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QI Panel:

Biden's Africa Trip: What Are the Payoffs?

December 6th, 2024

10:00-11:00 AM ET

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 0:40

Hello everyone again. Good morning. My name is Kelley Vlahos, and I am very proud to be moderating today's panel exploring the themes, dynamics and political implications of President Biden's trip to Angola this week, and some of the broader issues, both economic and political, that are surging through that region in Africa today. But first, if you are not familiar with the Quincy Institute, we are an action tank committed to moving American foreign policy toward diplomacy and positive engagement and away from the primary tools of militarism and economic coercion as a way to establish U.S. primacy abroad. So Biden traveled to Angola this week. It was his first such trip to Sub Saharan Africa in his four year term, and the first of an American president since Barack Obama traveled to Sub Saharan Africa three times during his own two terms in office. Much of the trip focused this week on the libido project and 18 or an 810 mile railroad connecting Angola with neighboring Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. We will delve into that and the reasons why both President Biden and President Yao Irenko called this a proud, historic moment and a turning point in the relationship between the two nations. We will also talk about how US relations are faring with other African governments, and the prospects for any change good and bad in the upcoming Trump administration.

But first, let me introduce our esteemed panel. Ziyanda Stuurman is a Senior Analyst for southern Africa at the Eurasia group, where she analyzes political and economic developments with a focus on South Africa, Mozambique and Angola. Ziyanda has been a policy research and researcher in the South African Parliament, and she has worked as an advisor on policy making with a development development economics think tank based at the University of Cape Town. Elizabeth Shackelford is the Senior Policy Director at Dartmouth Stickey Center for International Understanding, and a foreign affairs columnist for The Chicago Tribune. Previously, she was a senior fellow on US foreign policy at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. Before that, she served as a career diplomat in the US State Department until september 2017 with postings in Poland, South Sudan and Somalia. She is the author of the descent channel American diplomacy and a dishonest age which chronicles the challenges facing us foreign policy in the modern world. And Dan Ford is my colleague and junior research fellow in the global south south program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible statecraft. Previously, Dan worked as a research and Communications Assistant at the Global Interagency Security Reform.

Thank you so much for joining me today, all of you. This is a really excellent panel, and great timing for this discussion on Biden's. You know one of the last trips, if not his last global trip of his presidency. So I'd like to start by asking each of you, what should we take away from the fact that a Biden has not traveled yet to Sub Saharan Africa throughout the four years of his

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presidency, and b that is one and only trip to this region was to Angola, and what did you think of the results? Like, what were your takeaways of this week's trip, his the press reporting of it, the takeaways from his relationship with President Lourenço there? What can you tell me? Ziyanda, let's start with you.

Ziyanda Stuurman 4:45

Thanks so much, Kelley for for inviting me, and I'm really looking forward to today's discussion. You know, I think it's it's really interesting to think about. You know why Biden has only been able to make one trip to the African continent? And I think particularly given you know that that he hosted the US Africa summit in Washington in december 2022 and you know there between himself and vice president Kamala Harris, you know, repeatedly said that, that the US government was all in on Africa. I think what we should take away from that is that this has been a very noisy time in geopolitics and in international affairs. You know, the Russia, Ukraine war, of course, conflict in the Middle East and everything else in between has been, I think, a huge distraction in many ways, to many different countries and and the US is one of them that's a country that's had a difficult year as well. So you think that it's it is really interesting to have picked Angola, particularly in this moment in time, and with a presence like Jerome Larose, who's really set himself up the reformer. In many ways, we'll get into a lot of that later. But really the takeaway here is that this is a US Africa relations, and I think U.S.-Angola relations.

Elizabeth Shackelford 6:22

Yes, I mean, I would agree with Ziyanda, you know, largely this geopolitical period we've been in for the past few years has been, it's, it's really made it inevitable that Africa is going to be the first region on the chopping block of priorities for any US administration. So I'm not at all surprised that, given how busy the world has been with other crises that you know, a lot of a very energetic approach to U.S.-Africa policy at the start of the Biden administration did really start to Peter down at the end of the day. I think that this trip was made to happen because it had long been promised and it had been postponed repeatedly. I think it was very important to the Biden administration, and particularly the really relentless teams at the National Security Council focused on Africa to make sure that this promise was fulfilled. How important was this trip at the end of the day? Well, a lot less important with Biden as a lame duck president at this point. But I think it still does matter.

And one of the reasons that I think that it will matter is because the focus on Angola is this, as you know, the center of this trip was about, you know, financial and economic investment and partnership, and not what the US has really focused on, really prioritized previously in its Africa relationships, which has really been a focus on counter terrorism, military partnerships and and a lot of focus on at least talking, if not doing a lot about democracy and human rights. So this was a very different focus. And I think because it has that kind of economic investment focus, that there is much more of a chance that this will be built off of by the Trump administration coming in. So I do expect that the Trump administration's focus on Africa is going to be primarily, you know, with kind of economic and trade and investment focal points. And so wrapping up the

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Biden administration's Africa policy focus with this trip, it has a lot more promise for something that's going to be built on by the next administration

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 8:20

What do you think about that Dan, that this, this real, palpable shift away from security and development, or at least the kind of development programs that we are used to seeing or conversing about in this part of the world, and more towards the economic development that The libido project. What do you think of that shift, and how does it portend for where the conversation might be going on Africa in the next administration?

