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Black Remobilization and the Crisis in American Democracy and Security in the US Election of 2020: Part 2

Africa: Subordinating continent to Israel & Persian Gulf?

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3rd Floor Robert Sobukwe Building
263 Nana Sita Street
Pretoria South Africa

+27123376082

info@igd.org.za
www.igd.org.za

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About the authors

Mr. Francis Kornegay is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Global Dialogue. He is also a member of the JIOR international editorial board and a past fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center of Scholars. He has Masters Degrees in African Studies from Howard University and in International Public Policy from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins. Kornegay served two stints in the US Congress as a professional staffer, among other things, developing financial sanctions legislation on South Africa. He established the Research and Evaluation Unit for the African Development Foundation, an independent US agency. In South Africa, he served as the country director of the African-American Institute (AAI) and was involved in electoral support activities. Since then, among other things, he has focused on South-South co-operation issues on which he has written and published extensively.



This is the second part of an occasional paper theme inspired by the University of the Witwatersrand African Center for the Study of the United States “Count Down to US Elections 2020” webinar series. Whereas Part I delves primarily into the US domestic landscape shaping how Black America relates to the 2020 national election amid the far-right challenge to the American system being mounted by the incumbent presidency of Donald J. Trump, this follow-up takes this analysis into the foreign policy realm of US-African and Mideast relations while exploring possibilities and prospects of a policy activist constituency renewal that might gain traction off of ‘Black Remobilization’ dynamics explored in Part I which ends on a note of reimagined internationalist possibility. Part II briefly revisits the domestic Black political terrain as a lead-in to what may lie in store for Africa depending on the outcome of the November election.

Introduction

The announcement by Black Lives Matter that it is was launching a Political Action Committee on October 12th represents what could turn out to be a remobilization sea change in American Black politics and activism.¹ As Maya King noted in *Politico*, this is “a highly unusual move for a grassroots organizing group with no central leadership.”² The Black Lives Matter PAC will complement the Frontline initiative recently launched by the 50 organizing group coalition of the Movement for Black Lives to “turn out the vote among young people of color” whereas BLM was also spearheading “four separate projects aiming to encourage young Black voters to head to the polls, including a multi-million dollar outreach campaign and anti-disinformation initiative.”³ These developments, however they impact the election outcome on November 3rd, represent a major departure from the disconnect between BLM *protest* activism and Black *political* participation in 2016 amid a demobilized Black electorate within battleground states.

Still, given Republican voter suppression efforts led by the White House, it will be important for a postmortem on the November election to discern the extent of overcoming the 2016 disconnect between the upsurge in justified protest over multiple police homicides and Black voter motivation and turnout. After all, media reports have tended to highlight Democratic candidate Joe Biden’s challenges in generating Black and Hispanic voter enthusiasm throughout the campaign. This could have implications for reviving a more activist African affairs constituency among African-Americans and relevance for US-Africa policy. Whether a remobilized African-American Black movement results in an activist Africa constituency rebirth as did Black activism in the 1960’s and 70’s which culminated in the anti-apartheid movement that produced the bipartisan Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (CAAA) is unclear. CAAA momentum was also accompanied by the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and paved the way for other initiatives that became the staples of an Africa policy that has remained largely unchanged under Republican and Democratic administrations alike.



It remains to be seen if BLM political as well as protest activism will spillover similarly. Yet, its PAC initiatives and those of Movement for Black Lives have to be considered preconditional to any African and/or international affairs anti-apartheid movement-style activism. This might also have to foreground engaging the UN Human Rights Council on voter suppression in the same manner that previous Black leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson and Malcom X did regarding the plight of African-Americans and, before the founding of the UN, the advocacy of William Trotter and Ida Wells-Barnett as recently pointed out in the New York Times by Peter Beinart on how “America May Need International Intervention.”⁴ BLM and allies, including the Black leadership establishment along with Hispanic communities should prioritize advocacy for international monitoring of US elections. There is thus ample historical precedent for BLM and allied grassroots dynamism translating into international affairs activist constituency-building.

The first order of business, however, is retiring the Trump administration and electing Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, failing which, projections for a pro-Africa and internationalist US agenda may seem of little consequence. Therefore, before focusing on Africa, the extent of African-American political motivation in propelling a Democratic victory in November warrants scrutiny in spite of recent signs of BLM electoral activism. Despite the race relations political and security crisis created by Donald Trump, foreshadowing American democracy mutating into far-right racial fascism, voter registration data cited by veteran New York Times analyst Thomas Edsall in Midwest battleground states in the run-up to the November election could almost be interpreted as a replaying 2016. Hence, suspicion of a disconnect between Black protest activism and Black voter and political activism. To what extent will BLM efforts and those of Movement for Black Lives along with the initiatives of LeBron James and Stacey Abrams and others counter this?

According to Edsall: “In Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin...overall registration is up by 6 points through August compared to the 2016 cycle, but net Democratic registrations are down by 38 percent. That’s about 150,000 fewer additional Democrats than was added in 2016. In addition” Edsall continued, “registration among whites without college degrees is up by 46 percent while registration by people of color is up only 4 percent. That gap is made more stark when you realize that over the last four years, the WNC (white non-college) population has increased by only 1 percent in those states, while the number of people of color increased by 13 percent. The pattern was more pronounced in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin than it was in Michigan.”⁵ Could Edsall’s findings, then, still reflect an apparent disconnect between protests motivated by police homicides of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and several others and Black voter mobilization registering significantly at the polls in November? However, updated reporting on early voting and Black and Hispanic preferences provide a mixed picture from how “Black people are literally voting like their lives depend on it,’ contributing to record early vote” to a Five



Thirty Eight analysis on how “Trump is losing ground with white voters but gaining among Black and Hispanic Americans.”⁶ In any case the The GOP determined during the Obama-Biden years that they would do all in their power to frustrate the magnitude of Black voter mobilization that elected America’s first Black president. However the 2020 election turns out, these are reflections in need of urgent political analysis especially now that BLM and allies are embarking on a definitively much needed political track. After all, however 2020 turns out, there are strategically critical mid-term elections awaiting in 2022. And BLM’s grassroots focus (as well as international resonance) is where Africa and international constituency activism will have to gain traction outside the more establishmentarian confines of foreign policy elite interactions along the east coast Boston to Washington corridor.

