

Africa in Global Geopolitics



And Global Geopolitics
Seen From Africa:
The 'Kategaya
Doctrine'

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It needs to be said at the outset;
the hell Africa matters and has always mattered
in world geopolitics, even if for the wrong reasons.

For long periods, many African countries were unable to exert total dominion over their territories – providing a vacuum into which other global players muscled in and, as former South African president Thabo Mbeki put it in his famous “I am an African” speech, “act out the foolish deeds of the theatre of the day.”¹

On deeper scrutiny, this picture of a supine Africa in international relations, and how much it shapes the global geopolitics that acts out on continent – around control of natural resources, international terrorism, military resources, precious arable land, intellectual output, and lately innovation – is more complex than it appears.

First, it's largely true that for a very long period, most of Africa saw itself as a victim, and international foreign policy scholarship, commentary, and civic activism also portrayed it that way. At best, it was a continent where a range of international players in cahoots with their treacherous and oppressive local political and business classes exploited its riches.

Secondly, the other element that has marked Africa's relations with the world, has been demand for some form of reparation for debilitating European colonialism (which admittedly laid the foundation for many of the continent's woes of recent decades) to help Africa secure its economic interests and fix its security.

The third face of Africa's engagement with both the world and itself is more complex; and it is where most of the contradictions lie. Unlike nearly most other parts of the world, there is no big kahuna in African geopolitics – an economic or military power that, when she barks, the rest pay attention, or is able to decisively define diplomatic outcomes on the continent. And where countries have been able to influence events – for better or worse - like in the Democratic Republic of Congo or Somalia, it has been the smaller ones, not the big boys like Nigeria, South Africa, or even Egypt.

It's when one closely scrutinises this third area, that one sees very pragmatic and interesting approaches to Africa's body contact with and approach to the world, which has happened in ways that have not been captured by the conventional geopolitical lenses with which the continent has been viewed.

¹ "I Am an African" was a speech made by Thabo Mbeki, then deputy president, on behalf of the African National Congress in Cape Town on 8 May 1996, on the occasion of the passing of the new Constitution of South Africa. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Am_an_African

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-Developed from the keynote speech by the author at the 2nd Kampala Geopolitics Conference on *"The Role of Africa in the Geopolitical Space"*, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, October 18, 2019.

Nobody Can Stop Reggae

One place we find it is in Uganda, so it is appropriate that the Geopolitics conference took place in the capital Kampala. A leading proponent of it was Eriya Kategaya, a ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) stalwart who tended to reflect its moderate tendency.

Kategaya, who died in 2013, was Uganda's First Deputy Prime Uganda and minister of East African Community Affairs, when in 2011 he came and sat humbly through an East African Scenarios workshop in Nairobi, organised by the Society for International Development (SID).

At one point, when the debate got heated about how continued fragility in Africa could leave it vulnerable to all manner of global forces, including terrorism, Kategaya thought it necessary to inject a dose of realpolitik and bring folks back to earth.

There was no recording, so this is not verbatim, but to approximate his statement from my scribbles, he said;

"Africa is the richest continent in the world in terms of natural and mineral resources. It has nearly 600 million hectares of uncultivated arable land [about 60% of the global total]. We spend a lot of time talking about this wealth, but mostly doing nothing with it... look, nearly 90% of shipping containers that bring goods to East Africa go back empty... the world won't and can't just sit by and watch if we don't put our resources to productive use to service some of its needs. Global players will come, take and do something with the resources. It's the cold reality. It's the way the world works".

If Kategaya had been steeped in popular culture, he might have quoted the wonderful South African musician Lucky Dube famous lyric to make the point; "Nobody can stop reggae", that has become a very popular throw-away line on the continent these days. The important question from all that then, is how we dance to the reggae.

As happened, a few months after the scenario workshop, I was invited to a meeting with someone who was leading an initiative by a rich Gulf nation to establish a pan-East African TV news channel. When he told me he wanted me to consider getting involved, I replied that I had no TV background and was uncomfortable with some of the rituals of television.

He told me it didn't matter because what they wanted me to do was offer knowledge leadership. The rest would be taken care of by broadcast professionals. I then inquired why they were considering doing the channel in Kiswahili, not English.

He said there was a bigger strategic goal for the TV service beyond news. The Gulf, he said, had looked decades ahead to its food security, and concluded that it needed to take greater control by growing it, and the only place they could do that was in Africa. The biggest obstacle to that was that there was deep resentment at the grassroots against farmland leases to foreigners in Africa, and even willing central governments couldn't afford to pay the political cost of doing so on a large scale.

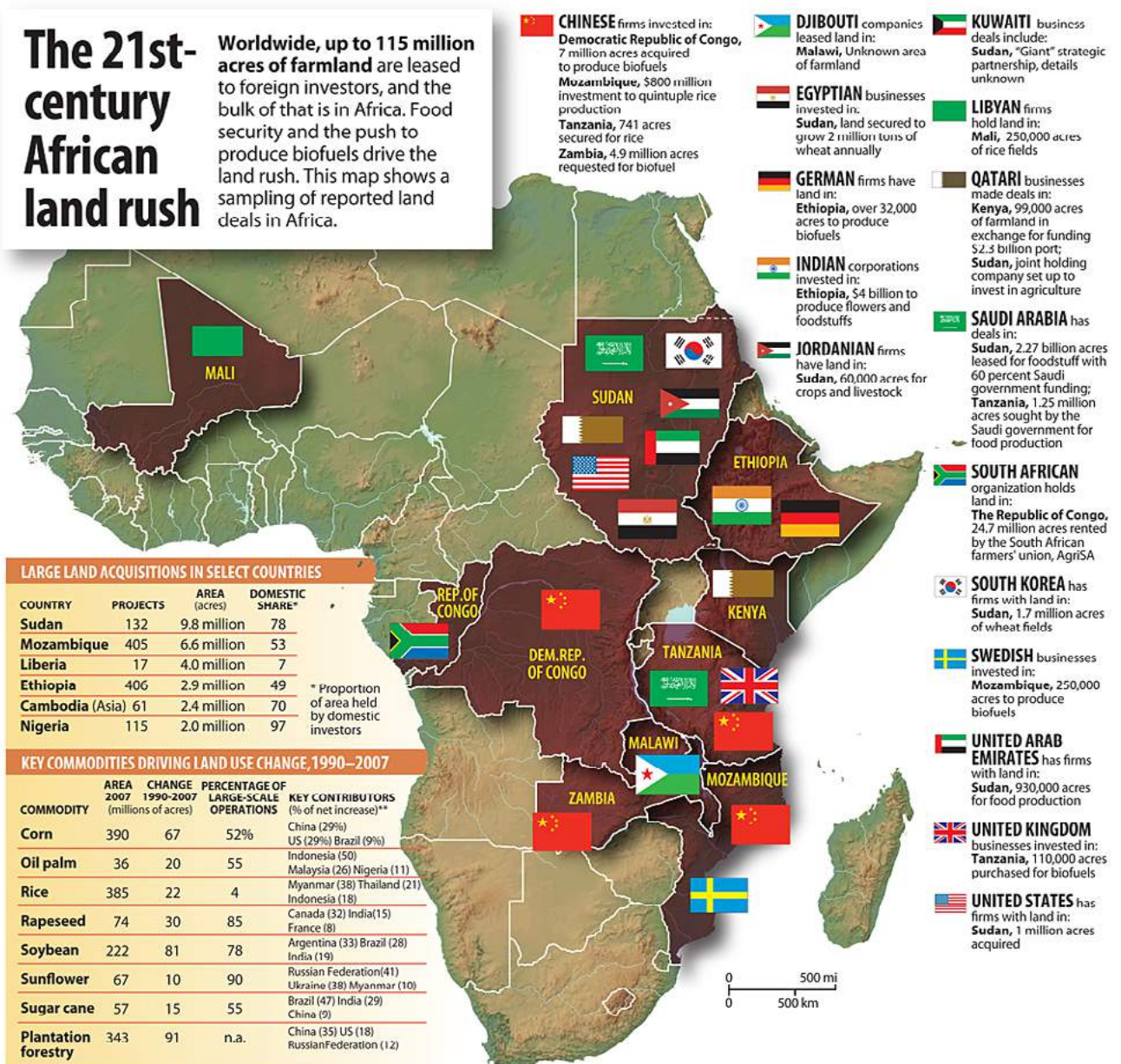
He said the hope was that the TV channel would start the kind of conversation and understanding between East African and Gulf societies that would remove distrust and allow farmland leases to advance in future. It was a remarkable insight into how countries pursue their interests, and a dramatic illustration of what I would call the "**Kategaya Doctrine**".

The channel never happened, but some land leases did, although they seem to have flattened out in recent years. The Global Policy Forum published an attention-grabbing graphic (Figure 1) in February 2012, titled "**The 21st century African land rush**", noting that at that point "worldwide, up to 115 million acres of farmland are leased to foreign investors, and the bulk of that is in Africa. Food security and the push to produce biofuels drive the land rush."

The Swahiliphone Zone and The Indian Ocean Circle

Notable here is that the mix of factors driving geopolitical engagement have changed, beyond old Cold War political alliances, to food, and energy diversity.

FIGURE 1.



Significantly too, although the countries in Africa that have done the most farmland leases are scattered in central, southern, east and Horn of Africa, broadly they are concentrated in the Swahiliphone zone, so the Gulf Swahili channel was not a shot in the wild, after all.

This Swahiliphone zone, the wider eastern side of Africa, is the site of some of the most consequential global power play taking place on the continent today. The region is also the bridgehead for a lot of the action in the other critical geopolitical theatre – the Sahel.

