

HEGEMONIES AND ALLIANCES 5.0 THE OTHER GAME: MIDDLE EAST POWERS IN AFRICA

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On November 29-30, 2019 a conference entitled “The Other Game: Middle Eastern Powers in Africa” took place at the premises of the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue in Vienna. This was the fifth conference of the series “Hegemonies and Alliances” organised by the Kreisky Forum, curated by Walter Posch of IFK/NDA and generously supported by the MoD’s Directorate of Security Policy and Al Sharq Forum.

The conference brought together a select mix of scholars on Middle Eastern and African affairs, from the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, Russia and the USA as well as active and former officials. The aim of the conference was to better understand the role of Middle Eastern powers in Africa. Starting point was the need to relativize or to correct a certain view that reduces Africa merely to a theatre of Sino-European competition. In a certain sense, this was already an admission of a multipolar reality, as one speaker pointed out. Rather by default than by design the conference put the focus on two regions, the Horn Africa and West Africa. Although the conference was organised differently, we decided to start our report with the “big powers”.

(I) In or Out of Africa? The big powers

In general, US foreign policy under president Trump takes two different aspects into account: unilateral decisions of the president - whose authority is extremely strong - and institutional adaptation, meaning the process of adaptation and adjustment between the president and relevant institutions. Changes and continuity have always been the hallmarks of formulating a national security strategy, yet the currently applied organising principle of foreign US policy seems to focus almost exclusively on competition in the global arena, i.e. every state has to look after own interests. Thus, competition with Russia and China is more important than fighting terrorism! According to president Trump, once the US defeats ISIS, then it’s done. Some participants applauded this approach, after all the war on terrorism was never defined and a refocus on power politics provides clarity at last. On the Horn of Africa for instance the focus of US policy will shift on towards China and its policy of getting a grip of the ports there. Within a general framework of downsizing US engagement in the world, which entails a clear vision of downsizing the American footprint in both military and developmental engagement, restraint becomes a mainstream idea. The intellectual and strategic framework and underpinnings are currently developed at the newly founded (bi-partisan) Quincy institute. Thus the US views Saudi, Emirati and Turkish engagements in Africa positively and encourages initiatives like the Red Sea Forum without getting too deeply involved themselves. This said, basics of American pro-African policies remain intact, as the continents economic potential is well understood. However, for a variety of reasons the Gulf countries will remain always more important than Africa. But there is also the fact that Africans do pick their partners the way they like and the African Union, in spite of its weaknesses, pushed back on many things such as on a permanent presence of the US Africa Command.

Russia’s return to Africa seems to concern Western strategists more than anyone else. However, after the Soviet Union left Africa, Russia only recently discovered its interest for the black continent: the first Russian-African summit took place 2019, which is widely regarded as the turning point of Russia’s Africa strategy. Moscow’s strategy is not a zero sum game but aims to achieve a complementarity of resources, combining technology and social capital, economic interests and to a certain degree security - Russia offers military training and became an important arms supplier. On the side of soft skills, Russia provides academic training for more than 10.000 African students and Moscow’s attempt to cooperate with Muslim communities in Africa. On the economic side, traditionally Russia’s main trading partners have been the northern African countries. As of now, Russia’s main interests lay in the import of minerals, mining including gold mining in Congo, oil and gas and technology transfer. This said nothing



could be further away from the truth than viewing Russia's engagement in Africa as a *grand retour*: True, the trade volume has increased from 2013 to about 20 billion USD – but that is 70-times less than Russia's trade with Europe and ten times less than the one with China. Even more, one forgets about India, which during the last years increased its trade with Africa from 20 billion to more than 65 billion and has an impressive presence of 3 Million people living in Africa, mostly on the Eastern coasts from the Horn down to South Africa.

China's engagement with Africa is driven by its "Belt and Road" initiative, a state driven initiative, which allows Peking to gain influence via economic power. China follows a state led economic model of development, all actors – the construction firms, financial actors and, of course, development agencies are state actors and serve Chinese foreign policy and strategic interests. All public funds support the international branches of Chinese enterprises, expecting them to go abroad and become competitive. Thus, the lines between development and business are blurred. But contrary to Russia the arms business does not play an important role; maybe because China wants to prepare the ground first and sell arms later or simply because China does not see itself as a security provider for Africa at all. Many in Africa see the – ill defined – "China model" as an economic model, not as a social one, and appreciate the fact China does not insist on political requirements such as Human Rights or environmental standards. Yet the Chinese model based on economic engagement with showcase projects such as railway construction in Africa and other megaprojects are more and more criticised. Debates about megaprojects and their costs and length are often underestimated and Africans start to resent the "tap trap", such as in Kenya, where China holds about 70% of the debts.

