



Africa: A Hybrid Battleground

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1. Introduction

In the context of hybrid conflicts in Africa, two fundamental traits of challenges are expected to prevail by the 2030s: (1) the traditional hybrid challenges to modern state functioning (as known today from current conflicts), against which national and international actors (African Union, NATO, European Union) can shore up defenses from provisions to active defense; (2) hybrid challenges that specifically target states already in fragile conditions, against which there will be no effective national counterbalance due to failing state functions and institutions. In the latter case hybrid challenges will exacerbate the systemic pressures (lack of security, stability, services) in these fragile states, increasing the role of non-state actors as stakeholders in providing security. The more so, because most African states will be battling the effects of population boom and all related scarcities, including water and sanitation, food, housing, employment etc., resulting in governance failure and increasing the likelihood of evolving such ungoverned/contested spaces in Africa which we have witnessed in Iraq and Syria after 2014.

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The purpose of this paper is to highlight those presumptive forms and effects of hybrid warfare that will characterize Africa as a ‘hybrid battleground’ by the 2030s, inflicting strategic disruption. Furthermore, in parallel to identifying these hybrid challenges, the authors will outline necessary steps on behalf of NATO to increase the resilience of African states to said challenges.

As the authors are aware of the narrative debates concerning the use of the term ‘hybrid warfare’,³ this paper will be based on the understanding of hybrid threats along the following – broadly understood but security and defense specific – lines, used as a working definition:⁴ The strategic aim of hybrid war (similarly to other wars) is fundamentally political, where one party to the conflict tries to force its will upon its adversary. ‘Hybrid warfare’ is the use of ‘hybrid war’ instruments in practice. *Hybrid war is a form of indirect and restricted warfare in which the employer relies on the full spectrum of military and non-military (diplomatic, economic, informational, financial, political, energetics, public administration, crime-related, intelligence, cyber etc.) means to enforce its will along offensive or defensive aims upon its adversary. In hybrid war the use of non-military means is dominant, the kinetic use of conventional armed forces takes place only upon completion or consolidation of the employer in the military domain. Thus, hybrid war is not a total war in its nature, though escalation might lead to outright military conflict.* The use of hybrid warfare is based on blurring the boundary between war and peace, thus creating an ambiguous situation in terms of international law (of war). Hybrid warfare starts long before the first actual combat moves take place on the ground. Furthermore, the means of hybrid warfare can be employed not only by state actors but powerful non-state actors as well.

Providing adequate answers to the employment hybrid means is challenging for two main reasons:

³ See for example: Patrick J Cullen – Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud: *Understanding Hybrid Warfare*. MCDIC, London, 2017; James K. Wither: “Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare.” *Connections*, Vol. 15., 2016, No. 2., 73-87; Andrew Radin: *Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics: Threats and Potential Responses*. RAND Corporation, Washington D.C., 2017; András Rácz: *Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine. Breaking the Enemy’s Ability to Resist*. FIIA Report 43., FIIA, Helsinki, 2015.

⁴ The authors wish to express their thanks and gratitude to the Hungarian team of experts – Alex Etl, Krisztián Jójárt, Péter Marton, András Rácz, Péter Tólas and Péter Wagner – who shared their input, insight and opinion when crafting this definition.

- 1) Hybrid warfare is characterized by the lack of transparency and the deniability of attribution, as the offensive party hides and denies its participation and role in the conflict as long as possible. These circumstances make it more difficult for the defending party to find remedy or retribution and to mobilize its allies against the adversary.
- 2) *Hybrid warfare actively builds upon inciting internal societal (ethnic, political, religious, ideological, economic, and other) conflicts of the defending party. The employer of hybrid means strives to present societal movements of discontent incited by him as legitimate and organic articulations of societal tension and discontent towards the government of the adversary.*

The authors deem the elements highlighted in *Italic* above particularly important for the evaluation of hybrid threats in Africa, as the security environment is already highly vulnerable in these specific aspects in several countries, and unfavorable circumstances might further deteriorate on the continent with the growing pressure of demography and scarcities. These characteristics significantly limit the capabilities of national governments and international institutions to counter hybrid challenges.

