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# Research Report



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

December 2022

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## 1. Introduction

In December 2022, President Joe Biden will host the second US-Africa Summit starting on the 13th until the 15th. The first summit was hosted by Barack Obama in 2014. It is important to delve into a contextualised analysis of what this Summit means for Africa-US relations in a contemporary global system that is fraught with instability. This is of greater importance given the recent launch of the US Strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa and the US National Security Strategy. Both these documents are of great importance in order to understand where the United States seeks to position itself in a changing global landscape, and in order to better understand the current state and future trajectory of US-Africa relations. Indeed the US Strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa has to be read alongside its National Security Strategy for greater context and to assess how its Sub-Saharan Strategy should be located in a broader global context.

The war on terror, which was catalysed by the 11 September 2001 attack on the US impinged on the United States' outlook on Africa. It caused a reprioritisation of US stated interests. The US became more interested in using Africa for security reasons, mainly to prosecute what has come to be termed as the "global war on terrorism." Apart from direct security concerns, there are also ideational security concerns for which Africa could be useful to the US. Chief among these concerns is the rise of China and Africa's increasing interaction with it. The conflict in Ukraine has also provided further impetus for US animosity towards Russia, which will find expression in American interactions with Africa. With the US focus on the war on terrorism having dominated much of the overarching narrative of US relations with Africa, a critique on the securitisation of development challenges has continued to persist, with the current administration seeking to project a more positive narrative of its relations with the continent, even though it will likely prove difficult to overcome an approach that placed security and the prosecution of the war on terror above other priorities. The securitisation of development approach has had its shortcomings in that it did not take a holistic approach to addressing the continent's development challenges, often not addressing the root causes of some of the protracted political and security challenges in Africa.

It is arguable that 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 and leading military power is an obvious suitor. However what Africa recoils from is to be used as a pawn, in much the same way as it was during the Cold War. It remains to be seen whether the Africa Summit in December 2022 will address these lingering African concerns, and whether the continent will be able to enhance its agency and shape the key contours of US-Africa relations in a manner that prioritises the continent's development goals as outlined in Agenda 2063 and the various regional indicative strategic development plans and frameworks adopted by the regional economic communities (RECs) in Africa.

It should not come as a surprise that while Africa has kept its ties with the West, especially in the continent has also sought to entrench relations with non-Western powers such as China, Russia, India, and Turkey. It has also maintained relations bilaterally and through various Africa summits with the likes of Japan, South Korea, and the European Union (EU). Agency is thus of utmost importance as the continent uses these diverse relations to resolve its perennial development challenges. In sum, Africa, like the rest of the world, deserves to be given latitude in choosing who the continent relates, and on what terms. It is this agency that the forthcoming publication will assess, examining the key determinants of the US-Africa Summit, and to what extent Africa's interests align with those of the US. It also seeks to better understand African priorities in its relations with the US, and what actions the continent can take to enhance its agency. This is in line with the continent's aspirations as expressed through the reform measures of the African Union to ensure that the continent's relations with external actors meets the continent's development objectives.

The election of Joe Biden, which made the Trump presidency a one-term administration, has had significant implications for the United States in how it manages its domestic agenda and its role in a changing geopolitical landscape. It has also impacted how the world views the US, even though the effects of the Trump administration and its various decisions on the global stage are likely to outlast his time in office and impact not only the Biden administration, but also subsequent occupants of the White House. It would thus be misguided to simply wish away the Trump presidency as though it was either an extreme anomaly or as if it simply did not happen. Indeed many of the policy positions taken during the Trump administration continue to be US foreign policy positions and have not been reversed within a polarised political landscape in Washington. This should shape how partners of the US set about creating a set of expectations for the Biden administration.

International partners of the US will also have to factor in the reality of a fiercely divided domestic political landscape, both between the Democrats and the Republicans, and intra-party divisions within the two political parties.<sup>1</sup> One should also factor in the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has killed more American citizens than the Spanish Flu of 1918.<sup>2</sup> Its effects, especially in the US, should thus not be underestimated. International partners must also factor in the various tensions within society and the accompanying cultural wars on a range of policy positions including women's reproductive rights. This constrains the possibilities of the current administration to make vast changes as the smallest of decisions and policy positions have become fiercely contested in the political system and in the media.

The following publication argues that African stakeholders will have to carefully manage their expectations to avoid disappointment with the Biden administration. Expectations must thus be formed based on a systematic analysis of the opportunities and constraints facing the Biden administration and

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<sup>1</sup> Bremmer, I. 2021. 'The U.S. Capitol Riot Was Years in the Making. Here's Why America Is So Divided', Time, Available online <https://time.com/5929978/the-u-s-capitol-riot-was-years-in-the-making-heres-why-america-is-so-divided/>, January 16

<sup>2</sup> Gamillo, E. 2021. 'Covid-19 Surpasses 1918 Flu to Become Deadliest Pandemic in American History', Smithsonian Magazine, Available online <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/the-covid-19-pandemic-is-considered-the-deadliest-in-american-history-as-death-toll-surpasses-1918-estimates-180978748/>, 24 September

the Democrats, and an understanding of the limitations within the US political system, especially with the midterm elections that took place in November 2022 resulting in a closely divided House and Senate that may lead to further gridlock as the Democrats held onto the Senate whilst the Republicans took the House of Congress. African stakeholders must thus learn from the misplaced expectations that accompanied the Obama administration, and lessons must be learned in how expectations are formed and managed based on the domestic and foreign policy priorities of the administration of the day. The research report argues for a more focused agenda, with fewer issue areas to prioritise, but to put the maximum number of resources and coordination towards them. These priorities must be drawn from the continent's own development goals but also have a realistic chance of being supported in terms of their alignment with some of the US priorities outlined in their national security strategy and the Sub-Saharan Africa strategy.

Looking at the persistent challenges brought to the fore by the pandemic, and the foreign policy pressures facing the Biden administration, it is evident that Africa will continue to not be on the top of the list of priorities as US attention is mostly diverted by inflationary pressures and rising food prices and living costs at home, and the conflict in Ukraine and its implications for US allies in Europe. However, it is precisely in Africa that the US will have to rethink key elements of its strategy so that it does not reflect a knee-jerk reaction, mostly targeted at countries the US considers rivals in Africa, and thus missing the potential for expanded cooperation with a continent set to double its population to over 2 billion by 2050. This will create opportunities not only for Africans, but also for external actors and it will be important to reimagine and rethink how the US wishes to engage the African continent and its various institutions. While the United States has recently adopted a Sub-Saharan Africa strategy, one of the key tasks ahead will be the ability of the current administration to pull together all the different stand-alone projects the US is involved in into a more coherent narrative on the US engagement with Africa in a manner that avoids working in silos with limited coordination. Despite the adoption of the new Sub-Saharan Africa strategy, it is in its actions that the current administration will be judged, especially in its ability to break from the past, when US engagement with the continent was largely based on US security and geostrategic concerns.

It will however primarily be the responsibility of African stakeholders, including influential African countries and institutions with close ties to the US, regional economic communities, and the African Union (AU) that must lead efforts to strengthen relations based on Africa's development priorities rather than short term objectives set by the United States depending on the priorities of the administration in power. It will also be the task of non-state actors in Africa to proactively engage with their counterparts in the US, especially think tanks, universities, and civil society organisations. This will have the effect of expanding avenues for dialogue and people-to-people relations. At the state level, it will also be important for African stakeholders to coordinate and ensure that while the respective ministries of foreign affairs will lead coordination efforts, relations also expand to cooperation amongst other national departments and sub-national actors such as cities and provinces in the US and Africa, while continued support for the respective private sector actors must continue to be encouraged to ensure that relations are sustained irrespective of the changing political fortunes of the Democrats and the Republicans.

The following report contains various sections that seek to provide a better understanding of the current state of Africa's relations with the United States and ways in which the African stakeholders can enhance their agency. While outlining the evolution of US diplomacy in Africa, it asks whether we are seeing a break from Trump to assess the levels of continuity and change under the Biden Administration. It also unpacks the democratic mission of the US in Africa, and its efforts against the China-Russia tandem, while assessing technology as a seminal sphere of US-Africa relations. The research report also outlines key programmes such as Prosper Africa, and the effects of the securitisation of development. For the African continent to enhance its agency and align US engagements to African priorities, the AU reform Agenda needs to be elevated in Africa's relations with the US to ensure greater alignment with African priorities as outlined in Agenda 2063 and the various regional indicative strategic development plans adopted by the continents' regional economic communities (RECs).

## 2. American Diplomacy: Contrasting Impulses, converging Interests

American diplomacy, like any other country's diplomacy, has been perceived in varying and contradictory terms. What sets perceptions of American diplomacy apart is that American domestic and international activities often have a telling impact on the rest of the world, proportional to the economic, military and political power that the country is able to wield. Another feature of American diplomacy, which Henry Kissinger alludes to in his book *On China* (2011), is that it is premised on Christian ethics and zealotry. Kissinger used the word "missionary" to describe the zeal with which Americans bandy about the universality of their values. After the United States went to war with Spain in 1898, ostensibly to free Cuba from Spanish colonialism, President William McKinley set his eyes on the Philippines, and justified his actions using Christian precepts. He said that America was going to the Filipinos with the intention of educating, civilising and Christianising them as fellowmen for whom Jesus Christ had died for. Bear in mind that this was the time when renowned English bard, Rudyard Kipling, had written one of his most famous poems, *The Whiteman's Burden*, which called on the white race to shoulder the burden of bringing lesser races, the half-devil and half-child demographics of the world into the civilised fold.

With some changes, this backdrop continues to drive America's diplomacy. In *The Arrogance of Power*, J. William Fulbright notes that American adventurism in Cuba (which it turned into a protectorate after vanquishing the Spaniards) and the Philippines was driven by the galling feeling that a country as big as the United States did not have an empire, to which it felt entitled. Albert Beveridge, a Senator for Indiana from 1899 to 1911, was more plainspoken in this regard, urging that the American people were ordained by providence to dominate other cultures and races and, where possible, take over their land, too. He openly described Americans as a "conquering race." Whether driven by issues of race or economic stamina and military superiority, underneath American diplomacy and rhetoric with other players in the international system, beats a self-righteous dogma of perceiving the rest of the world as inferior to American values. This has at times been referred to as American exceptionalism.



At state level, Americans have often believed in the virtue of their relations. The popularity of populists and politicians of an insular mould among ordinary Americans shows that the sanctimony of politicians does not always percolate to ordinary Americans. This is not because ordinary Americans believe in the diplomatic sovereignty of other countries. On the contrary, insular politics among ordinary Americans spring from the impulse that immersing the USA in foreign affairs often entails entertaining the interests and whims of lesser powers in the quest to be accepted by the rest of the world. Additionally, intervening in the affairs of other countries sometimes entails the expenditure of American resources on foreign causes. This was partly why Donald Trump's 2015 campaign for the presidency found resonance, when he promised to be more assertive towards NATO, and to urge other countries to match America's contribution to it. Recently, Republican Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene threatened that once Republicans take hold of the House of Congress, no more money will be spent on Ukraine's defence against Russia's invasion. Even though her sentiments go against America's official line of moral responsibility to the rest of the world, it nevertheless dovetails with ordinary American feelings that domestic resources should not be spent on far-away lands.

There is another type of ordinary Americans, those who feel that meddling in the affairs of other countries disrupts international norms, and is especially problematic when it seems to interfere with the activities of elected governments. A number of events could be adduced to explain current American diplomacy and conduct. We have listed the Spanish war. Others include the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and the creation of the League of Nations, championed by Woodrow Wilson. Wilson's League, while gaining some traction in the rest of the world was rejected by his own congress. The League was perceived as a utopian machination that was at variance with international politics. Hans Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* and E. H. Carr's *Twenty Years Crisis*, are some of many works that, directly or indirectly, repudiated Wilson's attempts at instituting global concord.

Another significant factor in American diplomacy in the 20th Century was Richard Nixon's and Henry Kissinger's opening to China. This was informed by pragmatism and realism and falling in line with what was prevalent global diplomatic trends. America wanted a market for its products, and it also wanted to further isolate the Soviet Union. China was crucial on both scores: it was, and still is, the world's most populous nation, and it was also a crucial member of the communist bloc. Thus, winning it to America's side would drastically reduce the communist demographic in world politics. Diplomacy also played a part in America's overtures to China. The real groundwork started in 1972, a year before China had been voted to take its permanent place as a member of the United Nations Security Council, at Taiwan's expense. It thus made sense for America to toe this line.