Background: Reconnecting with Africa?

Prospects for a Black remobilization around the 2020 election translating into African affairs constituency renewal will have to factor in the overwhelming domestic policy dominance of African-American and overall American priorities should Biden and Harris win in November. The coronavirus pandemic has taken a heavy toll on Black and minority communities which, in fact, may even have been part and parcel of Trump’s calculus in what famed journalist Carl Bernstein has labeled ‘homicidal negligence.’ Genocidal negligence might even qualify given how Blacks and Hispanics have been impacted by the virus compared to whites. So domestic renewal and reform will be uppermost on the African-American agenda amid the decimation of so many of the organizations that once comprised the US constituency for Africa. This is another story altogether. But this does at least in part account for the low ebb of African and international issues failing to animate much traction at the congressional level compared to the anti-apartheid Southern African liberation support period.

For one thing, in spite of the fact that Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) chairperson Karen Bass also chairs the House Africa Subcommittee, her attentiveness and commitment to Africa policy on self-determination issues such as in the case of Western Sahara have been found seriously wanting based on the 2019 delegation she led to Morocco.⁷ On the other hand, however, Bass did co-sponsor a House bill opposing Israeli annexation of Palestinian land in the West Bank.⁸ Herein could potentially lie the seeds of convergence on Africa and Mideast policy activism based on a need to counter coordinated US-Israel geopolitical ‘normalization’ initiatives impinging on Africa from Trump administration coercive ‘diplomacy.’ As such, there exist alternative geopolitical Africa policy scenarios that could unfold, depending on a second Donald Trump administration or, alternatively, a Joe Biden-Kamala Harris administration bringing into play renewed Democratic Africa policy priorities. But these may have to be. strategically coordinated with Mideast strategy and policy as well; this is as a result of Trump’s alliance with Benjamin Netanyahu and cultivation of a Saudi Arabia-United Arab Emirates-



Egyptian Arab policy nexus. In any case, what has passed for bipartisan Africa policy continuity may have reached an inflection point of departure suggesting different possibilities: decreased or enhanced strategic autonomy implications for Africa depending on the November election outcome; this is not only in terms of geopolitical-strategic dynamics but of equal importance in regard to African integration via the Continental Free Trade Area and the African Union's Agenda 2063. If there is a Biden-Harris victory, Africa policy will have to transition from a non-strategic programmatic to a more focused strategic, even geostrategic, agenda. It will have to reflect a Mediterranean-Indian Ocean peace and security nexus linked to addressing Persian Gulf-Red Sea challenges in advancing and stabilizing democratic and regional integration prospects throughout the Maghreb and the Horn of Africa.

As such, the following US-Africa projections based on the outcome of the election attempts to connect dots involving the following countries: ***Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Sudan***; the DRC because it will succeed South Africa as chair of the African Union (AU) in 2021. Meanwhile, Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan are stalemated over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) while Sudan is in throws of a very delicate democratic transition. Kenya's trade initiatives, on the other hand, pose serious challenges to regional and continental integration. Morocco's opposition to self-determination in Western Sahara adds to the North African complexities revolving around the fate of Libya and the interregional geopolitical state of play throughout the Mediterranean. All, taken together, are influenced by the US-Israeli 'normalization' agenda in tandem with the Saudi-UAE Red Sea alliance.

Maghreb & Nile-Red Sea geopolitics of 'normalization'

Given Africa's demographic dynamism, approaching 2 billion by 2050 (with Nigeria alone projected to overtake the US at more than 400 million), the continent can no longer be relegated to the back-burner of US geostrategic considerations. When it comes to Israel, in spite of cancellation of the Lome summit with African states in 2017, Tel-Aviv has expanded its relations on the continent as have other external power amid an AU lacking a continental bloc policy on external relations.⁹ Under these circumstances, Israel-African relations have not engendered much controversy -- until now. Why then should US-Africa policy be predicated on expanding Israel's ties in the Arab/Muslim world when most African states already have diplomatic relations with the Jewish state on the basis of being required by Washington to also adopt the Trump administration's pro-Israel policy at the expense of the Palestinians? And to bandwagon with a US-Israeli Middle East agenda aligning with the security interests of Cairo, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi?




Hence, first off, it is instructive to reflect on how developments could play out within a landscape under Trumpian-Netanyahu-Saudi-Emirates construction interacting with the outcome of the November 2020 election. In what might be dubbed America's African diplomacy of Arab/Muslim 'normalization' with Israel, the thesis being put forth here is that should Trump win reelection, under his administration, US-African relations and policy will be shaped by a Washington-Tel Aviv axis coordinating with the Persian Gulf Saudi-UAE axis with the possibility, depending on the extent of African Union (AU) and key member states cooperation, of transforming Africa into a subordinate continental subsystem under Mideast hegemony. This dominance will be anchored in shaping geopolitical outcomes in the Northeastern Horn of Africa. Thus, under a Trump second coming with the hard-ball evangelical zealotry of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Israel and its new found Saudi-UAE allies will become co-subimperial managers of Africa's agenda in a plethora of divide-and-rule arrangements. To understand these possibilities, revisiting the September 15th White House Rose Garden ceremony involving Israel, UAE and Bahrain and the speculation it generated may help in discerning such a scenario.