Contrary to classic powers, the EU understands itself as a global player following a participative and cooperative agenda. Thus, European speakers stressed the importance of African institutions like the African Union. Created in 2000 it came into being in 2002 and was fashioned after the EU Commission and up to 90% of the AU's budget comes from the EU. A very Western European point of view was the understanding of a "long tradition" of the Euro-African relationship including the colonial history. Modern Euro-African relations are based on the Cotonou-Agreement, which is to expire in 2020. The EU applies several instruments and strategies on Africa, including high-level summits and EU-Delegations, to an EU Emergency and Trust Fund for Africa, as well as different missions and operations – most of them harshly criticised in their proper context and the lack of cooperation with the civil society bemoaned. Yet Africa changed since the "Joint Africa-EU Strategy JAES" in 2011 and further changes are to be expected with Brexit.

Speakers counted among the biggest challenges: "demography" (rapid population growth in Africa, of course), which was presented as a social and political challenge (i.e. negative) on one hand but as a chance for change for instance via civil society activism etc. on the other hand. Lack of democracy, endemic corruption (perhaps both being colonial legacies, to a certain degree? W.P.) and the need for disarmament ("gun ownership is [African] manhood" someone remarked, yet gun production seems to be European, still) and finally desertification caused by climate change. Quite tellingly, a Horn of Africa "strategy" from EU would be needed as the current engagements are outdated. One interesting question regarded the topic of African agency. There was a widespread agreement in the conference, that strategies should be developed together *with* instead of *for* the Africans and a new Cotonou agreement will not be ready anytime soon. In fact, on the side of implementation the Europeans face the tensions between giving Africans agency and not trusting African capacities and capabilities, at least in the military field.



(II) The Horn of Africa

Iran...

The competition among Middle Eastern powers over influence in Africa was understood as an expression of the end of the US dominated unipolar world-order. Expectedly, Iranian-Saudi rivalry stretches to the whole continent, albeit with varying intensity. Taking Iranian-Saudi competition as a starting point some saw Tehran's presence in Somalia as an element to support its alleged proxies, the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Others disagreed; given the situation in the Middle East, Iran does not see Africa as the primary theatre to challenge Saudi Arabia, nor did it pick up a fight with Israel there as of yet. Even Tehran's much talked about presence in Somalia was facilitated because China did not yet engage there. Tehran favours influence and security interests over economic ones for the simple reason it cannot compete economically with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Thus, Iranian aims in Somalia are relatively modest: the port of Assab serves to fight piracy rather than it is used for power projection. In general, Iran's presence in Africa should somehow help it to evade international pressure, to gain strategic depth and to find new allies among marginalised countries or those who cannot rely on a US security umbrella.

... and Sudan

Reassessing its policies in the aftermath of the Arab spring, Tehran decided not to get deeper involved in the Horn but aims to boost its "soft power" in the region. It also counts that rivalry among Gulf states would checkmate themselves. However, as some stated, Tehran had to cede a lot of ground to its rivals and it is hard to imagine how it could regain lost influence via soft power alone. Regarding the Horn of Africa (including Sudan), a majority concurred with the reading that Tehran just put a brave face on a serious strategic setback. This becomes more palatable the more one compares it to the Iranians' key role in the 1980s in Sudan, which quickly switched sides after losing oil rich South-Sudan, and where Israel tried to mediate the civil war. The economic disaster also resulted in deep domestic changes in Sudan: - at least half of the government consists of former opposition figures as the main party became dismantled; - women take a huge part in the public although their presence in a future government and in general is not yet clear; - the new state may even be weaker than the old one as Ethiopian brinkmanship towards Sudan indicates. However, this weakness will not make it easy prey for the Gulf countries. Sudan does not share the same interests or the same ideology like Saudi Arabia or the UAE, who have not lived up to their financial pledges anyway.