Assuming the non-sentimental “Kategaya Doctrine” posture to explore the power plays in the above theatres, we need to ask: with resources that are so critical for Africa’s and the global economy, food, human, and environmental security, what is the continent doing to:

1. Make them productive for itself and the world?
2. To secure them?

Africa’s place in geopolitics here will be defined by how much of those goods (international security, sustenance, environmental safety, and global economic and market provisions) it supplies or doesn’t. This leads to the to the next question:

3. How is the world responding to Africa’s success or failure to supply these goods?

As it happens, Eastern Africa’s fortune – or misfortune if you are a pessimist – is that it’s part of what of the Indian Ocean region, or more elegantly the Indian Ocean Circle.

FIGURE 2.

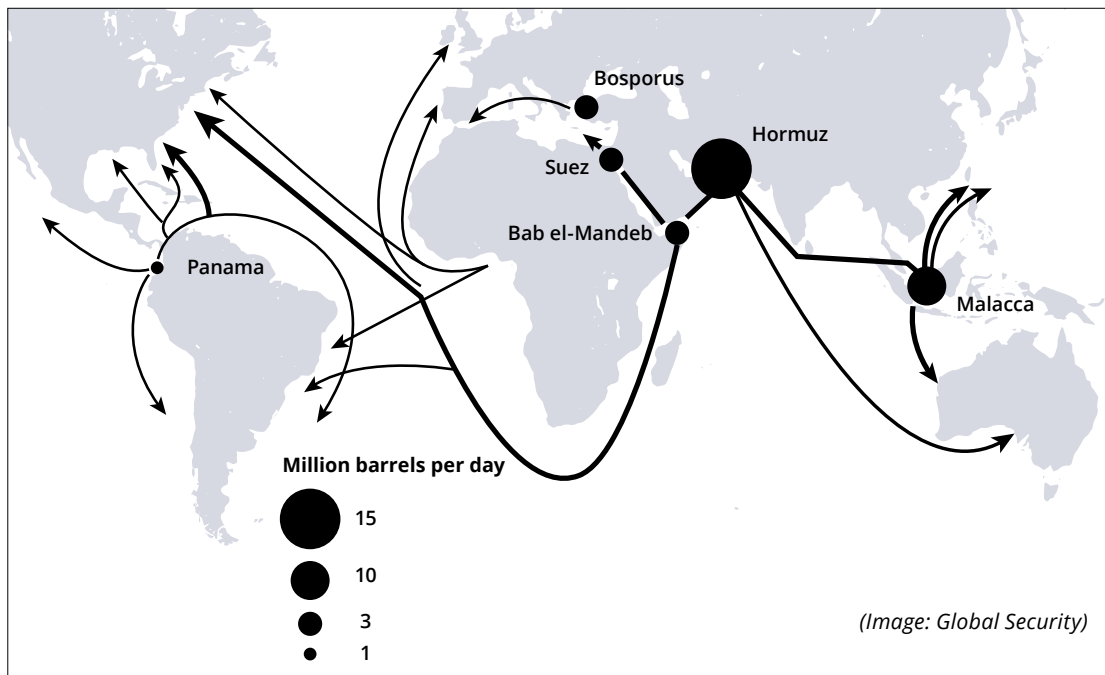


(Image: Shutterstock)

The Indian Ocean Circle is one of the most precious geopolitical estates in the world today, and living in it or its neighbourhood has serious consequences and imposes certain responsibilities. It is a long list.

For starters, some 80% of the world's maritime oil trade flows through three narrow passages of water, known as choke points, in the Indian Ocean - the Strait of Hormuz; Bab-el-Mandeb located between Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula, and Djibouti and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa. It connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden; and the Strait of Malacca, the waterway connecting the Indian Ocean) and the South China Sea (Pacific Ocean).

FIGURE 3.



Secondly, it is the home region of what the US geopolitical intelligence organisation Stratfor in 2013 called the "Post-China 16", or "PC16", a group of 16 countries - shown in Figure 4 - that could take China's place as it moves beyond the low-end manufacturing and export-led model that defined its dramatic three-decade rise².

FIGURE 4.



2. "The Post-China 16: Ascendant Manufacturing Countries", Jul 30, 2013. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/post-china-16-ascendant-manufacturing-countries>

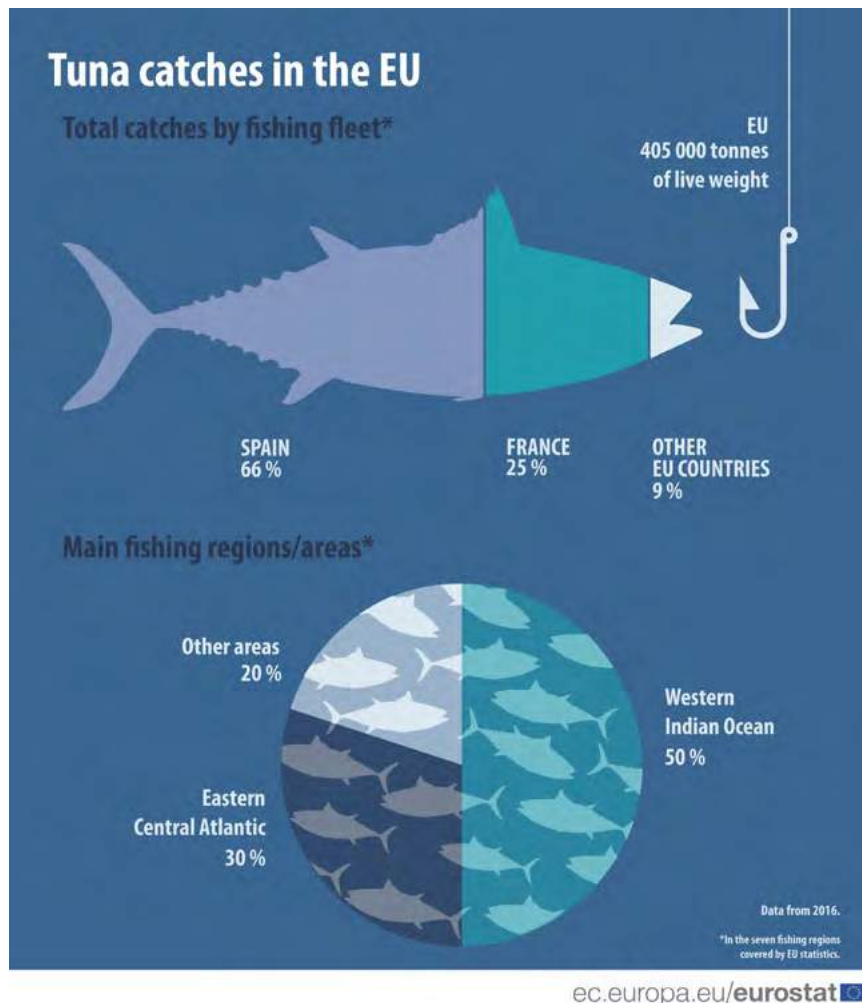
From Africa, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania – all in East Africa - were projected to be in the “PC 16”, although on current form it looks like that mix of countries could change. Looking to the years ahead, the region will likely be an important manufacturing hub and precious cog in the global supply chain.

Thirdly, the demographic premium of the Indian Ocean Circle and concentration of global trade infrastructure there are dizzying. The countries bordering the Indian Ocean are home to over 2.5 billion people, 30% of the world’s population.

The region hosts 23 of the world’s busiest ports³. It’s projected that the region’s economy alone will account for about 22% of world GDP by 2025 and 16% of global trade⁴. And at a culinary level for Europe, quite a bit of what happens at its lunch and dinner tables starts its journey in the Indian Ocean. According to data reported in 2017, 53% of the European Union’s tuna catches happen in the western Indian Ocean (Figure 5).

The Internet Age also conspired to add a twist to the tale. It’s striking that barely 12 years ago, a map of Africa showed hardly any fibre optic network linking to it. That started to change very fast after SEACOM launched Africa’s first broadband submarine cable system along the continent’s eastern and southern coasts in 2009.

FIGURE 5.



3. "Can Indian Ocean region power global growth?" <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/45UFVgOHcXYfK36vALLrCN/Can-Indian-Ocean-regionpower-globalgrowth.html>

4. "Can Indian Ocean region power global growth?" <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/45UFVgOHcXYfK36vALLrCN/Can-Indian-Ocean-regionpower-globalgrowth.html>

Today, the African Undersea Cables network (Figure 6) is virtually unrecognisable and the integration with the wider global broadband submarine cables infrastructure (Figure 7) welds it to the rest of the world like Siamese twins.

FIGURE 6.