It should be noted, though, that at the heart of America's diplomacy, in addition to long-held impulses of superiority is securing the national interest. American interests run a whole gamut from military, economic, political and cultural. When put in a very difficult situation, the United States has shown a readiness to sacrifice certain interests, mostly political ones, for self-serving interests that guarantee military dominance, economic superiority and intelligence gathering. These help the United States to have an edge over other powers, and to undermine their advance towards matching America in some respects. America's conduct towards Africa and the developing world shows the dominance of material

rather than moral interests in American diplomacy, despite claims about the superiority of values such as human rights and democracy.

## 2.1 American Diplomacy in Africa: The Cold War Premise

The Yalta Conference, convened between the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia as the Second World War was petering out was somewhat a slight version of 1919 Versailles. Versailles was a disaster for countries such as China that were still saddled with foreign occupiers (i.e., Japan), despite having worked together against foes of the United States. Yalta had a backdrop to it that was not so apparent to the citizens of The Big Three who were busily hammering out what form the post-WWII global system would take. The backdrop, which stood in jarring contrast to the premise of WWII as the fight for civilization, freedom and human rights, was that Britain still had colonies, whose citizens were kept in perpetual denial of human rights and freedom.

For the many Africans who fought in the Great War in different forms, the silence at Yalta over their plight was the summit of hypocrisy. Africa's interests were pushed further back in the American political psyche as the tentative and convenient concord among the Big Three was shattered by the emerging Cold War. From the last three decades of the 19th Century, America's growth was inexorable and it was marching towards global dominance. It was serendipitously helped by the fact that none of the two world wars caused physical damage to America itself, thereby seriously damaging its economy and confidence. By the end of the Second World War, George Marshall's notion of America's help to rebuild Europe demonstrated not only America's wealth and undisputed dominance, but its interest in building a post-war Europe that was indebted to it.

From this backdrop, the United States was understandably hostile to the Soviet Union's pretensions to equal status as a superpower. To curtail and sabotage Soviet growth and influence, the United States employed means fair and foul, and Africa was caught right in the middle of the belligerence. When the Cold War was earnestly under way, Africa receded to the background to American foreign policy priorities, except in situations when propping it up could be instrumentally useful for America's interests. In July 1956, Egyptian President Abdel Nasser precipitated a major crisis when he nationalised the Suez Canal, which up to then had been under the management of British and French Interests. Nasser was furious with America's refusal to follow through with its help to build the Aswan Dam. Nasser argued that he would use revenue collected from the Canal to build the Aswan Dam. Israel, which neighbours Egypt and straddles the Canal, was the first to attack Egypt and was later joined by Britain and France. Nasser counted on Soviet help and, predictably, this roused America's interests and fears. President Dwight Eisenhower warned all the foreign parties involved to show restraint and ultimately withdraw from the conflict. The crisis further weakened the already diminishing influence of Britain and France, thereby confirming the United States and the Soviet Union as the only claimants to global superpower status.

## 2.2 American Diplomacy during the Decolonisation of Africa

From 1956, when Nasser ignited the Suez Canal, Africa's fight against colonialism was on the ascent. 1956 was also the year in which Egypt formalised its relations with China, a country that for years was secretly plotting a way to global power status, aided by its rich history and unparalleled population. The seeds for 1956 were planted in 1955 when China and Egypt both attended the Afro-Asian Summit held in the Indonesian city of Bandung. The summit was a convergence of players, most of whom were to form the Non-Aligned Movement, a collection of international actors who sought independence from both parties of the Cold War dichotomy.

This was not realistically possible at the time when most of Africa was under colonial rule. Even the nascent nations that had recently broken off colonial shackles, were economically dependent on their erstwhile colonisers. As Britain and France had been weakened by the loss of colonies, America and the Soviet Union were the foremost sources of economic help and investment in Africa. This is where African diplomatic dexterity comes into play, and America's realist interests as opposed to stated moral declarations were highlighted. Politically and ideologically, sub-Saharan Africans identified various partnerships in the socialist bloc. This was mostly because leading socialist players such as the Soviet Union and China, did not have a history of colonialism in Africa. In fact, China could evoke its own history of foreign domination and occupation as a historical intersection on which firm relations with Africa could be established. Another reason had more to do with communitarianism as a dominant mode that drove African economics before the European advent of capitalism in the continent.

However, despite this presumed kinship with the socialist camp, African leaders were keenly aware that the West (the United States and its capitalist allies) was more prosperous and hence any prospects of an economic tonic have more auspicious chances if one associated closely with the capitalist bloc. It is thus less surprising that countries such as Zambia that were diametrically opposed to colonial and minority domination, and whose economic practices were left-leaning, were nonetheless trading more with the capitalist countries some of whose members it denounced for supporting colonial and settler regimes in Africa.

For its own case, the US used Africa's dependency on capitalist revenue, and America's obsession with sabotaging Soviet influence in Africa to engage in acts of political skulduggery. Examples of this are legion. In Angola, America supported Jonas Savimbi's UNITA rebel movement. As a champion of democracy, America should have been totally opposed to a rebel movement that did not want democracy, did not recognise a movement in power, and was scornful of the human rights of ordinary people whom it could not bend to its destabilising will. In addition, Savimbi was also a surrogate for the apartheid regime in South Africa. It was to Pretoria's benefit that Angola, which offered succour to the exiled ANC military outfit, Umkhonto we Sizwe, was unstable and hence an unreliable haven for liberation outfits. Furthermore, Angola shared a border with South West Africa (Namibia), a country over which apartheid South Africa exercised suzerainty. It was thus to the apartheid regimes benefit that it would hold Namibia under its heel and have an ally across the border in Angola.

From this background, it is clear that UNITA was bane of Africa's and Angola's attempts to secure stability and entrench democracy. Why, then would a country that George W. Bush, as president once described as the brightest start of democracy support a movement in the direct opposite of this characterisation? The answer, of course, was the Soviet Union, and American obsession with global dominance. Savimbi was a willing lackey of actors who would help him to wrest power from Luanda. He gained support from the United States and South Africa mainly based on the fact that he was not aligned to the Soviet Union. To liberation movements such as the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party of South Africa and the South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), American involvement in Angola was a demonstration of a morally bankrupt and hypocritical foreign policy. This, of course was not a contradiction to American officials such as Henry Kissinger and scholars such as John Mearsheimer whose instincts are to look at international politics from the realpolitik lens. Whatever the explanation, coddling and propping up UNITA was detrimental to millions of ordinary Angolans, and also put a spanner in SWAPO's efforts to drive South Africa out of Namibia.

Savimbi was not the only actor to expose America's curious diplomacy in Africa during the Cold War. Mobutu Sese Seko of the then Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), was another corrupt African despot who enjoyed American largesse based on the fact that he was not in the Soviet orbit. Mobutu's excesses were well known even to the Americans, but those flaws were subsumed under America's interests to make Africa a capitalist continent that could not easily co-exist and relate with the socialist bloc. American diplomacy, especially in its realpolitik bent, became clearer after Ronald Reagan became president in 1981. His international and political soulmate was Margaret Thatcher, who in 1979 had been elected as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

Reagan and Thatcher were unwavering unabashed Cold War crusaders. Their commitment to undermining Soviet influence in Africa was most glaring on their stance on the apartheid question. The United States and Britain were in concord on the Zimbabwe question where in November 1965, Ian Smith had unilaterally declared independence from the United Kingdom and established Rhodesia as an independent African country. This adventurism did not augur well with the United Kingdom, and it was compelled to put pressure on Smith to agree to elections that could reflect the will of all Zimbabweans. In addition, Jimmy Carter also put a lot of pressure on Britain and Rhodesia and this paid off in 1979 when Smith capitulated and acceded to calls for elections, which were held in 1980 and ushered in a majority government with Robert Mugabe as the Prime Minister.

South Africa proved to be more complicated for Britain and the United States. South Africa was a popular destination for American and British investment, and was also a bountiful fount of mineral resources that powered and enriched American and European industries. Apartheid was also a thoroughly capitalist edifice that, to an admirable extent had weathered the potentially mortal damage that economic sanctions could have on the country. South Africa was also developing a nuclear capability which also enhanced its security and defence stature on the global arena. Another reason that enhances apartheid South Africa's allure in Western capitals was that opponents of apartheid such as the ANC and the SACP enjoyed long-established relations with the Soviet Union. Even the Pan Africanist Congress, a South African liberation movement that was not under Soviet sponsorship,

benefited from a close association with China, another socialist country. All these raised alarms to the United States. The SACP and ANC had an alliance which involved intersectional membership wherein a significant and influential number of ANC members was also members of the SACP.

Thatcher famously described the ANC as a terrorist organisation, thereby confirming her support, tacit or patent, for the apartheid regime. Even after Kissinger and Nixon had long left the White House, Reagan's stance on apartheid South Africa showed that a change of personnel in the United States does not always translate into a change of diplomacy or foreign policy. In Reagan's Cold-War attuned mind, giving the ANC and the SACP a chance to contest, and possibly win, a democratic election in South Africa would be tantamount to surrendering one of the last bastions of African capitalism to the socialist Soviet Union.

To show the extent to which America was willing to go to support apartheid, Reagan vetoed the Comprehensive Apartheid Act, which levied economic sanctions against South Africa. On 29 September 1986, the House of Representatives voted 313-83 to override Reagan's veto. On October 2, the Senate followed suit, voting 78-21. Significantly, this was the first time since enactment of the War Powers Resolution in 1973 that Congress had overridden a presidential foreign policy veto. It also demonstrated the complexity and variety of factors that shape American foreign policy. Here were two arms of government disagreeing so publicly on a highly important issue. It is safe to surmise that members of Congress, who represent constituents were somehow reflecting the attitudes of their electorates. Following this logic, there was a shift on American attitudes towards the promotion of human rights in the rest of the world. The government, one could argue, was more interested in macroeconomics which are driven by multinational corporations, some of which had massive investments in South Africa. It was partly because of support from powers such as the United States, the United Kingdom and France, including non-state sanctions busters that apartheid held out for as long as it did.

When eventually the Nationalist government in South Africa agreed to rescind apartheid, it was not due to diplomatic pressure from the United States. It was mainly because South Africa was looking like an absurd blemish on a continent that was now under majority rule. The Berlin Wall had been torn down in 1989, and finally in December 1991 the Soviet Union was dissolved. That the new independent countries that had left the Soviet Union did not show appetite for continuing on a socialist path allayed American fears about socialism, and indeed the dissolution of the Soviet Union was interpreted as a triumph for liberal democracy and the market i.e., capitalist economics. Based on this, apartheid South Africa had lost its special place as a buffer against socialism in Africa. What was clear, as the Cold War was petering out is that American diplomacy or foreign policy to Africa was one complicated by vacillations, even on important issues such as the promotion of democracy, human rights, and helping to build newly independent African countries into unified wholes. The Cold War had cast blinkers on the United States and drove its morally ambiguous behaviour which entailed supporting odious regimes and rebels whose conduct was a cruel antithesis of whatever values that the United States claimed to promote. How, then, was the United States to conduct itself in Africa after the end of the Cold War?

## 2.3 American Diplomacy to Africa after the Cold War

The end of the Cold War was a game changer in global politics. It also called for the realignment of priorities and a revision of perceptions of different players. Ideology as the pith of global discord seemed to have receded. Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* was penned around this time. Francis Fukuyama had written about the end of history. All these opinions were forecasting America's role in an international system devoid of a main rival, and in a world where there seemed to be a drift towards values that America has always espoused, of political contestation, free market economics and the protection of individual liberties. Huntington had predicted that culture would now drive conflict and discord in the emerging post-1991 international order, whereas ideology had played this role from the end of the World War 2 to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Africa, as mentioned above was of instrumental value during the Cold War. However, with the Soviet Union obsolete, what place would Africa occupy in America's priorities and diplomacy.

Despite billions of American dollars in aid, loans and investment spent on Africa from the time of independence, it was clear in the last decade of the 20th century that the continent remained mired in poverty and instability. Some of this, obviously, was due to America's own policies that were self-serving and cynical. Even intervention through structural adjustment programmes could not help to turn the continent's fortunes around. The United States seemed undeterred to play its part, and aid kept flowing into African governments. The Clinton Administration was alive to Africa's circumstances and embarked on a policy that exuded cooperation and consultation. America was also seeking African partnership by courting influential powers such as South Africa (after it ended apartheid and established a democratic government in 1994).