This is in line with NATO's approach, as explicitly stated as early as in the Multiple Futures Project – Navigating towards 2030, published in 2009, later on developed into a broad set of threat assessments regarding various adversaries and counter-hybrid strategies. This foresight already envisioned adversaries who are 'both interconnected and unpredictable, combining traditional warfare with irregular warfare, terrorism, and organized crime.'⁵ When conducting a foresight analysis for the 2030s and beyond, we must keep in mind that three types of potential adversaries can use hybrid warfare tools in African conflicts: local state as well as non-state actors and external actors (directly or via proxies). Any of these formats can affect NATO's security interests either directly (member states' citizens and economic interests, crisis management operations' personnel, humanitarian (NGO) presence) or indirectly (through exacerbating existing conflicts and inflicting new ones), spreading instability and feeding the threats of terrorism, extremist violence and organized crime to the North Atlantic region. This complexity must be reflected not only in the threat matrix identified for future hybrid conflicts in Africa but also among the recommendations for policy responses. Still, we keep in mind that the effects of and responses to hybrid conflicts in Africa are different from those targeting NATO member states' resilience and stability.

⁵ Multiple Futures Project: Navigating towards 2030. NATO ACT, 2009, p. 6. https://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/events/2009/mfp/20090503_MFP_finalrep.pdf

The methodology of the paper is built on trend analysis, highlighting the future vulnerabilities of (many) African states, adding current case study examples to highlight how underperforming and fragile states can become vulnerable to hybrid warfare and what consequences might appear. Here, a distinction must be made: despite the commonly held opinion that fragile states would be more exposed to hybrid conflicts, we must also keep an eye on better functioning, but underperforming states as well, because we have already seen the example of Ukraine in 2014 as a target of hybrid warfare. Therefore, we will identify key countries in Africa that might be crucial targets of hybrid warfare (as mentioned, possibly waged by state and non-state actors as well).

Accordingly, the paper is structured as follows: first, a trend analysis highlights those factors that make African states more fragile in the 2030s, also more vulnerable to hybrid conflicts. Here, brief current case studies exemplify such vulnerabilities. As a summary of this analysis, the primary hybrid threat matrix of fragile states will be outlined, followed by the implications for NATO and brief recommendations.

2. Fragile states and ungoverned spaces in Africa

It is essential to understand that most African states have undergone fundamental transformation in the past two decades. While in the 1990s and the early 2000s many African countries served as role models of „failed” and later „fragile states”, incapable to fulfil their primary functions (control of territory, monopoly over the use of violence and military power, maintenance of public administration and provision of social services,), the internal and external efforts for state building have also brought significant achievements in the continent since then. This becomes evident if we take a look at the 10th Fragile States Index, which stated that one of the biggest improvement in statehood in the international system took place among West African countries, e.g. Liberia and Sierra Leone, which managed to step over the shadow of civil wars and strengthen their governments, public administration and public services.⁶ At the same time we could also observe outstanding improvement even with regards to such problematic entities as Somalia, Ethiopia or Angola, states plagued by dictatorship, ethnic cleansing, famine and state collapse throughout the 1980s

⁶ J.J. Messner (ed.): “The Fragile States Index 2014.” *The Fund for Peace*. pp 37-38. <https://fundforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/cfsir1423-fragilestatesindex2014-06d.pdf>

and 1990s. The conclusion of civil wars, the economic boom of the continent, the new wave of ‘African renaissance’ and the new ‘scramble for Africa’⁷⁵ all contributed to the improving security and social conditions of the region. Although some authors underline the dark side of this rapid development, labelling it the ‘neo-colonization of the continent’⁸ – also foreshadowing the prevailing rivalry of external actors for influence –, it is hard to argue against the improvement of social services, security and governance, both at macro and micro levels.⁹

Nevertheless, it is also true that there are plenty of challenges to be resolved. Even strong central governments are struggling with the structural challenges of the continent, such as overpopulation, the lack of sufficient infrastructure, environmental degradation due to climate change, the resulting shortages of food and water, as well as ethnic or religious tensions and political grievances. The trends we can forecast in these regards are alarming, setting the stage for undermining currently stable, well-functioning states and for destabilizing underperforming, fragile states.