Dan Ford 8:50

Yeah, it's, it's, I think it's a sign that the administration's at least hearing some of the calls from from Africans for greater and deeper economic investment on a number of fronts. This is a really complicated project. There are a lot of different funding streams. There are a lot of partners involved. One sign that the project will likely move forward, regardless of who the US president is, is the fact that the US isn't the sole funder of this project. It's a g7 initiative under PGI, which stands for partnership for global infrastructure and investment, which is essentially the G sevens response to the Belt and Road Initiative. The Italians are putting up over \$300 million the US has put up in the billions now, but so have local Africans. African Development Bank and Africa Finance Corporation has also contributed to this project. So there are a lot of funding streams involved that'll continue regardless of who the president is. I agree with Lizzie that the fact that it is sort of an economic project is sort of a good sign that it'll likely be continued into the next administration.

We know that Donald Trump has spoken about being a deal maker, and he wants to privatize a lot of things. Think that the US government does. And I think, you know, working with the private sector to build this complex in comprehensive corridor is something that can, that can be done in the next administration. And from the folks I've heard, I think it's likely to be continued, at least largely, as is currently the case. The fact that he, you know, hasn't, hasn't had a bilateral trip to Africa until now. His only trip was cop, which is, of course, a multilateral event in Egypt a couple years ago. Again, it sort of signals that Africa hasn't been very high on the on the list of priorities. Somewhat understandable given the wars in Ukraine and Gaza and other other issues going on in the world, but certainly a little bit late for a trip to Angola, having said that this is tied directly to the libido corridor, which he wants to be really his lasting legacy on the continent. And that's that's why he chose Angola.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 10:55

Thank you, Ziyanda, I'd like to to get more into the Lobito Project with you. I, as a non Africa expert myself, this is the first time hearing about it, but all of the coverage of the trip, of Biden's trip this week has has focused on that corridor, the infrastructure associated with it, and the US

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investment in it. Can you tell us, tell our viewers what this corridor project is, a little bit of the history, and what the hopes are for it, for the region, the benefits for the region.

Ziyanda Stuurman 11:33

Yeah, I mean, I think it's a the project itself is incredibly interesting, because it is a kind of stitching together and a patchwork of what was colonial rail infrastructure, with the backbone of it really being the Benguela rail line, which was built in in, you know, Colonial Era Angola, and that had been damaged over over several years and several decades, And that's now being connected to a rail corridor and a dry port in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and extended out into into Zambia. Both of those two countries have large deposits of a lot of critical minerals that you know, the US, the EU and the rest of the world is really going to lean on quite heavily in the years to come in terms of the global energy transition, and this runs the gamut from lithium to cobalt to copper to nickel. And really, this project is about bridging all three countries with this modern freight rail corridor that really drastically reduces how long it takes to move products from one part of the continent to the other, and, importantly, to a port in in southern Angola that is primed, or in prime position, to export out to again, many of the EU member states, as well as the US so for the broader region, this already carries, I think, a lot of promise and a lot of potential, not just for those, for those three countries, but it's but for Angola, I think in particular, really heralds an opportunity for four provinces in the south of the country that have been economically underdeveloped to leapfrog, I think, in many ways, into the future. And again, as I said, I think very importantly, into a future in which the supply of critical minerals is critical in and of itself.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 13:35

So let me ask a follow up question to that. Ziyanda, you know, there does seem to be some criticism that this would, this is all about exporting to the rest of the world, and this might not benefit the region in terms of keeping manufacturing here, keeping keeping the minerals here, and being able to produce things with them, and not just you know, shunting off all of this lucrative business elsewhere. Can you talk a little? Will this railway help development projects and facilities manufacturing in the region so that it's doesn't it's not all exported, and that Africa can actually benefit itself from all these critical minerals?

Ziyanda Stuurman 14:25

Yeah, I think that's a great question. And, and, you know, not, not unfortunately, but it does really depend on, on the various African governments that are involved in this project themselves. You know, the the, I think that it would be difficult to private companies that are invested in this project, you know, you're, you're going to have to, at scale, also invest in in the industrialization of these three countries. So that is very much on on, you know, I think these three governments involved. But, you know, as as I said, there's huge potential for not just a rail corridor and. Just the establishment of special economic zones, but honestly, the growth of new industries completely, you know, the beneficiation of many of these minerals, long before they are they're

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exported out of the continent, could very easily happen. You know, in all three countries, for there to be real value add and for there to be genuine export revenue, not just, you know, as as you were saying, again, just locked into the extractive industry, I think that that is going to take a huge investment in human capital and education systems, you know, and in road and electrification infrastructure. But certainly as one, you know, all of those endeavors could pay off handsomely for every country involved, and even neighboring countries. You know, when you when you think about the spillover effect of a project this big.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 15:55

Absolutely Lizzie, what about China? How much of this trip, this pursuit of new infrastructure for Angola is a recognition by Biden and the US that is largely fallen behind Beijing and its economic influence in Angola and other parts of Africa. How much is great power politics at play here?