Despite the changes in international politics, however, America's economic interests perdured. Leading up to the new millennium, and the end of the Clinton Administration, there are a number of factors that the US had to pursue in its foreign policy towards Africa. These included crisis diplomacy, investment in security, HIV/AIDS, humanitarian help and courting powers such as Nigeria and South Africa. In the final years of the Clinton Administration, America's engagement with Africa was heavily influenced by the rising of terrorism. In 1998 American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania had been bombed, bringing into sharp relief at least two things: one was Africa's securities vulnerability, and the second was the intense anger that America's foreign policy had inspired in some parts of the world that differed from many aspects of American behaviour. Diverging perceptions of politics, economics, gender, security and even race, had provoked feelings of rancour. The Muslim world, for example, was uncomfortable with American involvement in the Middle East and its invariable support of Israel, which at times was unwarranted and irrational. The 1998 embassy bombings set the tone for how the Bush Administration dealt with Africa in the new millennium. Interestingly, this time around it was not due to security problems on the African continent, but on American soil.

## 2.4 American Diplomacy to Africa after 9/11

On 11 September 2001, the United States was hit by the biggest terrorist attack on its soil, sponsored by Al-Qaeda, and extremist Muslim groups whose origins and growth the US had fostered during the Cold War. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. In typical Cold War myopia, the United States provided help to any player that could help to eject the Soviets from Afghanistan. One such player was the Mujahideen. America should have known that this outfit nurtured extremist views, and that the Soviet Union was not the only foreign power whom it loathed. America would fit the bill. With the Soviet Union driven out, the Mujahideen were now free to give vent to their feelings and notions of what Islamic purity should be, and it is partly because of this orientation, and the need to keep foreign powers away from sullying Islam that elements morphed into Al-Qaeda.

September 11 did not only change America, but also the world. Coming so early in Bush's presidency, it happened just shy of eight months after his inauguration, the attack became the hallmark of Bush's troubled presidency. It explains why he blundered into Iraq in March 2003, fatally supported by the credulous and eager-to-please Tony Blair – who was the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

Africa featured prominently in America's fight against terrorism. Osama Bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda, had spent some time in Sudan. In addition, the failure of African governments to provide employment and development enhanced the allure of terrorist groups that pitted themselves against ineffectual governments. Bush bifurcated the world on using the "either you are with us, or you are with the enemy" formula to press the world into siding with America. It is noteworthy that America combined its fight against terrorism with other soft power pursuits. The Bush Administration made major strides in helping Africa's fight against HIV/AIDS. Bush even made visits to countries such as Ghana and Uganda where he saw first-hand, the progress of his efforts. The Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is the legacy that outlived his presidency, and Africans who have benefited from it appreciate the positive aspects of American involvement in African affairs.

The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) was another Bush initiative that did not directly depend on his dogged fight against global terrorism. The MCA had its background in 2002 when Bush had called for "a new compact for global development, defined by new accountability for both rich and poor nations alike. Greater contributions from developed nations must be linked to greater responsibility from developing nations." To help this call, he pledged that America would increase its development assistance by 50%, reaching \$5 billion in 2006. There was an eligibility criterion for countries that sought to benefit from this account, whose Board was to be chaired by the US Secretary of State. All countries with incomes below \$1,435 by 2005 were eligible. All countries with incomes up to \$2,975 (the current World Bank cut-off for lower middle-income countries) by 2006 would be considered.

The MCA, much like structural adjustment programmes came with stringent performance indicators. It had 16 indicators, divided into three main themes (Governance, Investing in people, Economic freedom) and it also specified recognised assessors of these indicators. Indicators are listed below, with assessors in brackets.

***Governing Justly:***

Civil Liberties (Freedom House)

Political Rights (Freedom House)

Voice and Accountability (World Bank Institute)

Government Effectiveness (World Bank Institute)

Rule of Law (World Bank Institute)

Control of Corruption (World Bank Institute)

***Investing in People:***

Public Primary Education Spending as Percent of GDP (World Bank/national sources)

Primary Education Completion Rate (World Bank/national sources)

Public Expenditures on Health as Percent of GDP (World Bank/national sources)

Immunization Rates: DPT and Measles (World Bank/UN/national sources)

***Promoting Economic Freedom:***

Country Credit Rating (Institutional Investor Magazine)

Inflation (IMF)

3-Year Budget Deficit (IMF/national sources)

Trade Policy (Heritage Foundation)

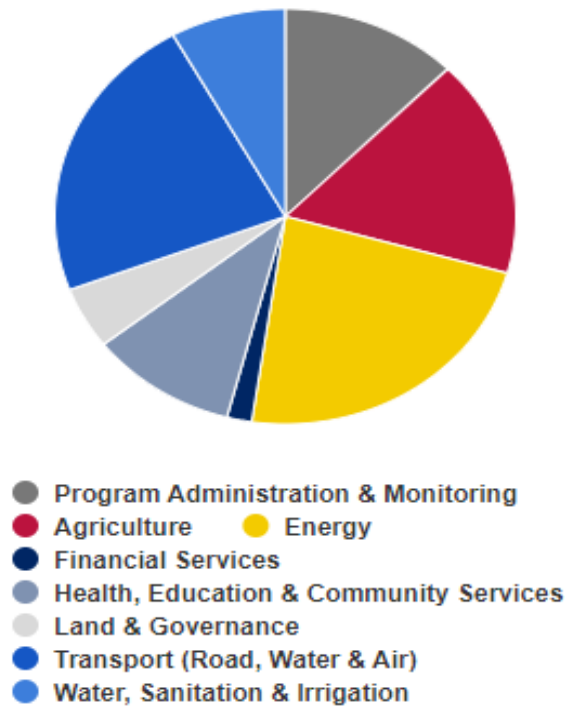
Regulatory Quality (World Bank Institute)

Days to Start a Business (World Bank)



Below is that illustration of how the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) has been investing in Africa:

### MCC's Investments in Africa by Sector



25 African countries form partners of the MCC. Africa is the biggest beneficiary of the MCC both in terms of the quantum of assistance, and the numerous agreements to which African partners committed. Over 9 billion has been spent since 2004, and investment has been mainly in water and energy infrastructure, agriculture, and health. One of the virtues of the MCC is that it can easily be adapted to other American initiatives in Africa such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) which was approved in 2000, and the Prosper Africa framework that was sponsored by the Trump Administration. Merging AGOA and Prosper Africa with the MCC also helps America to shatter the suspicion that it is mostly interested in African extractive resources, mainly oil. Non-oil exports reached the 200% increase mark in 2015, which was about \$4.1 billion. This, according to MCC has resulted in 300,000 direct jobs in beneficiary countries.

Investing in infrastructure is also crucial because poverty reduction, which has proved Sisyphean for Africa, to a large degree depends on infrastructure and trade. According to estimates by the African Development Bank, on an annual basis Africa has a deficit of more than \$100 billion in infrastructure. The dearth of transport, power and water infrastructure is not only a major constraint to economic growth, but also to regional connectivity and trade. Having noted that poverty reduction should also be taken up by the private sector, the "MCC committed \$70 million to support public-private partnerships in partner countries through its Public Private Partnership (P3) Platform." African countries alone were to receive grants totalling \$52 million. These investments were expected to generate \$1 billion in private-

sector investments worldwide through 2020.<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy, though, that American diplomacy was not uniform. It had to be applied somewhat on a case-by-case basis.

America's priorities had to be tailor-made to countries according to their circumstances. Egypt, for example, has always been important to the US, being the most populous Arab country. Egypt has also played a seminal role in shaping Arab-Israeli relations, an initiative that was started by Anwar Sadat, Menachem Begin, and Jimmy Carter. Currently, Egypt is important in America's security interests in Africa. There are a number of countries that are receiving further American attention on the basis of security – in addition to MCC and AGOA. Nigeria is one of them, Somalia is another and, with what has been happening since 2017, Mozambique is also catching America's interest due to the rise and spread of terrorism, which has hitherto been confined to the Cabo Delgado Province. Scholars will have to debate the efficacy of helping Africa to surmount the challenges that compel young people especially to swell the ranks of terrorist groups. In this matter, the United States will have to work closely with other partners such as China, Russia, France and United Kingdom that have major interests in Africa.

## 2.5 American Diplomacy in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Africa vis-à-vis Other Players

In terms of historical, political and economic orientation, American diplomacy in Africa is in tandem with that of other players such as Britain, France and Canada. America, for example, seems to have no qualms with French military involvement in West Africa where terrorist groups have been causing havoc. It is however, uncomfortable with the involvement of countries such as Russia and China. The United States has been vehemently hostile to Djibouti having a base for the People Liberation Army of China, even though America has countless such bases in the world.

In October 1975, Chairman Mao had told Henry Kissinger that there were only two superpowers, America and the Soviet Union, and that China was backward. At the time when China was an impoverished socialist country, America opened up to it in the person of a politician who for a long time was deeply hostile to China – Richard Nixon. Things had changed as he became president, and China's discord with the Soviet Union gave the United States an opportune chance to court China and further isolate the Soviet Union. While publicly the United States still proclaimed its anti-Chinese chant and was formally against offering China any form of military support, after Nixon's historical visit to China in 1972, the United States, through Henry Kissinger informed the Chinese that America would not preclude France and Britain from putting their arms and equipment at China's disposal.

Today, America perceives China as its biggest rival in Africa occupying the space that the Soviet Union occupied all those decades ago. This is because America begrudges China and its stupendous economic growth, which the US actually helped to spur by relocating some of its manufacturing capacity, and not blocking China's accession to the World Trade Organization. It is interesting to note

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<sup>3</sup> Millennium Challenge Corporation. MCC and the African Growth & Opportunity Act (AGOA). Available: <https://www.mcc.gov/initiatives/initiative/african-growth-opportunity-act-agoa>

that the globalisation which America had fostered and championed increased the fortunes of developing countries such as China, but this also brought a sense of disadvantage to ordinary Americans who recoiled from trade that seemed to offer advantage to America's competitors.

Aided by its massive industrial growth and a burgeoning need for mineral and energy resources, China started making inroads into Africa in the few years towards the new millennium. Its 'go out' policy saw an exponential increase in Chinese multinational corporations setting up shop in Africa – which also increased the number of Chinese nationals traveling to Africa for a variety of reasons. The United States must also have been nerved by the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and the admission of South Africa as part of BRICS (a group of countries comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

American discomfiture with how China has been received in Africa has been both covert and overt. In their capacity as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and Rex Tillerson used their visits to Africa to demonise China. In 2011, during her visit to Zambia, Clinton urged her African audience to pay particular attention to countries that are making inroads into Africa, as some of their actions might have the same damaging effect that was typical of colonial powers. It was clear that she was referring to China. This is what American diplomacy in Africa has been reduced to, in respect to China: churning out diatribes against China, but at the same time being reluctant to engage the African continent on issues that China seems willing to engage.

American actions in Iraq in 2003, Libya in 2011, Sudan and Zimbabwe for the last 23 years created a space for China to step in. Aided by its policy of non-interference in the affairs of other countries, China has steered clear of interference with countries such as Iraq, for which America paid dearly in terms of lives and international repute. Libya is also another epitaph on America's foreign policy blunders in Africa in the 21st century. Sanctions on Sudan and Zimbabwe brought untold suffering on ordinary citizens. China's willingness to help was hailed as a munificent demonstration of friendship, though Americans have gone to great extents to excoriate China for coddling 'rogue' African regimes. By and large, Africans seem to be amenable to China's foreign policy, as they see it as respectful of African sovereignty, while America's pontification is looked at from a historical perspective of treating Africa as a blackhole from which no wisdom should be sought, even on matters that concern the continent. Thus, American diplomacy has somewhat lost its lustre due to America's own doing, characterised by lack of regard for African views, and a jealousy towards players like China that have also shown an appetite to trade with, and help develop, Africa. Chinese-led initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, which has received wide support in three continents, is sure to concern the US even more, even though the insular brand of politics that has seeped onto the American political scene will occlude any ambitious ideas to invest externally, at least to the extent that the BRI is doing. Short of this, America will be ruefully trying to impugn China, while remaining hamstrung by way of tangible and appreciable competition and even coordination. Thus, for any revival of the appeal of American diplomacy in Africa, Africans will look for something much more tangible and helpful rather than rhetoric and self-absolving conduct that aims at isolating other players who are beating a path to Africa's door.

### 3. Prosper Africa

The election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States startled and stunned the world. Throughout his presidential campaign, Trump was univocal about his xenophobia and racism. He was openly racist and insular towards China, and he treated Africa as a hopeless continent. In the latter he shared many Western stereotypes about Africa, but he was plain about it. Despite this, however, he championed Prosper Africa as his framework for engaging with the continent.

The Centre for Global Development, a London- and Washington-based think tank proposed the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act which was introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate in February 2018. The Act enjoyed bipartisan support. The BUILD Act brought together the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the Development Credit Authority (DCA) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to form the United States International Development Finance Corporation (DFC). The DFC invests in developing projects specifically in the developing regions of the world. On 5 October 2018, then President Donald Trump signed the BUILD Act into law.

