

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

SECRETARY TILLERSON'S MARCH 2018 TRIP TO AFRICA

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING  
706 Duke Street, Suite 100  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

PARTICIPANTS:

CHRISTINA GOLUBSKI  
Assistant Director, Africa Growth Initiative  
Brookings Institution

BRAHIMA S. COULIBALY  
Senior Fellow & Director, Africa Growth  
Initiative  
Brookings Institution

VANDA FELBAB-BROWN  
Senior Fellow, Center for 21st Century Security  
and Intelligence, Foreign Policy  
Brookings Institution

WITNEY SCHNEIDMAN  
Nonresident Fellow, Africa Growth Initiative  
Brookings Institution

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. GOLUBSKI: Thank you again for joining us for this conversation on Secretary Tillerson's upcoming trip to Africa. Today we are joined by Dr. Coulibaly, Brahim Coulibaly. He is the Senior Fellow and Director of the Africa Growth Initiative here at Brookings. We also have Vanda Felbab-Brown. She's a Senior Fellow at the Center for 21st Century Security Intelligence in the Foreign Policy program here at Brookings. And we have Witney Schneidman, a Nonresident Fellow with the Africa Growth Initiative.

So, we're going to get started in just a moment. If all the reporters could just go around and tell me your name and your affiliation that'd be great.

MR. DEMONDU: Hello. My name is Pediran Demondu from the BBC Nairobi.

MR. AKERS: My name's John Akers for the Financial Times. I'm also in Nairobi.

MR. GRAMMAR: Robby Grammar from Foreign Policy, based in D.C.

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MS. GOLUBSKI: All right. Thank you, everyone. Just a reminder as we get started. This entire conversation is on the record, so feel free to attribute your quotes. I'm also going to have a transcript available after the call, and I'll make sure to email it out to everybody. And when you are not speaking I ask that you please have your phone on mute. And for everybody please once you begin speaking just identify yourself.

So, I thought we'll start with Witney.

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: Okay. Thanks, Christina. I guess I'll just give my thoughts on the overview. I think this trip seems to be pretty much a listening tour by Secretary Tillerson. He's going to, I think as you all know, to Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria. And, you know, the themes of security clearly are paramount, questions of democratic governments have to be very high on the agenda, certainly in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria. But I know that trade and investment are also issues at the top of Secretary Tillerson's mind.

I guess from my perspective it seems that there's no evident deliverables, and there are no initiatives that are going to be announced. So the question becomes whether or not the Trump Administration plans to follow up on any of that important programs started by previous administrations such as AGOA, such as Power Africa, such as PEPFAR, such as the Young Africa Leaders Initiative, such as Feed the Future. So I think questions will be put to Secretary Tillerson along those lines.

Clearly, there are going to be some difficult issues for the Secretary to respond to. Certainly, President Trump's alleged comment, negative comments about Africa are going to be a factor in this trip. But also, this Administration's stated intention to cut the State Department budget 30 percent. So how he's going to reconcile all of these different dynamics I think will be an interesting challenge for the secretary.

MS. GOLUBSKI: Thanks, Witney. Dr.

Coulibaly, do you want to go ahead and give some

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remarks?

DR. COULIBALY: Yes, sure. Thanks, Christina. So I do think that this trip is actually a quite welcome development. Because if you've looked at since the Administration came into power last year the top three U.S. officials, that would be President Trump himself, Vice President Pence, and the Secretary of State they have visited other regions of the world. Africa was the exception. So I think this trip comes in to, indeed, signal that the continent remains on the radar of the agenda.

So in terms of its own symbolism I think it's important. It sends important signals, and it kind of builds off meetings they had last November with about 37 Ministers from Africa. But I think as Witney mentioned when you look at the set of countries that are being visited I think it kind of reinforces the perception that security, indeed, is the overwhelming focus. And it remains to still be seen in terms of the commercial front and the development what the agenda is from this Administration.