Elizabeth Shackelford 16:18

100% I mean, just to be blunt, you know, the the United States with its, you know, we've been very involved on the African continent, with a lot of these countries for, for many, many years. But the nature of us engagement has been very different from that of of China and, you know, as a US diplomat who spent a lot of my time on the continent, you know, we would often talk about or hear about, you know, our culture isn't just to leave big things. It wasn't our our kind of development culture to build things, to leave infrastructure because it was unsustainable. It required upkeep that, you know, other countries that are doing that aren't necessarily doing, we wanted to, you know, do more development that would have longer term impact. Well, that really hasn't paid off. And what we have seen is that while there are a lot of problems, there have been a lot of challenges with China's engagement. There is some big payoff for some of the large infrastructure projects that they've been able to do. I just returned a few days ago from a trip to Kenya, and the railway that China has put in Kenya has really been a game changer for a lot of things there. That is not to say there aren't challenges, there's debt and issues like that, but I think what we've realized in recent years is that there is a big payoff in terms of the perceptions across the continent with those kind of physical things that you can see and feel and touch and use that are that are left there by, you know, kind of Chinese investment.

And we don't necessarily have that to show, I mean, a lot of our investment in democracy, you know, democracy and democratization efforts has really, you know, you look at, look all across West Africa, where democracy is that we've been investing in or have been failing. So that's not really leaving that kind of concrete value add that a lot of Africans can see. So that's a little bit of an oversimplification of the issue. Of course, this is very complex, but I think we've realized that, you know, we're not going to get to where we want to be with influence on the African continent without helping growth in Africa. And what we have been doing has has been falling short there. So, you know, I think that if you look at this just, you know, kind of from a raw geopolitical perspective, the United States feels like we've been falling behind, and that is one of the reasons that we're basically taking a page out of out of China's playbook. We're falling behind

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on some other areas, though, that I hope we'll be able to also match China now has more consulates and embassies across the continent than we have. That is something that is new and has happened in the last generation or less. We have fewer African students coming to the United States to study there are a lot of things that China has done to really enhance its influence in recent years, and I think that we're taking some hard lessons from that

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 18:58

Absolutely. Dan, do you have anything to add to the libido corridor project thread before we move on, I know, and I'll just throw this out there that one of the concerns always is that the benefits won't go to the people. And I know that Angola has been suffering from poverty and and their debt is, I think, at 17% to China right now. And so they're struggling to pay off the debt. They're struggling to give their people a living wage. There many living under the poverty level. Is, I mean, can you talk a little bit about the concerns about like, wow, billions of dollars are going into this project. Everybody's heralding it. But why are the people still poor? Will this actually sort of translate into better living and life for the people of Angola? Yeah?

Dan Ford 20:00

Yeah, yeah, that's, that's a pretty fundamental question. Kelley, you know, Helena matza, who is the PGI coordinator at the US State Department, has given interviews where she sort of talked about this issue on behalf of the US government. Of course, she's she works for the government, and their response is that they're taking more of a localized approach to this project than in previous development projects, and because it's a comprehensive infrastructure project that's being funded by multiple streams, including locally, as I mentioned, with the African Development Bank and Africa Finance Corporation, and is being really developed as separate projects that are all supposed to come together with different goals, that, again, are all supposed to come together to build this comprehensive corridor. It should take into account local concerns better than previous projects have, and it should be able to withstand funding cycles and then eventually, hopefully, kind of be privatized and have profit motive and profit incentive to private companies trade and use the corridor for decades into the future, there is, I think, signs that that's that's happening. I mean, the Africa Development Bank has, has contributed, I think, about a billion dollars to this project, Africa Finance Corporation as well, is, I think, taking a very heavy funding and management of the second phase, which is going to go down into Zambia. So there are signs that that's that that's going to happen.

There are also, you know, in addition to rail, there are a lot of other infrastructure projects that are part of this. There's solar infrastructure that's being built the US, export, import bank announced during Biden's trip, \$900 million of a loan for solar infrastructure in Angola. This is in addition to other solar infrastructure, there are bridges being built as well, and feeder roads that are going to connect the rail to local villages and other communities to help tie tie this corridor together a bit better, to the local, local communities. It's also going to allow the local countries to trade amongst themselves. It isn't just about it isn't just going to end up leading to, you know, goods being shipped externally or although, of course, I do think that was the motive for the

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project starting in the first place. But there are benefits to the local countries being able to trade with one another. You know, goods that are taking that took 45 days now take 45 hours to go from a small village into the port, and it's already starting to see some goods being shipped. So, you know, there's hope that this will be a bit more it'll allow for some downstream supply chains locally. I think there's a very real possibility that that's the case. We'll have to wait and see, but, but, yeah, that's the hope.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 22:40

Thank you, Dan. Okay, so let's get to what I know everybody is thinking and wondering about, and that's where do we go from here in the Trump administration? This is his second term, and so there's some history there that I hope Lizzie will get into, a little bit that can might inform like, what his next administration might look like in regards to Africa policy. US Africa policy. So what do we expect in the coming you know, months year of the new administration, according to University of Cincinnati Professor Alex Thurston, who writes for Responsible statecraft quite regularly on these issues, Trump and his team will likely not be thinking much about Africa. He points to an article by Professor Stephen Wald, who's also associated with Quincy, writing about the 10 foreign policy implications of the 2024 US election in which he didn't even mention Africa, because the Middle East, Ukraine, NATO, China, among other issues, will likely take front stage, center stage, rather and leaving Africa as usual, behind if Trump ignores Africa, he says, this is Alex Thurston. Now that would be in keeping with a bipartisan neglect of the continent. From the time of Barack Obama through the president through the president rather Lizzie. Let's start with you. You actually worked in the first Trump administration. What are your thoughts about what a second Trump administration might look like in regards to us Africa? Policy?