It was an open secret that Trump was compelled to sign the BUILD Act because of American concerns about China's growing presence in the world, as demonstrated by the scale and popularity of the Belt and Road Initiative. Trump had won his election on insular grounds that, among other things, promised to rejig America's trade equation with China, and bringing back jobs that he accused China of having stolen from the United States. The main sectors that DFC invests in are sanitation, infrastructure, healthcare, and food security. It came as a successor to the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), which was much modest and had an investment cap of \$29 billion while the DCF stood at \$60 billion. With specific reference to Africa, the DFC has worked in close concert with initiatives such as the Power Africa and Prosper Africa initiatives. Prosper Africa was launched in 2018 with the aim of increasing "two-way trade and investment between the United States and African countries. Through Prosper Africa, the U.S. Government works with the private sector and our African government partners to advance deals, promote market opportunities, and strengthen business and investment climates. In so doing, Prosper Africa creates jobs for both African and American workers and fosters shared prosperity."<sup>4</sup> To some observers, like many other American overtures towards 21st century Africa, Prosper Africa was almost expressly tailored toward competing and undercutting China.

The Prosper Africa Initiative comprises 17 United State Government departments and initiatives. For a self-interested player that America is, Prosper Africa, like other initiatives preceding it have the potential for boosting America's economy, and its benefits for Africa cannot be taken as assured. America is alive to the fact that, before the onslaught of COVID-19, Africa was home to some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. It is also a young continent with a rapidly growing middle class that is estimated to double by 2030. By 2050, authoritative forecasts suggest that Africa will be home to a quarter of the global population. The youthful nature of the continent gives it an incomparable pool of labour. It is no

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<sup>4</sup> USAID. Prosper Africa. <https://www.usaid.gov/prosperafrica>

wonder that players such as China are now more open to export some of their manufacturing to Africa. In addition, the growing African middle class presents the continent with increased purchasing power.

Africa's young people and the burgeoning middle class are rapidly urbanising, and hence the need for infrastructure in energy and transport will become more pressing. Africa's potential and challenges confront the United States with foreign policy options. As has been shown, America is almost instinctively drawn towards Africa for its own interests in undermining the reception of competitors such as China. It was the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and now it is China. There are a few options that the US can exercise in order to shed some aspects of its diplomacy in Africa. One of them is anchored on the fact that the Sino-American rivalry that seems to tax America's priorities is not exactly as the US-Soviet rivalry. Contrary to what the name of China's ruling party, the Communist Party of China might suggest, China embarked on economic reforms in the market that saw it adopt some of the neoliberal economic systems that the United States espouses. In terms of economic moorings, then, there are convergences that could be elided into opportunities to synergy. This is unlike the differences between America and the Soviet Union.

Another difference between the Cold War of the 20th century, and the current tussle for supremacy is economic integration. Unlike the case between the Soviet Union and the United States, today the foremost economies of the world have so much trade engagements between the two of them that a complete breakdown of this connection is almost inconceivable. Thus, America's engagement has to pay heed to possibilities for cooperation and coordination, and that having different players paying attention to Africa should not always arouse passions for competition and sabotage in Africa. Additionally, while the Soviet Union was actively participating in competition with the United States, with Africa being one of the main arenas, China does not seem to have an appetite for all-out competition with America.

The almost innate nature of American competition with other powers, using Africa for these turf wars, has been understandably criticised by Africans. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the Director General of the World Trade Organisation once criticised Western attempts to traduce China's growing footprint in Africa. She urged the West to "learn to compete." While this is instructive advice, it also falls in the mainstream advice that America receives over the new realities of other countries' growing profile in Africa. This advice usually talks about competition, and urges America to mount its own challenges in order to catch up with or even outstrip China's profile. However, America's policy needs not be like this all the time. Professor Graham Allison has written about the Thucydides Trap into which America and China are likely to fall if they cannot map out paths for coordinated or even separate, but non-confrontational growth. The United States' actions will be crucial in defusing any possible tension as China increasingly asserts itself in Africa.

## 4. A Break from Trump? Continuity and Change under the Biden Administration

According to figures from Johns Hopkins University<sup>5</sup> and the World Health Organization<sup>6</sup>, the US still has the world's highest number of Covid-19 infections and deaths per day. Added to these challenges, a July 2022 Gallup poll<sup>7</sup> found that Biden's approval ratings were down to only 38%, the lowest approval rating in history at this point in office. The democrats will however be breathing a sigh of relief following a better than expected showing at the recent mid-term elections, which have resulted in them keeping hold of the Senate while the Republicans control the House of Congress. While a relief for the democrats, it doesn't necessarily bode well the ability of the incumbent President to implement his domestic agenda and foreign policy as a highly polarised political landscape continues to characterise the United States.

Some of the foreign policy decisions of the Trump administration have had far-reaching implications across the world - whether due to an aggressive trade war against China and some of its own transatlantic European allies, or through its decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem and the recognition of Israeli settlements, some of these decisions have proved difficult to backtrack on. The US position on Morocco and Western Sahara is another case in point where the Biden administration has been tested, especially because the US recognition of Moroccan claims over Western Sahara are tied to Morocco normalizing relations with Israel. The manner in which the US has approached these areas of policy has also proved to be divisive on the African continent given the AU position on these ongoing conflicts. Rather than reverse or repudiate some of the Trump era policies adopted by the United States, the Biden administration has chosen silence to avoid what may be a heated backlash from the Republic Party and some sections of society. Such is the level of polarization within US politics that the current administration would rather avoid discussing some elements of existing US policy that has outlived the Trump administration in the hope that the policies are not associated with him even though he presides over them.

The fact that domestic issue areas act as a constraint for the Biden administration is also visible through ongoing inquiries into the January 6, 2021 insurrection, which continues to divide the country and make the task of building national unity even more difficult.<sup>8</sup> While Trump is no longer in office, he continues to influence the national discourse, especially with the possibility of running for office again in the next

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<sup>5</sup> Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.2022. COVID-19 Map, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

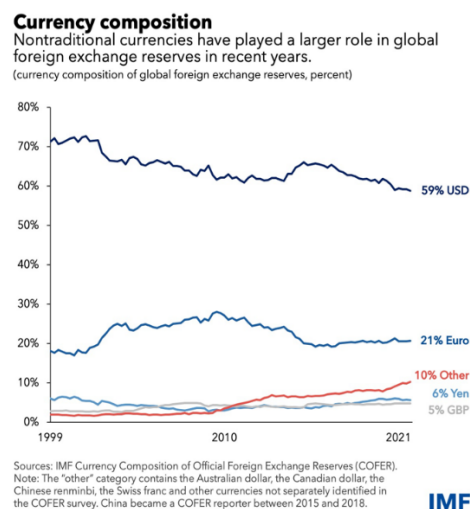
<sup>6</sup> World Health Organisation (WHO). 2022. WHO COVID-19 Dashboard, <https://covid19.who.int/>

<sup>7</sup> Gallip. 2022. 'Presidential Approval Ratings-Joe Biden', <https://news.gallup.com/poll/329384/presidential-approval-ratings-joe-biden.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> Collinson, S. 2021. 'January 6 investigation confronts a perennial dilemma -- how to hold Trump accountable', **CNN**, Available online <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/08/politics/donald-trump-senate-judiciary-committee-report-january-6-investigation/index.html>, October 8

Presidential elections in 2024, having recently announced his intention to once again run for office.<sup>9</sup> This has meant that questions relating to the legitimacy of the current administration, which Trump and his supporters insist got into the White House through a ‘stolen election’, continue to find their way into the national discourse and fuel greater divisions in society on fundamental questions such as the legitimacy of the electoral system and process, especially given that the majority of Republicans and voters that voted for Trump continue to believe that the previous elections were indeed fraudulent. According to some estimates, close to 35 percent of Americans believe what some have called the ‘Big Lie’, whereas close to 70 percent of Republicans believe the election was stolen.<sup>10</sup> This highlights the complexities of the domestic environment within which President Biden has to operate within, an environment that makes it difficult to enact far reaching changes domestically and on contentious foreign policy questions.

While the US still has the largest economy in the world, it remains open for discussion whether the country can continue to accumulate more debt in the coming years and shift its debt ceiling indefinitely.<sup>11</sup> This is especially the case as the US dollar is increasingly called into question as the global reserve currency. These are debates not likely to be resolved in the near future, but they do demonstrate that an erosion of US credibility to lead globally will impact the manner in which the ballooning national debt issue is addressed and the ability of policy makers in Washington to continually extend their debt ceiling.



Source: IMF

<sup>9</sup> Frum, D. 2021. ‘Revenge of the Donald: Nostalgia and resentment could be enough to catapult Trump back into the presidency’, *The Atlantic*, Available online <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/trump-running-president-2024-election/620502/>, October 28

<sup>10</sup> Longwell, Sarah. 2022. ‘Trump Supporters Explain Why They Believe the Big Lie’, in *The Atlantic*, Available online <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/trump-voters-big-lie-stolen-election/629572/>, April 18

<sup>11</sup> Yellen, J. 2021. ‘Debt ceiling: What’s next for the US debt limit’, *BBC*, Available online <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-58820071>, October 15

Arslanalp et al. 2022. ‘Dollar Dominance and the Rise of Nontraditional Reserve Currencies’ <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2022/06/01/blog-dollar-dominance-and-the-rise-of-nontraditional-reserve-currencies>



One of the major challenges for the US under the Biden administration is the management of domestic and global expectations following the disruptive presidency of Donald Trump, whose actions at home and abroad continue to reverberate beyond his term in office. Many of the aftershocks have thus remained with the Biden administration. Having increasingly sought to withdraw from global institutions it had historically played an integral role in establishing during the Trump years, the US government will also have a difficult task convincing international partners that they can be relied on, and that the Trump phenomenon was an anomaly rather than a sign of things to come, especially given the former President's continued grip over the Republican Party.

Domestic challenges in the US have also been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, with the country being one of the most affected in the world in terms of cases and deaths recorded. This is impacting on social cohesion and the ability of the new administration to effectively execute its key priorities, especially in a political environment where everything including COVID-19 and vaccine mandates have seen polarization along party political lines.<sup>12</sup>

So far-reaching has the single term of Trump in office been, that many of the allies of the US have been forced to question the reliability of the overall partnership with the US. This was evident during the diplomatic spat between France and the US over Australia abruptly ending a defense contract for France to supply conventional submarines for Australia in a deal worth approximately \$90 billion in

<sup>12</sup> Hals, T. 2021. 'Republican governors lead attack on Biden vaccine mandate', [Reuters](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/republican-governors-lead-attack-biden-vaccine-mandate-2021-11-05/), Available online <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/republican-governors-lead-attack-biden-vaccine-mandate-2021-11-05/>, November 5



favour of a trilateral defense agreement between Australia, the US, and the United Kingdom.<sup>13</sup> This will lead to the sharing of technology and Australia being equipped with nuclear-powered submarines. At the time, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and President Emmanuel Macron made their frustrations well known, with the foreign minister likening the unpredictability and manner of execution from the White House to the unpredictability of the Trump administration.<sup>14</sup>

France additionally sought to gain solidarity amongst its neighbours in Europe while withdrawing its Ambassadors in the United States and Australia, an unprecedented diplomatic move highlighting their levels of frustration.<sup>15</sup> Recently, France has also criticized US actions to deal with inflation in a manner that moves the country towards protectionism and accusing US action of potentially causing deindustrialization within Europe. French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said that the United States' new Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) law was a major threat to European companies and that the EU had to stand firm against it. Indeed European industries fear that the bill, which essentially provides tax credits for eligible components produced in a US factory, would take away potential investment from the continent.<sup>16</sup> This comes in the midst of the conflict in Ukraine where US allies in the EU have had to bare much of the brunt in absorbing rising energy prices and the effects of the far reaching sanctions imposed on Russia. While the European partners in the EU had increasingly spoken about the need for strategic autonomy following their assessments on the long-term reliability of the transatlantic partnership, it is questionable whether the conditions the EU faces during the conflict in Ukraine will allow them to achieve that goal or whether it replaces energy dependence on Russia with energy dependence on the US Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) sector at even higher prices. German industry and the German economic model will also be heavily tested, having relied heavily on cheap, reliable gas flowing from Russia to keep its companies competitive, especially those in the manufacturing sector.<sup>17</sup>

In the first half of the Biden administration's term of office, South Africa and its African counterparts had to mostly tame their expectations given that it was largely concerned with national questions related to the pandemic and challenges of social cohesion. The police killing of George Floyd and others like him, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the storming of the Capitol considering the increased threat of domestic right-wing terrorism, have all unleashed a plethora of challenges that have preoccupied the administration. This has had foreign policy implications, and South Africa and its partners in Africa will have to craft a strategy based on a few concise areas of convergence for African political, social, and economic actors and the possibility of increased engagement during the second half of his