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And on the diplomatic front we're still waiting to see appointment of some key senior officials such as Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. And also some important and positive positions in Africa that we haven't yet seen quite filled. So in a nutshell, my observation is since the inauguration last in 2017 is on the three main pillars of the foreign relationships development diplomacy. You can call it three Ds.

We're seeing more action on the defense side, but not as much action on the other two pillars. And it's going to look like -- but I see them all as being wheels of the same vehicle and if you have one out spinning the others you don't get to accelerate the vehicle as much as you would like. So what we're hoping is that the trip will be the beginning of a process to engage the continent and to begin a dialogue about what relationship the U.S.-Africa relationship can really be. Because the continent has a lot of potential and a lot to offer and that's being recognized by Africa's other partners who are quite

aggressive in fostering their relationships. And I see the competition only getting stronger and only if the U.S. also gets a bit more proactive on all fronts. You risk falling further behind.

MS. GOLUBSKI: Thank you, Dr. Coulibaly.

Vanda?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Sure. Thank you. I want to pick up on the point about more action being on defense. That certainly indicates with the Trump Administration in Africa. It's also been the case the Trump Administration in other regions with President Trump's systematically dismissing or downgrading political action, at various points talking about that internal politics, in Africa countries themselves, across the world often embracing highly problematic authoritarian leaders, and that is very interesting in the context of the countries that he is visiting where the U.S. has some of the most visible, most immediate security interests, or that are involved in crucial regional security issues, but where just about in every other countries visited there are currently very

significant domestic political tensions.

And so what Witney said at the beginning, the Secretary might be coming there to be listening, but he is coming to countries where there is really significant political, if not outright, turmoil. Certainly, there's political conversation in which local U.S. diplomats have been seemingly involved in, and where there certainly will be expectations that the Secretary's coming in with some concrete message. Whether this is Kenya or this is Ethiopia, even in Chad and Nigeria there are also very specific political security issues.

For example, with respect to Chad, a crucial country in the anti Boko Haram G-5 space, yet the country is essentially bankrupt in supporting financially its military forces. So even though we don't have a visible political crisis there, again, we have some real difficult political issues surrounding the security deployments. And so these countries will be looking for a message. They will be looking for initiatives, and the Secretary -- if the Secretary's

position ends up being merely listening, wise as this is, this sometimes for the great power to have the capacity to do that the timing of it might be quite awkward as real difficult political issues are being sorted out, and there are very immediate, highly visible security issues or political crisis. You know, one of the security issues is, of course, Nigeria. The result with the new kidnapping and attack on the IDP camp and then surrounding pressure on Buhari not to run.

MS. GOLUBSKI: All right. Thank you, Vanda. I guess we'll open up for some questions. Just a reminder, please identify yourself before speaking.

Speaker: My name is [inaudible] from the BBC. Witney was just talking about this relationship and it's likely they might speak about democratic governance, and I'd just like to know your thoughts on Kenya's situation right now in light of the recent Media shutdown, in the wake of the recent happenings in the country. The alleged police killings of (inaudible) of the human rights organizations. And,

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also, the perceived defiance of court orders by the state. At the Brookings Institution what do you think of the current situation of democratic government in Kenya, and what do we expect Rex Tillerson to tell President Kenyatta?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I can start. This is Vanda again, and I want to just make sure that this is my opinion, not Brookings. Brookings doesn't have an institutional opinion. So my take is that the democracy is under very serious pressure in Kenya right now. From two sources, both a deeper source of elections continually producing highly polarizing results that only a part of the country sees as legitimate and acceptable, and where a substantial minority or close to half of the country has persuaded the democracy is not delivering what it should be delivering to them. So that's the sort of deeper crisis.

