

Ambassador Discusses China's Involvement in Africa

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On Thursday, January 19, 2017, the UCF Global Perspectives Office hosted David H. Shinn, former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia and Burkina Faso. About 50 members of the UCF community listened to Shinn discuss China's engagement with Africa.

Jessica Squires, Assistant Director for the Global Perspectives Office, introduced Shinn, whose experience as a diplomat spanned nearly four decades. Shinn is currently an Adjunct Professor of International Affairs at George Washington University, where he received his B.A., M.A. and Ph.D.



Ambassador David Shinn discussed China's interests and involvement in the African continent.

Opening his presentation, Shinn listed what he believes to be China's five key interests in the African continent. These included: access to raw materials, political support, increasing trade, reducing diplomatic support for Taiwan, and protecting Chinese investments in Africa. Shinn indicated that the United States shares four of these five interests, noting that recognition of Taiwan is not a U.S. priority in Africa, but that military access for ships and planes is. Furthermore, he predicted that China might soon seek to carry out military operations in Africa.

Shinn suggested the unique relationship between China and African countries is best evidenced by the frequent visits of African officials to China, and vice versa. He noted that China has surpassed the United States, and is now Africa's largest trading partner. Although, he indicated, the data indicates an overall profitable partnership, not every

African country reaps the benefits. Poorer countries that lack valuable natural resources have suffered huge deficits without aid from the Chinese government. According to Shinn, many African countries welcome Chinese loan programs that do not have the explicit political strings attached that come with aid from western sources. Chinese loan programs do have some economic strings attached, Shinn noted, as they provide business opportunities for Chinese companies and employment for Chinese laborers.

Those dissatisfied with the collaboration between African and Chinese leadership, according to Shinn, include traders and African civil society groups. Increased competition among African and Chinese small traders within the market can become problematic. Additionally, Shinn described African countries as "ill-equipped" to inhibit the import of potentially dangerous counterfeit goods. Conversely, traders and African civil society are among many dissatisfied with the collaboration

between African and Chinese leadership. Chinese-African relations became problematic with increased competition among African and Chinese small traders within the market. In addition, African countries are “ill-equipped” to inhibit the import of potentially dangerous counterfeit goods. Giving the example of toothpaste, Shinn explained the measures taken by agencies in the United States to recall products that could cause bodily harm to consumers. Without such agencies, African nations remain vulnerable.

In response to a question about China undercutting international agencies, Shinn elaborated on China’s contrasting approach to providing aid. Unlike agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, China will provide aid to countries with useful natural resources, unethical government leaders notwithstanding.



Another audience member asked how risky these loans are for China. Shinn stated

that risk was minimal, since China only maintained investments in countries rich with natural resources. However, he conceded that a decrease in the price of oil would make existing economic partnerships less profitable for China.

Shinn asserted that “China offers serious competition to the West” and is even viewed as a favorable alternate. China’s interest in Africa is for the long-term and as its military power increases, so will its need to conduct military operations in Africa. Shinn concluded, “China’s engagement in Africa has been more positive than negative.”

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