about Russia's involvement.

¹⁵⁶ See CRS In Focus IF11650, *Russian Private Military Companies (PMCs)*, by Andrew S. Bowen.

¹⁵⁷ Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Russian Disinformation Campaigns Target Africa: An Interview with Dr. Shelby Grossman," February 18, 2020; Nathaniel Gleicher and David Agranovich, "Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from France and Russia," Facebook, December 15, 2020.

¹⁵⁸ Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Targets Financier's Illicit Sanctions Evasion Activity," July 15, 2020, and "Treasury Increases Pressure on Russian Financier," September 23, 2020.

¹⁵⁹ See, e.g., White House, "Remarks by National Security Advisor John R. Bolton"; State Department, "Press Briefing on U.S. Policy in Africa with Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of African Affairs, Tibor P. Nagy, Jr.," October 23, 2018. On the effectiveness of U.S. foreign aid, see CRS Report R42827, *Does Foreign Aid Work? Efforts to Evaluate U.S. Foreign Assistance*.

compared to past-year allocations.¹⁶⁰ Congress, however, appropriated foreign aid funding above levels requested by the Trump Administration each year, and in many cases did not accept the Administration's proposed aid account reorganizations and policy changes.¹⁶¹

Trump Administration officials also pledged to reorient and rebalance U.S. aid to Africa, in part to address global power competition.¹⁶² In practice, however, the Administration maintained many of its predecessors' assistance initiatives focused wholly or largely on Africa, including the global President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and Feed the Future (FTF) initiatives, and the Africa-specific Power Africa and the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). The Administration also launched new initiatives and aid programs with implications for U.S. aid to Africa. These included Prosper Africa, the DFC, and the Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) initiative, a women's economic empowerment program. As under its predecessors, both the Trump Administration's annual budget requests and congressional appropriations of U.S. assistance for Africa remained overwhelmingly weighted toward health programs, with the balance largely dedicated to traditional development and security activities.

Notwithstanding its stated skepticism of development aid, the Trump Administration also expanded USAID's footprint in Africa, with bipartisan congressional support. Notably, USAID upgraded its presence in Niger to a full Mission, opened a new office in Cameroon, added five African countries to the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), and launched a new development initiative for West Africa's Sahel region, the Sahel Development Partnership.¹⁶³ The MCC also awarded new multi-year development aid Compacts to Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire.

DOD Posture Reviews and Drawdowns

The Trump Administration's National Defense Strategy asserted that "inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security."¹⁶⁴ In 2018, news outlets reported that then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis was planning to curtail counterterrorism missions in Africa in which U.S. personnel were deployed alongside local forces. The planned drawdown reportedly would center on U.S. deployments in Niger, where four U.S. soldiers were killed by Islamist militants in 2017.¹⁶⁵ In late 2018, DOD announced "force optimization" plans, to be implemented over several years, entailing "a reduction of about 10 percent of the 7,200 military forces serving in Africa Command" and a reorientation of certain deployments.¹⁶⁶ DOD's announcement suggested that counterterrorism would be de-emphasized overall, though activities in Somalia, Djibouti, and Libya would "largely remain the same." As noted above (see "U.S. Military Engagement in Africa"), Djibouti hosts the sole U.S. military

¹⁶⁰ Calculations account for humanitarian assistance. See CRS Report R45763, *Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs: FY2020 Budget and Appropriations* and similar reports for past years.

¹⁶¹ See CRS Report R46656, *Selected Trump Administration Foreign Aid Priorities: A Wrap-Up*, coordinated by Emily M. Morgenstern.

¹⁶² White House, "Remarks by National Security Advisor John R. Bolton."

¹⁶³ Written testimony of USAID Administrator Mark Green, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, *Review of the Fragility in the Sahel*, hearing, 116th Cong., 2nd Sess., March 10, 2020.

¹⁶⁴ DOD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Eric Schmitt, "After Deadly Raid, Pentagon Weighs Withdrawing Almost All Commandos from Niger," *New York Times*, September 2, 2018. See also CRS Report R44995, *Niger: Frequently Asked Questions About the October 2017 Attack on U.S. Soldiers*.

