

Statement of
Acting Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs John Bass
U.S. Department of State
“Great Power Competition in Africa”
September 11, 2024

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss great power competition in Africa and other important issues on the continent.

Today marks 23 years since 3,000 innocent people were killed in attacks in the United States. We honor their memory and the memory of over 7,000 service members lost in the war on terror, along with fellow diplomats and development professionals. We also remember our four colleagues killed in the terrorist attack that began on this day in 2012 in Benghazi, Libya.

Africa is at a pivotal moment. Home to the world’s fastest growing and youngest population, there is little doubt the world’s future will be shaped in large part by Africans. By 2050, one in four people on the planet will be African. Africa hosts diverse and irreplaceable natural resources and critical minerals. African nations play an influential role as a regional voting group in the United Nations and in advancing global priorities to the benefit of Africans and Americans.

The region is also of acute interest to our strategic competitors, who are coaxing African countries into trajectories of debt, negative growth, and exploitative security relationships. China has established a one-way trade relationship with Africa, dumping goods at below-market prices, while the United States has for years promoted African exports to the United States through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The PRC is also working to expand its military presence and relationships in Africa.

Meanwhile, Russia has committed widespread human rights abuses while providing security to unelected governments, sown disinformation about

health programs that benefit Africans, and exploited Africa's natural resources. In this environment, the United States seeks to demonstrate the value of our partnership while promoting fairness and transparency.

Terrorist activity in Africa has also grown over the past decade with violent events nearly tripling since 2014. Efforts to build capable, professional, and accountable security forces must support and not replace investments in good governance, human rights, stabilization, and economic opportunities. The Biden-Harris Administration laid out our priorities in the U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa in August 2022. The strategy is grounded in partnership and respect. In December 2022, President Biden hosted the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, bringing together leaders from 49 African countries and the African Union, alongside members of civil society and the private sector. The summit catalyzed U.S. public and private investment and partnership, including the commitment of \$55 billion in USG investment and over \$15 billion in private sector investment.

We have bolstered our commercial diplomacy efforts in order to create a modern economic partnership with Africa and reduce dependency on aid. A signature example is the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment's (PGI) development of the Lobito Corridor from Angola through the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Zambia. We and our partners have created a once-in-a-generation rail project to improve east-west connectivity and integrate Africa with global markets. Our strategic infrastructure projects in the energy, digital, transportation, and agricultural sectors will boost trade and create jobs in Africa and here at home.

We are grateful to have had bipartisan Congressional support for several critical and historic aspects to our policy in Africa. I would like to thank Ranking Member Meeks for putting forward a bill to institutionalize the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, so it is held every four years. In addition, I encourage you to work with your Senate colleagues to pass legislation as soon as possible to reauthorize the AGOA, PEPFAR, the DFC, and modifications for MCC. I cannot emphasize enough how transformative these programs have been to Africa's economic development – and to

advancing U.S. interests in Sub-Saharan Africa. These programs set us apart from our competitors.

Another aspect to our historic approach to the continent, which our rivals are now copying, are educational exchanges, including our English-language training, our visitors' programs, and our support for independent media. Even as we have experienced cuts to these programs over a period of years, China and Russia have dramatically expanded theirs. We hear again and again that students and visitors would prefer to come to the United States, but we lack the funding to meet this demand – foregoing a key opportunity to invest in our future relationships with the continent.

I would also like to request your support for the extension of a critical authority for Overseas Comparability Pay (OCP) in any Continuing Resolution or other funding legislation pursued before the end of the fiscal year. Currently, the last day that federal employees in the foreign service are authorized to receive OCP is September 30. If OCP lapses, all of our dedicated professionals working on the continent will take an immediate pay cut. This will undercut our ability to recruit and maintain staff at our African posts – and all of our posts globally.

As my colleagues and I have traveled across the continent, we have seen a thirst for more U.S. engagement. The American model of development and investment is highly valued; we are appreciated for our efforts to uphold democracy and human rights, as well as our efforts to lead peace processes during crisis, and our partners seek our support on security. There are several critical steps we must take to sustain this momentum. Working together, I am confident we can do so.

Thank you again for your commitment to strengthening the U.S.-Africa partnership. I look forward to your questions.