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<sup>13</sup> Willsher, K. Hurst, D. 2021. 'Aukus: French contractor 'astonished' at cancellation of Australia submarine deal', The Guardian, Available online <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/07/aukus-french-contractor-astonished-at-cancellation-of-australia-submarine-deal>, 7 October

<sup>14</sup> Willsher, K. Hurst, D. 'Someone lied': French foreign minister accuses Australia of submarine betrayal in latest broadside, The Guardian, Available online <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/sep/30/someone-lied-french-foreign-minister-accuses-australia-of-submarine-betrayal-in-latest-broadside>, 30 September

<sup>15</sup> Charlton, A. 2021. 'France Seeks European Support After AUKUS Submarine Deal Surprise', The Diplomat, Available online <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/france-seeks-european-support-after-aukus-submarine-deal-surprise/>, September 21

<sup>16</sup> Reuters Staff. 2022. 'France's Le Maire: U.S. Inflation Reduction Act law is major threat to EU companies', in Reuters, Available online <https://www.reuters.com/article/france-economy-usa-le-maire-idAFP6N2YK01Y> November 7

<sup>17</sup>Cooban, A. 2022. 'Rocketing energy costs are savaging German industry', in CNN Business, Available online <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/07/energy/german-industry-energy-prices/index.html> October 28

administration, especially now that the United States has presented a Sub-Saharan Africa strategy and a national security strategy that outlines priorities for the Biden administration. This is especially important given that much of the time of the Biden administration has been absorbed by pressing domestic and external challenges, including the ongoing rifts in the transatlantic partnership and deteriorating relations with China and Russia. A long list of areas from the African side will not work, and the continent must prioritise fewer points of engagement, with a greater impact on Africa's development objectives. These key objectives would have to be aligned with agreed to regional and continental development priorities articulated in the various regional indicative strategic development plans and in Agenda 2063 and its ten year implementation plans and catalytic projects.

It will thus remain important to proactively engage with state and non-state actors in the US on a set of key African priorities for the Biden administration to consider. Some of that will include efforts to reverse Trump-era policies on Israel and Palestine, Western Sahara, and to advance mediation efforts in Ethiopia, which had been made more complicated by the political conflict in the Tigray region. Some of these foreign policy positions adopted by the Trump administration have indeed proved more difficult to reverse than perhaps anticipated, and while the Biden administration does not loudly speak of the relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem, this remains US policy and practice. The Biden administration has similarly remained rather muted on the Abraham Accords and efforts to normalize diplomatic relations between Middle Eastern and African countries and Israel, including with Morocco in exchange for US recognition of Moroccan claims on Western Sahara. These represent Trump era foreign policy positions that the current administration is not willing or able to expend political capital to reverse in a polarized society and while African countries should continue to address these, they should also manage their expectations on the possibility of significant policy changes in Washington. African countries will however have to continue to seek to operationalise infrastructure pledges from the United States that are outlined in the US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>18</sup> This is especially the case in prioritizing infrastructure that supports regional cooperation and the building of resilient regional value chains able to adapt to future pandemics and external shocks.

The Biden administration has sought to mend alliances with traditional partners and position the US to again become a respected power. This has been outlined in the country's national security strategy.<sup>19</sup> However, this will not be a straightforward process as many parts of the world reflect on the possibility that a Trump-like presidency may again happen in the near future, or that many of his far-reaching policies will be difficult to reverse in a divided domestic political landscape, which has proved to be the case. What has also been apparent is that despite the fact that the Trump administration was belligerent and did not cultivate good relations with China, the Biden administration has continued on this path at a time when the majority of the US population, both Democrats and Republicans, continue to express animosity towards Beijing.<sup>20</sup> This will continue to shape the approach adopted by the Democratic Party

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<sup>18</sup> The White House. 2022. [US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa](#), August

<sup>19</sup> The White House. 2022. [National Security Strategy](#), October

<sup>20</sup> Silver, L. Devlin, K. Huang, C. 2021. 'Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries', [Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/), Available online <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/>, October 6

government as it seeks to appear strong for the domestic population. Indeed the national security strategy of the US outlines that it sees China as its most important challenger while making the distinction that unlike other global powers, China is in a position to apply a greater degree of material resources towards shaping the global order in a manner that does not necessarily align with US values and interests. This bipartisan stance against China, which is also applied in the various regions of the world will continue to impact US-Africa relations, as has also been the case with Russia, which the national security strategy also outlines as a more immediate challenger to the existing US led order and Europe's security architecture.

The direction of US policy on China is also evident through the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Strategic Competition Act of 2021-1. Amongst other things, it proposes millions of dollars of funding towards reports on the 'negative impact' of China's Belt and Road Initiative Projects, which forms part of a proposed \$300 million 'countering China's influence fund'.<sup>21</sup> It will thus be important to ensure that Africa is taken seriously by the Biden administration for the opportunities it presents, and not simply because of efforts to counter China in Africa. This may act as an Achilles heel for US relations with Africa if the perception with the continent is that US engagement largely seeks to counter China and Russia rather than advance Africa's development objectives and strategic goals. Despite US efforts to craft a more positive language in its Sub-Saharan Africa strategy, it remains clear that one of the overarching goals of the Biden administration, as was the case under Trump is to outcompete China globally and in the various regions of the world, including in Africa. Antony Blinken's recent visit to Africa could thus not have been timelier – as US tensions with China and Russia continued to heighten, and American decision makers had become even more invested in ensuring that they dilute the influence of their rivals on the continent. It is in this context that the US sought to reassure African stakeholders that it was not forcing them to choose, but merely offering a different model and type of partnership in comparison to countries it considers rivals. It remains to be seen whether Africans were convinced by the rhetoric considering the other laws and policies adopted with the aim of countering Russia and China in Africa. This very matter was raised by Minister Naledi Pandor, South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation when mentioning the 'Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Bill', which was dismissed as being counterproductive and not being in line with the spirit of good relations between the US and Africa as it would be tantamount to bullying.

## 5. How should African partners respond to the new US outreach in Africa?

As Africa looks to proactively engage the United States following the release of its Sub-Saharan Africa strategy, one of the key areas for discussion will relate to efforts to reconcile how the US sees Africa versus how the continent sees itself. This is reflected in the fact that the US does not really have an Africa strategy, but a Sub-Saharan Africa strategy. This already highlights a misalignment reflecting that

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<sup>21</sup> US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. 2021. 'Strategic Competition Act of 2021', Available online <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/DAV21598%20-%20Strategic%20Competition%20Act%20of%202021.pdf>

the US does not have a holistic manner of viewing the continent, instead dividing it along its own lenses. This ensured that even before the strategy had been read, it was being critiqued for not being a comprehensive all-encompassing Africa strategy. This was a similar critique that faced the European Union (EU) as it sought to negotiate the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with African counterparts along regional boundaries set in Brussels rather than those determined by African stakeholders. The US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa acknowledges this flaw and states that the US will have to 'address the artificial bureaucratic division between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa'<sup>22</sup>.

Recent years have seen greater efforts by Africans to exercise agency and ownership in pursuing their development efforts. These aspirations are captured in the African Union's Agenda 2063<sup>23</sup>, and in the Kagame Report<sup>24</sup> on the institutional reform of the African Union. These initiatives share a quest to identify and act on African priorities, and thus spearhead an endogenous development effort on the continent. Agenda 2063, which outlines 'The Africa We Want' has developed its first ten year implementation plan under the theme of 'A Shared Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development', covering the years 2014-2023. This strategic framework, and subsequent ten year implementation plans should guide Africa's participation in the various international fora in the first ten years of implementing Agenda 2063, and in the following ten years. It is towards these priorities equally that external powers' commitments to African priorities should be measured; the priorities should assist in shaping Africa's strategic engagement with the world for the duration of the framework.

The real test for achieving Agenda 2063 is whether African stakeholders are themselves committed to its implementation and to mustering the necessary political will. It is thus important to understand the extent to which African stakeholders align their engagement with the United States towards achieving the key regional and continental priorities and expanding the policy space and strategic autonomy of the continent. Continental integration is thus integral to achieving a greater level of strategic autonomy for Africans in global affairs. The quest for strategic autonomy should in no way be interpreted as a delinking of the continent from the processes of globalisation. It emphasises that Africa's encircling interconnectivities are both the continent's weakness in terms of external vulnerability and potentially its strength through enhancing its integration in the global economy. As such, the quest for strategic autonomy aims to ensure that Africa's engagement with the world is based incrementally on the interests of Africans.

Strengthening continental integration and cohesion will thus have to be prioritized to strengthen continental autonomy within a fraught global geopolitical landscape. Leading African economies will need to play a proactive role in creating and safeguarding the strategic autonomy of the African

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<sup>22</sup> The White House. 2022. US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa\_August, p12

<sup>23</sup> African Union Commission (AUC). 2015. Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want: A Shared Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development

<sup>24</sup> Kagame, P. 2017. The Imperative to Strengthen Our Union: Report on the Proposed Recommendations for the Institutional Reform of the African Union.

continental and maritime space. The imperative of greater regional and continental integration must thus not only be seen as important from an ideological and historical point of view, but from a dispassionate and strategic calculation of Africa's aspirational role in the world. Indeed a more integrated continent is of paramount importance to the strategic interests of the continent in a changing international landscape. The key priority thus remains greater integration and how Africa can leverage its external relations and partnerships to advance this overriding goal.

A fragmented continent of mostly landlocked countries will not be able to engage the United States on a more equal footing, hence the imperative of greater regional integration and a shared pooling of sovereignty on select matters of importance. It is imperative for larger African economies to realise that inability to create a more autonomous continental and maritime space will diminish their own influence on the African continent, as external powers might step in to fill a void created by a lack of meaningful integration and cohesion. This situation is already reflected in the plethora of external powers having established, or are in the process of establishing, Africa platforms in their own national interests. Given these circumstances, Agenda 2063 could risk never amounting to more than being aspirational, should it not be accompanied by more robust African leadership, geopolitical sagacity, and greater institutional integration. In terms of the reform agenda, this may have to involve a scenario that, over time, erodes AU member state sovereignty on certain agreed upon issues and international fora in favour of strengthening the RECs. Perhaps the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), one of the key outlined priorities of Agenda 2063, could act as the catalyst in giving impetus to this process.

Now that the ACFTA has arrived, it will be important to ensure that an active AU structure focused on business, trade and investment is empowered with driving the role of the African and non-African private and public sector, something like an AU Business Council for Trade and Investment. However, this council-like structure needs to ensure that it factors in the role of the African diaspora as important stakeholders in terms of mobilising resources for mutually beneficial trade and investment opportunities, and also as important advocates for African interests in the policies of their own countries. This will especially be important as the continent seeks to build a relationship with the US that is aligned to African priorities. Indeed the US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa places additional emphasis on mobilising the private sector and to invest in African infrastructure and technology related sectors, while also making mention of the role of the African diaspora, which has actually become one of the most educated and highly paid diaspora groups in the US. Tapping into this will be important for Africa to create groupings that are mostly aligned with their priorities within the US.

Major African and diaspora business magnates and financiers such as Mo Ibrahim, Aliko Dangote, Patrice Motsepe and African-American Robert Smith are indicative of the investors in need of cultivating and for driving the 2063 agenda. An integral part of the reform of the AU will have to focus on the funding of the pan-African institutions and the imperative of reducing the extraordinarily high percentages of donor funds required to operationalise programmes of the AU. If Africans can fund their own institutions, then they can propose to redirect some of that traditional donor funding towards longer term investments in infrastructure, manufacturing, agriculture, and the development of new technologies on the continent. This is closely tied with the agenda on domestic resource mobilisation

and stemming illicit financial flows, which have been identified as integral matters for African countries to resolve. Resolving these internal reforms within the AU will allow the continent to form more productive relations with the US that are partnership oriented not only rhetorically but through actions.

If Africa is to overcome continental fragmentation into the many and sundry weak-to-failing 'sovereign' states, one area that might be considered a new model in approach to official development assistance (ODA) is one that shifts focus from bilateral aid to Africa from donor countries toward a more multilateral framework that channels the bulk of ODA through the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the AU's NEPAD development agency which, in turn, would disburse it into the RECs where they then collectively decide on financing agreed upon country-level and inter-state priorities. This should become a topic of engagement with the United States given its influence with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and its Development Assistance Committee (DAC). This group of countries continue to channel significant amounts of development cooperation in Africa, even though not always addressing African concerns in terms of conditionalities and the type of sectors and initiatives being supported. This would require African stakeholders holding the United States to its commitments in terms of supporting regional integration and building the capacity of African institutions.