Gulf States' competition

The three main Gulf actors UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are in competition with one another. Among them only the UAE seem to follow a viable long-term economic strategy. For instance, the Emirati's port strategy is colliding with the Chinese "One Belt One Road" project. The UAE bought much of Somalia's critical infrastructure before the Chinese could. Indeed, the UAE's strategic skills and vision are remarkable and its capability to follow an independent course of action is confirmed -as one could see in Yemen, where disagreements between UAE and Saudi Arabia have increased over time. The UAE are able to formulate – and tackle with – security concerns of their own. They act upon their own reasoning regarding the question of the root cause of the Yemen conflict and from this onward the issue of how to proceed. The multifaceted Yemen conflict runs along various different lines one of them being the socioeconomic structure in the former communist south and the mainly tribal structure in the north but it also relates to more basic issues, such as water, or better the scarcity of it. The conflict has acquired a strategic dimension, as it relates to the Saudi-Iranian competition, and as one participant put it, has the potential to become a frozen conflict, perhaps with a serious level of violence

thus raising questions of the “level of frozenness” i.e. meaning a stalemate does not necessarily imply the end of “hot” military action.

In general, Riyadh focuses its activities on North Africa especially in stabilising Egypt, whereas it plays a rather secondary role in Libya, where Qatar and the UAE are more active – the latter to the dismay of some European countries. In addition, Saudi Arabia has drawn down its presence in Somalia especially regarding its support for the Shabab militias, who thanks to US pressure and counter terrorism efforts cannot existentially threaten the current power structures in spite of being very adaptive. Even so, there is a clear political shift of Somalia towards the wider Gulf region. This leads to an unbalanced situation between Somalia and outside actors and aggravates the complicated relationship between the federal government (supported i.a. by Qatar) and autonomous entities, such as Somaliland, whose passports Saudi Arabia had accepted recently. Special attention is due to Kenyan Somali tensions, which have the potential of unsettling East Africa.

Turkey in Somalia

But UAE-Qatari rivalry in Somalia may as well exacerbate tensions, especially since Qatar’s policy in Libya failed. There is also another incentive for Qatar to stay engaged in Somalia, which was not mentioned during the conference: its partnership with Turkey. Turkey’s engagement with Somalia began in earnest in 2005-08 and was put to a new, more comprehensive level in 2011. Yet domestic problems especially the confrontation between Erdoğan and the Gülenists, who were very outspoken advocates of Turkey’s Africa policy, necessitated a reshuffling. At a certain point, Turkey exerted an irritating high amount of pressure on countries to close down Gülenist schools and networks. Even so Turkey’s influence (or presence? i.e. embassies 42 nowadays as compared to 12 in 2009...) in Africa grew and became more visible at home. The importance of the recent maritime agreement between Turkey and Libya was explained as being part of improving Turkish soft (!) power in Africa and to increase political as well as economic influence. Someone urged the EU to come to an agreement with Turkey over Libya, without however addressing the problem that the European position is not unified either. Early on, Turkey committed itself to officers’ and NCO training in Somalia (Mogadishu) but evidently there is no military master plan behind it, rather the military aspect is part of a civilian master plan: focussing on peacebuilding and stabilisation based on civilian and military capacity building. By doing so, Ankara aims to establish Turkish soft power. Meanwhile, Somali communities active in business and academia exist in Turkey’s major cities, strengthening Turkish-Somali relations on their own (trade with Africa amounted to 22 billion USD and Ankara hosted an important conference for expat Somalis in 2014). Turkey is also active in education (scholarships, Maarif schools) and donates first aid on a bilateral basis rather than involving UN institutions. The high prestige Turkey enjoys in Somalia derives to a very important degree from the fact, that Ankara has sent its own personnel and does not work via proxies, as others do. Another reason why Turkey’s presence is well received is that contrary to Qatar it avoids getting involved in local African politics.