First of all, according to official UN estimations, the population of the continent will double by 2050, reaching 2.5 billion people.¹⁰ Although the demographic transition is approaching its end in the Northern and Southern parts of Africa, in many regions it is far from over: in the Sahel, for instance, it has just begun with extremely high (6-7) fertility rates. The net annual population growth of Nigeria is around 5 million people, and 2 million people in Egypt and Ethiopia, respectively. Such a rapid increase of population puts enormous pressure on the social and economic systems of the affected countries, which are lacking resources – and reserves – to cope with it. The fact that 70% of Sub-Saharan population is under 30 years old, will provide space for hybrid challenges undermining the resilience of such key entities, as examined in the next subchapter.¹¹

⁷ R. Rotberg: *Africa Emerges*. Polity, 2013.

⁸ Ian Taylor: *Africa Rising? BRICS - Diversifying Dependency*. James Currey, 2014.

⁹ Just a recent example for this is the book of Camilla Toulmin, who describes the transforming life of a remote Sahelian village with increasing interconnections – with, of course, opportunities and challenges – to the outside world thanks to mobile networks, trade, and enhanced mobility. Camilla Toulmin: *Land, investment and migration: thirty-five years of village life in Mali*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

¹⁰ “World Population Prospects 2019 Highlights”. *UN DESA* 2019. https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf

¹¹ “Statistic on Youth”. *UNESCO* 2013. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/world-radio-day-2013/statistics-on-youth/>

Another fundamental obstacle for the continent is underdeveloped infrastructure, making it challenging to maintain or regain territorial (political, military, economic) control and to reach out to (geographically) distant communities, the potential targets to both conventional and hybrid challenges. The lack of sufficient number of railways, paved roads and access to electricity limit the speed of economic development and the spread of consumer goods, state services – and information. This strongly contributes to the emergence of ungoverned areas and safe havens for extremist and rebel groups, as we have witnessed on numerous occasions in Eastern and Central African countries and across the Sahel, as well as in Libya in recent years, because central governments have only limited capabilities to reach such territories. Even though immense infrastructural investments of the past decades tried to mitigate this problem, but there is still a lot to do on the one hand (e.g. Europe, covering the third of the territory of Africa, had 217,000 km railway lines, while Africa only 82,000 km)¹², while infrastructure development projects are plagued with corruption and foreign interference on the other (see the next chapter).

Thirdly, it is common sense that Africa is highly affected by climate change. Furthermore, in some cases those areas suffer most from the fastest transformation of climate and weather patterns, which have the least capacities to cope with it. For instance, while the average change in global warming since the beginning of the industrial revolution is around +1 Degrees Celsius, it is already well above +1.5 Degrees Celsius in the Sahel.¹³ The consequences, such as desertification, drought and heatwaves, as well as torrential rains and floods are increasing the competition for resources across these regions, and stoke violent clashes mainly where nomadic and settled populations struggle for grazing lands, wells and agricultural lands, primarily in Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia and the Sudan. The effects of overpopulation coupled with environmental degradation exacerbate instability and make the resolution of conflicts even harder, paving the way for sustained, low intensity armed struggles in many

¹² “Total length of the railway lines in use in the European Union (EU-28) from 1990 to 2017”. *EU-ROSTAT* 2020. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/451812/length-of-railway-lines-in-use-in-eu-28/>; “Rail Infrastructure in Africa. Financing Policy Options”. *African Development Bank Group*, 2015. https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Events/ATFforum/Rail_Infrastructure_in_Africa_-_Financing_Policy_Options_-_AfDB.pdf

¹³ “The past, present and future of climate change.” *The Economist*, 21 September 2019. <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2019/09/21/the-past-present-and-future-of-climate-change>

countries. In addition, the general deterioration in living conditions and rising grievances make easier for extremist ideologies to find their way to the population, especially to more vulnerable young generations.