Hence, something along the lines of an AU-ECA-RECs triangle to focus development cooperation interventions into a more pan-African integrationist road to Agenda 2063 would need more serious thought. Here, a beefed-up governing role for the existing AU Commission/ECA/African Development Bank Joint Secretariat could serve as the continental integration nexus in interfacing with the RECs. Such a governing framework would contribute to overcoming the 'one and many' phenomenon that prevails. This alternative model of international cooperation would aim to allocate resources more efficiently. Whilst not completely removing bilateral development cooperation, the aim would be to reduce it in favour of the regional and continental form of engagement. This would also be in line with the aim of channelling the continent's international relations in ways that enhance continental integration and Agenda 2063.

Following adoption of the Agenda 2063 Framework Document by the Summit in January 2015 as the basis for Africa's long term socio-economic and integrative transformation, the African Union Commission (AUC) was directed to prepare the First Ten Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063. This plan was adopted in June 2015 as a basis for the preparation of medium term development plans of member states of the Union, the Regional Economic Communities and the AU organs. The document identifies priority areas, their associated targets, expected outcomes and indicative strategies to stakeholders; while highlighting the fast track projects that will bring wins and generate sustained interest by the African citizenry in the African Agenda. It is thus not a lack of ideas that afflicts the African development processes. Rather, more often than not the problem is a lax approach to implementing agreed-upon targets. It will thus be important to ensure that relations with the United States are adjusted in line with the goal of achieving the outlines priorities in Agenda 2063 and the various regional indicative strategic development frameworks adopted by the regional economic communities. This requires a strict, disciplined, and systematic approach towards implementing agreed-upon priorities.

All the flagship projects and programmes approved by the AU Summit are included in the First Ten Year Implementation Plan. These consist of 12 programmes/projects which they would like to see implemented as a catalyst for the implementation of the broader Agenda 2063.<sup>25</sup> The 12 priority programmes are:

- Integrated High Speed Train Network connecting all African capitals and commercial centers.
- An African Virtual and E-University to increase access to tertiary education and develop high quality open, distance and eLearning resources.
- Formulation of a commodities strategy enabling African countries to add value, earn higher returns, and integrate into the global value chains based on local content development (which will need to be coordinated via the RECs within the AUC/ECA/AfDB framework and the CFTA).
- Establishment of an annual African forum that brings together the political leadership, private sector, academia and civil society in evaluating the implementation of Agenda 2063.
- Establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area by 2017 to accelerate intra-Africa trade and strengthen Africa's voice and policy space in global trade negotiations (already achieved in 2019 but required to evolve to the next level of an African Economic Community).
- The African Passport and free movement of people.
- Implementation of the Grand Inga Dam Project, which will generate 43, 200 MW of power to support the current regional power pools.
- The Pan-African E-Network to expand and improve e-services, especially intra-African broadband terrestrial infrastructure, cyber security, and the information revolution.
- Silencing the guns by 2020 to ensure the ending of all wars, civil conflicts, and gender based violence.
- African Outer Space Strategy to strengthen Africa's use of outer space to bolster its development.

With Africa projected to begin dominating global human demography by 2050, effectively transforming the continent of human origins and 'out of Africa' world-wide dispersal into a 'back to Africa' return to humanity's epicenter, how do these projections factor in Africa's slave descended diasporas into Agenda 2063 prospects? What potential, if any, is there for a strategic 2063-UN International Decade of People's of African Descent linkage that might rekindle a lost pan-African dynamism. These questions must be answered by the current Biden administration working with its counterparts in Africa. Taking into account that the diaspora is seen as the sixth region of Africa, the AU will need to muster sufficient motivation to mount a concerted Agenda 2063 campaign in and among diaspora communities that could

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<sup>25</sup> African Union Commission (AUC). 2015. Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want: A Shared Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development

well determine the nature and degree of strategic momentum this vision generates in the years and decades ahead. What is particularly interesting about this dimension of continental autonomy equations is how the bulk of Africa's diaspora are situated in the Euro-American West and in the Western Hemisphere at a time when the global economic gravitational pull toward an Afro-Eurasian center of gravity gathers momentum. Within this context exist potentialities for African diaspora communities, contingent on their mobilisation, to balance Africa's geopolitical-economic east-west/north-south equations within the changing strategic landscape and, in the process, enhance continental autonomy by advancing an integrated Africa as a 'soft power' hegemon.

Mobilising the African Diaspora into a pan-African augmenting force in what would amount to a Global African calculus would be no mean feat and would be contingent on a mutuality of converging political will within the AU system and among diaspora communities alike. The impetus would have to emanate from the AU in putting real flesh on its designation of the African Diaspora as its Sixth Regional Pillar. The priority and strategic focus would have to be in the United States in re-energising an African-American based – but not exclusively black – constituency for Africa for influencing US-Africa policy around which Agenda 2063 coupled with the UNIDPAD should excite political imagination comparable to that generated by the anti-apartheid movement. This is also where a prospective AU Business Council for Trade and Investment could serve as an entrepreneurial stimulus for African-American minority business enterprise engagement with continent-based SMMEs within the context of the ACFTA. Implementing Agenda 2063 and its ten year implementation plans of action would open up broad vistas of engagement by African-American and other diaspora community civil society organisations and constituencies.

The longer term question is what will Africa look like by 2050, just over a decade leading up to 2063? And this is keeping in mind the converging multi-dimensional challenges of a youth bulge in need of educating and socialising into productive citizens in their societies while containing tendencies for their recruitment, forcible or otherwise, into violent insurgencies; employment creation; rapid urbanising pressures requiring urgent urban-rural planning and spatial adaptations factoring in physical and social infrastructures interacting with inter and intra-state migratory patterns; and the harmonising of contradictions between human and natural ecosystems wherein the latter must be protected from rampant development and illicit resource extraction that is a threat to the continent's biodiversity while making it vulnerable to all manner of natural disasters. Cultural conflict within and between pastoral and herding communities, within and between countries, also has to be factored into this mix of challenges. All of these multi-factoral dynamics will accompany the demographic trends overwhelming the fragmented colonially inherited map of Africa ratified for Africa's first generation of anti-colonial nationalists at the OAU's 1963 founding. With the US Strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa making specific reference to a closer focus on urban dynamics on the continent, the partnership will need to deliver concrete outcomes in building more resilient urban infrastructure that caters for the changing demographic trends that will see a greater number of Africans living in urban spaces by 2030.

Having noted the domestic constraints for the Biden administration, it will be important for African stakeholders to familiarise themselves with the key personnel of the current administration, some of



whom also served during the Obama administration. This is important in crafting a proactive African strategy towards the US that takes into account the track record of appointed officials and the domestic constraints faced by the administration. Some of the important positions include Secretary of State Antony Blinken, chairperson of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Gregory Meeks, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, administrator of USAID Samantha Power, Monde Muyangwa as Assistant Administrator for USAID, and US trade representative Katherine Tai.

The late Francis Kornegay, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Global Dialogue, noted that the Biden administration contained a historic amount of African Americans in strategic positions within the executive and the legislature, who would be tasked with efforts to rethink not only US-Africa relations, but US foreign policy in general. He also noted the importance of the chairmanship of the Africa Subcommittee, headed by fellow Black Caucus member Karen Bass, while veteran Caucus member Barbara Lee, who formerly served on the staff of Ron Dellums, takes over chairing the equally strategic House Appropriations Foreign Aid Subcommittee. These developments are accompanied by President Biden appointing the former assistant secretary of state for Africa, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, as US ambassador to the United Nations. Kornegay argued that “[n]ever before has there been such a high-level, pivotal concentration of forces among African-Americans in the US official foreign affairs establishment, with the potential to shape or reshape relations between Africa and the US and American foreign policy more broadly.” These observations by Kornegay are crucial to how African stakeholders should go about articulating their priorities, and which policy inlets they can make use of. Indeed in the case of House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairperson Gregory Meeks, it was notable that he shared some of his views on a potential new engagement strategy from the US in its relations with Africa that would encompass a more deliberate approach towards Pan-African structures and regional organisations in the sub-regions.<sup>26</sup> Key to this new approach would be ensuring that while the US continues to cultivate key bilateral relations, it also become more visible in the various regional institutions.

Another appointment of interest to African stakeholders is that of Judd Devermont, who recently headed the Africa programme of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). He has largely been tasked with the process of formulating the new Africa strategy and draw on his previous experience within the think tank environment, where he has actively engaged with African counterparts on what they regard as priorities the US administration should take into account when formulating a strategy. The appointment makes it clear that while Africa may not have been central to US thinking in the beginning of the Biden administration’s term of office, it is beginning to gain greater importance in a changing geopolitical environment. Judd Devermont will also be able to draw on his experience within US intelligence to ensure that he consults broadly both within the US and in Africa. While some of these appointments will be welcome on the continent, they will continue to face challenges of rethinking a long held US engagement with Africa that was largely based on security concerns while striving to overcome an institutional culture that has seen the continent more in the periphery of US strategy. It

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<sup>26</sup> Meeks, G. 2021. ‘America’s Africa policy needs a rethink’, *Mail & Guardian*, Available online <https://mg.co.za/africa/2021-02-05-americas-africa-policy-needs-a-rethink/>, February 5

will thus be important for the continent to use existing networks with some of those appointed to highlight lingering misalignments in terms of the gap between stated policy and practice, and in terms of overcoming the strong motive of US policy makers and practitioners in forcing African countries to make choices between Russia and China on the one hand and the US and its Western allies on the other hand. Indeed these are choices that Africans do not want to see themselves having to make, instead arguing for increased international engagement with all potential external partners.

African stakeholders will thus have to ensure the proposed agenda is not so broad that it limits the creation of concrete programmes. The proposed agenda could thus be limited to areas such as economic development, regional integration, geopolitical dynamics and governance. Under economic development, African stakeholders can already begin to envision and deliberate on a post-African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trading relationship with the US that factors in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). African diplomatic representatives in the US could thus already initiate conversations with counterparts to get a sense of the evolving US trade agenda, especially related to Africa. This would also include a proactive engagement with US counterparts at USAID to ensure the continued support of development efforts on the continent, especially for least developed countries (LDCs) and middle-income countries, which still have large sections of their societies living below the poverty line. Such support could also include building the requisite capacity amongst LDCs on the implementation of the AfCFTA in what would resemble an aid-for-trade programme in line with a transitioning AGOA and a new African trade landscape in the form of the AfCFTA.

However, these discussions would also touch on how Africa could work with the US on triangular cooperation projects that seek to avoid great power competition on the continent. Indeed, countries like South Africa have already worked with USAID and Irish Aid on various triangular cooperation projects with potato farmers in Malawi and Lesotho. Given the growing importance of triangular cooperation to the implementation of the sustainable development goals, these discussions could identify potential development areas to work together on in Africa. This will be important in the aftermath of the United Nations' 2nd High Level Conference on South-South Cooperation, held in Buenos Aires in 2019. It firmly endorsed not only the growing importance of South-South Cooperation, but also the importance of triangular cooperation to support the implementation of the sustainable development goals.<sup>27</sup> Having entered the decade of action in the lead-up to the 2030 deadline for implementing these goals, the US will have to demonstrate how it wishes to partner with African countries to meet their development priorities. As more African countries set up structures to manage their South-South cooperation, and with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) having an expanded mandate to coordinate South-South cooperation in Africa, it will be important for the likes of USAID to work closer with leading actors in Africa at a country level and with the likes of the APRM and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA) during the decade of action leading to the final period of implementation for the Sustainable Development Goals. They will however also need to test the

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<sup>27</sup> General Assembly. 2019. 'Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-Level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation', A/RES/73/291, Available online <https://www.unsouthsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/N1911172.pdf>, April 30

feasibility of entering into developmental triangular partnerships with other development cooperation partners in Africa such as China, but always guided by the prerogative to achieve the continent's outlined development priorities and programmes.

Taking into account the growing importance of regional integration to African efforts to play a more important role in global affairs, it will be important that it remains one of the key areas that African actors focus on in their relations with the US. The AfCFTA will serve as a catalyst for ramping up efforts to accelerate regional integration. African stakeholders will thus need to be proactive in focusing US efforts towards catalytic projects able to galvanise regional integration efforts, including through the identification of cross-border infrastructure projects and providing support to customs officials to build the necessary capacity to enforce new trade rules. This would position the US as a key partner in meeting Africa's development priorities as they are articulated in Agenda 2063. Given the global supply-chain weaknesses that came to the fore at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, African countries will seek to use the pandemic as a catalyst for supporting the development of regional value chains, and the AfCFTA will be a central part of that strategy.<sup>28</sup> If the US partners with African counterparts in supporting the development of regional value chains, it will help to enhance Africa's agency with all external partners, including those that the US considers as competitors in Africa.