Adam Weinstein 18:50

I've even noticed on, you know, Sunni, even sort of more radical Sunni, social media, the sort of admiration for Iran, because at least Iran is willing to take it to Israel. And so I wonder how much of a boon for the Islamic Republic's legitimacy, both within Iran and in the Muslim world, so to speak, it's its stance on Israel. Post October 7 has been, I mean, has it been sort of a as much trouble as it's caused them? Has it been a gift, in a way as well.

Elizabeth Shackelford 24:29

Well, when it comes to the continent, your personnel is really policy here, as you've mentioned, Donald Trump does not care about the continent. I think the the best that we can hope for out of the you know, kind of top of the administration is that he refrains from some of the broad ranging insults to the entire continent that he imposed before the Muslim travel ban, the shithole countries, etc, etc. So if we can get Donald Trump to completely avoid going that route and just basically ignore Africa, I think we're actually going to be doing better than we did last. Time. But then where you're going to look to see what the policy really is, is going to be who gets appointed to lead his Africa policy? Who's going to be the assistant secretary of state for Africa?

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Who is he going to appoint for his leads in the National Security Council? Again, I don't think he cares a lot about these issues, so it's just going to be a matter of who he taps to lead it.

And there are a couple of different things that we might see, depending on who ends up in place, I think that we could see, and likely will see, a real focus on the economic investment. The question will be, how much they're able to do, or are interested in doing, a lot of the Trump administration is likely going to be reflected on, you know, what are the business interests of some of Trump's allies? So if there are some who are thinking, we really want to get in here and get better access to critical minerals that we need for a wide variety of issues, from national security to otherwise in the United States, we could see the facilitation of making it easier for, you know, for American investors to to work and thrive on the continent. If you look at Project 2025, which I you know, we'll see how much of that gets implemented. But there's very little on Africa in it, although, to be fair, it's not particularly, you know, alarming or, you know, unobjectionable, it's it doesn't really demonstrate a really big shift from what the Biden administration has talked about, but it does talk about creating space for American companies to invest, and, of course, on the focus on countering China.

So I expect that we will see that kind of shift away from military partnerships to continue towards really an economic focus. The question is going to be, how much is invested in that policy. I'd say the other thing to watch out for, though, is going to be on the cultural front, which is, I believe, Project 2025 specifically talks about getting away from kind of, you know, cultural finger wagging and pushing particular ideas of, you know, kind of liberal international ideas with our Africa policy in the future, but there is a very large evangelical influence on the Trump administration. And so depending on how involved they get in Africa policy, we actually could end up seeing a big investment in kind of promoting the culture wars that you know, that we have seen some who support the Trump administration fighting here in the United States, there is an Evangelical, kind of extremist evangelical backing to the anti LGBTQ laws that have been pushed in different parts of the continent. And so, you know, I'm a little bit, I'm keeping an eye open to see if that becomes an actual official part of US policy on the continent, but I expect the biggest chunk is going to be on the kind of economic focus

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 27:40

And let's let's delve into that a little bit more. I know you can't, you probably don't have your eyes on how every leader in Africa has responded to Trump. But in general, has his election been a welcome news? Have you seen commentary from different capitals. I mean, how are leaders in Africa accepting the the second Trump administration? And is it just, and I would imagine it's a mixed bag. But can you talk a little bit about how how people are, or how leaders are positioning themselves for this new reality?

Ziyanda Stuurman 28:24

Yeah, that's a, that's a great question. And I'll start at a, you know, super basic microcosm level, as a as an African living on the continent, I would love for Trump to ignore the continent again.

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It's helpful in the sense that, you know, there are a number of projects. They don't necessarily lie at the at the White House level, with the high executive level, you know, they're, they're further down in the in the bureaucracy, and they really keep the engine of what is us Africa policy running. And this really runs the gamut from, you know, USA ID to projects that were launched under Power Africa under Barack Obama, as well as AGOA, the preferential trade platform and others as well. So there's, there would be a sense of normalcy if, if, you know, as Lizzie said, I think Trump refrained from, from necessarily keeping Africa top of mind. You know, we look at a bit more broadly across the continent there, there's, there's some really interesting relationships that that formed and flourished under Biden, and at least the the rhetorical sort of outreach to the African continent.

And, you know, an example here is Kenya. That's that's hopefully looking forward to continuing what I think were really good relations with the US. You know, South Africa has had a very rocky relationship with the US for a long time and and I think that was true to a certain extent in the last few years. But. Very broadly, I think that, you know, the general sort of feeling with many African governments, and, you know, to make this a little bit I think partisan, you know, when you when you have a Republican president in the White House, citizenships are usually transactional. You know, not a lot is expected of each other from either side. You know, I think that there are more, there's more effort in terms of soft diplomacy under Democratic presidents, at least there has been in the past. So it's a, it's a sort of return to that normal that that sort of swing between these two parties and the way that that government and foreign policy works, I think there'll be a return to that sort of normal. And as I said, I think as long as a Trump isn't laser focused, you know, on one on one particular country or another, very broadly, I think a lot of relationships will at least stay stable.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 30:58

Thank you so Dan, I want you to play a little game with me. I want you to put on your Trump hat, and I want you to imagine a landscape in which Donald Trump is laser focused on Africa, but in a very positive way, and maybe you can imagine yourself as his chief advisor on Africa relations. What would you recommend to Donald Trump in terms of what he should be doing on the continent and what that what the most positive projection of US involvement would look like?