The immediate crisis is, of course, the response of the Kenyatta government to the Odinga maneuvers, including extremely heavy-handed measures,

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and I would say, perhaps, the (inaudible) the situation that we are seeing some of the most essential onslaught on democratic principles in Kenya in two decades. Not just the shutdown of the media, not just the attacks on human rights groups, but it's true that you pointed out systematic harassment of political opposition and visible, unaccountable impunity and defiance of the government of the judiciary.

So after the sentiment that the new Constitution had really changed the balance of power between the various branches; that it empowered the judiciary, in particular. So I think it's a very -- there are scores of deeper and immediate very problematic developments, and certainly the Secretary should very strongly speak against them.

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: And this is Witney just responding in my individual capacity. I mean, I don't think we can emphasize the importance of Kenya to the United States. Clearly, it's one of the U.S.'s strongest allies in the region, you know, from a

security point of view, from a trade and investment point of view. And just given the length of interaction between the U.S. and Kenya that goes back to independence.

And I think Secretary Tillerson has quite a challenge on his hands to sort of engage with the government in a serious way to encourage them to not overreact. As Vanda said, you know, the overreaction to Odinga's self-inauguration was really sort of a blow to the credibility of the government. Certainly taking the TV stations off the air as well.

Similarly, with Odinga he's got to be seen - - he's got to be engaged in such a way that he starts working to develop the democratic fabric of that society. I think that has to be one of the top priority issues that Secretary Tillerson has to engage when he's in the country.

SPEAKER: Yes, thank you.

MR. GRAMER: Hi. This is Robbie Grammar from foreign policy. Two quick questions. The first, do you think it's weird that there are no clear

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deliverables that the State Department has announced in the run up to Tillerson's trip or is it normal for a Secretary of State to do just the listening tour like this?

And then the second one is, you know, Ethiopia's in the midst of this, you know, severe political crisis right now and Tillerson's about to visit it. I mean, what will he have to do? What type of political tightrope will he have to walk to balance that as the crisis unfolds?

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: Well, just on the deliverable for me, in my experience, it is unusual for a Secretary of State to make a trip like this and to have no deliverables, to have no initiative that they're ready to announce. Maybe they'd surprise it, but it's not -- in my talking with folks at the Administration it's not clear that they do.

And, you know, as was mentioned earlier, as Vanda mentioned, in November Secretary Tillerson had a meeting here in Washington for two days with 37 foreign ministers from African countries. So you

begin to ask, you know, okay, it's great that they're doing the consultations. They had a very substantive consultation in November. You know, he's going to do this extensive trip over the next week. You know, when do we get to see the outlines of what Trump Africa policy is? And so, you know, it may be a listening tour for him, but I think it's also a watching tour for many of us looking to see what programs and what areas this administration wants to address on the continent.

And also, to what degree will there be continuity with programs initiated by previous administrations? Democrat and republican? And to what degree will the Trump Administration offer new initiatives?

DR. COULIBALY: So just to follow up on this. And I do think it would be unfortunately, indeed, if we come out with no deliverables, but it's still yet to be seen precisely what would be accomplished. So we'll be following this closely.

The fact that he's going to Ethiopia was a

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good thing because Ethiopia's also home to two of Africa's main continental institutions, namely, the African Union, but also the UN ECA. And I think, too, that would have been a good opportunity, and if it's not on the agenda it should have been to have some serious discussions with African leaders at the African Union, for example, in terms of, what, beginning to lay out the groundwork that could inform a U.S./Africa strategy that is really fit for the 21st century.

And as you know, sometime this month the African Union they're going to sign a Continental Free Trade Agreement that is going to integrate the whole continent, you know, 1.2 billion people, combined GDP of about 3.5 trillion. We think these are all positive developments. So the continent is moving in one direction and we're just hoping the current administration is taking note, and is also engaging this continent in a direction in which it's trying to move.