In the wake of the Trump-Netanyahu orchestrated 'peace deal' with United Arab Emirates and Bahrain at the September 15th White House Rose Garden ceremony, speculation was rife about which Arab and/or Muslim states would next join with the US and Israel in betraying Palestinians to the tender mercies of unending occupation and settlement expansion in the West Bank.¹⁰ After all, who cares that Netanyahu 'conceded' suspending annexing a major portion of the West Bank in exchange for 'normalizing' relations with Gulf Arab states that had already normalized in everything but name with Tel Aviv? Certainly not Netanyahu's who, from his standpoint, remains committed to annexation which has been happening anyway. As suggested in an earlier analysis the real significance of the White House ceremony in the Rose Garden was its implications for Africa and US-African relations; this relates to Washington's and Tel Aviv's search for additional Arab/Muslim countries jumping on the 'normalization' bandwagon which will be followed up with a vengeance in a second Trump term. Not only that, for African states already having ties with Israel, the Trump administration seeks to steer as many of them as possible in Israel's camp and in alignment with the agendas of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and UAE.

Landscape of complexities I: The Maghreb

In short, the Trump administration's pro-Netanyahu/Gulf Arab Mideast policy is already dictating Washington's African diplomacy such as it is in advancing an emerging *anti-democratic coalition of forces* (anti-Arab Spring inspired). These threaten to subordinate Africa, especially the northeastern Horn into a subsystem of dependency along the Red Sea-Gulf of Aden gateway into the northwest Indian Ocean. This alignment extends into the Maghreb, centering around the internationalized Libyan civil war. It also implicates the



other self-determination struggle besides that of the Palestinians, the Sahrawi struggle for independence of Western Sahara where Morocco's illegal occupation and Paris-backed intransigence has robbed the AU of a functioning Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) as its regional economic pillar in North Africa. Further marginalizing the Sahrawi struggle is the 'great gaming' of Libya's future within the context of jockeying for position in the resource-rich eastern Mediterranean by Turkey and Russia as well as France amid other claimants such as Egypt, UAE and the military component of Sudan's fragile transitional regime in Khartoum.

In the wake of UAE and Bahrain, the fact that Morocco and Sudan were being broached as candidates for following them into a Trump encouraged embrace of Israel is indicative of what is at stake in challenging Africa's strategic autonomy in a second Trump term. Although Morocco resists pressure to normalize with Israel, there is a logic in its being considered a candidate.¹¹ The anti-self determination as well as democratic connecting of dots implicates Rabat's interest in consolidating its sovereign claims over Western Sahara to the marginalizing of Palestinian self-determination. This would align with Saudi-UAE backing of the military wing of Sudan's transitional government and the mercenary troop support Sudan's military lends to both the Cairo-Saudi-UAE (and Russian) backing for the Haftar LNA forces challenging the UN-backed Government of National Accord in Libya and to the anti-Iran genocidal Saudi-UAE war in Yemen. The Yemen and Libya theaters of conflict represent a shared interest of the Israel-Egypt-Saudi-UAE in confronting the two non-Arab regional power claimants in Turkey (Libya) and Iran (Yemen). Moreover, in the case of the anti-Iran dimension of this alignment, demonizing Iran has served Israel's successful distraction purpose of changing the subject on the Palestinians with US Israel Lobby and Republican collusion reflecting in opposition to Barack Obama's Iran Nuclear Deal, thereby splitting Democrats on Mideast policy.

All combined, this balance of forces with the backing of the US, France and Russia bodes ill for the AU fledgling 2063 integration agenda and to the future of US-African relations and policy prospects depending on the outcome of the US election. However, while the basic regional concentration of contending forces locates primarily in the eastern Mediterranean-Northeast African theater of geopolitical dynamics, the Morocco-Sahrawi Western Sahara stalemate fits within this scenario as well. Both Rabat and Tel Aviv are pursuing strategies of buying off sub-Saharan members of the AU aimed at shifting the intra-African balance in their respective favor while Israel is supportive of Morocco's claims to Western Sahara over Sahrawi self-determination.¹² So although resisting, it is not a stretch imagining Morocco might one day return the favor by 'normalizing' with Israel at the expense of Palestinian self-determination as both pursue strategies of buying off AU members; this prospect effectively shifts Africa south of the Sahara into a subordinate continental state system as a rear base for the anti-democratic coalition of forces joining Israel-Egypt-Saudi Arabia and UAE along




with France and Russia. For Emanuel Macron, the southern Mediterranean extending into the Sahel is Paris' sphere of influence irrespective of the AU which, under its current leadership is seen as deferential.¹³ For Russia, Africa is a 'Resource Province' for augmenting its own minerals and energy geostrategy along with exporting proxy security capabilities via the Wagner Group (Central African Republic, Libya, Mozambique's ISIS-threatened Cabo Delgado) and setting up troll platforms targeting Black voters in the US election (Nigeria and Ghana).¹⁴ However, it is AU leadership dynamics that, over at least the next year, will factor into how these and other external influences shape Africa's complicated and fragmented intra-continental landscape. This where the possible emergence of a Cairo-Kinshasa Axis may surface within the fraught context of Nile hydropolitics affecting Ethiopia as well as Sudan, in turn, merging into Persian Gulf pressures impinging on Khartoum to 'normalize' with Israel.

Landscape of complexity II: Nile-Congo basin linkages?