Dan Ford 31:44

Well, I think, you know, the continent is big and broad, and there are a lot of challenges, and I think there are a lot of sort of avenues to go down, but certainly I would, I would encourage The president to continue funding the libido corridor, and work to sort of find ways to deepen supply chains locally in the countries that are connected to this corridor. I do think moving more to a DFC model Development Finance Corporation here in the US, as opposed to more traditional USAID funded projects. I think that that there's a good reason to do that. I think that that's more likely to lead to greater privatization. You also have to find ways to connect private enterprise. In Africa, the population on the continent is going to double in the next quarter century. That's a lot of people that need resources, that will need access to jobs and money, and then we'll have to

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spend them. And I think there's an opportunity for U.S. businesses to engage. That's something that I think is music to Trump's ears, and I think something that he would want to have as part of his legacy when he finishes his second term in four years. You know, there are other conflicts that are complicated. And I think I probably will echo what my co panelists have said, and I would probably advise the President to do nothing, as opposed to get get super involved. And perhaps, you know, perhaps make, make a tough situation worse.

You know, I think Sudan's a complicated one where you have the current administration has tried to provide an end to that war. It's a war that risks spreading into regional conflict. Tom Perriello is the current Special Envoy, I would emphasize, sort of a continued diplomatic effort to end that conflict. It's unlikely anything will happen, as long as you have outside forces that continue to arm the RSF and the staff, the paramilitary and the government forces. So I would naturally encourage the president to put pressure on the UAE to stop funding the RSF and then the Egyptians and Iranians that are also contributing to that conflict. You know, I think it's, it's, it's unlikely that that that conflict will end soon. It could worsen. It could it could lead to total separation of two parts of the of the country. But I think that's something that I would like to see the President perhaps use a little bit of diplomatic leverage to see an end to that war.

But again, I think you know, when you're talking about Trump, the economic engagement is really central. And on that, AGOA, which has been mentioned, is the major trade deal. It's up for renewal in September of next year. That's something that from folks I've talked to, they hope to see that renewed details in the details. And there's, there's some controversy over how exactly it should be renewed and how the details should look but I think focusing on moving that forward would be good for the US.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 34:43

Lizzie, it does seem like everybody is in agreement, whether here or on both sides of the aisle and numerous administrations, that economic development must happen and it must happen with private industry come. In and creating jobs and and creating markets locally and regionally. But we have the security situation that Dan had mentioned Sudan. We've we've seen instability in places like Mali over the last several months, coups and in numerous places. I mean, it's, it's, it's it the Congo. I mean, there are a lot of unknowns. So how do you how does a Trump administration try to help resolve some of the security issues so companies will feel comfortable building and investing locally in Africa?

Elizabeth Shackelford 35:42

I mean, that's that's certainly a huge question, and it's not something that the US government has failed to try in the past. But, yeah, I've written it and done research on this before and made some recommendations in the past about, you know, taking a really, really, really scrutinizing our approach to military assistance in the past, which, you know, I fear, has really helped to expand the security problems rather than reduce them. But, you know, I look at a Trump administration, and there are a lot of ways, I'll just be frank, that I fear a Trump administration, but on the

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African continent, I think that maybe there is an opportunity to break away from some of our kind of traditional paths. You know, I look at this. I mean, I hear what Dan says about, about Sudan, Sudan's really difficult in my dream world of what could, what positive could come out of this? You know, could, could someone like, could someone, some evangelical supporter of Trump with a lot of money, come to him and say, Sudan's causing huge problems. We don't like this. It's causing mass levels of suffering, and that's also not good for expanding in the, you know, economic engagement in the region. Can you do something about this? And having Trump take his kind of wild man, I'm unexpected, we aren't sure what I'm going to do and go to the UAE and say, You're stealing all this gold with the use of, you know, some militia there. I need you to stop it, or I'm going to take away the weapons we're providing you.

I mean, those are the types of approaches that I have heard American diplomats, you know, including the special envoy Perriello, who are looking at what's happening in Sudan as a specific example, and saying, Well, it's difficult. Yes, the UAE, we're putting pressure on them. We're telling them that. But are we really, are we really making, you know, a hard push on a close security ally to change fundamentally what's happening in Sudan, to bring peace. And I I'm not going to hold my breath, but I do think that someone who's willing to break away from our the the diplomatic approach we've taken in the past and take a strong stance on something maybe, maybe we could see something different. We haven't done a lot of good so far, so it's worth trying something different.

But I do think that you know it comes to what the Trump administration values, and if someone you know the the imaginary guidance you know as Dan, as his close advisor on Africa, or any one of us you know, can say, if you want to make this a place where your wealthy friends make money, you have to bring security. And what does that mean? And if you're looking at Sudan, I've made some suggestions. We've got to get our partner to stop funding genocidal maniacs there on the Sahel. It's a really hard issue. We've been we've had this obstacle of, you know, how do we deal with and work with coup governments? You know, military takeovers? Maybe a Trump administration can take a different approach, because it doesn't have, you know, quite as many qualms about working in that region. I personally would like to see not to abandon our focus on values, but to shift from the trappings of democracy to who's providing good governance. Because good governance brings stability in places. That means that US investors and companies can come and build and so can we convince the Trump administration to actually care about good governance, whatever that governance is in the end.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 39:04

Did you, just to follow up on that. I mean, What? What? What do you think of the idea of, you know, this, this shift to economic stability, economic investment, and possibly away from some of the democracy building that the United States has engaged in and has connected to a lot of its projects and investments there. Do you agree with the critique that I've heard? And again, I'm not an Africa expert, so this I'm just hearing things at a different level here that doesn't matter as much to China, and that's why China has been a little bit more effective at infrastructure projects and in joining a lot of these governments, because they don't have the trappings of the

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connections of the democracy building and all the other things. Can you talk a little bit about what the United States might do, or the West in general to sort of be more effective?