Djibouti

One often-overlooked aspect in Western analysis of the Horn of Africa is the fact that the region corresponds with the Middle East much more than with the rest of the continent. Somalian – Yemeni relations, Sudanese mercenaries paid by Saudi Arabia for fighting in Yemen, Israeli engagement and the great interest and diplomatic efforts Saudi Arabia and the UAE invested in the reconciliation process between Eritrea and Ethiopia are vivid testimonies for these relations. One may conclude that instead of the “Horn of Africa” one has to understand the littoral of the Red Sea as a cultural and geographic unity or at least a continuum, with Djibouti being the very nodal point connecting both sides. Djibouti tries to use its strategic location to its advantage, by diversifying its economy and its

trade partners; it views foreign investments as a long-term success - this is how China comes in. Therefore, Djibouti builds up its regional port to international levels. Generally, Djibouti views the Gulf countries as one entity, regardless of port issue problems with the UAE. Djibouti's strategic location and domestic stability makes it also attractive for foreign bases. For instance, parts of AMISOM are stationed there. In fact, Djibouti cannot afford to have any armed conflict with other countries. Relations with neighbours had been difficult at times as both Ethiopia and Somalia tried to annex it.

Israel

In this context, the Israeli reading of the Horn of Africa as a "gateway" towards the rest of Africa only makes sense considering that Israel regards Ethiopia as part of the Middle East. Under Haile Selassie Ethiopia was the cornerstone of an Israeli strategy to counter Arab nationalism and its standard-bearer Egypt. Ever since relations became more sober and nowadays Israel is interested in the stability of both countries Ethiopia and Egypt, and shows great interest in the development of the Grand Renaissance Dam, a bone of contention between Addis and Cairo. Everything relating to the Nile is extremely sensitive: Israel is an exporter for water down to Egypt as the Fertile Crescent is everything but. Ethiopian stability also became a domestic issue for Israel, due to its great Ethiopian Jewish community. In general, Ethiopians are welcome in Israel because they identify with Jerusalem. Migration to Israel does play an important role in Israeli politics although not as central as it might appear. Yet there is admittedly a big debate ongoing affecting domestic politics, as not only Eritreans and Sudanese but also Asians arrive. Expectedly, Israelis distinguish between Jewish refugees from Africa for whom state and society feels an obligation and others. However, this does not mean that they were simply ignored, in Southern Tel Aviv alone there are about 50.000 refugees. Other than Ethiopia, Israel is mainly interested in economic relations with the region and maintains cordial relations via a vast net of embassies to many African states, in spite of the notorious financing problems of the MoFA.

Ethiopia and Eritrea

Riyadh and Abu Dhabi rest their efforts on cultivating their relationship with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmad. The very nature of such a transactional rather than multilateral relationship poses the risk that on the long run or as soon as he runs into bigger problems, he may adapt to a more autocratic style of governance. With the EU on the side-lines and much money – but certainly not for anything – spent by the Gulf countries, this may even happen rather soon. Allegedly an evangelical Christian of mixed ethnic (Oromo, Amhara) and religious (Muslim, Ethiopian orthodox) background, he raised high hopes; some see him as a new Gorbachev some almost as a messiah. Actually, he is partially highly popular because he is the first prime minister to travel to all parts of the country, enjoying a warm welcome wherever he went. As an energetic representant of the younger generation he has a clear "me vs. them" – meaning him and the old guard – attitude. The old guard still exists and hedges its bets for a comeback until after the day Ahmad fails. This may well happen for two interdependent reasons: changes within Ethiopian society and Eritrean politics. Changes in Ethiopia are no longer elite driven, with the youth playing an important part of it. Developments within the wider region (Arab Spring), increased interconnectivity and the diaspora via social media accelerate these changes, resulting i.a. in the rise of identity politics. As a result even federalism is questioned aggravating the issue of the – ethnic and religious diverse – periphery. Likewise, the peace process has certainly changed the political atmosphere and boosted Ahmad's popularity but beyond that, failed to yield the hoped for results because Eritrea's president Afawerki stopped the implementation of the Jeddah peace deal (which was not too specific anyway to begin with). Afawerki may as well be forced to scuttle the deal altogether, as a peace settlement would seriously harm his anti-Ethiopian ideology, the only justification for his autocratic rule. In the short term, the peace agreement resulted in increased



economic engagement of the Gulf States, but on the long run, Eritrea needs a stable economic relationship with Ethiopia.