Last, but not least we have to keep in mind the ethnic and religious fault lines across the continent. There is no doubt that Africa left behind much of the major ethnic cleansings and genocides of the 1990s and early 2000s, and the process of nation-building reached significant results creating the national identity of 'Kenyans', 'Nigerians', 'Libyans'.¹⁴ But the national identities are still fragile and live parallel and overlapping with other identities. Therefore, the ethnicization / clanisation of political life is still an instrument in many places both at local and national levels. One of the most current example for this has been the wave of protests sweeping Ethiopia, organized mainly along ethnic lines and leading to clashes between the different (Oromo, Somali, Amhara, Sidamo) groups of the country, eventually forcing three million people to become refugees.¹⁵ The puzzle of identities will live with African peoples throughout the next decades as well, making them prime targets for political polarization, disinformation and manipulation among their heterogenous communities.

These structural challenges are already eroding the power and influence of even the strongest African states. The riots in 2007/2008 and in 2017 during the Kenyan elections – also organized mainly along ethnic lines – or the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2014 demonstrated that even the relatively well-functioning states of the continent could easily fall back to chaos and dysfunction. The capabilities of governments to provide the full-scale service of a Western-style welfare state are still lacking, and in spite of the tremendous efforts – and achievements – of the last decades it will also be lacking for the years to come. The effects of such strategic shocks become more evident if we observe some events that tried the existing – and sometimes already struggling – systems hard.

For example, the current COVID-19 pandemic showed that African countries do not have enough resources to cope with all the different – health, social, economic – aspects of the crisis, and they have to single out and heavily prioritize

¹⁴ Personal interviews in Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Somalia, and Uganda between 2012-2020.

¹⁵ "Ethiopia: 3 million internally displaced in escalating humanitarian crisis". *Euronews*, 31 January 2019 <https://www.euronews.com/2019/01/31/ethiopia-3-million-internally-displaced-in-escalating-humanitarian-crisis>

their main goals: whether they are trying to sustain a functioning economy, reduce the spread of COVID-19, or concentrate their efforts to other challenges, such as violent extremism. With regards to East Africa and the Sahel, the rising power and operational freedom of Jihadist organizations in parallel with the spread of the pandemic has become obvious both because countries had to spend their financial resources in the health sector instead of the security/defense/intelligence sectors and also because of the slowing down of the military rotations coupled with the reluctance of foreign actors to send more troops and aid to the region, as highlighted by many authors.¹⁶ Such multiple internal crises, together with a decreased presence of international (e.g. NATO) presence foreshadow the characteristics of the future hybrid battleground in Africa. Summing it up, even the role models of the continent have limited reserves and resilience to hold on when crises break out, and there are numerous niches in their governance, public administration and security sectors which provide opportunities for hybrid activities.

Furthermore, some of the most fragile entities are still in Africa: if we check the latest Fragile States Index, we can find that seven from the ten most fragile states are in the continent.¹⁷ Although we must be cautious with the oversimplification of reality by a list, the FSI highlights well that most African states are still extremely vulnerable in several functional sectors, and therefore, highly vulnerable for hybrid attacks, which aim their weak governmental, social and economic systems – or conventional and social media. The current example of the Central African Republic shows how the security apparatus of a state can come easily under the control of an external power – in this case, Russia. The president of the CAR, Faustin-Archange Touadéra hired the Russian private security company Sewa Security Service for his personal protection and deployed Russian advisors (mainly from Wagner Group) to the presidential palace and the army.¹⁸ Russian companies also utilized their political and military power to capture the economic and financial assets of the CAR, jeopardizing the hardly-existing social services

¹⁶ E.g. “Al-Shabaab recruiting behind the Covid-19 ‘Iron Curtain’”, *Hiiraan*, 26 July 2020, https://hiiraan.com/news4/2020/July/179242/al_shabaab_recruiting_behind_the_covid_19_iron_curtain.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront. With regards to the Sahel, see Julie Colman: “The Impact of Coronavirus on Terrorism in the Sahel.” *ICCT*. 16 April 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-terrorism-in-the-sahel/>

¹⁷ J.J. Messner (ed.): “The Fragile States Index 2020.” *The Fund for Peace*. <https://fragilestatesindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/fsi2020-report.pdf>

¹⁸ Diamond Geezers: “Russia’s murky business dealings in the Central African Republic”. *The Africa Report*, 23 August 2019, <https://www.theafricareport.com/16511/russias-murky-business-dealings-in-the-central-african-republic/>

and public administration.¹⁹ In another case, Somalia has become a proxy battleground among Persian Gulf countries, as Gulf countries tried to convince different Somali political groups to support the Quartet (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrein, Kuwait) versus Qatar in their row. The foreign influence further plagued Somali politics with corruption, mistrust, and sometimes with violence, which contributed to the prolonged anarchy in the country, increasing tension between the different Somali political and clan-groups.²⁰