Ziyanda Stuurman 40:10

Yeah, that's a it's a good question. And, you know, I think a great way to always answer this sort of question is, you know, to repeat the quote. And now for I can't even remember where the quote comes from, but the really great quote that sums it all up, you know, where, where I think it was an African official. Official had once said, you know, when the US goes to Africa, they go to give a lecture. When China goes to Africa, they build a bridge or an airport. You know, I think that that, that level of real politic. You know, in fully understanding that all of these various governments have agency, you know that there are complicated and complex societies where you're not just going to be able to, you know, stamp a version of democracy or a version of liberal values. And then, you know, but almost as I think Kelley, you had pointed out, kind of finger wag and say, you know, you're not doing this right. You're not doing that right, you know, I think that that's that kind of approach, and is welcome, as I was just saying with the quote, but it's also realistic about where various countries are, you know, in in in their idea and in their conception of good governance and leadership.

And I'm certainly not saying that, that, you know, autocracies are good, or authoritarians are good, but there's a, I think, a really, you know, the African continent is a really, really interesting example of where there are flawed democracies in which, you know, different societal values exist and and that's just how democracies also work. They are about different people, and we're talking about a continent of of of billions of people. And so in, in that sense, you know, a focus really on on what it is that makes it a good you know, productive society and economy thrive. I think it is always going to be better than moralizing in one way or another, but that's, you know, to end off. I think that shouldn't ignore where there are gross human rights violations, where they are, you know, governments that are waging war against their own people. I don't think we want to get into a into a scenario that is that. But there is, I think, a huge, huge difference between, again, moralizing on the on the one side and and completely ignoring, I think, human rights violations on the other.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 42:38

Yeah, and one of the questions that I had had teed up for today was about the human rights issues in Angola, President Lourenco, who has who has been a mainstay of Angolan politics since the independence in 1975 has been accused his Government has been accused of extrajudicial killings and violent crackdowns on protesters. In recent years, this has been documented by the US State Department amnesty and international in the in the three day trip that Biden engaged in, there wasn't a lot of talk about human rights, and I'm sure that that has been a criticism. So I'm not attempting to sort of say that we should abandon our focus, like, like you said, See and on human rights issues, but it did seem like in this particular trip that the focus was more on more of this realistic approach to, how do we help Angola sort of develop its own economic vitality through the through these projects.

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I'd like to move over to some questions from our listeners, and I wanted to make sure I banked in a little time for that. And we've been getting a few really good questions. And this one is in particular about Angola. It's from Melissa Cook, and she says Angola has a holistic economic development approach. They want to make libido a true economic corridor, benefiting agriculture, manufacturing, telecoms, power transmission, etc. She says, I'm not a Trump fan, but remember the Build Africa Act, which created prosper Africa and funded DFC, what, which was enacted during the first his first administration, the first Trump administration. I worked a lot on USDA. USTDA funded projects, including the new environments on social impact assessment study for the libido project. And she says, so I hope the doge doesn't close it. So this wasn't a question, but more of some some context from Melissa cook, I mean it Dan, I mean it does seem like there had been some efforts at these economic projects during the Trump administration. Administration is there, is there any risk that some of them will fall off, because there seems to be more of a focus in the Trump administration at cutting government programs and costs and expenditures, and that this might just like things like this might just kind of fall within that sort of basket of things that that they, that the DOGE can, can, can focus on.

Dan Ford 45:26

Yeah, that's a very good question. Melissa, I think, you know, there that's always, I think there's a lot of uncertainty with Donald Trump's next term as president, you know this, this Doge is think they've, you know, they're trying to really take a pretty comprehensive look at the government and make some pretty serious slashes the likes we haven't seen in decades. So I do think some of these initiatives could be on the cutting blocks. We'll have to wait and see prosper Africa. Melissa's right is was a very good program that was started initiated in 2018 I think it officially came into force in 2019 and it's it tried to sort of create a one stop shop between 17 different US government agencies and departments to try and cut through some of the red tape and bureaucracy that some companies might run into as they're trying to do business in Africa, or African companies trying to do business in the US. So there was a lot of benefit there. Having spoken with some folks about it, I think it hasn't quite lived up to the potential expectation, but there are a lot of deals that it has helped facilitate, over 2000 since it came into force and and I think I counted 12 specifically in Angola, so there's, you know, that's a good model for the sort of project that could be continued. It could be perhaps enhanced. I think there's some issue with staffing at the Secretariat level. Perhaps that does get cut in Doge. Perhaps the funding isn't there. Perhaps DFC funding, especially on projects in Africa, goes down, I'm not sure.