The fact that staunchly pro-Israel president of DRC, Felix Tshisekedi, succeeds South African president Cyril Ramaphosa as AU Chair in 2021 could reinforce anti-democratic coalition of forces subordinating Africa to pro-Netanyahu and Persian Gulf agendas should Donald Trump be reelected. Whether or not Ramaphosa, within the AU's chairmanship 'troika' arrangement will have any leverage remains to be determined. But under his AU chairmanship, efforts to negotiate a tripartite accommodation on Ethiopia's GERD have gone nowhere. Trump's mutual 'strongman' alliance with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi compromised Washington's mediating the GERD dispute, contributing to the GERD stalemate and undercutting AU efforts under Ramaphosa's chairmanship. With DRC's Tshisekedi assuming the AU chairmanship in 2021 against the backdrop of Addis and Cairo competing for support in their dispute among Nile basin countries, another dimension to be factored into this mix is the possibility of a Cairo-Kinshasa alliance shaping contained in a September 19th letter Sisi received from Tshisekedi. The DRC President supports Egypt's terms in the GERD dispute. As an upstream Nile Basin country that did not sign the 2010 Entebbe Agreement of upstream countries, according to *Al-Monitor*, the Egyptian presidency acknowledged "the DRC's expression of support for the Egyptian terms of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) issue and aspirations to develop bilateral ties with Egypt and tap into its experience in infrastructure and large development projects."¹⁵

What is particularly revealing about this bonhomie between DRC and Egypt is how Tshisekedi's support for Cairo in its tug-of-war with Addis links to DRC's Grand Inga Dam ambitions, thereby reflecting a potential political geography of linkage between Nile and Congo basins. Indeed, were it not for GERD geopolitical contradictions an eventual Congo-Nile interregional river basin cooperation infrastructure would benefit the entire continent in intra-African integrated sustainable development. Against the backdrop of




Ethio-Egyptian tensions, according to *Al-Monitor* reported that Abbas Sharaky, chief of the Natural Resources Department at the Institute for African Research and Studies, indicated that “Egypt is expected to cooperate with the DRC on the Grand Inga Dam project, in addition to the economic cooperation in the issue of water, agriculture and animal wealth. Egypt will not wait for for the water to come to it, but will take preemptive steps to ensure its food and water security.”¹⁶

Trump’s reelection would likely tip this Nile-Congo balance of force against Ethiopia given that Trump, in support of Sisi and Egypt’s terms on the GERD, suspended in September \$130 million worth of aid to Ethiopia “because of a ‘lack of progress’ on negotiations pertaining to the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the River Nile.”¹⁷ This sanctioning of Ethiopia exposes the false pretenses of Washington ever being an ‘honest broker’ in its attempted GERD mediation between Egypt and Sudan on the one hand, Ethiopia on the other. This decision also reflects the toxicity of the US-Israel aligned Cairo-Riyadh-Abu Dhabi alliance that promises to hold sway in dominating the African geopolitical landscape should Trump continue into a second term. However, sanctioning Ethiopia has been strongly opposed by Biden’s Africa team and would likely be reversed if Biden and Harris win.

Sudan-Israel

Trump’s alignment threatens Sudan’s post-Bashir democratic transition as Sudan emerges as a major battleground between Turkey and Qatar on the one hand, Cairo-Riyadh-Dubai on the other. (SEE POSTSCRIPT) The latter is implicated in pressuring the fragile transitional civil-military government nominally led by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok into recognizing Israel in exchange for removing Sudan from the US State Sponsor of Terrorism list (STT). This has the potential to unravel the transitional Sovereign Council (SC) and the country’s democratization. Saudi-UAE proxy, the notorious former Janjaweed leader and commander of the brutal Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Mohamed Hamdan ‘Hemeti’ Dagalo, also deputy head of the Transitional Military Council (TMC), is in the forefront of having Khartoum accept the Israel recognition-STT de-listing trade-off.¹⁸ TMC chair, Lieutenant-General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan is also pushing this trade-off while Hamdok and his civilian government and backers in the pro-democracy Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) resist such linkage, preferring decoupling STT de-listing from relations with Israel. Thus has ‘normalization’ emerged as critical power-struggle factor within the political dynamics of Sudan’s democratic transition.¹⁹

The Hemeti-Burhan TMC calculus, according to a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace analysis is to “strengthen military actors and former Bashir regime figures” and the corrupt ‘officer-businessman’ class in the run-up to elections in 2022. This of course would also serve the post-Arab Spring anti-democratic autocratic agendas of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and UAE. They have received mercenary recruits from Sudan into their misadventures in



both Libya and Yemen. The vulnerability of the Hamdok-led civilian component of the SC was demonstrated by Lieutenant-General Al-Burhan's meeting in Kampala with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu in February without consulting civilian partners in the SC and the FFC. This has been seen as having "undermined the government, the FFC, and the Prime Minister's credibility while shoring up his own support base."²⁰

Landscape of complexity III: Kenya-East African integration challenges

Hamdok and the FFC are in a virtual trap between Burhan and Hemeti with little room for maneuver in alleviating Sudan's dire economic predicament amid the power jockeying for 2022. Trump and Pompeo were pushing for normalization at all cost prior to the election. Would a President Joe Biden administration rescue them? Meanwhile, the Trump administration has its normalization eyes set on Kenya as well although Kenya already has diplomatic ties and a special relationship with Israel. But apparently this is not enough for Washington as *The East African* reports that the US wants Kenya "to support Israel's political and commercial interests, or forget a free trade deal (FTA) with the world's biggest economy."²¹ Given this coercive uptick from Washington, this begs a whole host of questions about Nairobi's intentions when its negotiations with the Trump administration for a bilateral US-Kenya trade deal has already generated no small amount of controversy over its commitment to the fledgling African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). (See: "The AfCFTA and the U.S.-Kenya Free Trade Agreement Challenge by Francis A. Kornegay, Jr. & Faith Mabera, *Africa Up Close*, 18 March 2020) Why then would Kenya want to further burden the US vs. AfCFTA controversy with additional risks to its credibility as a leading actor in the affairs of the continent by allowing itself to be bullied into accepting the Trump administration's conditions on Israel at the expense of the Palestinians?