The political situation in Ethiopia I think

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is going to be a very delicate one to try to maneuver around trying to balance out both the commercial interests since, you know, you may know the Ethiopia airliner bought, like, about 2 billion worth of aircraft from Boeing. But at the same time, too, making sure that the clear message is about the democratic process in government is heard. It's going to be a bit of a challenge. And then we look to see what comes out of it and what signal we can extract in terms of how the administration intends to balance its commercial interest versus its commitment to the governance and democratic processes.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Vanda again. I would add to that, Ethiopia also is an interesting test case. Not only balancing the commercial versus governance objectives, but also in terms of balancing counterterrorism versus governance objectives. It's been an uneasy challenge for the United States and many countries certainly in Africa for a long time with our counterterrorism interest with countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. Often it's not

trumping, if I may abuse that word, at least strongly competing and downgrading with our political inclusion with governance objectives.

And all too often that's been a wrong balance. All too often we have given countries too easy path on the governance issue even if they, in the long term and even medium term, seep into the counterterrorism objectives and (inaudible) and undermine, and (inaudible) the counterterrorism objectives. So when Tillerson goes to Ethiopia it's quite possible that there will not yet be a new prime minister, and even if there is a new prime minister, and even if he ends up being in Oromo that alone is not sufficient to heal the country where the ethnic exclusion and ethnic tension had been building up for a very long time, well before 2015, and where yet all too often Washington and the West judge the government as an example of effective leadership despite the exclusion of very close allies in counterterrorism objectives in the Horn and Somalia, but throughout the Horn.

And so it's very important if there is a government, even more important is that there is a prime minister that the Secretary presses for much more ethnically inclusive governance, and governance that gives great states of freedom of expression, of freedom of association, not simply along ethnic division lines.

So the larger question is it weird that the Secretary is going without very concrete issues to even ask or more importantly, to offer. I would say that, yes, this would be very weird for many in other administrations. It is not so weird for the Trump Administration. If you look at the Secretary's visit to Latin America, about three weeks ago now, the tour was in some extent trying to repair relations that even some of the closet allies became deeply concerned about comments the White House, President Trump had made. And also to change the agenda from priority and importance of U.S. interests. Often seeking commercial ones over these political issues in a way that surprise and displease the region. And,

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certainly, there was a sense, well, at best the Secretary's acting as kind of (inaudible) of very uncomfortable, very problematic statements coming out from the White House, at worse, not even accomplishing that.

So quite, I think, surprise and disappointment with the visit there. With the best that could be said, well, at least he wasn't President Trump and saying things like President Trump. So hopefully in Africa that with it they'll bring more oomph and punch towards meaning and moving them, simply trying to address problematic uncomfortable directions and statements.

MR. AGLIONBY: Hi. This is John Aglionby from the Financial Times. I was wondering if we could maybe turn the coin over, and rather than thinking about Tillerson not coming with any deliverables, despite that will his host, perhaps, look for some receivables. And what do you think his host will be looking for from him? How do you think they view Tillerson and the Trump Administration at the moment?

And, secondly, to what extent, as been discussed, do you think, you know, defense and anti-terror or counterterrorism rather is very much of the agenda. If one looks at the massive ratcheting up of U.S. involvement in Somalia and elsewhere. Is this very much, you know, indicate front and center of U.S. policy in Africa right now? Thanks.

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: This is Witney. I'll just start. So, look, I think Tillerson will be received well. There's no question that African governments want to engage with the United States. I mean, it was important that, you know, all 37 nations were invited to Washington in November on relatively short notice and they all came. So I think the African leaders who meet with Tillerson will be, you know, wanting to hear about U.S. thinking on a broad range of issues: security, trade and investment, economic development and what is the Trump Administration seeking to do?

So I think from the African point of view this is an opportunity to convey to Tillerson their priorities, and to share with him and this delegation

the kind of partnership with the U.S. that they're looking for.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Vanda here. I want to add to that. I think that's absolutely true, however, or in addition to that, in addition to listening to what they want I think they'll be very strongly at this point looking for indications to see how the administration will move and has moved. They'll likely to be asking questions about the very significant militarization of U.S. policy toward Africa, and what's happening with the non-military element.

