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Africa in Transition

Campbell tracks political and security developments across sub-Saharan Africa.

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by John Campbell
October 1, 2012



Algeria's Foreign Minister Mourad Medelci addresses the 67th United Nations General Assembly at the U.N. Headquarters in New York 29/09/2012. (Eduardo Munoz/Courtesy Reuters)



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The annual United Nations General Assembly debate, which brings over one hundred heads of state to NYC, ended today. As part of the series of speeches made by each country delegation, the foreign minister of **Mauritania**, Hamadi Ould Bab Oul Hamadi, and the foreign minister of **Algeria**, Mourad Medelci

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On Africa in Transition, a former U.S. ambassador to Nigeria signals the most important political, security, and social developments occurring in sub-Saharan Africa.


About the Author



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Floods resulting from the autumn rainy season have devastated central and southeastern Nigeria. According to Nigerian media, the flooding is the worst...

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called, inter alia, for a permanent African seat on the UN Security Council. Their remarks are a reminder of the

importance of this issue to African elites continent wide, who regularly cite the scope and importance of UN activities on the continent. But, leaving aside the multiple obstacles to any changes (or “reform”) in Security Council membership criteria, Africans are divided over which country would occupy a permanent African seat. Hence, discussion of a permanent African seat on the security council often has an air of unreality.

The African media usually identifies Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt as the leading candidates for a permanent seat. Nigeria’s spokesmen refer to the country’s population—some 165 million—and its long history of leadership in UN activities, especially UN peace making and peace keeping operations going back to Congo in the 1960s. South Africans cite the size and modernity of its economy—the largest in Africa—and the country’s successful transition to “non-racial” democracy. Its elder statesman, Nelson Mandela, is probably the most celebrated African political figure now living. Egypt has a large population, a large economy, and a history of diplomatic activism. However, many sub-Saharanans would regard the country as ineligible for an “African” seat because it is part of the Near East. (The U.S Department of State assigns Egypt to the Bureau of Near East Affairs, not the Bureau for African Affairs.) Though both governments downplay it, there is a rivalry between Nigeria and South Africa for leadership of sub-Saharan Africa. Its most recent manifestation was the contest for the position of Chairperson of the Africa Union Commission. After a long deadlock, it was won by Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, a South African former minister of health and of foreign affairs. Many of the small francophone states opposed the candidacy of a South African, and Nigeria was unenthusiastic.

Some Africans believe the rivalry between Nigeria and South Africa could be solved by creating two permanent African seats. That hardly seems likely. Indeed, there seems to be little movement on the broad issues of Security Council reform. But, for African elites, the issue will not go away, and it is a potential irritant in their relationships with the permanent members of the security council, whom they perceive as opposed or indifferent to reform. African intellectuals often looked wistfully for some alternative to the security council, but thus far have found none. South African enthusiasm for its membership in the BRICS owes more than a little to this frustration.

Security Council reform is often seen as contingent upon wider reform of the entire UN system—including difficult issues such as funding or personnel. African states could make a better case for a permanent seat if they actively worked toward a broader reform agenda. For the most part, however, they have not.

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Posted by **Maria Lanthier**
October 6, 2012 at 10:02 am

It is high time that the input of African leaders be brought t to the Security Council !



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October 16th, 2012

No Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership this Year—Again

The Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership is awarded to a democratically-elected African chief of state who pursues good governance...



Former U.S. ambassador to Nigeria John Campbell explores Nigeria's postcolonial history and examines the events and conditions that have carried this troubled giant to the edge.



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[Boko Haram](#) (58)
[Brazil](#) (2)
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[Chad](#) (3)
[China](#) (11)
[Civil Society](#) (24)
[Climate Change](#) (4)
[Conflict](#) (98)
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[Corruption](#) (35)
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[Democracy](#) (64)
[Development](#) (15)
[Diaspora](#) (2)
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- [Kenya](#) (22)
- [Kony 2012](#) (1)
- [Liberia](#) (10)
- [Libya](#) (8)
- [LRA](#) (1)
- [Malawi](#) (1)
- [Mali](#) (21)
- [Maps](#) (4)
- [Markets](#) (4)
- [Media](#) (2)
- [Mexico](#) (1)
- [Mozambique](#) (1)
- [Niger](#) (3)
- [Nigeria](#) (182)
 - [Niger Delta](#) (13)
 - [Nigeria Security Tracker](#) (3)
 - [Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink](#) (1)
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- [Reports](#) (16)
- [Rwanda](#) (3)
- [Sahel](#) (1)
- [Senegal](#) (5)
- [Sierra Leone](#) (9)
- [Somalia](#) (6)
- [South Africa](#) (85)
- [South Sudan](#) (15)
- [Sudan](#) (35)
- [Swaziland](#) (1)
- [Tanzania](#) (1)
- [Technology](#) (8)
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- [Trade](#) (5)
- [Uganda](#) (14)
- [Uncategorized](#) (80)
- [United Nations](#) (21)
- [United States](#) (17)
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