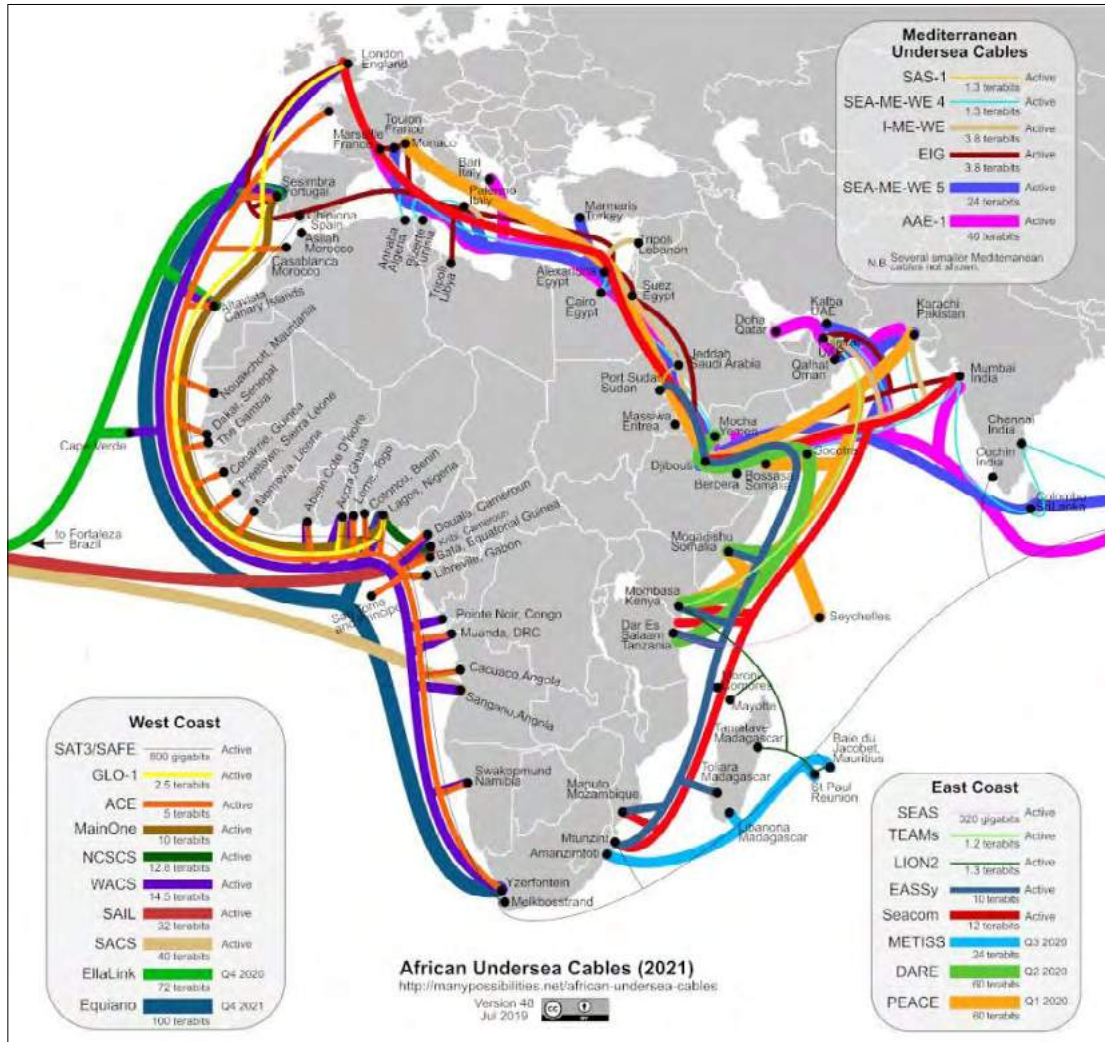
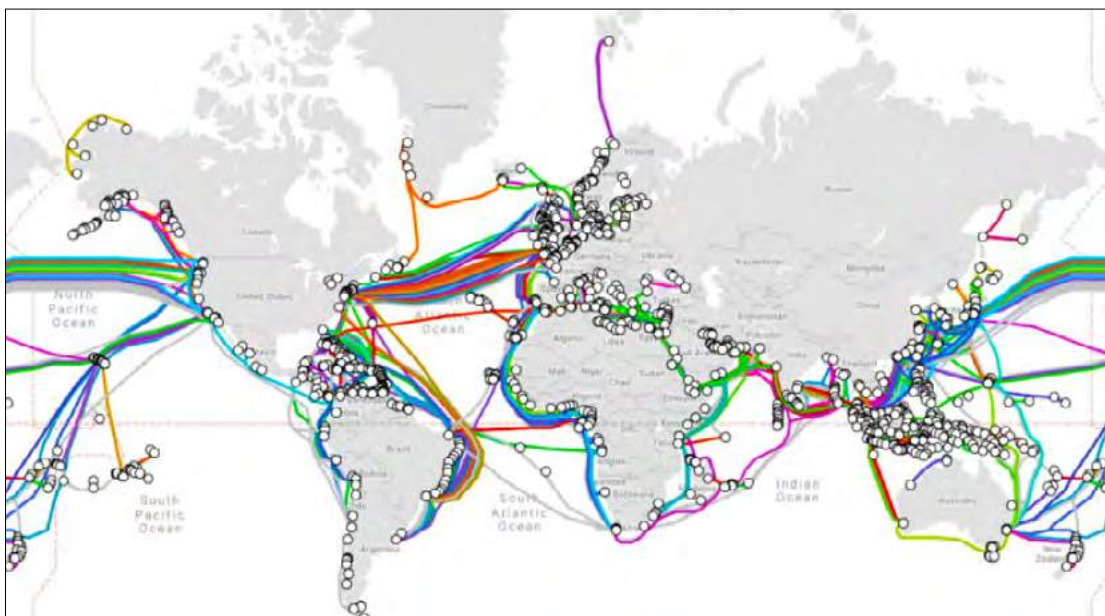


FIGURE 7.

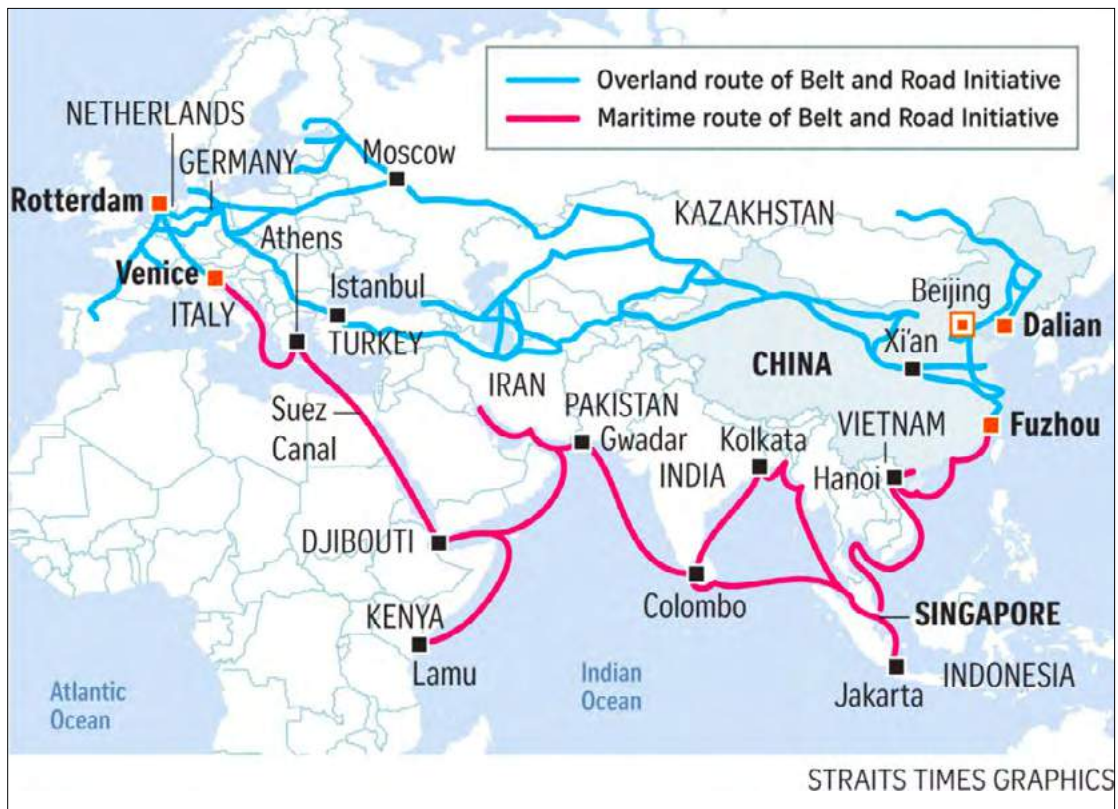


Asphalt, railways, ports, airports, cables, and wires can sometimes remake relations between nations and continents. The infrastructure of the World Wide Web has done the same with Africa, as a link between the Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean sphere, in ways that are not focused on much in geopolitical discourse, or have been fully appreciated yet. With it have come responsibilities for Africa to be a steward of these goods.

The world (or at least the men and women who make the hard decisions about national security and economic decisions that are too uncomfortable for most people) have responded the only way it has done since time immemorial to the concentration of such vast geopolitical assets and economic in the Indian Ocean Circle; it has moved in to exploit them for profit and to capitalise on them for their greater national security.

A prime example is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Figure 8), a global development strategy adopted by the Beijing government in 2013 involving infrastructure development and investments in 152 countries and international organisations in Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas⁵, and that aims to make some rich pickings in the Indian Ocean Circle, among others⁶.

FIGURE 8.



With a planned completion in 2049, it's projected to cost US\$4–8 trillion, servicing over 62% of the world's population (Figure 9).

5. Formerly known as One Belt One Road (OBOR), short in Chinese for the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belt_and_Road_Initiative

6. How will the Belt and Road Initiative advance China's interests? <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-belt-and-road-initiative/>

FIGURE 9.



If one zooms in, and looks at the Swahiliphone Zone in Africa in this wonderful 2018 map of Chinese projects in the world (Figure 10) by Soren Patterson, at AidData at the College of William a Mary⁷ (the blue circles pinpoint the location of thousands of Chinese-funded projects, and largest circles represent projects in the multibillion-dollar range), and what has been described as “China’s digital silk road in Africa”⁸, (Figure 11) it leads to some of the most messy and controversial realities of geopolitics. When you have so much invested in a place, or if so much is at stake for a country, it’s not long before it sends tanks and soldiers in to secure it, and interferes in a host nation’s politics to get the most favourable policies for itself.