But you know, as as the government, as the new government, I think sees, you know, competition with China as being a central component. I do think there's a possibility here where competition can lead to some good things. It can lead to the United States, providing some, you know, sophisticated infrastructure projects across Africa. You know, in a capitalist society where money talks, some competition can incentivize people to engage positively. I think there's also opportunity here for cooperation. The Chinese have invested a billion dollars on the eastern portion of what, what is likely to be the eastern portion of the libido corridor, the TAZARA railway. And is there a possibility here for the US to actually cooperate with the Chinese, perhaps in

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building that line through Tanzania to the Dar es Salaam port on the Indian Ocean? I mean, under a Trump presidency, perhaps cooperation with the Chinese seems unlikely, but it's a possibility. Regardless, I think there'll be, there should be, you know, incentive to invest in Africa through prosper Africa, through the renewal of AGOA as well. You know, one criticism is that these efforts are a bit too bilateral, and they're not as multilateral as perhaps Africans would want. Africa's, you know, created a free trade area that is the largest, either the largest, or is going to be the largest in the world, you know. So there's an opportunity for more multilateral engagement. But, you know, I think, I think there is hope that, you know, some of these investments will continue, and new ones will come to fruition under his presidency.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 48:35

I would suggest, like, sending you over to the Trump administration, so you could be an advisor, because I really like what you're saying, but I don't want to lose you at the Global South program at Quincy, but they, I mean they need, they need people who have this positive vision and remind the Trump administration that some of these projects actually do work and can work well, if there's the right focus on them. We have a question from Lynn Graybill that is concerned about bricks, which is the Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa grouping, and which has been in the news quite a bit. They've added some new members, and they're sort of representing the like, the sort of anti west or non aligned of the global south and other countries who are looking for alternatives to the Western financial system, alternatives and runs around sanctions which have affected many of these countries and there's and their relationships with others, and Trump has come out recently, and it to the question of whether, you know, the bricks has been talking about a new financial system, a new currency away from the dollar. This is all in a nascent stage. Here. It's not even you know, in reality. But it's it's been a conversation and a part of a broader question about multilateralism, and he came out and said that he would punish severely any BRICS country that moves away from the dollar. When Graybill has this question, are you concerned about his threats regarding bricks. Sienda, do you have any thoughts of what the Trump relationship to bricks would be because, and on one hand, he has good relations with many of these leaders. On the other, they're clearly trying to move away from the west.

Ziyanda Stuurman 50:35

Yeah, really good question that I think you know, as you just described, bifurcates, the group quite a bit. You know, I think very much. On the one hand, you have Iran. You have that's part of the larger BRICS grouping. You have Iran. You have Russia and China, who are very happy to have the group be a platform for, you know, this real challenge to the Western order. If you want to put it that way, it that way. And then you have more of your global south swing states. And here, you know, Brazil, South Africa and India are, I think, well represented. And that obviously would push back against that, that idea. So I think the group, in and of itself, is still going to be, you know, sort of fluid in the way that it thinks of itself as a grouping, you know, started a couple of years ago, not even really having had that huge ambition, but rather sort of put together by, I think it was a Monaco motto that was coined by somebody from, You know, Goldman Sachs. So

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this definitely didn't start as a huge geopolitical, ambitious group, but a very, very practical one built around trade and diplomacy. You know, to answer Lynn's question, no, and this is mostly because, you know, as much as Putin had held, I think it was an example of what he would eventually want to call a brick stolid, you know, to rival the US dollar. That is such a far off pipe dream. You know, when you think about what it would take to build a common currency, you also need a common central bank. And I know, you know, our own central bank governance, South Africa would never give up. You know, South Africa's sovereign independence over its monetary policy. I don't think that would be true in India and several other countries that are part of the expanded BRICS group. So, you know, if you ask me, in 30 years, is is, is something that's focused or is a group that's focused on de-dollarization and a real challenge to the west? Is that possible? Yes, if you ask me in the next three years, I would say far less.

Kelley Beaucair Vlahos 52:49

I have one other question, and thank you for that. And that's that was very comprehensive, Lizzie, I have one other question. And this is, this is, this is going back to our conversation on China. It's a question that came over email by Anne Moison, and she says, Is there a smarter way for the G7 and the U.S. to leverage, slash, use the existing China investment to further enhance growth in Africa, rather than trying to replicate the China pattern similar to how China leverages US security focus investments I'm getting from this that she's asking, is there any way that we could positively work with China and take advantage of the fact that they are there and building all these things instead of setting it up as part of our great power conflict?

Elizabeth Shackelford 53:38

Well, I think for starters, all of China's infrastructure investment on the continent has benefits for anybody who wants to engage on the continent, right? So, you know, again, the various roads and railways and other kind of physical infrastructure that enhances transportation that China has already invested in makes it easier for American businesses to come in and engage in trade. It makes it faster to get things to port, faster to get things to trade. So fundamentally, I think that the United States seeing Chinese investment on the continent as a big threat to us is a mistake. I think it's a fundamental mistake. But at the same time, I don't think that means that we shouldn't also be investing in infrastructure on the continent for a couple of reasons, one being, it's massive. There is so much need for infrastructure development in so many different parts of the continent. If you want to try and make, you know, build better access for goods to get to market. Build better access for the many resources, valuable resources on the continent that you know, Americans and Europeans and others need for, you know, everything from tech to security issues.