But to some of them that might not be so uncomfortable and distressing. In fact, I think that several of the countries would very much like to hear to get a boost in military spending, a boost in military engagement without having to worry about accountability. Even accountability to the United States, but certainly accountability to their local population. And it's very important that that's not a message that's conveyed. That we do not (inaudible)

with places like Kenya, like Ethiopia, like Nigeria. The message that U.S. military had, U.S. intelligence, U.S. technical training only should come in with strict adherence to human rights with civil liberties. That we do not indulge the behavior of Nigerian military in the north. That we do not indulge with systematic discrimination against Somalias, including Kenyan Somalis in Kenya.

Then the relationship is not simply shrank to "as long as you kill whoever the local terrorists are we don't mess with your internal politics." And, certainly, in many of these countries we have most people very charged. You know, with Kenya just look at the attacks that the U.S. Ambassador has faced for very mild remarks that should be expected from the United States and from the U.S. Ambassador, and one of the things that have been very distressing, I would say most distressing is just even how many human rights groups, civil society groups, NGOs too have jumped on the Ambassador remarks such as "look at your own election how discrediting they were. You have no

moral authority to tell us how we handle our internal politics." And we simply would like to see, I would certainly like to see the Secretary reclaiming that moral ground, reclaiming very clear U.S. commitment to values of inclusive governance, respect for fundamental human rights.

DR. COULIBALY: This is Coulibaly. I think out of this trip of the African leaders are really able to get some more clarity that would be a good achievement. Because up until now what we're getting is actually -- what they've been getting is a bit of a mixed signal. Would have they -- you know, President Trump has mentioned the commercial opportunities of the continent during his UN speech. I think that was well received, in fact, quite welcome, but then that contrasted a bit with him walking out of during the Africa session during the G-20 meeting at a time when Germany was pushing for an important Africa agenda.

And then the unfortunate alleged comments about Africa and Haiti I think was not quite well received on the continent, and the reactions have been

quite forceful. So this would also be the opportunity for them to actually get and share also their perceptions or their feelings about those comments as well as what they hope to see in terms of U.S./Africa cooperation. And we have said their commitment, indeed, to their willingness to work with the U.S., as Witney mentioned, and also was echoed by the new president of the African Union, President Kagame. So I think this is a good trip, a good opportunity, and we just hope it's going to really begin the dialogue and restore trust and mutual respect that is, indeed, necessary for well and effective foreign relations.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: If I can just add one comment. You know, clarity is very important and certainly there's not been much clarify from this administration on many foreign policy issues. But I will say that clarity alone is not sufficient. If the clarity is, yes, we have shrunk the relationship essentially just to counterterrorism and it's up to you how you handle internal politics then it's, in my view, even worse message than a lack of clarity.

MS. SCHNEIDMAN: Right. Because there's a broad range of issues that need to be addressed, I think as we're all aware of, not just security, not just trade and investment, not just governance, although these are top-line issues, but certainly issues of trafficking in people, the issues of migration, the issues of conservation, the issues of the youth. And the U.S. has been engaged in all these issues over the last several administrations. So, you know, hopefully what we get from this is, you know, a commitment by the U.S., by the Trump Administration to stay engaged on the continent across the board, and also some ideas on how to take that issue forward.

Coul raised the issue of the continental free trade agreement. You know, the U.S. has been dealing with the African Growth and Opportunity Act, and I think there's a lot of, you know, folks questioning where do we go from AGOA? Here's Africa moving toward more rapid regional integration. The European Union has been very active in creating free trade agreements to their economic partnership

agreements. China, of course, has been very aggressive in making commercial loans available, and the U.S. is sort of still dealing with this position of a non-reciprocal trade agreement. So I think the time is now for more creative thinking in a number of areas.