Therefore, considering its economic and political potentials and vulnerabilities, Africa will be perhaps the most ideal hybrid battleground of the coming decades to test old/new methods and instruments. As we highlighted above, one could already observe such symptoms in numerous countries and in various sectors. Because of the widespread vulnerabilities of states across the continent it is challenging to single out a handful of countries as potential primary hybrid battlegrounds, but because of their determining regional power and influence in terms of politics, economy (infrastructure) and security, the stability of the following countries are deemed to be crucial for countering conventional and hybrid challenges: Egypt, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Angola, South Africa.

3. Hybrid challenges as threats to state functioning: defining the threat matrix

The deep structural challenges of Africa and its fragile states provide multiple opportunities for the use of hybrid warfare in the continent. Unfortunately, it is true at all levels: external actors, African nations and sub-state players all have started to use these methods, what can be observed both in inter- and intrastate conflicts/rivalries.

Before we go into details, mapping the threat matrix, it is worth to briefly mention that to some extent, hybrid warfare can be assessed as not only a negative phenomenon in the continent. The fact that many actors tend to use hybrid warfare as part of their asymmetric toolbox as influencing operations, instead of an open military conflict, helps to reduce the level of violence and the number of casualties – at least in the short term. This leaves more space for negotiations and room for

¹⁹ Dionne Searcey: “Gems, Warlords and Mercenaries.” *New York Times*, 20 September 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/30/world/russia-diamonds-africa-prigozhin.html>

²⁰ “Somalia and the Gulf Crisis”. *International Crisis Group*, 5 June 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/260-somalia-and-gulf-crisis>

maneuver for various actors. This is more obvious if we compare this approach with the different historical stages of the ‘struggles for Africa’: while in the 19th and 20th centuries external interventions led to extended violence and the death of millions, in the last decades conflicts are rather low intensity, more sophisticated and less bloody.

Nevertheless, the long-term effects of hybrid warfare are perhaps more devastating due to undermining governmental and societal resilience and capacities. Therefore, in this subchapter we highlight the most vulnerable sectors and the rising threats for African states and societies.

1. *The social challenges of access to information and the social media.*

Conventional and social media are – and will be – among the most important hybrid battlegrounds. In Africa, the boom of the telecommunications sector has significantly increased access to media outlets and social media platforms. In theory, it should enhance knowledge-sharing and access to information, while in practice countless examples demonstrate that many online sites and social media platforms serve as sources of fake news and conspiracy theories, misguide users through disinformation, strengthening wishful-thinking, preconceptions and misperceptions that can spread incredibly fast. These elements of the ‘post-truth era’ undermine societal consensus and polarize public opinion on the one hand, while also increase the perceptions of mistrust and insecurity on the other. For instance, in the current demonstrations in Ethiopia the opposition regularly shares false information in social media to boost riots against the government. A particular example: the infamous opposition politician Jawar Mohamed posted that the government had wanted to kill him, what led to high -scale protest in Addis Ababa and to the complete lockdown of the Ethiopian capital for days.²¹ Another example can be brought from the third Libyan civil war, in which the belligerent parties regularly blame each other for the deployment of foreign mercenaries, equipment and advisors, and the use of proxies. Even though in many cases it turned to be true, lots of video and photo coverage proved to be fake.²² Last, but not least, we have to mention the COVID-19 situation in Somalia, where many patients avoid hospitals and die without

²¹ “Deadly unrest reflects Ethiopia’s discontent”. *DW.com* 25 October 2019. <https://www.dw.com/en/deadly-unrest-reflects-ethiopias-discontent/a-50991625>

²² See the examples of the Twitter account of Oded Berkowitz: <https://twitter.com/oded121351>

proper assistance because of the rumors that people are intentionally killed in healthcare facilities or people are intentionally infected there by the virus. This example demonstrates the use of fake news propaganda by the Jihadist group al-Shabaab, accusing the government with such methods.²³ The remaining challenges of proper education and the amount of the youth in the continent make Africa extremely vulnerable for such fake news and propaganda. People are lacking proper training and methodology to assess and try to clarify (false) statements.