So I don't think this is an either or. I think that at the end of the day, it is unfortunate that the United States and China see this much more from, you know, kind of a purely competitive perspective, because I think that we both benefit more from each of us investing more in the continent. I mean this, you know, from population, just the explosion in population there, it's, it's, it's going to be a place where, if you're not investing in Africa, and we're not all working towards

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the continent being more well integrated into the global economy, I think everyone's going to see a cost to that. So, but that said, it's natural the United States and China are in a big geopolitical competition. So my hope is that African leaders are able to play them against each other in the most brilliant way to get the maximum impact for their own states and their people. You know, that might not be up to us, but you know, played well. I think you know, countries like Angola can benefit from those railways coming from both directions, and so I don't see this as a problem for the United States. I don't see us as switching our focus to being more cooperative. But I think that both countries really being fixated on trying to expand economic engagement and infrastructure development is going to be can really be a positive outcome for for Africans

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 56:03

Let's since we have a few minutes left, I would love to just shift up to the Horn of Africa. And I'm not sure if any if you feel comfortable talking about this, but Lizzie, you, you brought up the issue of Sudan and how there are foreign, foreign proxies involved on both sides of that brutal conflict and the suffering of the people there. As a result, I also see that in the Horn of Africa, there are a lot of Middle Eastern influences in what's going on in Somalia and Somaliland and Ethiopia and Eritrea. And what can you talk a little bit about, what the United States can do, if anything, to sort of to sort that out, or at least, kind of take, take our, you know, allies or partners in the region, and tell them to extricate or to find ways to resolve the conflicts there diplomatically before they they truly get out of hand and become more regional crises. Which they are, they and seemingly are right now.

Elizabeth Shackelford 57:15

Well, I do think that it's, it is a growing you've got a series of very big security and humanitarian crises happening across the horn, they are going to start bleeding into each other and further complicating each other, and even for those who do not care about the some 25 million people at risk of famine right now in Sudan, hopefully people care more about stability. Your basic question of you know, is it possible for the US to do more 100% what matters? What will really take is just raising it on our political priority level. And right now it's, it's simply not. You look at 20 years ago, with the war in Sudan, with Darfur, and there was a tremendous, a tremendous push for action out of Congress, out of the American public and that led to results and really solid engagement from the White House that really did help resolve that conflict and reduce the suffering. We just we need political will. We also need to acknowledge the US. Government needs to acknowledge its level of influence and sway with some of these countries. The challenge, like just focusing in on one and that there are many, many examples of this. But let's just say the UAE is engagement in Sudan, which is very unhelpful. The problem there is that we have what 1525, other issues that we care about with the UAE and its engagement in Sudan, Sudan as a chat, as a priority, is just really low on that, on that list. So I think you know, for people out there who care about these issues, you know, raise alarm, talk to, you know, talk to your representatives in Washington and push it more. And hopefully, there will be a constituency that can make the US government care more about raising the priority level, not just about the people of Sudan, but about that entire region's stability. If we've got to sell it as look at all of

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these great economic opportunities for your donors, then so be it. But whenever we can get more focus there.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 59:06

So for my last question, I just like to do a little round robin and ask you so in the coming months, the first year of the Trump administration, what are you personally focused on, in terms of the continent and what flashpoints, what indicators are you looking for that might reflect or suggest what a broader policy is? In other words, what's going to come up on your radar? And you say, Okay, we know what's happening now. Like, what are you looking at, personally as a researcher and a scholar in Africa today? I'll start with Ziyanda.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 1:00:58

Very interesting. And when's that? G20 Summit?

Ziyanda Stuurman 1:01:02

November next year.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 1:01:03

Lizzy?

Elizabeth Shackelford 1:01:04

Personnel, personnel, personnel. I'm looking to see who gets appointed for Assistant Secretary for Africa. I'm looking to see if he's appointing special envoys to anything in particular. Let's say this, you know, let's say some major appointments go to in laws. I will know that he does not particularly care about what is going to happen. Let's say it goes to, you know, big, big multinational corporation, you know, founders, maybe they're going to care a lot about expanding business. Is he going to appoint, you know, special envoy to Sudan? Is it going to be someone who's super close with the middle, you know, with our Middle East partners, or is it going to be an evangelical who actually has a track record of caring about humanitarian outcomes? Those are going to be the thing, the signals that I'm looking for. And you better believe I'm going to go look at, you know, any social media postings for whoever he appoints to see. Is this one of the folks who said we're going to recognize Somaliland? Or is this somebody who, you know, focused on a totally different issue? So since White House won't care, I'm going to see what the personnel who are appointed are going to care about most.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 1:02:06

Excellent, Dan?

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Dan Ford 1:02:09

Yeah, similar to Lizzie. I think, you know, it's important to see who he appoints into these positions. Is he going to put someone, a special envoy on Sudan? And then, you know, I am hopeful, as I think I've mentioned, on the economic front, so on the security front, I have more questions, and would be curious to see who's in those positions, and what the early few months might indicate as to his policy on Sudan, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel as well, where the USS had a very checkered kind of policy past. So those are the regions I would really try and focus on, to try and understand how much of a priority they are and what his policy might look like for his second term.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos 1:02:52

Well, thank you very much for joining us. I want to I want to leave the program today just by bringing our audience back to our global south program. Please go to the Quincy Institute website, look up Global South under program areas. It's a new program, basically, and I'm reading now from the site: "We're helping to fashion a new bargain between the United States and the global South, including its middle powers, to deepen ties and enhance US influence in the vast region in less militarized ways, in part by bringing their voices and perspectives into Washington's policy making spheres". So please check out that exciting new program of which Dan is a research fellow. And thank you so much for joining us. Thank you to our esteemed panelists. I really, really enjoyed this conversation and all of your insights and and I know you'll be joining us again at some point as well. So thank you.