FIGURE 10.



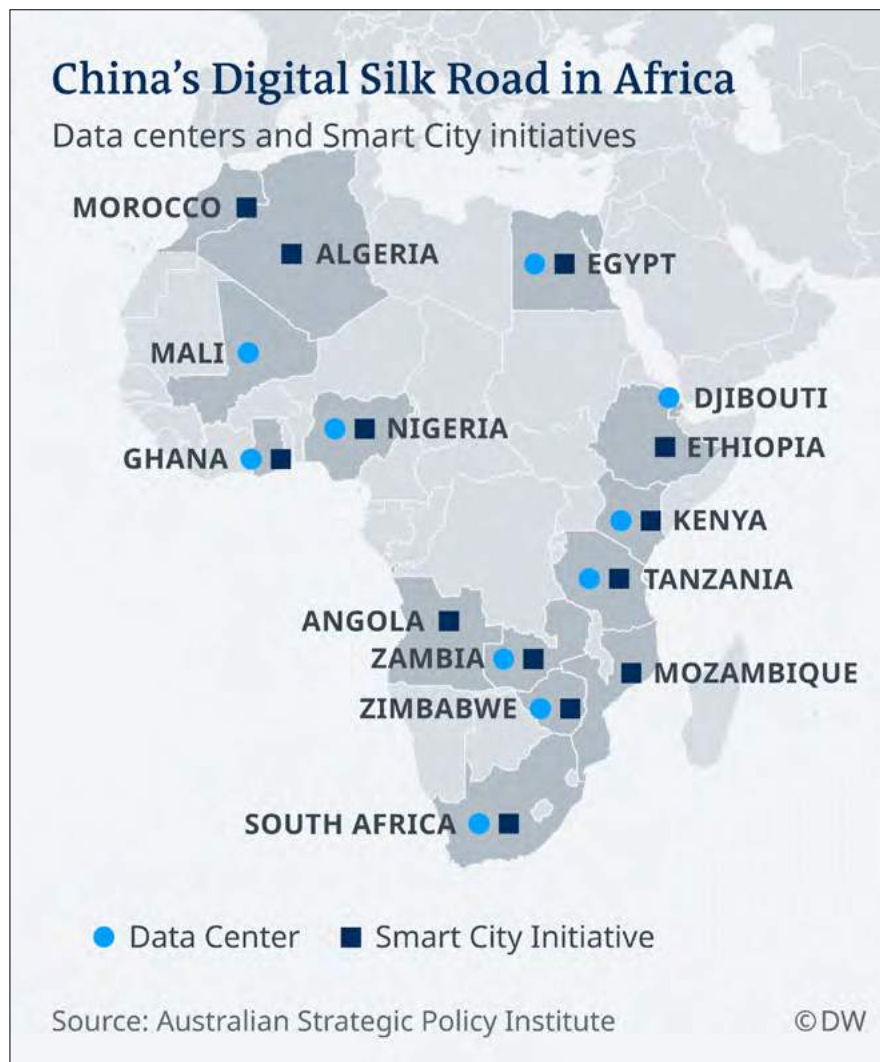
(Yellow circle added for emphasis)

7. "Mapping China's Global Development Footprint" <https://www.aiddata.org/china-project-locations>

8. "Investing in Africa's tech infrastructure. Has China won already?" <https://amp.dw.com/en/investing-in-africas-tech-infrastructure-has-china-won-already/a-48540426>

FIGURE 11.

It would be naïve, and profoundly ahistorical for Africa to think this wouldn't happen – especially when these internationally-funded goods are imperiled by local actors.



Somalia Pirates and Patriots

At the southern entrance of the Bab-el-Mandeb chokepoint along which 3 million barrels of oil are shipped a day, along the Somali coast from about 2001 piracy took hold.

Now, there's a view that holds that Somali pirates were great patriots, who took to the waters initially to push back – or at least shake down - the illegal fishing vessels they saw in the distance, as their broken country, without a government for years, had no authority to police them. There were also allegations of nuclear waste dumping⁹.

In any event, at the height of the Somali piracy, the "Oceans Beyond Piracy" project by The One Earth Future Foundation in Colorado, reported that in 2011 that the total cost of Somali piracy was estimated to reach \$6.6 - 6.9 billion¹⁰. In 2010 there were 15 vessels and 326 sailors being held by Somali pirates¹¹.

Eastern Africa felt the heat in several direct ways. The East African Marine Cable (TEAMS) high-speed internet cable had to be shifted from the coastline for fear of pirates by an extra 200 kilometres. The Seacom cable had to be delayed¹².

As the world's big and smaller powers gathered in the Indian Ocean, assembling the largest number of navies seen anywhere in the world since the Second World War to combat Somali piracy, there was not a single African one in the lot. Partly, it was because no African country really had a navy worth putting out to the waters for such an operation.

However, inland in the belly of Somali, an African country was about to take a remarkably bold – if not insane – move. After Somalia had been embroiled in 16 years of lawless and conflict since the fall of dictator Siad Barre in 1991, the African Union (AU) took its most decisive action, creating on 19 January 2007, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

9. "Somalia: Pirates or Patriots of the Sea?"
<http://www.thepatrioticvanguard.com/somalia-pirates-or-patriots-of-the-sea>

10. "The Economic Cost of Somali Piracy 2011"
http://oceansbeyondpiracy.org/sites/default/files/economic_cost_of_piracy_2011.pdf

11. "As Patrols Increase, Somali Pirates Widen Their Reach"
<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1984473,00.html>

12. "EA has to wait longer for Seacom, Teams cables"
<https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/2560-616118-x0fv7d/index.html>

Uganda Flies into Mogadishu Hell

On 21 February 2007, the United Nations Security Council approved the mission's mandate. In March 2007, Uganda became the first country to send its troops to Somalia as the foundation for AMISOM, dispatching two troop carriers into the capital Mogadishu, that was controlled by militants.

Flying virtually blind into Aden Adde International Airport, it was a classic audacious case of Napoleon Bonaparte's famous battle plan: "First we show up, then we see what happens."

One of the planes was shot as it landed, sending it crashing. Miraculously, there were no deaths. Shaken and bruised, the Ugandan soldiers disembarked. The second plane landed unscathed. They battled to secure the airport, and the areas around for five months in a lonely and bitter urban war against mostly Al-Shabaab militants. In August of 2007, they were joined by Burundian troops.

It would take another five years, until April 2012 to be precise, for the two AMISOM contingents to claim some kind victory over Al-Shabaab in Mogadishu.



A Ugandan soldier serving with AMISOM mans the frontline in Maslah Town, on the northern city limit of Mogadishu on April 30, 2012. (Photo/Stuart Price/UN/cc Flickr).

On a first visit to Mogadishu in 2012, the wreckage of the downed Ugandan troop carrier lay by the runway at the Mogadishu airport as a reminder. The battle for Mogadishu had been furious; the whole city was scarred and looked like a giant lunar surface. Though figures weren't available then, sources spoke of "nearly 1,000" AMISOM soldiers killed, as well several thousand of Al-Shabaab fighters. For weeks during the fight for Mogadishu, the two sides' frontlines were barely 100 metres apart, and days of fighting would yield only a metre in won territory.

The Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) has fought or had its nose in more frontlines than any other African army – Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, (South) Sudan. It says something that its AMISOM contingent had a grudging respect for Al-Shabaab, with troops saying they were more indefatigable than most adversaries they had ever tangled with.

The 2010 World Cup South Africa

The treasure and blood weren't in vain. Uganda's brazen plunge into Somalia in the end supplied one of the biggest geopolitical goods to the world in that time, creating the ripple effects that led to the containment (not defeat) of extremist violent groups in Somalia, and stopping the pirates from disrupting the maritime economy on the west side of the Indian Ocean.

It had far reaching effects on Africa's trajectory in the global digital economy, and the World Cup 2010 that was held in South Africa, the first time the tournament was played on African soil.



South Africa fans celebrate at the first match of the Fifa 2010 World Cup - Mexico vs. South Africa - in Soccer City, Johannesburg. (Photo/ Celso Flores/cc Flickr).

One of the leading drivers of fibre optic investment in Africa was that 2010 World Cup. Without stabilisation in the west Indian Ocean lanes where the broadband cables were laid, of which as indicated earlier the disruption of the militants' logistics core in Mogadishu and its financial networks was key, the story, especially the financial cost, might have been very different.

Somalia, itself, though remained just one piece of a much bigger geopolitical puzzle. The fact that 80% of the world's maritime oil trade flows through the Indian Ocean, the rise of the Indian Ocean rim as a prime global economic zone, fishing, the demographic explosion, and the spillover of the Sunni and Shiite Middle East rivalries into the Horn of Africa and Gulf of Aden, inevitably led to the proliferation of military bases in the region.

Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, with a population of less than million - the smallest on mainland Africa - bounded by Eritrea to the north, Ethiopia to the west and southwest, and Somalia to the south, situated on the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and with deep water ports, ticked all the strategic boxes and soon became a foreign military base for Mecca. Today, the country has the most foreign military bases in the world¹³.

13. "This Tiny Country Has the Most Foreign Military Bases"
<https://theculturetrip.com/africa/djibouti/articles/why-does-djibouti-have-the-most-foreign-military-bases/>

In 2001, the US established its first permanent military base in Africa at Camp Lemonnier, a former military base for the French foreign Legion that it leased from Djibouti; the power race had begun in earnest. Today, in addition to the USA, China, France, Italy, Japan, Saudi Arabia, all have bases in Djibouti, with some of them hosting other nations¹⁴. India too could soon be up and running.