2. *Utilizing gaps in state capacities.* As exemplified above, the lack of specific state functions opens wide opportunities for influencing and intervention. In the CAR the weakness of the security services made possible for Russia to seize significant influence in the country through the intelligence, security, and defense sectors. It is not a unique issue. During the 'Riverside Dusit 2 Hotel attack' in Nairobi, January 2019 white [Caucasian] contractors appeared in the photos of the response teams released afterwards, which supported the arguments that the Kenyan security services are highly influenced by contractors or advisors from different nations (allegedly Israel and the UK).²⁴ Such 'expertise gaps' are present in various sectors, bearing extreme importance in infrastructure development, energy, as well as IT and telecommunications – providing access to critical information and infrastructure for external state actors.
3. *Abusing corruption and false brokering.* The vast infrastructural projects of Africa – financed and conducted mainly by foreign companies and by foreign loans – are highly vulnerable for corruption and mismanagement. In addition, thanks to their scale, they pose a direct challenge for host nations. Fostering the financing and realization of megaprojects in development can also reveal false brokering. For instance, some authors argue that China intentionally offered huge loans for Zambia, knowing exactly that Lusaka will be incapable

²³ "The gravedigger's truth: Hidden coronavirus deaths". *BBC* 27 July 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-53521563/the-gravedigger-s-truth-hidden-coronavirus-deaths>; Christopher Hockey and Michael Jones: The Limits of 'Shabaab-CARE': Militant Governance amid COVID-19. *CTC Sentinel*, June 2020, Vol. 13, No. 6., p 34. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CTC-SENTINEL-062020.pdf>

²⁴ "SAS hero who saved hundreds of lives when he shot dead two terrorists during attack in Kenya is awarded Conspicuous Gallantry Cross." *Dailymail*, 19 November 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7688099/SAS-hero-saved-hundreds-shot-dead-two-terrorists-Kenya-awarded-Gallantry-Cross.html>

to pay them back, which makes possible for Beijing to seize the management of the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport.²⁵ Similar methods could be observed in the case of Kenyan Mombasa Port, which is East Africa's main commercial gate.²⁶ The monopoly in telecommunication sectors – like the exclusive role of ZTE Corporation, Huawei Technologies and the Chinese International Telecommunication Construction Corporation in Ethio Telecom – provide almost unlimited influence in the affected countries.

4. The proliferation of advanced technologies and difficulties of attribution.

In addition, access to advanced technologies (as well as materials and manufacturing capacities), the spread of autonomous weapons and the innovative use of conventional weapons (such as drones, drone swarms) coupled with difficulties of attribution when any attack happens, will make it challenging in future conflicts to determine adequate answers against an (un)identified opponent. With the evolution of the IT sector and the growing penetration of telecommunications in administration and financing make the cyber realm of African actors ever more vulnerable, with the same problems of proper attribution.

In conclusion, we must point out that hybrid warfare as an asymmetric tool can be used in Africa both by internal and external state and non-state actors, moving along a wide range from regional powers to local extremist groups. Potential targets of hybrid warfare are similar to what we have already experienced in contemporary conflicts, in a 'whole of government targets' approach, with centers of gravity in communication, public administration and development, IT and security sectors. Africa as a hybrid battleground will bear outstanding importance because structural challenges burden most African states with already weakened resilience and scarce resources, decreasing their capability to withstand multifold crises at the same time. The degree, to which hybrid warfare will be used and whether conventional warfare as a follow-up would proceed, will mostly depend on the capabilities of the aggressor (e.g. non-state actors can rely on hybrid warfare tactics but do not possess large conventional military forces to back up influence operations).