¹⁶⁶ DOD, "Pentagon Announces Force Optimization," November 15, 2018.

base in Africa and largest U.S. military presence on the continent, while Somalia and Libya are the only African countries in which the United States has active airstrike campaigns.

Officials initially indicated that cuts would largely affect U.S. forces in West Africa, but that DOD support for France's counterterrorism operation in the Sahel, Operation Barkhane, would continue; construction also advanced on the new U.S. Air Force facility in Agadez, Niger.¹⁶⁷ In March 2019, then-AFRICOM Commander General Thomas Waldhauser testified to Congress that the Command had been directed to implement a first tranche of cuts, in which "300 or so" U.S. personnel would be recalled by June 2020.¹⁶⁸ The withdrawal centered on U.S. personnel in Cameroon and, to a lesser extent, Niger; General Waldhauser reiterated that cuts would not affect activities in Somalia and Libya. He also cast doubt on prospects for further cuts, noting that it remained to be seen whether AFRICOM would "ever be directed to execute the second half" of troop withdrawals and pledging to "push back" on drawdowns that were not in "our best interest."

In early 2020, a new Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, initiated a fresh review of AFRICOM's footprint and missions while also announcing the deployment of a new Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB), based outside of Africa, specializing in "train, advise, and assist missions" in the region.¹⁶⁹ DOD described the SFAB deployment as a reorientation toward global power competition in Africa, and said that the SFAB would enable the Army "to return elements of an infantry brigade from the 101st Airborne Division back to its home base ... to train and prepare for high intensity conflict operations."¹⁷⁰ In contrast to statements by former Defense Secretary Mattis, Secretary Esper stated in early 2020 that "no decisions yet have been made" to maintain support for Operation Barkhane or the Agadez facility.¹⁷¹ Several Members of Congress expressed opposition to the possible drawdown of U.S. military forces from Africa and concern over the implications for French and other counterterrorism operations in the region.¹⁷² Ultimately, DOD did not issue a final decision by the end of the Trump Administration regarding support to Operation Barkhane or the DOD operations out of Agadez, and both continued.

In December 2020, DOD announced that President Trump had directed the withdrawal of "the majority of personnel and assets out of Somalia by early 2021."¹⁷³ As noted above, between 650 and 800 U.S. military personnel were operating in Somalia as of September 2020.¹⁷⁴ DOD stated that some forces would relocate to neighboring countries, where they would retain the ability to mount "cross-border operations." The directive came as part of a series of decisions to withdraw U.S. combat troops from long-running conflicts worldwide. Some analysts and Somali security

¹⁶⁷ DOD, "Joint Press Conference with Secretary Mattis and Minister Parly in Paris, France," October 2, 2018.

¹⁶⁸ Testimony of then-AFRICOM Commander General Thomas Waldhauser, House Armed Services Committee, *National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in the Greater Middle East and Africa*, hearing, 116th Cong., 1st sess., March 7, 2019.

¹⁶⁹ DOD, "Statement on the Deployment of Army's 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade to Africa," February 12, 2020.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*; see also Testimony of Defense Secretary Mark Esper, House Armed Services Committee, *The Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Budget Request from the Department of Defense*, hearing, 116th Cong., 2nd sess., February 26, 2020.

¹⁷¹ DOD, "Joint Press Briefing by Secretary of Defense Esper and French Minister of Armed Forces Parly," January 27, 2020.

¹⁷² Letter from Representatives Anthony Brown, Jimmy Panetta, Austin Scott, Richard Hudson, Chrissy Houlahan, Gil Cisneros, Jason Crow, Veronica Escobar, Elaine Luria, Xochitl Torres Small, and Michael Waltz to Secretary Esper, January 14, 2020; Letter from Senators Lindsey Graham and Chris Coons to Secretary Esper, January 15, 2020.