Beyond Djibouti, concentration of foreign military bases along the stretch of the Horn of Africa is equally striking, with Russia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates making an entrance (Figure 12).

FIGURE 12.



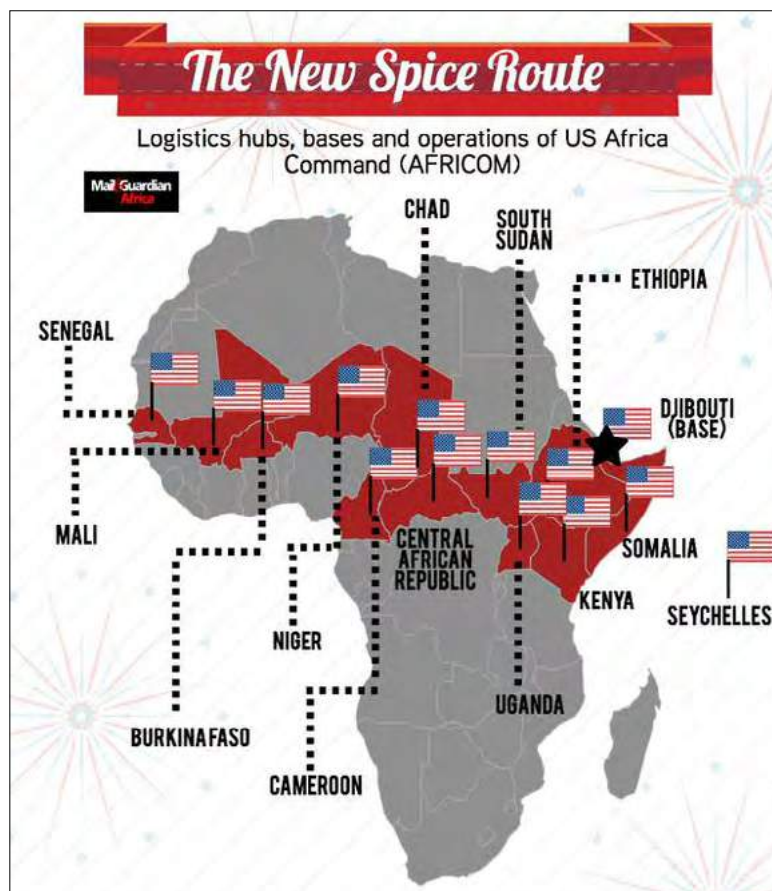
This concentration of permanent and or significant foreign military bases on the eastern side of Africa, remarkable as it is, however only tells part of the geopolitical drama playing out in Africa. Many of the rest of the acts radiate from there, too.

14. "Djibouti, Foreign Military Bases on the Horn of Africa: Who's There? What Are They Up To?" <http://defaakto.com/2019/01/02/djibouti-foreign-military-bases-on-the-horn-of-africa-who-is-there-what-are-they-up-to/>

Africa's Big Hippo Trench

In 2015, while I was editor at Johannesburg-based Mail & Guardian's pan-African Mail & Guardian Africa outfit in Nairobi, we did an infographic mapping of the military presence (both light and heavy) of the US across the continent at that point. The picture that emerged was intriguing – they cut right across the continent through central Africa and the Sahel line, from east to west. We called it the “Hippo Trench” (Figure 13), because they reminded us of the trenches some resorts inside wildlife conservancies in Kenya dig, to prevent hippos – considered deadly - from wandering into the tented areas or hotels. Most other animals will jump over them, not the hippos.

FIGURE 13.



Why the hippo trench? one would ask. About 25 years ago, when nasty folks like Osama bin Laden were beginning to come into the African security frame, there was a dodgy idea beloved by African and western securocrats to create a US-supervised coalition of “frontline states” to prevent Islamic extremism spreading from the north southwards into the rest of Africa. A hippo trench would have been the barrier. Fortunately, the idea fell out of fashion, as both the bloody manifestation of violent extremism and its understanding defied that simplistic geographic picture and line in the desert.

Furthermore, taking a broader continental view, there are many more guests to the geopolitical party, some no longer associated with the current imperial power play in Africa, though they might have been colonial powers. In common though, of the 13 countries with a known military presence in Africa (Figure 14 & 15), most are concentrated along the hippo trench.

FIGURE 14.

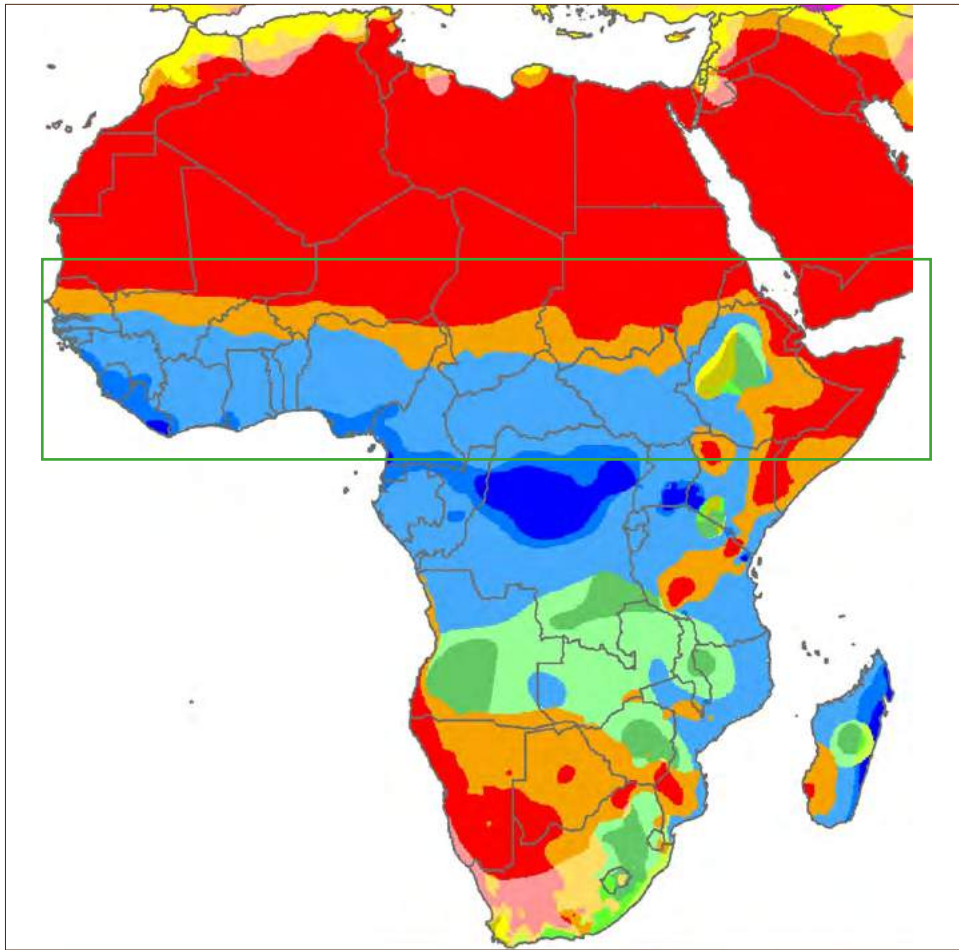


(Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, SA)

FIGURE 15.

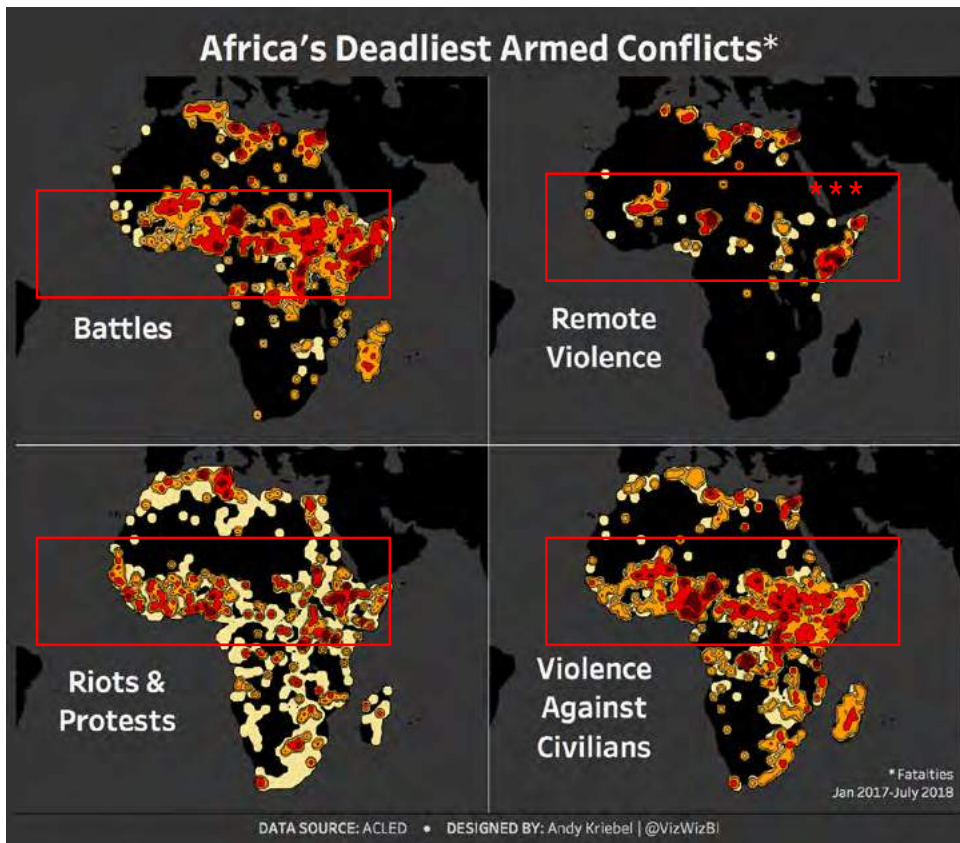


FIGURE 16.