It is thus arguable that it is in the strategic interests of the United States for Africa to have greater agency and strategic autonomy in its international relations, including through the creation of regional value chains as it would make the continent less susceptible to being overly dependent on any one external actor, including external actors the US regards as competitors or adversaries in Africa and beyond. This is partly mentioned in the US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa, which makes reference to enhancing African agency and the continent's institutional capacity. A strong monitoring and evaluation architecture must thus accompany the strategy in order to hold the US accountable for implementation of agreed objectives.

African stakeholders will also have to raise geopolitical dynamics on the continent with the US, especially in rebuffing efforts to force African countries to choose between China and the US in their international engagements and would also need to collectively rebuff efforts to prevent engagement with Russia given recent efforts by the US and its European allies to weaken Moscow militarily, economically, and politically for the foreseeable future. Such efforts will only breed animosity and accusations of bullying. African stakeholders will also have to ensure that issues such as Libya, Western Sahara, and Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan mediation efforts on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project remain a priority in terms of moving away from some of the Trump-era posturing and decision-making, which often lacked impartiality. In line with the recommendations of the African Union

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<sup>28</sup> Mthembu, P. 2021. 'The African Continental Free Trade Area: time to build capacity and resilience', *Southern Voice*, Available online <http://southernvoice.org/afcfta-time-to-build-capacity-resilience/>, March 8; UNCTAD. 2022. <https://au.int/en/newsevents/20140806/president-barack-obama-announces-37-billion-business-investment-africa-and-110>

(AU) Report on Institutional Reforms<sup>29</sup>, the AU and its membership will thus want to better manage its relations with external partners instead of being caught up in the geopolitical tensions amongst the great powers. This means utilising external partnerships as an integral part of achieving Africa's objectives, as captured in Agenda 2063 and some of the regional indicative strategies adopted by the various regional economic communities.

Lastly, governance should also form part of the key issue areas to develop mutual cooperation between Africa and the US. While governance, and more specifically democratic governance has consistently featured amongst US priorities in Africa, it will be important to ensure that US cooperation and interventions are not only focused on increasing the agency of non-state actors to hold officials accountable, but that efforts are equally focused on interventions that seek to build the capacity of the state to deliver services at different layers of government. Indeed the building of effective and capable African states must remain a priority both in terms of country to country programmes supported by the US, and in terms of support for the work of structures such as the African Peer Review Mechanism, which seeks to entrench good and transparent governance processes across the continent through the various peer reviews underway. Recent years have witnessed a renewed interest in the work of the APRM, and US efforts should thus also seek to complement this. Such cooperation on governance should however not be abused or misused to instigate regime change that often leads to instability and a collapse of institutions as the world witnessed with Libya. Dialogue instead of military interventions should thus always be prioritized to avoid some of the destructive tendencies witnessed in the past. Given the imperative of the economic recovery from the pandemic, African partners will also have to focus on enhancing economic cooperation with their counterparts in the US.

## 6. US Strategy and the Securitisation of Development: Rethinking Africom?

In late April, the USA announced that US Africa Command (Africom) would be opening a Security Office in Zambia<sup>30</sup>. It further announced that Africom would return 'a small persistent military presence' to Somalia<sup>31</sup>. African leaders have been historically reticent about allowing Africom because they did not want to sanction what would look like recolonisation under the guise of the US Global War on Terror. Along with Africom is the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act<sup>32</sup> as well as the Strategic

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<sup>29</sup> Kagame, P. 2017. 'Report on the Implementation of the Decision on the Institutional Reform of the African Union', African Union, Available online [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33272-doc-au\\_reform\\_implementation\\_report\\_july\\_2017\\_final\\_v2.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33272-doc-au_reform_implementation_report_july_2017_final_v2.pdf), July

<sup>30</sup> US Embassy in Zambia, 2022. 'U.S. Africa Command visit launches new U.S.-Zambia security cooperation', <https://www.africom.mil/article/34379/us-africa-command-visit-launches-new-us-zambia-security-cooperation>, April 26

<sup>31</sup> Harper, M. 2022. 'US troops back in Somalia to fight al-Shabab', in BBC, June 1

<sup>32</sup> Ndebele, L. 2022. 'US seeks to pass law to monitor Russia's activities in Africa', in News24, Available online <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/us-passes-law-to-monitor-russias-activities-in-africa-20220517> May 17

Competition Act of 2021<sup>33</sup> and U.S. Innovation and Competition Act<sup>34</sup>, that echo the posture of the Cold War. While investment in research and development is crucial for any nation, centring China and Russia as a key focus in these massive projects speaks more about power and dominance than a genuine partnership with Africa on trade, investment, and development. An inability to change this will likely lead to a failure of US policy towards Africa as the continent continues its efforts to assert a greater degree of agency and strategic autonomy in global affairs.

Post-Cold War, the US policy has moved from disengagement to hostility under the Trump administration. The 'shithole countries' comment and the travel bans imposed during the worst parts of the pandemic that affected many African countries did not win the US many new friends. The question that many are asking is why the sudden turnaround- at least militarily. An easy answer would be concern around deepening Russian and Chinese engagement on the continent and increasing insecurity that could become a hotbed for terrorism.

In recent months, the resurgence of coups on the continent has brought Russian mercenaries such as the Wagner Group<sup>35</sup> back into sharp focus, with a clear presence in Libya, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic and Mali. The US now provides intelligence support<sup>36</sup> to the original African hegemon, France, which has found its influence diluted in many of its former strongholds.

Alongside its Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, China has set up a base in Djibouti in 2017, something the US may also be using as a pretext to increase its presence. Chinese presence in Africa however continues to be dominated by trade and investment relations. Chinese investment over the last 20 years has been on the increase compared to a decrease in US investment, particularly in West Africa. Chinese security presence in Africa is thus still significantly dwarfed by the presence of former colonisers.

There is no questioning that Africa needs investment, trade and development partners to close its infrastructure gap, stimulate industry and manufacturing specifically, and innovation (Research & Development). China is investing in ports, rail infrastructure, energy, and other key areas of focus for African states. Together with their BRICS partners, China and Russia have committed to developing pharmaceutical manufacturing as well as research on health products centred in Africa.

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<sup>33</sup> US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. 2021. 'Strategic Competition Act of 2021', Available online <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/DAV21598%20-%20Strategic%20Competition%20Act%20of%202021.pdf>

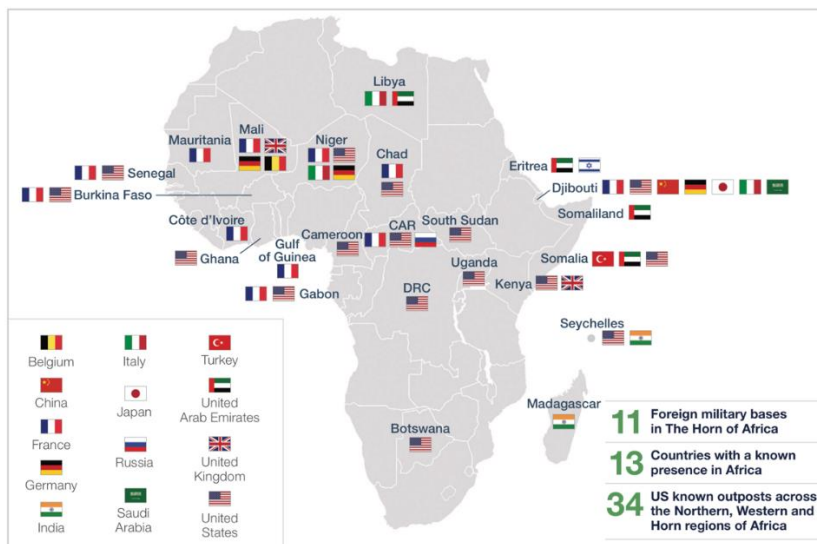
<sup>34</sup> Mervis, J. 2022. 'US troops back in Somalia to fight al-Shabab', in *Science*, Available online <https://www.science.org/content/article/house-passes-sweeping-u-s-innovation-bill-teeing-talks-senate>, February 4

<sup>35</sup> Fasanotti, F. 2022. 'Russia's Wagner Group in Africa: Influence, commercial concessions, rights violations, and counterinsurgency failure', in *The Brookings Institution*, available online <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/02/08/russias-wagner-group-in-africa-influence-commercial-concessions-rights-violations-and-counterinsurgency-failure/> February 8

<sup>36</sup> Hudson, J. 2022. 'Biden mulled reducing support for France's military operations in Africa. Instead, he doubled down.', in *The Washington Post*, Available online [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-france-africa-counterterrorism/2022/01/11/2c6c27a2-6d65-11ec-974b-d1c6de8b26b0\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-france-africa-counterterrorism/2022/01/11/2c6c27a2-6d65-11ec-974b-d1c6de8b26b0_story.html) January 12

Africa needs partnerships to get its endeavour to TRIPS waiver for vaccines<sup>37</sup> over the line. It receives instead a growing military presence of foreign armies, unwanted refugees and undocumented immigrants. It is established that underdevelopment is a major condition for violent extremism and terrorism. The United Nations certainly believes so with the adoption of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The African Union has the African Immediate Crisis Response Capacity (AICRC) force and other capacities it is investing in. Is it not worthy to invest in African agency, for Africans to build the capacity for its own security?

In addressing questions of peace and security, African stakeholders should seek a holistic approach to peace and security, one that recognises that in the absence of sustained development initiatives on the one hand, and good, effective, transparent governance on the other hand, the region is likely to be held back from contributing positively to shaping Africa’s development programme. The continent will thus have to take an approach that encourages dialogue processes driven by the affected parties in order to reach sustainable solutions while ensuring the implementation of development programmes that improve people’s lives and create the conditions for long term peace and security. The continent will also have to promote dialogue initiatives at different diplomatic tracks in order to avoid a crisis driven approach and to ensure sustained and ongoing dialogues amongst regional actors. The continent’s ability to act in the interests of peace and stability in the region and to combat the advent of terrorism alongside the African standby force will be important in demonstrating the continued importance of Africa at a time when the US will be looking to work with strategic partners on the provision of various global public goods.<sup>38</sup>



Source: ISS Africa

<sup>37</sup> Green, A. 2022. ‘TRIPS waiver compromise draws mixed response’, in [devex](https://www.devex.com/news/trips-waiver-compromise-draws-mixed-response-102860), Available online <https://www.devex.com/news/trips-waiver-compromise-draws-mixed-response-102860> March 17

<sup>38</sup> Mthembu, P. 2021. ‘SA in the World: Navigating a changing African landscape’, [Independent Newspapers](https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/sa-in-the-world-navigating-a-changing-african-landscape-580ef429-7890-4b46-81d3-bbe2bc00cf76), Available online <https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/sa-in-the-world-navigating-a-changing-african-landscape-580ef429-7890-4b46-81d3-bbe2bc00cf76>, September 6

Zimmerman, K. 2020. Why the US should spend 0.3 percent of its defense budget to prevent an African debacle, <https://www.militarytimes.com/opinion/commentary/2020/03/12/why-the-us-should-spend-03-percent-of-its-defense-budget-to-prevent-an-african-debacle/>



While the Biden administration embarks on a significant import substitution program to boost manufacturing, the impact of this on the already small numbers of African imports is a useful issue to consider. President Obama promised over '\$67 billion in company investments in Africa and over \$110 in annual peacekeeping support' in 2014. China has been a leading single country investor in Africa over the last 20 years. African agency in its own security was promised \$110 million per Anum but American agency in its own interests on the continent receive around \$2billion through Africom.

## 7. US Democracy Crusade in Africa

Among the many dimensions of the US-Africa relationship, the political sphere has arguably been the most prominent. Ever since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the promotion of democracy, at least as it is understood in the West, became one of the central elements of the US policy towards Africa. While the Cold War period saw the US deal with African countries on the basis of their loyalty to the US and the West against the Soviet Union along the ideological lines of capitalism, the post-Cold War era saw a new emphasis on democracy which entailed promoting transparency, elections, accountability, rule of law, promotion of civil society, respect for human rights and the constitution. The US committed itself to dealing and working with countries it deemed as satisfying its democratic standards. The reason for the US insistence on democracy was that it was good for the country's geopolitical and economic interests in Africa. The democratic peace theory asserts that democracies rarely go to war with each other, preferring to cultivate cordial and mutually beneficial relationships. Moreover, the adoption of democracy and its institutions would be conducive for a free market economy where American enterprises can thrive both through trade and investment. Therefore, the US government began distancing itself from countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Zimbabwe and Angola who resisted the calls for political liberalization while cultivating even closer ties with so-called democratic countries including Botswana, South Africa, and Mauritius. The latter countries saw an increase in the flows of US investments and assistance which was apparently a reward for their satisfactory democratic standards. Washington has doubled down on disengaging with governments it views as undermining democracy as demonstrated by the snubbing of such countries as Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan and Guinea for the upcoming US-Africa Leaders Summit. These countries have been snubbed because of the military takeover of the reins of power through unconstitutional means which Washington views as gross disregard for democratic values. Even the US-controlled Bretton Woods institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank made their dealings with African countries conditional on the adoption of democratic principles. The two global institutions contended that economic development and growth can only occur under a democratic regime. This saw many countries in Africa denied critical credit lines on account of their failure to implement political reform resulting in their inability to fund development programmes and the set in of long-drawn economic stagnation. Therefore, African states were encouraged to implement political reforms if they were to access credit lines to fund their development.