The prospect of President Uhuru Kenyatta and his government buckling to such dictates from Washington has already generated push back from such important constituencies as the East African Tax and Governance Network (EATGN) and the East African Trade Network (EATN), indicating that "Nairobi was being 'entrapped' in the Palestine-Israeli conflict."²² EATN co-ordinator, Leonard Wanyama argues: "Due to Kenya's own *special relationship* with Israel and its pragmatic approach in dealing with issues like tensions in the Middle East, US demands for such political connotations in the USFTA would undercut the country's reputation."²³ EATN has called on Kenya to reject Washington's demands. The thing is, apart from Washington's linkage of a bilateral FTA with Kenya to its pro-Israel agenda, the Kenyatta government has already complicated its credibility on the AfCFTA by pursuing such a trade deal in the first which is further compounded by a more recent pursuit of a post-Brexit bilateral FTA with the United Kingdom at the²⁴.

This threatens disrupting a prospective UK-East African Community (EAC) Brexit trade pact.²⁵ Here, however, there is a more compelling logic to Kenya's unilateralism than in the case of a USFTA. This has to do with Nairobi's frustrations with other EAC members



(Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda) in dragging their feet on preparatory negotiations for engaging Britain, the process, reflecting a contradiction between Kenya's status as a 'lower middle-income' country compared to the least developed country (LDC) status of other EAC members. Whether or not these contradictions are also factored into Nairobi's USFTA calculus at the expense of the AfCFTA is not known. But post-Brexit Kenya-EAC dynamics foreshadow what complications may be in store for post-AGOA US-African trade relations and may suggest the need for a transitional regionalizing of US-Africa AGOA dialogue on AfCFTA by Biden which the Trump administration has no interest in pursuing. Otherwise, the Trump administration's agenda is the subordinating of its African diplomacy to the dictates of advancing Israel's interests on the continent in tandem with its Egyptian and Persian Gulf allies in Riyadh and Dubai.

A Biden geostrategic pro-democracy Afro-Mideast policy?

US-Africa will have to shift from the programmatic to the geostrategic. If Joe Biden and Kamala Harris defeat Trump, thereby ushering in a Democratic administration in Washington, US-Africa policy will confront a major challenge in unraveling Trump-Netanyahu 'normalization' transactionalism distorting both African and Mideast peace and security prospects. This is where US policy formulation in the Horn of Africa under a Democratic administration will bear careful scrutiny. If a prospective Biden administration fails to employ a deft strategy of nuanced toughness in decoupling the Trump-Netanyahu 'normalization' gambit from US support for strengthening fragile democratic transitions in Sudan and Ethiopia, Biden's promise "to convene a summit of the world's democracies in the first year of his presidency" will lack credibility. ("The Democratic Renewal: What It Will Take to Fix U.S. Foreign Policy," by Ben Rhodes, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2020).

Reversing the Israel conditionality

Given how strong both Biden and Harris are in their support of Israel, Biden has already signaled that deconstructing the Trump-Netanyahu anti-Palestinian 'peace' paradigm will start with extricating the US out of its toxic alliance with Saudi Arabia and UAE while navigating a return to the Iran Nuclear Deal. Biden minced no words when he said: "Under a Biden-Harris administration, we will reassess our relationship with the Kingdom, end US support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, and make sure America does not check its values at the door to sell arms or by oil."²⁶ Biden has also sent warnings to Sisi in Cairo: "No more blank checks for Trump's 'favorite dictator'."²⁷

On this basis, a president Biden would be expected to make clear in no uncertain terms that it will not hold hostage delisting Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism pending




Khartoum 'normalizing' relations with Israel as the military wing of the transitional regime backed by Cairo-Saudi Arabia-UAE favor in defiance of popular Sudanese opposition to such a betrayal of Palestinians. This should be coupled with strengthening the civilian component of the transitional government led by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and signaling the threat of sanctions against the military-business oligarchs should they move to undermine Hamdok and his civilian team. Regarding Ethiopia, a Biden Africa policy would have to couple pro-democracy support in Sudan with reversal of Trump's pro-Sisi suspension of aid to Ethiopia in support of Egypt's opposition to Addis' filling the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). This should be coupled with an unbiased renewal of mediation under joint auspices of the AU and the US. The end point should be encouraging a GERD settlement kick-starting institutionalized Nile Basin regional cooperation between up and downstream countries extending into forging a northeast African economic community.

The strategic significance of decoupling Sudan and Ethiopia from Israeli-Persian Gulf agenda is in consolidating the northern end of the Tripartite 'Cape to Cairo' FTA within the Continental FTA encompassing eastern and southern Africa: the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC). Given the triumvirate structure of AU chair succession, South Africa will be a crucially strategic partner for a Biden administration in this decoupling process; this is especially given the pro-Israel leaning of Ramaphosa's incoming successor, Tshisekedi who is also backing Egypt in the GERD dispute. All the more reason for a Biden administration outreach to South

Such an outreach would also work in favor of South Africa and SADC addressing the terrorist threat to the region emanating from the Islamist insurgency in northern Mozambique. Otherwise, it is the AU's unstable northern tier quagmire in the geopolitics of the Middle East that demand urgent attention. And this should include an AU-sanctioned compromise shared sovereignty settlement between Morocco and the Sahrawis as well as Algeria and possibly Mauritania on the status of Western Sahara while activating the Arab Maghreb Union; also, 'silencing the guns' in Libya. In these endeavors, Biden and team might do well to motivate a joint AU-European Union (EU) Mediterranean dialogue on a future architecture of interregional peace and security. The bottom line for Africa and US-African relations is to liberate Africa from Middle Eastern 'Great Games' threatening subordination of the continent to a new imperium of external dominance.