MR. AGLIONBY: Could I have a follow up then? Sorry. Could I just have a quick follow up?

MR. GRAMER: No, no, you go ahead.

MR. AGLIONBY: To what extent do you think, you know, in the likes of morale, in Foggy Bottom, and shrinking budgets, a lot of staff leaving, the lack of appointments. To what extent does the U.S. have the ability to project diplomatically in a way that it might have done five, ten years ago?

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: It's a good question. You know, without an ambassador to South Africa, in DRC, in Tanzania, you know, clearly the U.S. is constrained in its ability to project. But, I mean, this is the challenge to Secretary Tillerson, you know, how does he define the Trump Administration's agenda on the continent given all the issues that we've just spoken

about, given the constraints that you've just identified. I mean, this is -- the ball's in his court to lay out what the Trump agenda in Africa's going to be.

MR. COULIBALY: This is Coulibaly. I think this kind of underscored the point I made earlier about some key personnel, some senior people to handle Africa issues still having not been appointed, and to the ambassador position you mentioned I would add also the Africa key person of the Secretary of State. The Secretary in charge of African affairs hasn't been appointed. So, clearly, that is one area where the administration's actions become a bit constrained because the key people are not being able to help push which is obviously a quite packed agenda and help to focus in on specific strategies to engage the continent is, indeed, a major issue.

And we will be looking, actually, for those key appointments to kind of gauge the speed with which the administration intends on ordering out a specific U.S./Africa strategy. Not just on the existing

programs and what they intend to do with those, but as well as also on what new initiatives they plan to initiate to kind of start setting their own legacy on the U.S./Africa relations.

MR. JOSH LEDERMAN: This is John Lederman from AP. Can you guys hear me?

DR. COULIBALY: Yes.

MR. LEDERMAN: I was wondering how directly do you think that Secretary Tillerson will have to answer for the shithole comment from the President a while back? I mean, is this still a raw issue? Will African leaders be inclined to bring it up sort of specifically and by name, or will it sort of just be an undertone of the, you know, skepticism about, you know, the Administration's commitment to the continent that we've been discussing?

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: I doubt any of the leaders are going to bring it up because I think they want to put that behind, you know, put that in the past, close the chapter. But, clearly, civil society, clearly in the media, clearly in other sectors that's going to

come up. And I think, you know, Secretary Tillerson has the opportunity to refer to President Trump's letter of January 25th where he says that the United States profoundly respects the partnership, and that the United States deeply respects the people of Africa, and reaffirms the commitment to a strong and respectful relationship with African states.

And I think if Secretary Tillerson really hits those notes, and really underscores the profound respect that many Americans have for the people on the continent that will be helpful to ensuring that this unfortunately moment is, indeed, in the past.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I agree and I would add to that that of course there are some concrete possibilities to demonstrate with fairly easy actions that desire to put aside, move behind, forget those comments that have to do with Visa policies and countries from the continent that have been restricted in having access to the United States. For example, Chad is a good example. There's been substantial engagement over the past six months since the list

came out to beef up security and told there is, for example, a possibility to outline during said visit that those measures have been taken out. There is greater satisfaction with safety now and that some countries are moving beyond those lists, at least.

MS. GOLUBSKI: All right. Thank you. Do we have another question?

MS. KATHERINE HOURELD: Yes, please. This is Katherine Houreld. It seems that there's a lot of pressure building on South Sudan and that some diplomats feel that putting more pressure on regional leadership, countries like Kenya or Ethiopia -- Uganda's not on the list of countries he's visiting -- but, you know, countries like this might be a way to increase pressure on the government. Have you heard anything from anybody at the State Department to suggest that South Sudan is going to do a topic of discussion when he goes to the AU? When he goes to Ethiopia or Kenya? Anything like this?