¹⁷³ DOD, "Somalia Force Posture Announcement," December 4, 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Lead IG for East Africa and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operations, *Quarterly Report*.

officials expressed concern over the implications of the pullout for the effectiveness and oversight of Somali partner forces.¹⁷⁵ DOD airstrikes in Somalia have continued since the relocation.¹⁷⁶

Trade Policy

Given the small magnitude and narrow composition of U.S.-Africa trade, the region was not the main target of the Trump Administration's major trade policy actions. Nonetheless, certain policy shifts and initiatives affected U.S. trade with African countries:

Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Negotiations. The Trump Administration made reciprocal trade negotiations a top priority of its trade policy with Africa. In 2019, for instance, Deputy U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) C.J. Mahoney expressed the Administration's support for a reciprocal FTA in Africa—while also pledging U.S. support for African regional economic integration under the AfCFTA.¹⁷⁷ In July 2020, the Administration formally launched bilateral FTA talks with Kenya, adhering to Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) procedures.¹⁷⁸ The Administration hoped to establish an agreement that could serve as a model for future negotiations with other African countries, but as of February 2021 talks remained in early stages; the Biden Administration may consider whether and how to pursue the negotiations. Future talks are likely to face the same challenges that have dogged previous U.S. pursuit of an FTA in Africa, including concerns among African countries over the extensive nature of U.S. FTA commitments (e.g., the scope of tariff liberalization or level of protections for intellectual property rights) and over how a bilateral trade agreement may affect efforts toward regional integration.¹⁷⁹ Congress would have to approve any comprehensive trade agreements through implementing legislation, but the Biden Administration also could pursue smaller-scale agreements that would not require congressional approval.

Tariff Actions. Increased tariffs on steel (25%) and aluminum (10%) imposed under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 were of particular concern for South Africa, which was the 25th (\$186 million) and 11th (\$387 million) largest supplier of affected U.S. steel and aluminum imports, respectively, in 2019. Products subject to Section 232 tariffs are ineligible for preferential tariff treatment under AGOA or GSP; the Administration granted product exclusions for a limited number of steel and aluminum imports from South Africa.¹⁸⁰ Withdrawing the tariff increases would require action by the President.

Eligibility for U.S. Preference Programs. Statutes authorizing U.S. preference programs give the President broad discretion in determining country eligibility. As part of its focus on unfair trade practices, the Trump Administration initiated a review of South Africa's GSP eligibility due

¹⁷⁵ Declan Walsh, "In Somalia, U.S. Troop Withdrawal Is Seen as Badly Timed," *New York Times*, December 5, 2020; Max Bearak, "As U.S. Forces Leave, Somalia's Elite Fighting Unit Fears Becoming a Political Pawn," *New York Times*, December 29, 2020.

¹⁷⁶ *Stars and Stripes*, "AFRICOM Launches Airstrike in Somalia Shortly after Troop Pullout," January 19, 2021.

¹⁷⁷ USTR, "Remarks of Ambassador C.J. Mahoney at the 2019 AGOA Forum in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire," August 5, 2019.

¹⁷⁸ See CRS In Focus IF11526, *U.S.-Kenya FTA Negotiations*. TPA is a time-limited authority that Congress uses to establish trade negotiating objectives, notification and consultation requirements, and procedures to consider implementing legislation for reciprocal trade agreements provided that they meet certain statutory requirements. See CRS In Focus IF10038, *Trade Promotion Authority (TPA)*.

¹⁷⁹ For a thorough discussion, see the Obama Administration report, USTR, *Beyond AGOA*, September 2016.

¹⁸⁰ CRS In Focus IF10667, *Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962*. The Administration granted exclusions for some steel and aluminum imports from South Africa. South Africa Department of Trade and Industry, "South Africa Welcomes Product Exclusion for Some Steel and Aluminum Products from Section 232 Duties," October 24, 2018; see also CRS Report R45687, *South Africa: Current Issues, Economy, and U.S. Relations*.

to concerns over its protection of intellectual property rights; the review remained pending as of January 2021.¹⁸¹ The Administration removed AGOA eligibility for Cameroon and Mauritania, citing human rights concerns, and restricted Rwanda's AGOA eligibility due to its restrictions on imports of used clothing. Previous Administrations similarly revoked AGOA eligibility for a variety of reasons, including concerns over governance and labor rights.