(III) Identity shaping: Sectarianism

In general, a contradicting picture about Islam in public life was drawn. According to many, a general tendency of Islam becoming a private issue can be observed, whilst at the same time, the opposite can be said for Ethiopia or Nigeria, where religion provides the language of discontent. A similar point could be made for Burkina Faso where socio-political exclusion results with the rise of Islamic movements. In West Africa and Nigeria, which are dominated by Sufi-Islam, all sides attempt to find converts to their respective branch of Islam, which in turn becomes quickly politicized. This is the case with Iran and Shiaism; according to Western and Wahhabi inspired observers Sufis tend to be easier to be converted, hence the number of Mauritians converting to Shia Islam has increased, which explains the many visits of Iranian and Mauritanian officials, against which Saudi Arabia forcefully protests. It is understood, Saudi Arabia is adamant to win converts to its stricter form of Wahhabism or at least Salafism. As there is no Salafi culture in the region, one participant went so far to state that new Salafi networks are nothing but criminals involved in drug trafficking. The UAE are adamantly fighting the Muslim brotherhood, which is supported by Qatar. Qatar also supports the Muslim brotherhood in Somalia and Libya. In Libya, however thanks to the UAE donating vast resources effectively the MB's capacities are diminishing dramatically. For Iran, defending Shiites and fighting "militant Islam" - meaning Sunni extremists from the Horn to West Africa- remains a political priority. Iranian institutions on the ground have to compete with Saudi founded madrasas throughout the region. One main field of competition is Nigeria, where the government has a long record of poor management regarding confessional tensions (or ethno-sectarian tensions, not much time however was spent on definitions). Iran supports and relies upon local Hezbollah-networks (or rather *hezbollahi* meaning that they are not part of the Lebanese Hezbollah but share its ideology). There are about 120.000 Lebanese Shia expats in West Africa from where the Shiite community spread. In general, the Shia community/ies is/are calm although they too have founded militias. Thankfully, their ideology hinders them to become a next Boko Haram. Things may change though if the leader of Nigeria's Shiite community, Ayatollah Sheikh Zakzaky, dies in foreign or Nigerian custody. In December 2015 hostilities between Shiites, the Nigerian government and Sunni radicals escalated. One reason was that Zakzaky travelled 2015 to Lebanon where he visited Hezbollah. For this reason, the US view Nigeria's Shiites as a parallel threat to Sunni Jihadism. The radicalisation of the Shia minority and a potential escalation could ultimately result in a confrontation between Iran and the West in Africa.

(IV) West Africa

It was widely assumed that the situation in West Africa differs greatly from the Horn due to the much stronger regional "West African" identity, which expresses itself by a deep tradition of regional cooperation promoted by the nation states. This identity even encompasses the Anglophone-Francophone divide and explains the creation of Economic Community of West African States - ECOWAS. Putting the initial focus on economic issues, it increasingly addresses security issues. Being the most significant organisation in the region it promotes a free trade area since 1990 and managed to build up a shared culture of governance and key principles (such as get together and intervene in crisis from member states/Liberia, Sierra Leone etc.). Needless to say, the institution is not perfect but it continues to promote the culture of collective action. Other historic examples for West African collective actions can be quoted, such as AFISMA in Mali, the 2014 Burkina Faso political solution or the 2016 intervention in Gambia. Hence, the G5-initiative established by France to counter jihadism,

supported, and financed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE should be seen from the perspective of West African collective action. Iran perceives the G5 Sahel Force negatively for two reasons: first, they see them as colonialist puppets and secondly they are distrustful of Saudi and Emirati involvement. But distrust is mutual, Western commentators could not make any sense out of the real intentions of a “Memorandum of Understanding” Iran signed with Ghana or Tehran’s, apparently incoherent, arms shipments to Africa.

On the surface of things, the sense of mutual interests of all parties involved in G5 shapes their institutional engagement. This initiative intensifies the engagement of Saudi Arabia and the UAE with “the EU” (meaning France). Multilateral cooperation in such a framework is a new experience for Saudi Arabia and the UAE; both usually prefer to foster bilateral relations. Yet some observers cautioned of too much idealism, and hinted at ulterior motives on behalf of all parties involved. For example, some criticized the Saudis, accusing them of sending radical imams, building mosques but keeping children away from school, but most importantly, contrary to their pledges, they simply do not pay at all. Furthermore, the Saudis and the Emirates are playing both sides G5 and the jihadists at the same time. Algeria too seems to lend its support to the jihadists, who constantly push south in recent years, thus posing an increasing threat to Ivory Coast. Others cautioned not to write off Morocco, which tries to engage the Sahel via its own institutions, too early. Turkey applies more soft power than hard power in West Africa and prefers bilateral relations than working through a framework of any kind. For once, it focuses on the Horn of Africa, besides Turkey is still about to figure out what Africa means for it, thus a lot of work is still about acquiring experience and learning through practice. This is also one reason, why it does not contribute troops for peacekeeping or training missions. Perhaps wisely so, because the fight against terrorism has its limits: French bases in Niamey and the Libyan border were supposed to contain the rise of ISIS in the greater Sahara. However, the US scaled back their engagement in the Sahel and elsewhere in spite of a generally deteriorating security situation, as the attacks on French troops in Mali show. In addition, the jihadists are extremely adaptable and quick to react and respond in military terms. Terrorism is presented as the main threat and counter-terrorism absorbs most resources, yet there are other challenges too originating from social and economic problems (drug trafficking, political problems, etc ...). Despite all missions and operations, the region is not more secure than before. Some participants thought that the West has not learnt anything from the insurgencies of the 1960s and pointed at the fact, that counterterrorism strategies are not suited to address an insurgency.