²⁵ "China takes over Zambia's Airport", *Green World Warrior*, 19 January 2019, <https://greenworldwarriors.com/2019/01/17/china-takes-over-zambias-airport-national-broadcasting-cooperation-and-zesco-power-plant/>

²⁶ Andre Wheeler: "Is Kenya's Mombasa Port another victim of China's debt diplomacy?", *Splash*, 7 February 2020, <https://splash247.com/is-kenyas-mombasa-port-another-victim-of-chinas-debt-diplomacy/>

4. Implications for NATO

Based on lessons learnt and strategic foresight we are aware that hybrid threats target states' preventive, reactive, resilient and defensive capabilities and the political-societal consensus that support the normal functioning of state institutions, provide social support and economic resources for defense. Hybrid tools are primarily non-military, but depending on the escalation potential, the use of conventional military means cannot be excluded either. Among the potential targets, across-the-board governmental institutions, key sectors of strategic importance can be identified, such as infrastructure development, media and energy (including natural resources and raw materials). The following countries have been identified as crucial for countering hybrid challenges: Egypt, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Angola, South Africa.

Potential responses to hybrid challenges must extend to the full civilian to military spectrum. At the extreme end of the spectrum, consequences of state collapse could include acute humanitarian crises, waves of irregular migration, prolonged low-intensity military conflict and the emergence of ungoverned spaces, powerful non-state actors and new state-like formations (as we have witnessed in case of the 'DAESH'. This outcome can be evaluated as the worst-case scenario of a major hybrid (and conventional) conflict in Africa, potentially requiring major stabilization intervention. But before reaching such an intensity, there are many stages where the potential damage of hybrid attacks can be prevented or managed.

To avoid strategic disruptions as consequences of hybrid attacks, African nation states are the primary actors to develop preventive and reactive capabilities to handle such crises. Non-governed spaces cannot create strategic vacuums as these would be filled by external actors, their proxies or local hostile non-state actors. First the state concerned (and neighboring states), then regional institutions shall take up ownership – and NATO and the European Union can have a positive effect on their preparation and crisis management procedures, in acute cases potentially providing resources and direct support as well. Regional institutions, primarily the African Union shall develop capabilities for the future to assist certain critical cases. Thus, multinational support to countries in crisis can be channeled through NATO's existing partnership programs and through inter-institutional (NATO-AU, NATO-EU, NATO-UN) channels.

NATO has no mandate or resources to develop deterrence measures against hybrid threats for Africa like the ones that have been developed in the Euro-Atlantic region, but the Transatlantic alliance has certain means to support African partner countries and regional institutions in their work of designing preventive measures and develop their resilience capabilities and governance integrity. Particularly, both the alliance and individual member states should rely on their meaningful partner relations with African countries and use their political leverage, support, and advice to apply whole-of-government as well as whole-of-society approach when strengthening integrity. This would allow for involving the widest possible set of stakeholders and resources in partner countries. Moreover, there is significant room for the European Union to support this endeavor as part of the NATO-EU strategic cooperation package. Direct support can take many forms, without duplicating existing efforts. For example, 'reaction teams' for targeted, pin-point support (for cyber, hybrid, strategic communications, SSR, crisis management tasks) can be created in the future as set forth in the EU Civilian CSDP Compact, where NATO can provide not only expertise, but integrated intelligence, analytical and planning capacity.

Potential adversaries are expected to knowingly target gaps in state capacities and public administration dysfunctions (such as corruption and low levels of integrity). To prevent and counter this, of course the most can be done by national governments. To counter influence operations and penetration to critical systems, first the situational and analytical awareness of partner countries must be increased. Through strengthening existing partnerships in these specialized fields, sharing lessons learnt and best practices of countering the means of hybrid warfare on behalf of member states of the Transatlantic Alliance, also through extending advising activities to countering hybrid challenges in close cooperation with the European Union are necessary steps.

NATO and the EU already have the expertise from which partner countries can draw, as well as the institutional links for engagement. Primarily the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, the Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, and the Energy Security Centre of Excellence are the partners for sharing knowledge and experience and for providing training and advising. Moreover, the African Union should also establish its own knowledge hub for experts and best practices that could support individual AU member states in times of crisis.

Last, but not least, NATO must be present in the battle of narratives through further increasing its visibility in Africa and strengthen the positive, cooperative image of the alliance within the populations of partner countries. Pursuing the shared interests in providing security and maintaining stability across the Mediterranean, through the Sahel and Eastern Africa and into Sub-Saharan Africa also means that state and non-state actors should also be willing and able to engage in cooperation with the alliance.