Something more is going on here. For example, the hippo trench loosely is also Africa's climate frontline (Figure 16). Red areas are desert areas and low on water, and the dividing belt is the Sahel.

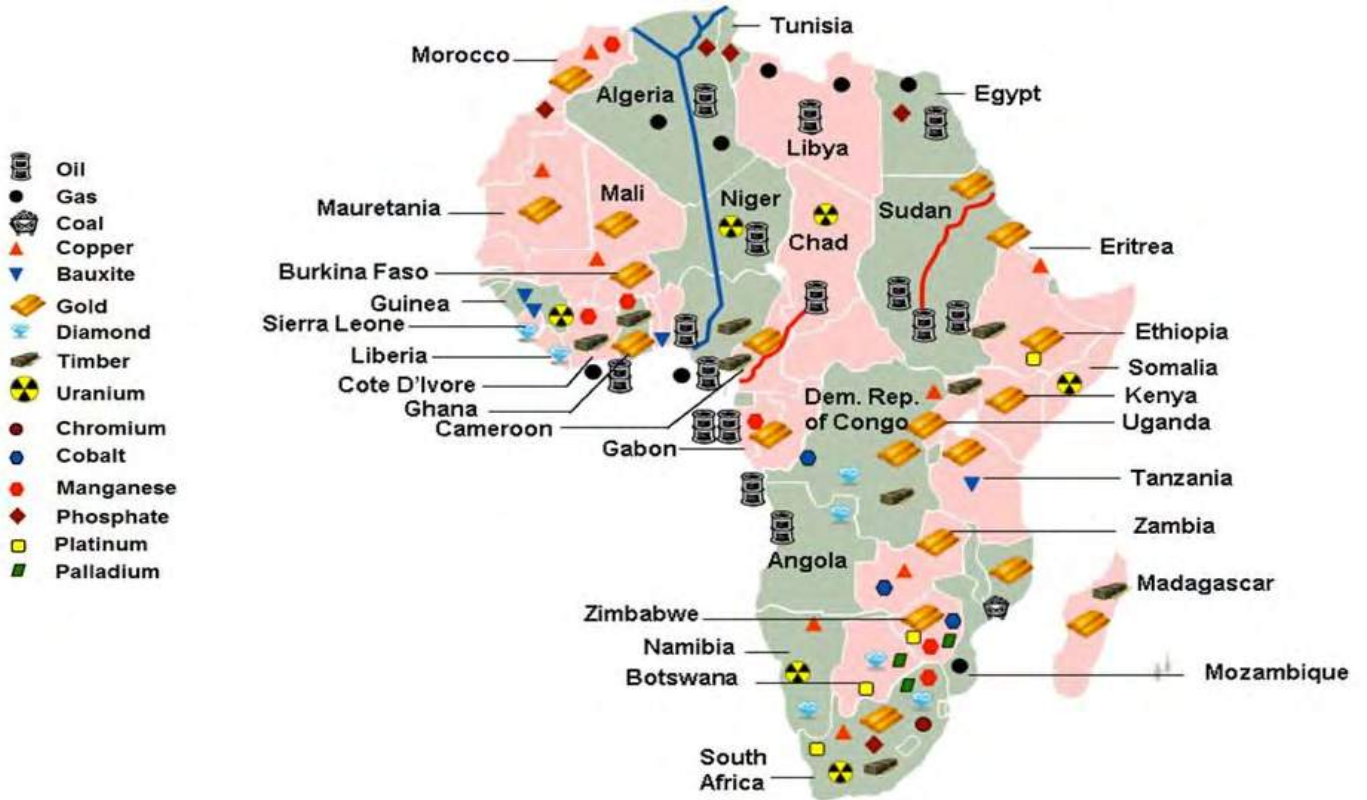
FIGURE 17.



If you slice it another way, the majority of Africa's most recent or on-going deadliest armed conflicts (Figure 17) are also happening along the hippo trench.

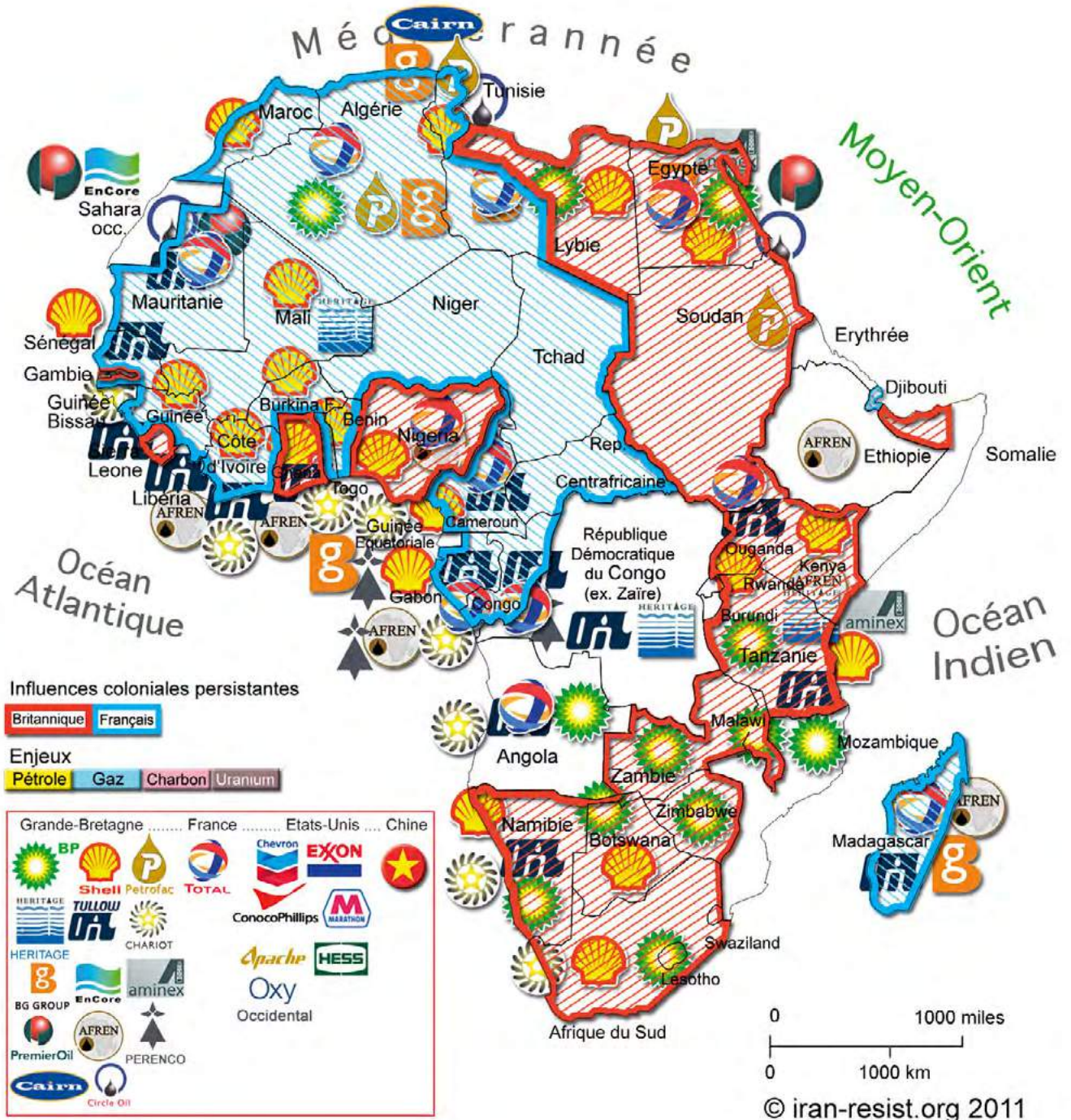
There is a strong tendency in geopolitical thinking about Africa to argue that all of the flashpoints and its deadly political contestations are over resources. There is definitely some merit to it, but a graphic of the key natural resources on the continent (Figure 18), shows that they don't rhyme with the concentration of foreign military or the deadliest conflicts in Africa.

FIGURE 18.



Likewise, if we look at the locations of, especially, the oil multinationals (Figure 19), usually linked to dirty politics, and take them as a measure of how much finance capital tilts African geopolitics one way or the other, the conflicts, again, don't neatly fit together with that.