Decoupling Africa policy from Middle East agendas might be coordinated with renewed efforts at engaging Israel and the Palestinians in arriving at a post-Oslo democratic accommodation. But this in all likelihood will have to involve building an Africa-linked Mideast policy activist constituency generating congressional clout that can challenge the



'Israel right or wrong' gatekeeping within the Democratic Party by the likes of New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez among others who are very close to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). This will be taken up later but it includes Biden's running mate, Senator Kamala Harris, not to mention Biden's own pro-Israel commitment which has been a staple among Democrats until recently. And it has taken, none other than the elder statesman of the progressives, Jewish Bernie Sanders to challenge pro-Israel orthodoxy as far-right evangelicals have increasingly become the base constituency within the Israel Lobby. A compromise reached in the Democratic Party platform does oppose settlement expansion by Israel with a nod to "freedom of speech even as it condemns the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement that targets Israeli policies toward Palestinians."²⁸

African integration: A regionalized strategic policy framework

Meanwhile, the other strategic imperative in moving away from the dominant programmatic thrust of US policy toward Africa has to do with advancing Africa's integration. This is not unconnected from freeing Africa's fate from that of Israel and Persian Gulf given the urgency of integrating the continent's northern tier across the Maghreb, on into the Nile and Northeastern Red Sea littoral, more definitively into the AU system. Policy needs to reflect a much sharper profile in terms of support for Regional and Continental Integration as a framework for already existing programs and initiatives as much as any new departures that might be contemplated. Here, in fact, US policy could benefit from taking a page out of India's geostrategic approach to economic relations with eastern and southern Africa as a point of departure for how Washington might proceed. For Delhi, emphasis has been placed on channeling its trade and investment relations through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) which also includes the member states of the East African Community. By doing so, India is encouraging intra-African trade integration within the 'Cape to Cairo' mega-region within the continental FTA.²⁹ In so pursuing such a strategy, multilateralism takes priority over bilateralism or complements it in India's relations along the African Indian Ocean littoral. As such, why not for the US as well although, geostrategically, the focus would need to be continent-wide?

SADC-US forum: A precedent?

US bi-multilateral relations with African continental and regional institutions emphasizing integration should take priority over US bilateral relations with each and every country. The policy of having missions in all African countries may need reviewing in as much as the US, by now, should have made whatever point it was trying to make regarding taking Africa seriously as a foreign policy priority although the continent still ranks low among strategic priorities; this is in spite of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) presence which has not appeared to have made a decisive difference in capacitating the AU Peace and Security



Architecture into autonomous command and control over the inter-African landscape. In any case, policy emphasis should shift more definitively toward focusing on Africa's multilateral institutional infrastructure and integration -- which is not to say that such relations do not already exist but that they should more sharply reflect the AU-Regional Economic Community (REC) infrastructure based on the AU audit of Adebayo Adedeji.³⁰ These have been more recently followed up in the Kagame Reform recommendations.³¹ In some cases this would mean building upon what already exists as in the US ambassadorship to the AU in Addis.

For starters, US policy could explicitly acknowledge AU Agenda 2063 and align US policy objectives in supporting this agenda coupled with elevating the continental AfCFTA as the focal point for arriving at a post-AGOA strategy as opposed to the 'divide and rule' bilateralism of Trump's US-Kenya initiative based on the FTA with Morocco. This should be accompanied by a reconfiguring of diplomacy toward more definitive engagement with regional economic communities (RECs). When Whitney Schneidman was deputy assistant secretary for Africa, he initiated the short-lived SADC-US Forum which became a casualty of Zimbabwe under the sanctioning of the Mugabe regime. Jendai Fraser during the George W. Bush administration tried unsuccessfully to revive this forum. This should be revisited irrespective of US relations with any individual member of SADC which might even, over time, provide alternative leverage over such problematic states. Indeed, within the context of such a revived forum, a regionalization of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) might be encouraged as a means of peer review being leveraged into a variable speed geometric instrument for deeper regional integration.

A revived SADC-US Forum could serve as a template for replication elsewhere on the continent:

- ECOWAS-US Forum
- EAC-US Forum
- IGAD-US Forum
- ECCAS-US Forum

Although non-functional, a prospective Biden administration might even contemplate an Arab Maghreb Union-US Forum as a means of working with the AU in trying to resolve both Western Sahara and Libya though, in both cases, this would also have to involve the EU and maybe the Arab League. The REC-US Forum template might flesh out the US ambassadorship to the AU with affiliated ambassadors in strategically selected countries in each REC region who would double as envoys to these forums. REC-US Forums could very well lend greater coherence to US-African relations overall as well as to existing programs and initiatives: SADC-AGOA forum; EAC-AGOA Forum, ECOWAS/ECCAS-AGOA Forum, etc. This regionalization of Agoa might form part of an agenda evolving into a CFTA-US trade agreement. In other words, programmatic US-Africa policy would be nested within a US-Africa geostrategic policy framework.



