



# GLOBALINSIGHT

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a focus on current issues

## The Biden Administration and Africa in a Changing Global Order: Towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> US-Africa-Summit

This synopsis is a summary of what could be presented to the United States when African governments meet for the US-Africa Leaders Summit. The ensuing policy brief will go into detail about the issues that should warrant closer attention, but for the sake of brevity we propose that the following issues be raised at the Summit:

*Global Insight aims to provide members of the policy community with concise but trenchant analyses of topical issues. Comments and suggestions are invited*

- *Security and Stability:* Wherein foreign players could offer crucial but ancillary support with Africa as the primary actor, and the exchange of intelligence as a priority
- *Democracy and Good Governance:* These are well-intentioned pursuits that should be accompanied by hard infrastructure and material involvement in Africa
- *Public Health:* Initial hoarding of vaccines from Africa should be condemned and discouraged from repetition
- *Technology:* Africa's sovereignty on choosing technologies to consume should be acknowledged. The ultimate goal should be promoting the creation of African-bred technologies
- *Adjusting to Multilateral Realities:* The United States should acknowledge that Africa has the prerogative to interact with other players. There should be an acknowledgement of multilateral realities, and that these do not only give America competition, they also offer opportunities for synergy
- *Supporting Different Actors:* Assistance should be given to all deserving players in Africa, from governments to non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations, but this should not be done with the intent of sabotaging legitimate actors, such as elected governments whose methods might not necessarily be to America's taste.

## **Introduction**

From 13 to 15 December 2022, United States President Joe Biden will host leaders from across Africa for the US-Africa Leaders Summit. The American government promoted the Summit as a manifestation of America's enduring commitment to Africa. In March 2023 the US will co-host the Summit for Democracy, with Zambia being Africa's co-host. The United States has acknowledged the inevitability that Africa will shape the future of the world. Only 3 per cent of Africans are above the age of 65 years. The continent is teeming with young people who will be the world's foremost consumers of all manner of goods, from food to technology. American engagement with Africa will almost ineluctably lead to discussions, both direct and obliquely about hogging Africa's markets, and preventing those that America considers its rivals from having similar access to African markets.

This will be a continuation of a practised habit by the United States vis-à-vis Africa. Africa has been perceived as a continent of instrumental value to the US, a useful region to help the US maintain its tenancy at the summit of global politics, economics, and defence. However, despite these realities, there has been a palpable reduction in US allure and influence, which may have prompted recent efforts to re-engage the continent. Africa is in pursuit of strategic partners, and the United States, as the world's largest economy, is an obvious option. What follows in the brief are suggestions on how Africa could engage with the United States in December 2022, and even beyond to the recently-announced Summit for Democracy due in March 2023.

## **Salutary Lessons of History**

Africa is an independent continent, presided over by sovereign governments that have an understanding of their needs and those of ordinary Africans. America's history of shoring up rebels who destabilised Africa, based on the fact that they were pliant lackeys of US interests should not only be whitewashed, but should be used as a salutary starting point in shaping America's current interaction with the continent.

There is a justifiable fear that, while the US no longer openly sponsors rebel forces on the continent, it can equally disrupt African politics through unprincipled funding of actors whose credibility is questionable, but whose preference of Western powers is beyond doubt. These actors could be centres of learning, civil society organisations, multinational corporations, and even individuals both from Africa and outside.

This point should be made at the Summit, and ideally a commitment should be obtained from the US to align its engagement with Africa's stated priorities as outlined in Agenda 2063 and

the various regional indicative strategic development frameworks adopted by the various regional economic communities (RECs).

## **The Question of Security**

In October 2022, the United States Embassy in South Africa announced that the U.S. government had received information that terrorists may be planning to conduct an attack targeting large gatherings of people at an unspecified location in the greater Sandton area of Johannesburg, South Africa, on 29 October 2022. No further information was provided regarding the timing, method, or target of the potential attack. The U.S. Embassy went on to advise staff to avoid crowds of people and other large public gatherings in the greater Sandton area of Johannesburg during the weekend of 29-30 October 2022.

Of import to the statement was the fact that it had been issued without prior knowledge of the intelligence structures of the South Africa government. Deputy Minister of State Security Zizi Kodwa said that the US had not been willing to share information underpinning the alert. Pressed on the issue by a South Africa radio interviewer, the American Ambassador to South Africa was at pains to dodge the question of circumventing South African protocol.

If the American Embassy can act in this manner to a country of such political and economic consequence as South Africa, what more *cart blanche* could it assert in much smaller countries? Representatives who will be in attendance at the December Summit should raise this issue of dispensing with protocol and diplomacy.

African leaders should stress the importance of information gathering and adherence to respecting African national governments.

## **International Synergy in Africa**

America's stance on other actors' association with, or involvement in, Africa has taken the same sanctimonious tone that it used to take even during the Cold War. The inclination seems to be to pontificate to Africa about its relations with countries such as China and Russia.

African governments are advised to raise this issue, as it also relates to the issue of sovereignty spoken about in the previous section. Africa should be left to explore relations with powers that it deems crucial to the continent's needs. While America's wont is to demonise Africa's relations with countries that the US finds unsavoury, America's own associations have brought massive suffering. Its unqualified support and protection of Israel has been a matter of concern to the developing world.

Furthermore, African governments could urge the United States to explore ways of collaborating with countries such as China and Japan. AGOA, FOCAC, BRI and TICAD offer

opportunities for merging efforts in relating to Africa. There are also opportunities for the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) to collaborate with other outfits that are involved in security and stability issues in Africa.

Finally, the United States acts in a manner that suggests it is instinctively wedded to the idea of providing intangible goods to Africa, most of which come in form of unsolicited counsel. Issues of human rights, democracy and good governance are used as battering rams for whoever the United States accuses of being a rogue leader. Yet the consistency of the US approach is constantly called to question by African counterparts.

While such intangible goods are important, the tangibles are equally important. Infrastructure is one such tangible good and the willingness of players such as China to provide tangible goods has been hailed by all echelons and socio-economic stations of Africa.

We can thus advise the United States to balance its commitment to intangible goods with one to tangible goods.

## **Public Health**

The United States spent billions in health assistance to Africa. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has done a sterling job since its inception. However, American behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic presented shocks for Africa. Together with Canada, the United States was hoarding vaccines that were several times more than their populations needed.

That behaviour has to be highlighted if it is to be avoided in the future. The Covid-19 pandemic posed a significant challenge to public health in Africa, much as it did globally. The resource disparities, inadequate funding, and insufficient infrastructure that make Africa uniquely vulnerable to other health disasters kept it firmly in the grip of the pandemic, even while many portions of the world began to reopen.

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