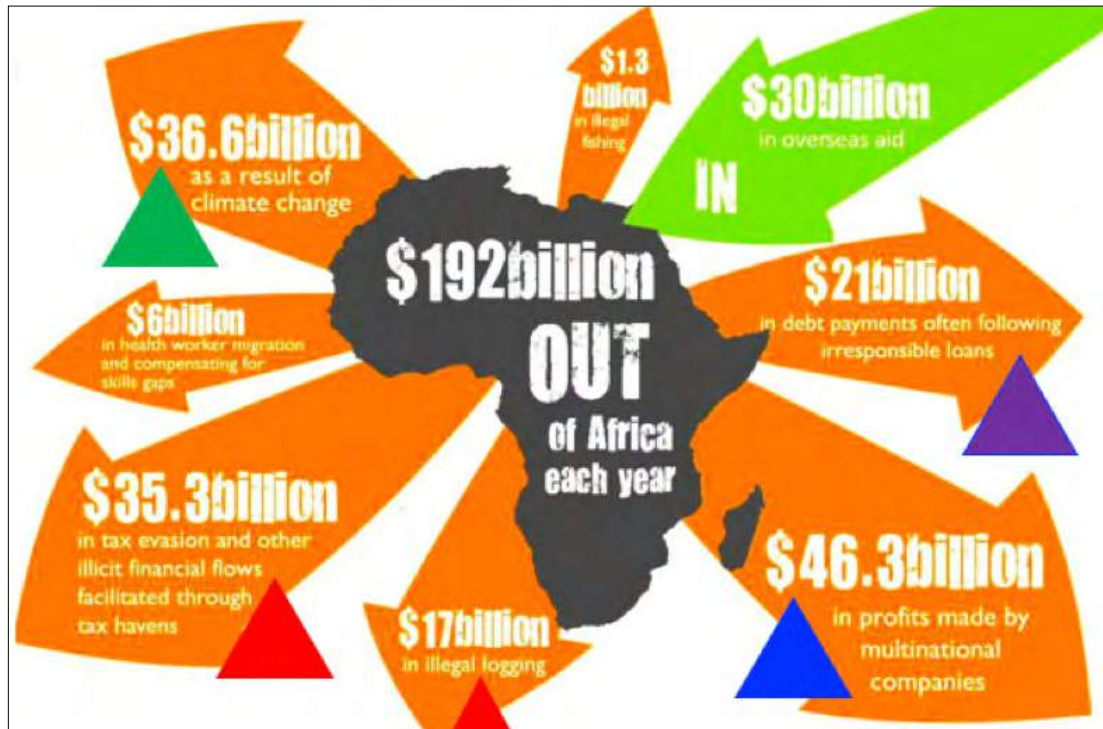
FIGURE 19.



(Oil resources in Africa by corporate ownership)

Given this, another area to look for leads explain some of the sharp edge geopolitical contests in Africa, then, could be to proxy data like the amount of illicit financial flows from the continent (Figure 20). Africa loses \$192 billion annually to the same countries that provide it aid¹⁵.

FIGURE 20.



A popular view has it that foreign actors cynically foment conflict, and help maintain despotic regimes on the continent, to protect these kinds of inequities. It should however be noted that the leading source of those outflows, \$46.3 billion, are profits made by multinational companies, which is not necessarily criminal.

The second largest cost, \$36.6 billion, is an interesting one – it is a result of climate change. The third highest, \$35.3 billion, is the patently criminal one; tax evasion.

15. "Honest accounts? The true story of Africa's billion dollar losses". <https://eurodad.org/files/pdf/53d0e6700214d.pdf>

However, if one then looks deeper at the top 10 countries by cumulative illicit financial flows (Figure 21), only two countries – Sudan and Ethiopia – are in our hippo trench/Sahel conflict zone. And even then, they are in the lower bottom of the list.

FIGURE 21.

Top 10 African countries by cumulative illicit financial flows, 1970–2008		
Country	Cumulative IFFs (1970–2008) US\$ Billion	Share in Africa's Total IFFs
Nigeria	217.7	30.5%
Egypt	105.2	14.7%
South Africa	81.8	11.4%
Morocco	33.9	4.7%
Angola	29.5	4.1%
Algeria	26.1	3.7%
Côte d'Ivoire	21.6	3.0%
Sudan	16.6	2.3%
Ethiopia	16.5	2.3%
Congo, Republic of	16.2	2.3%

Source: Based on Kar and Cartwright-Smith (2010).

Going by the above, while the conventional explanations for the motivations for the range of geopolitical postures and actions that litter the African landscape offer a good flavour of what the world wants from the continent, they are not sufficient explanation for, to borrow from Mbeki again, how the powerful “act out the foolish deeds of the theatre of the day.”

Porous Borders, Weak States

It's necessary, therefore, to look to a wider horizon. There, one will see that there are structural problems in African governance, and limited abilities of states to control their territories that incentivise both foreign and local actors to assume specific geopolitical postures.

For example, only 30% of Africa's 83,000 kilometres of land borders is properly demarcated¹⁶. Of Africa's total coastline length of 30,500 kilometres, it is estimated almost 65% (19,285 km) of it remains unpatrolled or patrolled but not regularly.

The 10 African countries that had or have instability and ongoing insurgency have to guard borders of about 42,280 kilometres (Figure 22) – over 50% of Africa's land borders – and have mostly done an underwhelming job of it.

FIGURE 22.

		Length (KM)
1.	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	10481
2.	Somalia	7015
3.	Cameroon	5018
4.	South Sudan	4997
5.	Libya	4349
6.	Nigeria	4047
7.	Mali	2237
8.	Sudan	1937
9.	Burundi	1140
10.	Central African Republic (CAR)	1055
	TOTAL	42,276

Apart from weak state and institutional capabilities, they have different geographical features that add to the difficulty of control, allowing arms -and goods that fund extremist violent groups - to move more easily. That in turn opens a tempting door to nations that are affected to intervene.

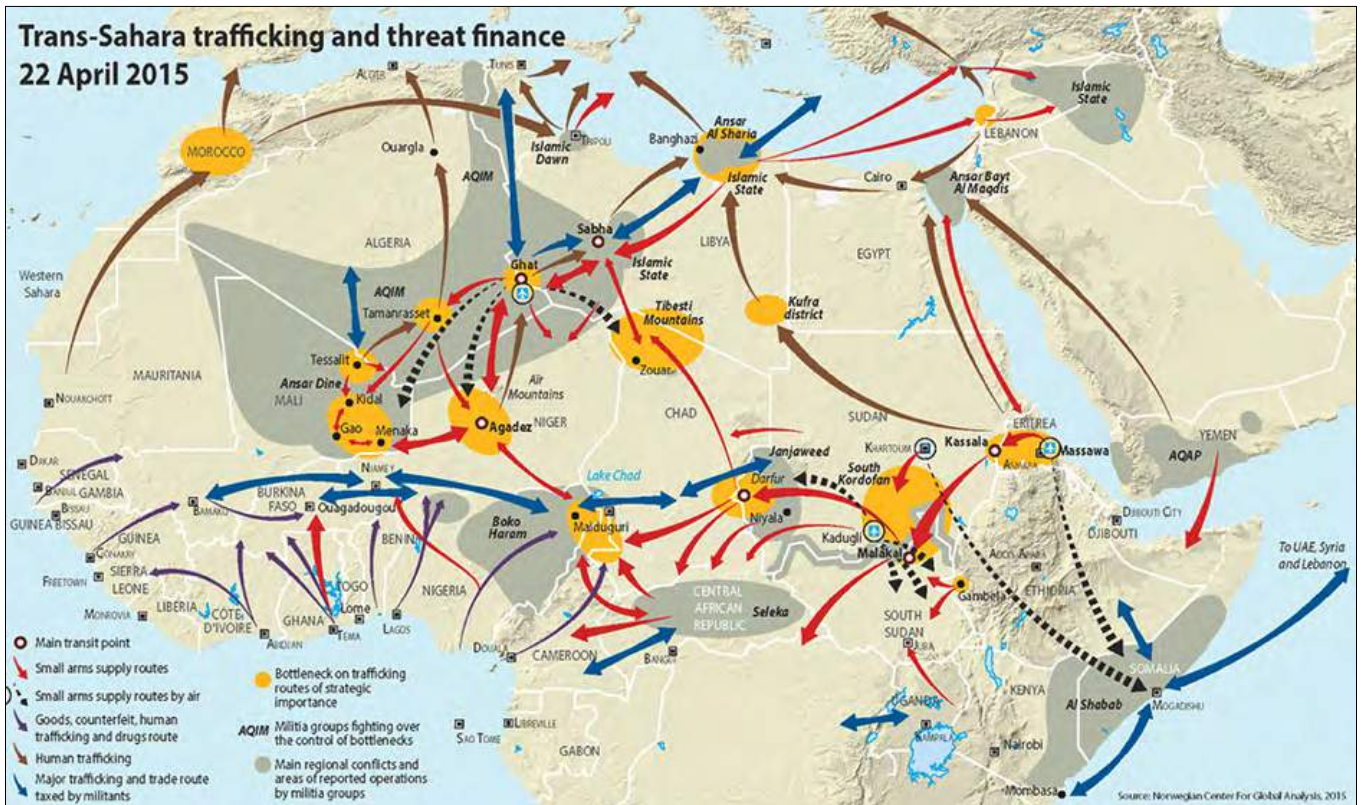
In just one instance, out of US\$2.1 billion worth of cocaine flowing through West Africa each year, only \$40 million remains in the region, mostly invested in the drug's protection and transit. Most of these drugs are destined for Europe.

We begin here to see a fit with the hippo trench, Africa's geopolitical hot zone, which has an array of foreign military players and a complex brew of African and transnational extremist violent groups, and the risk from the continent's "ungoverned spaces"¹⁷ (Figure 23).

16. "Why Africa's borders are a mess"
<https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2016/11/17/why-africas-borders-are-a-mess>

17. "Winning hearts and minds in ungoverned spaces"
<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2017/winning-hearts-and-minds-in-ungoverned-spaces.html>

FIGURE 23.