In Mali, the rise of Fulani militias adds to the general insecurity. The Fulani case has been exaggerated in many regards, either as a simplification by describing it as a herder – farmer conflict or as a terrorist network. Someone even invited participants to a “thought experiment” asking whether it would not be wiser to create a state for the Fulani, others suggested to establish autonomy for minorities such as the Tuareg, because Mali is dysfunctional anyway. At least Bamako should be forced to make some concessions to the tribes. This said the conflict in central Mali is all about economic participation, meaning trafficking, protection and the control of central routes, religious arguments are just second. In fact, Mali became the new epicentre of violence spreading to Burkina Faso, where social and political exclusion increase tensions; as well as to Niger, which became the heart of counter terrorism strategies and serves as host for many military bases. Yet some hinted at the fact that the Malian government is simply not interested in any kind of solution that could lead to any serious transformation and voiced the wish of the EU to stop supporting corrupt African governments. Turkey goes the other way, as Ankara pragmatically – and realistically one may add – deals with the interests of African leaders.

The situation in 2013 necessitated an urgent French operation. On the international level, this was supported by MINUSMA (Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation Au Mali) yet its mandate was criticized for being insufficient and not addressing the root causes. Also,

the strategy of France was analysed in ironic terms, namely to convince different countries to contribute troops to the mission and thus to “Europeanise” French interests. Be this as it may, whilst G5 gets all the attention the force is not functional. Participants bemoaned lack of coordination and lack of commitment on behalf of the G5 Force leadership and pointed at the “insanely” high level of corruption and the fact that 80% of the force is used for self-protection. In this context, someone suggested that the EU should adjust its political goals to the military operations the Europeans are able to conduct. Others added a galling critique on the lack of cooperation among the six entities involved in the three EU missions. In general, there are many “Sahel strategies” to secure the region but the complexity of situation and coordination of all mechanisms in the region turns out to be a very serious challenge. However, how could there be a common EU strategy anyway when there is no common European goal at all?

In Nigeria, political tensions have their roots in the economic and political neglect of the Northern provinces. The struggle for democracy after the end of dictatorship in 1999 focussed on the south. Therefore, not a lot of attention was paid to internal tensions and dynamics of exclusion in the North, which resulted in support for the introduction of Sharia law in twelve out of 36 states. Hence, the quest for the renewal of identity and society was left to extremists, such as Boko Haram who address political, economic and social problems to gain members. Religion thus serves as a tool to gain social control before political control is acquired in the next step. They are also those who connect the local to the global. The absence or dysfunction of many state institutions and malfunctioning of law enforcement facilitated the emergence of jihadi groups and criminal networks. To address and remedy these problems a keen understanding of local dynamics is necessary. A key problem however lies within the political process itself, which has proven incapable to manage political dissent in a meaningful way.

Israel maintains an efficient presence in West Africa security threats posed by Boko Haram and DAESH pose a potential threat for Israeli interests. A special relationship including security aspects was established with Ghana in 1985, diplomatic relations with Nigeria in 1992 and most recently, Chad and Israel decided to exchange ambassadors. This in itself is a breakthrough but the lack of transparency in foreign relations between both states makes it difficult to appropriately assess the coherence and potential of these relations. Israeli investment in West Africa is rising not only in the fields of agriculture and water management but also in building infrastructure, cyber, energy etc. Here Israelis and Iranians may come into crosshairs since Teheran has increased its efforts to find access to West African uranium.