Another consideration: an ECOWAS/ECCAS-US forum would contribute to expanding transatlanticism from a purely North Atlantic focus to a whole-of-Atlantic multilateral possibility of linkage with the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic; US forums with SADC and EAC (possibly within the COMESA umbrella) present the possibility of US-Africa Indian Ocean maritime security cooperation in the western ocean complementing Indo-Pacific considerations. However, Africa's interest would be best served by a broader 'peace and cooperation' inclusive multilateral framework as opposed to the 'great gaming' Indian Ocean rivalries between the US (with India) and China. In terms of security, REC-US Forums might also revive momentum for the much delayed implementation of the African Regional Standby Forces system in what might be an attempt at 'trilateral cooperation' between the AU and RECs, the US via AFRICOM and the UN in terms of its peacekeeping memorandum of understanding with the AU.

Establishing a REC-US Forum system within the context of supporting Agenda 2063 and the CFTA could be accompanied by a reduction in the number of US Country Diplomatic Missions while illustratively prioritizing the following missions:

SADC: South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania (EAC), Mauritius

EAC: Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda

IGAD: Ethiopia, Sudan

ECCAS: Angola, DRC (SADC, EAC)

ECOWAS: Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire

AMU: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia

Egypt (which doesn't fit within any REC although it is a full AU member)

Beyond rewarding political appointees, it is unclear what value added comes from having ambassadors in all AU member states. It seems doubtful such bilateralism in a hyper-fragmented continent benefits competition with China assuming this needs to be America's prime motivation driving US-African relations in any case. It is doubtful it benefits Africa, given the questionable *raison d'être* of any number of states, a point tellingly made by John Campbell: "...US diplomacy in Africa has for many years been conducted on the premise that all postcolonial African states are nation-states in the conventional sense--that is, countries with firm borders, unified governments, and people who share a common identity. There has been little recognition that many of these countries lack a unifying national identity or that small cartels of self-serving elites often dominate their governments."³² It is on this basis that a more strategic regionalizing of the US-Africa playbook may assist in this rewriting with an emphasis on sharing and pooling of sovereignty within the existing AU-RECs system? Perhaps, much needed budget savings for reallocation elsewhere might



be realized. The thing is, this approach would seem to more clearly align US-Africa policy with the more pan-Africanist Agenda 2063 aspirational goals of Africa rather than reinforcing the continent's dysfunctional colonial-inherited political geography that constantly subordinates into a reactive 'one and the many' paradigm with individual external powers, not just the US but with the EU, China, India, Russia, Turkey as well as Israel and the Persian Gulf powers among others. Such a reconfiguring of US policy should advance Washington's credibility on the continent relative to other external actors and in terms of content, accommodate all programs and initiatives already underway.

Reviving A Constituency for Africa

The foregoing is purely illustrative amid other US-Africa policy rethinking underway. However, the question that goes begging is whether or not there is potential for reviving an activist constituency for Africa that has been dormant since South Africa's post-apartheid democratic transition in 1994 and how such a constituency might align within a broader US foreign policy transformative process. The circumstances in the 2020s are not as strait forward from an Africa policy advocacy standpoint as they were at a time when white minority rule in Southern Africa evoked such racially inspired African-American identification with the continent and its liberation movements in what drove the anti-apartheid movement. The only major African self-determination issue pending for resolution now is Western Sahara. If there is potential for anti-apartheid activist constituency replication, it is in the pro-Palestinian Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS) movement which has already generated backlash of a magnitude inspiring several anti-BDS laws being passed in state legislatures while splitting congressional Democrats in both House and Senate on issues pertaining to 'freedom of speech' as well as more fundamentally on the credibility of the US-Israel relationship.

As such, given how entrenched this relationship has been over decades compared to the absence of a comparable relationship with South Africa's apartheid regime, there is little prospect that a bipartisan congressional balance of forces will emerge in support of the Palestinians under current circumstances. Democrats as well as Republicans see nothing but a down side in not supporting or at least acknowledging the Trump-Netanyahu-Pompeo Arab/Muslim-Israeli 'normalization' as progress toward Mideast peace. The scathing set of interviews attacking the Palestinian leadership by Prince Bandar Bin Sultan al-Saud is seen as a virtual signal of Palestinian discredit and isolation as more Arab/Muslim regimes are under pressure to follow UAE and Bahrain with Riyadh possibly icing on the cake.³³ To be sure, the subtext of such an assault is apparent Persian Gulf panic over any prospect that Palestinian self-determination might unleash renewed 'Arab Spring'-style democratizing momentum as they scramble to transform themselves into modernizing autocracies.



Democracy: Sudan and Ethiopia

Yet, the manner in which the Trump-Netanyahu gambit with UAE as well as Riyadh intrudes onto the democratizing but fragile landscape in the Horn of Africa, centered on Sudan, might offer some potential for an Afro-Mideast constituency linkage based on what is likely to be -- if Biden is the next President -- a pro-democracy and human rights foreign policy resurgence. For one thing, Biden's Africa team is dead set against Trump's punishing Ethiopia in its dispute with Cairo over the GERD and will want to strengthen the civilian component of Sudan's post-Bashir transition.

These are what might be considered 'low hanging fruit' in quickly reversing Trump's anti-democratic, pro-autocracy. Ethiopia and Sudan also provide an opportunity for Biden's Africa hands and allied interest groups to jack up the Congressional Black Caucus on Africa policy more broadly considered and reframed into mobilizing support for AU Agenda 2063. Among other things, given the growing African immigrant diaspora within a diversifying Black America, herein lies possibilities for organizing 'Friends of ECOWAS,' 'Friends of SADC,' 'Friends of EAC' and/or 'Friends of COMESA' as a constituency for transitioning AGOA into a US-AfCFTA pact.