Immigration Policy¹⁸²

In 2017, citing terrorism concerns, the Administration issued a series of presidential directives prohibiting nationals from Chad, Somalia, and Sudan from entering the United States, subject to waivers and exceptions—although amid criticism and legal challenges, only Somali nationals remained subject to such blanket prohibitions after late 2018.¹⁸³ A separate directive issued in January 2020 imposed entry restrictions (subject to waivers and exceptions) on immigrants from Eritrea, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania, among others, citing “deficiencies in sharing terrorist, criminal, or identity information” on the part of these countries’ governments.¹⁸⁴ President Biden revoked both directives upon taking office in January 2021, lifting such restrictions.¹⁸⁵

Implementing a decision initiated by the Obama Administration, the Trump Administration ended temporary protected status (TPS, a form of deportation relief on humanitarian grounds) for nationals of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, the countries hit hardest by the 2014–2016 West Africa Ebola outbreak.¹⁸⁶ Separately, President Trump ordered a wind-down of deferred enforced departure (DED, a form of administrative relief from deportation) for certain Liberian nationals, but delayed the effective date of its expiration pending congressional consideration of “remedial legislation” for those affected.¹⁸⁷ The Administration terminated TPS for Sudan in 2017, citing improved conditions in that country, though the decision has not yet taken effect due to a legal challenge.¹⁸⁸ Meanwhile, it extended TPS for Somalia and South Sudan, citing ongoing armed conflicts and extraordinary and temporary conditions in both countries.¹⁸⁹

As authorized by Congress, the Administration restricted visas, or threatened to do so, for certain nationals of African countries considered “recalcitrant,” meaning their governments do not

¹⁸¹ AGOA builds on GSP and requires that beneficiary countries satisfy both programs’ eligibility criteria. For more on GSP, see CRS In Focus IF11232, *Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)* and CRS Report R45687, *South Africa: Current Issues, Economy, and U.S. Relations*.

¹⁸² CRS Analyst in Immigration Policy Jill H. Wilson contributed to this section.

¹⁸³ White House, “Presidential Proclamation Enhancing Vetting Capabilities and Processes for Detecting Attempted Entry into the United States by Terrorists or Other Public-Safety Threats,” September 24, 2017; State Department, “Presidential Proclamation Lifts Travel Restrictions for Chad,” April 10, 2018. See CRS Legal Sidebar LSB10458, *Presidential Actions to Exclude Aliens Under INA § 212(f)*.

¹⁸⁴ White House, “Proclamation on Improving Enhanced Vetting Capabilities and Processes for Detecting Attempted Entry,” January 31, 2020.

¹⁸⁵ White House, “Proclamation on Ending Discriminatory Bans on Entry to The United States,” January 20, 2021.

¹⁸⁶ See CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*.

¹⁸⁷ White House, “Memorandum on Extension of Deferred Enforced Departure for Liberians,” March 28, 2019. In December 2019, Congress enacted Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness (LRIF) as part of the FY2020 NDAA (P.L. 116-92); LRIF enables certain Liberians in the United States to obtain LPR status, subject to conditions and exceptions. See CRS Report R46487, *Applications for Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness (LRIF): Fact Sheet*.

¹⁸⁸ USCIS, “Continuation of Documentation for Beneficiaries of Temporary Protected Status Designations for El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua, Sudan, Honduras, and Nepal,” 85 *Federal Register* 79208, December 9, 2020.