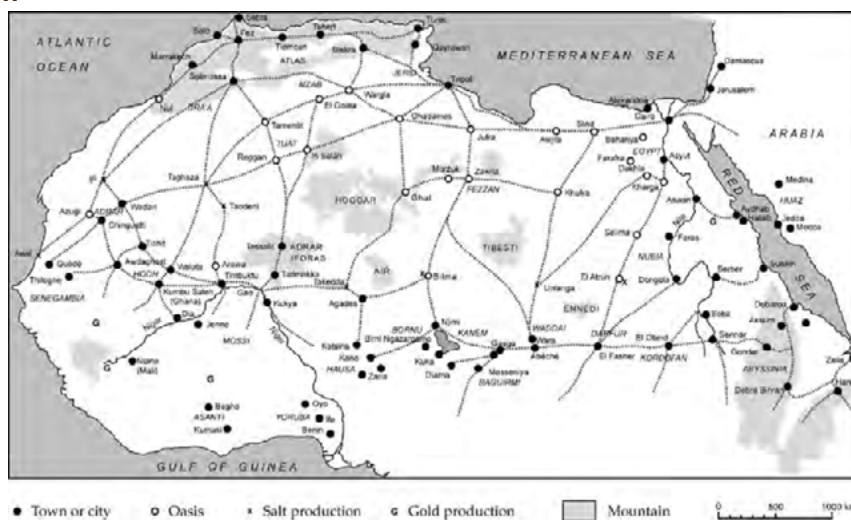


While the modern African states in the Sahel, in the Horn, and other parts struggle to dominate their territories, the bad guys have a lot going for them, including historical knowledge of the ancient Trans-Saharan trade.

The Trans-Sahara trade was carried out across the Sahara reaching sub-Saharan Africa from the North African coast, Europe, to the Levant. While existing from prehistoric times, the peak of trade extended from the 8th century until the early 17th century¹⁸.

The historical trans-Saharan trade network as mapped by Carina Ross (Figure 24), has an uncanny resemblance to the current Trans-Sahara trafficking and threat finance map in Figure 23.

FIGURE 24.



In summary then, Africa is hugely important for global security, economic prosperity, and resources. Where it fails to secure and supply those for the world, the world will come and take care of them for itself. It is naïve to expect or hope that those with the power and pockets to do so won't.

18. "Trans-Saharan trade" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-Saharan_trade

Environmental Security As Geopolitical Asset

But it would be an error to see Africa as not supplying global security. Beyond what happened in Somalia as noted earlier, the “Hippo Trench” and its neighbourhood is the site of some of the most exciting globally significant initiatives, and Africa’s unsung major contribution to global environmental security; the Great Green Wall of Africa (Figure 25). It is a big deal.

FIGURE 25.



The Great Green Wall has, deservedly, been described as “a symbol of hope in the face of one of the biggest challenges of our time – desertification”¹⁹.

When completed, it will be 8,000 kilometres of natural wonder stretching across the entire width of Africa: By 2030, the goal is to restore 100 million hectares of currently degraded land; sequester 250 million tons of carbon; create 10 million green jobs; grow economic opportunities for the world’s youngest population; and grow food security for millions.

Since its launch in 2007, in a continent where too often few walk the talk, progress has been quite impressive²⁰:

- Ethiopia: Over 15 million hectares of degraded land restored, and soon 4 billion trees will be planted.
- Senegal: 11.4 million trees planted, 25,000 hectares of degraded land restored
- Nigeria, where nothing seems to ever get done: 5 million hectares of degraded land restored and 20,000 jobs created.
- Sudan: 2,000 hectares of land restored
- In Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger: about 120 communities involved, a green belt created over more than 2,500 hectares of degraded and drylands, more than two million seeds and seedlings planted from fifty native species of trees.

It is reason to feel proud, and a reminder that in the face of overwhelming geopolitical issues battering the continent, Africa is not as helpless as it might sometimes seem.

19. “The Great Green Wall Initiative” <https://www.unccd.int/actions/great-green-wall-initiative>

20. “The Great Green Wall Initiative” <https://www.unccd.int/actions/great-green-wall-initiative>

The Millennials' Slice of the Cake

Finally, we have to be mindful that this paper was presented to an audience mainly comprised of millennials, a largely university-age audience where the average age is possibly 20. Though Makerere University has a diverse body of students from Africa, we are still in Uganda, one of the world's youngest countries with 47.41% of the population under 15 years.

The bigger issue, I think, is what do you do with all this information? You cannot become geopolitical warriors overnight or even next year.

There are, however, selfish reasons why a university student should care.

By 2020, depending on how you slice it, it's estimated the global market for geopolitical risk analysis and work will vary from a low of \$17 billion, to a mouthwatering \$120 billion. You can get in on that, if you get to master how the field works and the forces that shape geopolitics.

But, mostly the audience when this paper was presented was the gaming and Netflix generation. One of the richest sources for movie story-telling is geopolitics, and a particular recommendation is the wildly successful Chinese film *Wolf Warrior 2*.

The film is a sequel to 2015's *Wolf Warrior*, and was released in China on 27 July 2017. It tells the story of a maverick former Chinese soldier, Leng Feng who takes on special missions around the world. In *Wolf Warrior 2* he finds himself in an African country protecting medical aid workers from local rebels and vicious arms dealers. If you want to understand where China's real geopolitical mind is on Africa, there's probably no better lesson than watching *Wolf Warrior 2*.

The film broke numerous box office records in China, including the biggest single-day gross for a Chinese film. It also became the fastest film to surpass US\$500 million and the first film to gross more than US\$600 million at the Chinese box office, going on to a total domestic gross of US\$874 million²¹.

In summary, geopolitics has been, and continues to be, a goldmine for TV series and blockbusters, from the Bourne films, to James Bond (*Quantum of Solace* to name one), to *Timbuktu*, and *Eye in the Sky*, the list is long.

In the video games market, which is projected to be a \$300 billion industry by 2025, we are seeing a growing lucrative segment drawing on geopolitics, with games like "Civilization" and "Tropico", among others.

21. "Wold Warror 2" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolf_Warrior_2

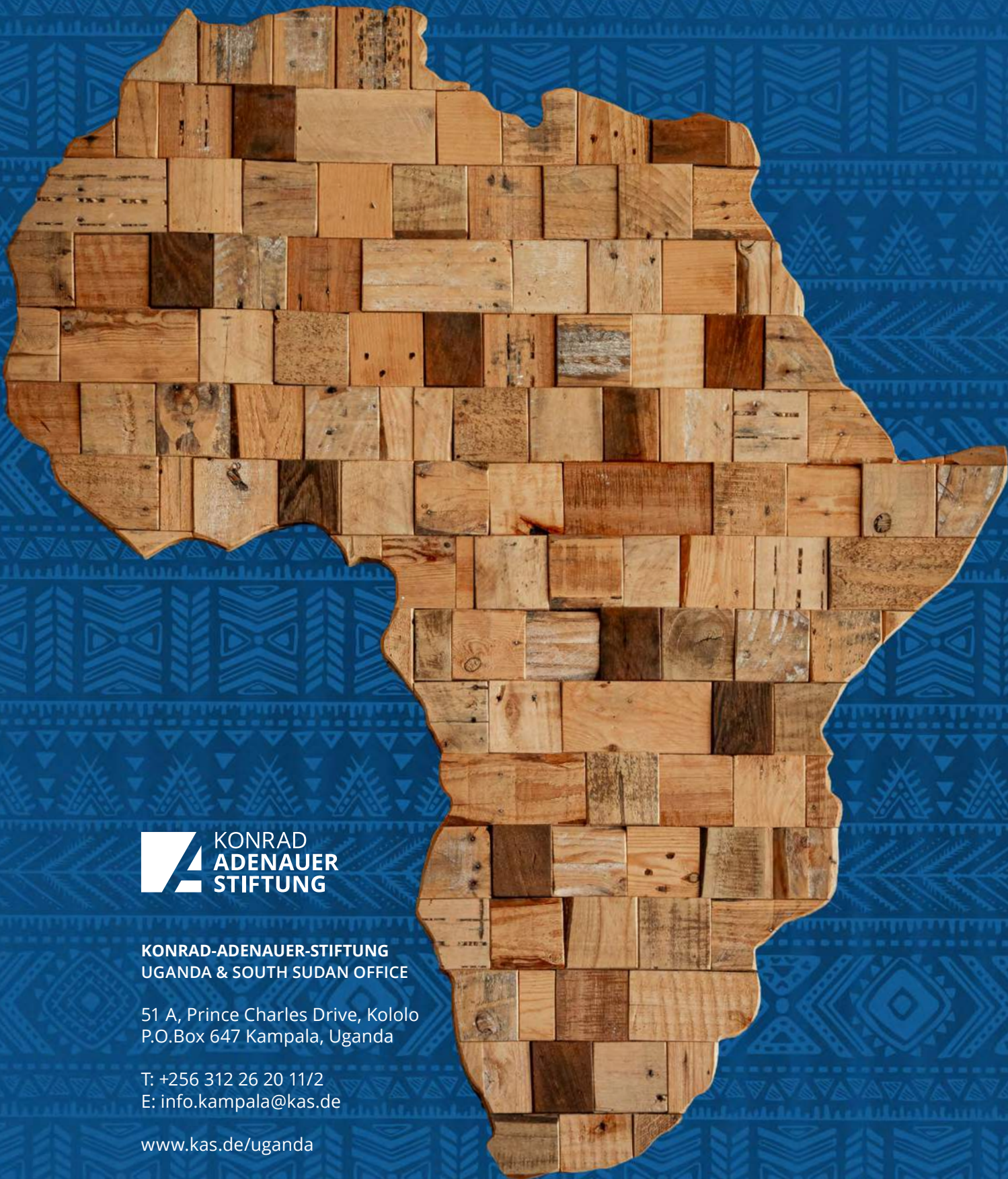


Today you might not be able to save Africa, or indeed the world, from those with mighty armies - if you think they are preying upon its people and resources, interfering with its elections, or making war for profit.

But you would do well to understand how global power plays out, and make some money writing powerful stories and coding video games about it, as you wait to grow up and do something about it.

For the films and video games are in themselves powerful education tools about the world today.

And if you do nothing at all, remember the reggae will still not stop playing.



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