A tri-caucus 'braintrust' congressional strategy

But this also implicates a more grassroots outreach beyond the Corporate Council on Africa and other east coast elite entities occupying the US-Africa policy terrain. Where such an outreach may have linkage potential between African and Mideast policy interests via the Black Caucus is in the fact that the CBC comprises a Tri-Caucus with the congressional and Hispanic Caucuses as well as allied groupings such as the Progressive Caucus with any number of membership overlaps among House members and allies in the Senate. Taking a page out of the mid-1970s, when Congressman Charles C. Diggs convened a national network of Black organizations in support of African issues to establish an Africa-foreign affairs 'braintrust' as an adjunct to the Caucus, the time may be ripe for motivating the Caucus to revive such a braintrust in conjunction with its Tri-Caucus Asian and Hispanic counterparts.

A Tri-Caucus foreign affairs braintrust would provide an opening for developing a national grassroots activist network toward building policy change momentum on Middle Eastern as well as African issues, the plight of the Palestinians and Palestinian self-determination in particular. Added to this scenario is the Black Lives Matter movement's transitioning toward state and local government electoral activism which offers an opportunity for building linkage between BLM and BDS as a new and younger generation of minority and progressive politicians emerge on the scene, challenging the leadership hegemony of old-



guard Democrats within the AIPAC orbit. The unseating of the chairman of the House International Relations Committee, Representative Eliot L. Engel of New York by progressive insurgent Jamaal Bowman who will infuse new blood into the Black Caucus is indicative of a new balance of forces that may be possible to cultivate from the grassroots 'bottom-up.' Moreover, given the globalization of BLM into an international protest and solidarity movement, a potential BLM International might further progressive momentum at home and abroad. However, when it comes to the Palestinian dimension in these constituency equation, these prospects will demand a new post-Oslo Palestinian self-determination narrative that shifts emphasis toward a pro-democracy agenda against the rightwing autocracy of illegal occupation and apartheid-style settler minority rule in the West Bank entwined with threatening annexation of the entire Jordan Valley; this would destabilize Jordan and reinforce Mideast instability.

Given how Jewish Americans are increasingly skeptical of, if not alienated from, Israel as a 'democratic state' with some even supporting BDS, the opening of a dialogue with AIPAC's alternative, J Street may be in order in conjunction with allied elements in Israel itself and in other countries with important Jewish and Arab/Muslim communities as in South Africa and in Europe. As in the case of Western Sahara, although differently configured, a federalized shared sovereignty democratization and demilitarization of Israel-Palestine within a Jordan Valley regional economic integration framework may be the only path toward stabilizing the Eastern Mediterranean/Levant subsystem of the Middle East.³⁴ Obviously the devil is in the details. But Oslo is dead. Democracy is the future and a Biden administration and Democrats in Congress will have less room for maneuver in ignoring the Palestinian part of the Israel-Palestine equation if democracy for the Palestinians in Historical Palestine replaces 'two-state solution' obligatory references.

Conclusion

Ironically, decoupling US-Africa policy from US-Mideast policy in unraveling Trump's one-sided version of an Israel-Palestinian 'peace process' may actually require linkage between Africa and Mideast policy advocacy in motivating the congressional basis for an important dimension of long-overdue US foreign policy-national security strategy revisionism. The foregoing analysis of how such a scenario might unfold as point of departure from an African-American remobilization dynamic within and beyond the context of the 2020 presidential election also factors in how Africa's complicated geopolitical landscape might inform a prospectively revisionist US-Africa policy process. Perhaps, strategically, African affairs constituency renewal may have to reflect an Afro-Mideast advocacy dynamic of self-determinative democracy, peace and security promotion in the Maghreb addressing Western Sahara and Libya extending to Israel-Palestine on the one hand, Sudan's transition and the intractable Ethio-Egyptian Nile dispute on the other.



Such an advocacy dynamic would and should include a shift of focus from a programmatic to a more strategic Agenda 2063 US-Africa policy posture; this would include revival of the Black Caucus foreign affairs braintrust extended to Hispanic and Asian caucuses (which will also mean addressing Latin American and Caribbean issues as well, especially reviving US-Cuba normalization toward ending the embargo on Havana). Perhaps, for such a scenario to unfold, thought may have to be given to networking a multi-stakeholder process of organizing something along the lines of an Afro-Mideast Democracy, Peace and Security Coalition Initiative. Irrespective of the 2020 election outcome as November 3rd approaches, such a possible seems long overdue for serious consideration.

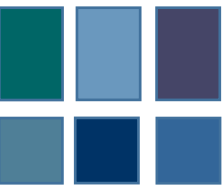
POSTSCRIPT

The recent announcement that the Trump administration has or is in the process of removing Sudan from the state terrorism list, on the face of it, appears to let the civilian component of the Sovereign Council led by PM Hamdok off the hook. Sudan has yet to formally recognize Israel in a transactional incentive for Trump's decision after Khartoum's payment. However, it appears General al-Burhan, as the most senior figure in the Council and co-leader with Degalo in the military wing of the Council has managed to finesse the sought after exchange. *The Guardian* reports: "While Burhan denied there had been a change in relations with Israel, Netanyahu later said the two governments were 'establishing cooperative relations', and Sudan has agreed to allow flights to Israel to overfly its territory." ("US removes Sudan from terrorism blacklist in return for \$335m," *The Guardian*, October 19, 2020)



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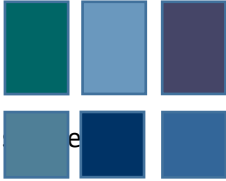
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