¹⁸⁹ USCIS, “Extension of the Designation of Somalia for Temporary Protected Status,” 85 *Federal Register* 14229, March, 11 2020; USCIS, “Extension of the Designation of South Sudan for Temporary Protected Status,” 85 *Federal Register* 69344, November 2, 2020.

cooperate with U.S. court-ordered immigration removals.¹⁹⁰ In late 2020, it launched a pilot program authorizing consular officers to require bond payments from certain nonimmigrant visa applicants from countries whose citizens overstay nonimmigrant U.S. visas at a rate above 10%; nationals of fourteen African countries are potentially subject to such fees, based on FY2019 overstay rates.¹⁹¹ Several Members of Congress expressed alarm over the Trump Administration's treatment of asylum-seekers from certain African countries, notably Cameroon, amid allegations of abuses against African asylum-seekers by U.S. immigration authorities as well as concerns over potential threats to the safety of asylum-seekers ordered removed from the United States.¹⁹²

The 116th Congress

The 116th Congress, like other past Congresses, shaped U.S. ties with Africa through its appropriations, authorization, and oversight roles. It enacted several pieces of legislation that influenced U.S.-Africa policy, including

- The Sudan Democratic Transition, Accountability, and Fiscal Transparency Act of 2020 (Title XII, Subtitle G of the FY2021 NDAA [P.L. 116-283]), requiring the Department of State to submit a strategy concerning U.S. support for a transition to civilian rule in Sudan and authorizing or directing certain assistance for such aims, among other provisions.
- The Global Fragility Act of 2019 (Title V of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 [P.L. 116-94]), requiring the executive branch to develop a strategy for helping to stabilize conflict-affected zones and identifying the roles and needs of U.S. agencies involved in implementing such activities.

Congress also passed several Resolutions in response to developments in the region, including the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon (H.Res. 358 and S.Res. 684), violence against civilians in the Central African Republic (H.Res. 387), and violence against protesters in Sudan (H.Res. 432). It additionally influenced U.S.-Africa policy through communications with U.S. and African policymakers to urge attention to or action on a range of issues, such as human rights abuses.

Issues for the 117th Congress

As it considers budgetary, policy, and oversight priorities—as well as potential shifts in U.S.-Africa policy during the Biden Administration—the 117th Congress may consider such issues as

- The scale and programmatic focus of U.S. foreign assistance to African countries.
- The footprint and objectives of U.S. military deployments in Africa, in the wake of the Trump Administration's drawdown of U.S. military forces from the region and AFRICOM's reorientation toward global power competition in Africa.
- Progress toward a free trade agreement with Kenya and other U.S. trade policy goals, as well as the impact of U.S. tariff actions on U.S. trade with the region.

¹⁹⁰ See CRS In Focus IF11025, *Immigration: "Recalcitrant" Countries and the Use of Visa Sanctions to Encourage Cooperation with Alien Removals*.

¹⁹¹ State Department, "Visas: Visa Bond Pilot Program," 85 *Federal Register* 74875, November 24, 2020.

¹⁹² Letter from Representatives Bennie Thompson and Karen Bass to Tony Pham, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, October 13, 2020; Letter from Senators Chris Van Hollen, Edward Markey, Christopher Coons, and Benjamin Cardin to Acting Department of Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf, October 28, 2020.

- The implementation of U.S. trade, investment, and development finance programming in Africa, including Prosper Africa and DFC activities.
- The implications, for U.S. interests and U.S.-Africa policy, of involvement by other global powers and contenders such as China and Russia.
- Progress toward civilian-led government and a cessation of armed conflicts in Sudan following the 2019 ouster of long-serving leader Omar al Bashir.
- Armed conflict and other unrest in Ethiopia, where the government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has facilitated some reforms since 2018 but has drawn growing criticism for suppressing dissent and failing to quell ethnic tensions.
- The extent to which the United States should prioritize counterterrorism in Africa, including in Somalia, the Lake Chad Basin, and West Africa's Sahel region, and what tools are best suited for U.S. counterterrorism objectives.
- The appropriate scale of U.S. responses to humanitarian crises in Cameroon, CAR, DRC, Ethiopia, the Lake Chad Basin, Mozambique, the Sahel, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, among others.
- Prospects for improved governance in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and The Gambia following recent political transitions in each country.
- Democratic backsliding and “third-termism” in parts of Africa alongside enduring authoritarianism in countries that play key roles in U.S. security or development efforts (such as Cameroon, Chad, Rwanda, and Uganda).

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