



**Statement of Congressman Ron Wright (R-TX)
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International
Organizations
House Committee on Foreign Affairs**

“Looking Forward: U.S. – Africa Relations”

March 26, 2019

Remarks as Prepared

Thank you, Chairwoman Bass, for calling this timely hearing on U.S. policy toward sub-Saharan Africa. I also want to thank each of our witnesses for agreeing to testify this afternoon.

I believe I speak for all of us when I say that U.S. engagement in Africa has become increasingly important. I was pleased to see the Administration recognize this and release a dedicated “Africa Strategy” in December. It is critical for the American people to understand our interests in Africa and for Africa to see our commitment to the continent. In my opinion, the strategy goes a long way in both respects.

In recent years, policy and debate on Africa has centered on counterterrorism, foreign assistance, conservation, women empowerment, development, good governance, and human rights amongst other things.

While I am proud of the progress we’ve made in our counter-terrorism efforts, we must continue to be proactive, particularly in the Sahel. As we’ve seen in the Middle East, left unchecked, extremist organizations have the potential to carry out deadly attacks across the globe and spur tragic humanitarian crises as people flee from harm’s way.

The same can be said on development and women empowerment. The BUILD Act and the Woman’s Entrepreneurship and Economic Empower Act, which were both signed into law last



Congress, will have a tremendous impact, but we must do more. Africa continues to grapple with high poverty rates, food insecurity, insufficient healthcare and education systems, and infrastructure deficiencies. Addressing these issues is not only in the best interest of Africans, but in the best interest of Americans.

For this reason, I introduced the Digital Global Access Policy Act, which promotes expanding internet access in developing countries, and, in turn, will help Africa overcome many of the problems I just mentioned. It is my hope that this committee and the House of Representatives will soon take up this critical legislation.

While many of the previous issues I've highlighted will continue to dominate our efforts in Africa, we must turn our attention towards countering China and Russia, as they expand their financial and political influence across the continent.

Through its Belt and Road Initiative, China has secured significant leverage over many African countries and access to Africa's precious natural resources. China's construction of its first overseas military base in Djibouti is also a cause for concern given its close proximity to ours. We see similar interest from Russia, albeit even more defense focused.

Checking Chinese and Russian investment and influence in the region (and the rest of the world) is critical to U.S. national security. We cannot write blank checks or discount requirements that come along with U.S. assistance, but we must think critically and innovatively about how we can offer an alternative.

I look forward to what will certainly be a productive and enlightening discussion about our next steps in Africa. Thank you. I yield back.

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