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: It has to be on the agenda, there's no question, and traditionally that's been --

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you heard Vanda and Coul talk about the complexity of their relationship with Ethiopia. Ethiopia has been at, sort of, the forefront of U.S. engagement with Sudan. And I don't think that's going to change, even given Ethiopia's own leadership challenges. But I haven't heard specifically what the administration is hoping to achieve.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Yes, same for me, but it's hard to imagine how the issue wouldn't come up.

MS. HALL: But there's no plan? There's no specific thing that is coming?

DR. COULIBALY: I have not heard anything either.

MS. HALL: Okay. Thanks a lot.

MS. GOLUBSKI: Thank you. Any more questions?

MR. GRAMER: I'll pull up one more, if you don't mind. I was just wondering if you could just talk about the dynamic with China and, you know, how much of a -- or to what extent African countries are looking towards them and the U.S. to sort of see, you

know, whether they -- how much of a conduit to they attempt to be, you know, Chinese influence on the continent and whether, you know, at this point, you know, most African countries are grateful for China as an alternative to the U.S. or, you know, resentful of some of the terms that come with that and hoping that, you know, that the U.S. would sort of supplant that?

DR. COULIBALY: I think my reading of the African countries' position is that they're ready to basically do business and they're ready to partner with any country that is also willing to partner with them in a way that it makes sense to them and furthers their agenda. And in terms of the U.S./Africa versus China dynamics it doesn't necessarily have to be, I think, an either/or. The opportunities for engagement from different partners in the continent is quite great.

The key challenge of the continent currently rests in infrastructure financing. And there if you look at the financing gap it's quite huge. We're looking at close to \$50 billion in unfunded needs, and

more recent estimates even suggest it could be double that amount. So, clearly, there's room for engagement with multiple partners, and Africa is ready and open for business. And the Chinese have understood it and have been more proactive and aggressive in a way that it's benefiting them.

Some of the firms actually operating on the continent, the Chinese firms, about half of them are actually engaged in the continent for the long term, in terms of the kind of investments they make in capital. And about a third of the firms, Chinese firms, actually have reported profits of 20 percent or higher. So these just shows a vast, diverse, and sophisticated engagement across the continent in a very proactive way, in a way that we would hope to see the U.S. also move in that direction. Otherwise, it looks like, as I mentioned in my opening statement, it risks actually falling further behind.

MR. SCHNEIDMAN: Yes. I think it's important to underscore what Coul just said. It's not an either/or dynamic, nor is it a zero sum dynamic.

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But the reality is that China just has been much more proactive in making resources for infrastructure available. Currently, China is lending at about \$7 to 8 billion a year for infrastructure development, for commercial loans. At the 2015 FOCAC in Johannesburg, President Xi committed to \$60 billion of commercial loans.

And the U.S., you know, we're still -- we're at about the \$8 billion mark for development assistance, and we really haven't been able to sort of turn the corner to give American companies the kind of support and help, frankly, that I think many need to sort of mitigate the risk of getting into the African market, to get involved in these infrastructure projects. Having said that, there's no question that, you know, there's a great appetite for U.S. investment in the continent. You know, American firms generally hire locally, they train locally, they promote locally. They conform with the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, by and large.

This makes American companies, you know,

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attractive business partners. Plus, they've got, you know, world class skills and quality products that they bring to the table. So, it's a very complex dynamic between the U.S. and China on the continent, and it would be great if Secretary Tillerson were to come forward with some ideas, given his experience as a U.S. businessman about how to help U.S. companies become more active in Africa.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I will add two more points on China. One is that in background briefings about Secretary Tillerson's trips, U.S. State Department officials emphasized very strongly their concern about China's role in creating new indebtedness in Africa, how likely it is to play a major, major problem and certainly something that the Secretary would want to tackle during his trip and that the U.S. administration wants to tackle.

What's interesting and my colleagues can come in on that because there has been prior grumblings from African countries about the role of U.S. private sector in loans and generating new

indebtedness. So there could be quite some push back about U.S. hiding its geopolitical confrontations with China, including about China's military base in Africa, etcetera, behind the words of indebtedness. I believe that there are real concerns, real indebtedness and that should not be allowed to escalate and happen, and then those are real and genuine. But nonetheless, it's up to the Administration to persuade Africans interlocutors that this concern is genuine and that the U.S. is doing its own share in mitigating its responsibility for indebtedness and for the lack of finance and lack of investment that my colleagues have emphasized.

China is also very interesting in another way because it's long embraced what seem to have been, perhaps, still are, some of the influence of the Trump Administration in terms of we deal with governments, we focus on the capital, we make deals with them, and we don't tell countries how to run their internal politics. Yet, that strategy has backfired for China across the world. It's not so easy to take such an

approach, and it has generated difficulties with China as Chinese workers often create all kinds of insensitivities and problems, including in Africa; there's been quite some substantial backlash, also in other continents, also in Latin America, with Chinese diplomats only very slowly realizing that it might be quite an illusion to think that you can simply make political deals and not worry about what kind of impact they have on the people.

Ethiopia is a prime example. Again, way before the 2015 issues there had been much longer underlying issues surrounding land expropriation, although the land is nominally held by the state, so I use the term expropriation loosely here. That involves the government leasing vast stretches of land to multiple countries, including Chinese, including Chinese businesses that created a lot of the underlying tension in addition to the other things I mentioned that we are seeing floating.

Finally, let me also talk about conservation and China, again, a very mixed record. On the one

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hand, China has finally outlawed its legal ivory market, and it's now in the implementation phase. It now remains up to China to be seriously and diligently implementing dismantling of its now fully illegal ivory market. And there's been an issue with many countries in the region, not simple issues. Some countries very much were hoping to be able to sell more legal ivory. There's seven African countries, for example.

But at the same time, Chinese businesses, Chinese diplomats, Chinese nationals have been some of the very prime offenders in wild life trafficking and poaching in Africa, both in the very iconic species such as elephants and ivory, but also often the mere presence of extensive number of Chinese workers building highways come along with substantial decimation of surrounding, not only natural habitats, but surrounding species that are being the (inaudible) of track into China.

And so I think China exposes the pitfalls of believing that one can only deal with government when

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the government handle and frankly request the populations and the indifference to issues of quality standards in products, human rights, civil rights, and environmental issues.

DR. COULIBALY: So, just to add quickly, so I think the point Vanda raised on the debt issue is, indeed, one that is important and has been at the center of concerns, even voiced by the State Department. So there's now, obviously, a rising level of debt on the continent. On aggregate it's still not that high, but the pace of increase is something that's been concerning. And in some countries it's been approaching, actually, a critical level.

And then state have invited the Chinese in the past to come and discuss it, and the country's having come off the debt forgiveness episode earlier in the 2000s to mid-2000s. There's really concern now that that is again creeping up and they see China as playing a bit of a role in it and would like to see China try to become a bit more restrained in the way it conducts lending on the continent.

But, again, there's also the areas where they find ground to collaborate, and I think China was quite helpful for them on the issues of South Sudan, as well as also on the assistance on defense and UN operations.

So I would say if the multidimensional aspect, the U.S., the tri-partite, U.S./Africa/China, and I think there's understanding that they could collaborate where it makes a lot of sense, and the U.S. can also learn something from China as it's an economy that has more with them experience with economic development. And then where there's tension work together to sort of resolve those on the continent.

MS. GOLUBSKI: Thank you. Do we have another question? Okay. Well, it doesn't seem like we have any more questions. I'd like to thank everybody for doing the call, especially Dr. Coulibaly, Vanda, and Witney.

Again, this is on the record, so feel free to quote them. I will have a transcript available

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today and I'll be sure to send it out. And if you want to follow up with any of our scholars please get in touch with me and I can connect you. So thank you again for joining us.

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