US government organizations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) among others have been active on the African

landscape under the mission of promoting democracy. The NED has worked with thousands of NGOs such as women's groups, human rights organizations, and media organizations across the African continent in promoting the democratization process through engaging both the African publics and the political leaders. The USAID has technically and financially supported electoral processes in numerous African countries to ensure their transparency and legitimacy. For example, the organization has availed US\$3 million for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)'s presidential elections set to take place in 2023. In Nigeria the USAID has been actively involved in training thousands of election agents and observers to improve the standard and quality of the elections in the West African country. Another prominent US organization, the Open Society Foundations (OSF) which was formed by the wealthy businessman George Soros has established offices in about 12 African countries claiming to be helping in driving democratic change and transformation in Africa.

The OSF has opened regional hubs such as the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), the Open Society Initiative in West Africa (OSIWA) and a similar one in East Africa. Every year, the organization channels hundreds of millions of dollars in support of democratic causes across Africa. In 2020 alone, the OSF spent US\$135 million (about 10% its global expenditure) in promoting democracy in Africa. These organizations sponsor media outlets in the name of encouraging media freedom, they fund civil society organizations that focus on various issues from corruption to gender equality and even political parties in some countries do receive support. The NED and the OSF have been linked to the ownership of some of South Africa's most prominent media outlets such as the Daily Maverick and amaBhungane which gives them a platform to export US media norms to the South African media. Moreover, the US has made democratic reforms one of the key conditions for benefiting from the trade preferences under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) where thousands of African exports to the US get preferential treatment to enhance market access. Countries in the region such as Zimbabwe, Sudan and Eritrea have been disqualified from AGOA because of their lack of democratic reforms. The AGOA Forum, which is held every year by US and African leaders to assess the trade pact has incorporated the civil society organizations and the private sector with a view to enhancing its democratic dimension. The US Congress even passed the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA) in 2001 in response to the Southern African country's perceived democratic backsliding. As if that was not enough, the US, France and Britain who are all members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sponsored a draft resolution to impose UN sanctions on Zimbabwe on account of the Zimbabwean government's alleged violation of human rights. However, the resolution did not pass as it was vetoed by China and Russia who argued that there were no grounds to intervene in Zimbabwe's internal affairs.

The recently released US Strategy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa also makes the spread and consolidation of democracy in Africa one of its main goals and strategic objectives. The Strategy document commits the US "to stem the recent tide of authoritarianism and military takeovers by working with allies and partners in the region to respond to democratic backsliding and human rights abuses, including through a targeted mix of positive inducements and punitive measures such as sanctions." Further, the US also promised "work with African governments, civil society, and publics to increase



transparency and accountability, including by supporting investigative journalism, combating digital authoritarianism, and enshrining laws, reforms, and practices that promote shared democratic norms.” In December 2021, the US President Joe Biden convened the Global Summit for Democracy that was attended by some African countries. The Summit declared 2022 as the Year of Action during which the US would work with other countries and organizations to strengthen democracy, promote respect for human rights, and counter corruption and authoritarianism.

The White House announced the establishment of the Presidential Initiative on Democratic Renewal which would see the US availing over US\$420 million to fund initiatives which include supporting free and independent media, fighting corruption, supporting advocates of democracy, promoting the use of technology in democracy and supporting free and fair elections. Judging by the tone of the US African strategy, some of these funds will find their way to Africa. Moreover, Washington’s democracy crusade in Africa is linked to its Global War On Terror which was launched by former president George W Bush after the September 11 attacks in 2001. The Bush administration argued that the best way to stop global terrorist networks such as Al Qaeda that prosecuted a deadly attack on the US was to build strong democratic states with sufficient capacity to thwart terrorist activities in their territories.

However, there is a very thin line between promoting democracy and intervening in the internal affairs of African states undermining their sovereignty. Oftentimes the US has been accused of advancing nefarious political agendas in the name of democracy thus risking political instability. The NED has been charged with pursuing a political agenda in several African countries including Egypt, Uganda, and Algeria. Wikileaks revealed that the NED, through its local proxies in the civil society, was instrumental in organizing and leading the anti-government protests that led to the downfall of the former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 and threw the country into political turmoil. In Libya, the NED funded and supported organizations like the Libya Forum for Human and Political Development and the Libyan Transparency Association which were actively involved in the demonstrations that led to the callous murder of then Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. Libya never recovered from the political upheaval that ensued as civil war has continued to devastate the country.

It is believed that the NED funded the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights which was at the forefront of the anti-government protests in 2011 although they did not result in regime change. Moreover, the NED also backed the opposition candidate known as Bobi Wine through funding and training. While the US explained its imposition of sanctions in Zimbabwe as motivated by respect for human rights, the international community has widely interpreted the US measures on the Southern African country as part of a regime-change agenda which has nothing to do with the protection of human rights. It has been reported that the US actually sponsored the Zimbabwean opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in a bid to overthrow the country’s ruling party which is ideologically at odds with Washington. Further, the US’ insistence on democracy in Africa comes across as a propaganda and indoctrination campaign underpinned by ulterior motives. One of the major objectives of Washington’s campaign for democracy in Africa is to reassert its influence in the continent. Further, the US’ commitment to democracy in Africa and the broader world has been questioned. This is because programmes designed and aimed at promoting democratic values are usually underfunded compared

to the initiatives that are connected to practical commercial interests. Washington has been accused of overlooking the erosion of democracy in countries where it has substantial commercial or security interests which renders its advocacy for democracy inconsistent and selective.

Over the years, the US' role and visibility in Africa has largely faded having been overshadowed by countries such as China. China has been eagerly welcomed by African countries because of its stance on non-interference in internal affairs and win-win approach to its relations with Africa. China's relations with Africa have grown tremendously over the last two decades across the economic, cultural, and diplomatic spheres. The Asian giant has been Africa's largest trading partner for the past 13 years, its largest bilateral lender in the last two decades and a major source of foreign direct investment. China and Africa have also intensified their diplomatic and cultural cooperation which has seen a remarkable increase in high-level political visits, cultural festivals, and China having a diplomatic footprint in almost every country in Africa. China's presence in and its highly successful relations with Africa has made the US and its western allies uncomfortable. The US has on many occasions advised African countries to distance themselves from China and even ludicrously accused China of pursuing colonial ambitions in Africa. Hence, the US democracy crusade in Africa should be seen in the light of its zero-sum geopolitical approach to global politics whereby China's cooperation with other regions somehow translates into a loss for Washington.

By converting African countries and their peoples into its version of democracy the US hopes to gain the political influence to manipulate them with a view to undermining their relations with China. In most cases, democracy for the US means installing a government that will be pliable to Washington's demands and interests regardless of what the people prefer. The US has a track record of overthrowing democratically elected governments especially in Latin American countries like Chile, Guatemala, Brazil, and Argentina because of their refusal to align with its interests. African leaders and peoples should see the US campaign for democracy in the continent for what it is. The US is too often not motivated by a genuine belief in and concern for the state of democracy. It is a transparent attempt to mold US friendly regimes in Africa that will dance to Washington's tune. Moreover, while democracy is important, it must not be imposed from the outside. Western countries tend to arrogantly think that their political cultures and values are universal and can be imposed on other societies in the world. However, history has conclusively demonstrated that political systems and cultures imported from outside rarely work in the countries they are imported into. African countries must build their own political systems informed by their history and cultural values which will be more stable and durable. They must not allow any foreign country, however powerful, to dictate their political future. What African countries need the most is economic development which will enable them to lift hundreds of millions of their citizens out of poverty. As such, in its interaction with Africa, the US should trade its self-serving emphasis on democracy for tangible and practical economic cooperation that will benefit the African people. Indeed, the eradication of poverty is the best foundation for democracy since it enables the people to participate in the governance of their countries without any handicaps.

## 8. US-Africa Cooperation in Digital Technology

New technology, especially in the digital sector, is proving to be the next frontier of economic growth and development. Emerging digital technologies are the motor driving the fourth industrial revolution. The widespread incorporation and adoption of digital technologies is fast transforming almost every facet of life including production, communication, transport, banking and finance, education, and governance to mention a few. The advancement in Artificial Intelligence (AI), cloud and quantum computing has greatly increased the capacity to store, process, analyze, and derive value from this data turning it into arguably the most valuable resource in the twenty-first century with an enormous socio-economic impact (UNCTAD, 2021; World Bank, 2021). Bughin et al (2018) projected that the harnessing of data could add US\$13 trillion to the global economy by 2030. A 10% increase in mobile internet penetration in Africa has the potential to boost the continent's GDP by 2.5% (AFR-IX, 2021). The digital economy is estimated at a staggering US\$15 trillion and has been growing two and a half times faster than the global economy in the last decade and a half. Digital technology can also be harnessed to achieve desired development outcomes in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as environmental sustainability, security, health, poverty eradication, gender equality, economic growth, trade, and educational improvement among others (Hilbert, 2014; World Bank, 2021).

Digital technology has fundamentally redefined global trade. Trade in digital products and services has grown tremendously while even trade in almost all non-digital items is now digitally enabled. According to the UNCTAD (2021) digitally deliverable services reached 64% of total global services exports in 2020 with a value of over US\$3 trillion. The value of global e-commerce reached US\$26.7 trillion in 2019. Cross-border business-to-consumer transactions totalled US\$440 billion out of a total of US\$4 trillion in business-to-consumer e-commerce sales. The use of Artificial Intelligence, quantum and cloud computing, and big data analytics has the potential to contribute immensely to socio-economic development. A 2013 McKinsey Report noted that open data (big and small datasets that are open to public use) could unleash economic value of between US\$3trillion and US\$5 trillion in just seven sectors including transport, education, electricity, consumer finance, healthcare, oil and gas, and consumer products. Another White Paper from the World Economic Forum (WEF) noted that the application of big data analytics in healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing, energy, banking and insurance, automobiles, telecom, and logistics sectors could add US\$500 billion to India's economy by 2025 (WEF, 2021). In the European Union and the United Kingdom (UK) the impact of the data market on their economies in 2020 was estimated at 440 billion Euros (Statista, 2021). The economic impact of big data is reflected in the list of the top 10 most valuable companies in the world which is dominated by data firms. Of the 10 most valuable companies 7 (Apple Inc, Microsoft Corp, Amazon, Alphabet, Facebook, Tencent, and Alibaba) are digital technology companies whose business models are fundamentally data-driven. Together these companies have a total market capitalization of a staggering US\$9.1 trillion.

That said, it is clear that digital technology is emerging as a highly strategic area of cooperation between the US and Africa and the two parties have demonstrated awareness of and the will to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in the sector. One of the new initiatives that have been highlighted under the new US Strategy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa is driving digital transformation. The document notes that the US:

Will foster a digital ecosystem built on open, reliable, interoperable, and secure internet and information and communication technology across sub-Saharan Africa. US companies and venture capital firms are bullish about the opportunities on the continent, building undersea cables, expanding the number of data centers and investing in dynamic African businesses. We will work to ensure affordable access to the internet, increasing data rates, lowering costs while advocating for open technology platforms like Open RAN to advance secure and cost-competitive telecommunications infrastructure and cloud computing. We will expand digital democracy programming, defend against digital authoritarianism, fight back against disinformation, combat gender-based online harassment and abuse and establish standards for responsible conduct in cyberspace. (The White House, 2022: 15)

This is compatible with the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2030) which seeks to achieve universal access to digital technology in the continent by 2030. The vision of the strategy is to "harness digital technologies and innovation to transform African societies and economies to promote Africa's integration, generate inclusive economic growth, stimulate job creation, break the digital divide, and eradicate poverty for the continent's socio-economic development and ensure Africa's ownership of modern tools of digital management" (AU, 2020: 2). The continental body intends to enhance cyber security, promote digital empowerment, encourage and facilitate digital innovation and build a Digital Single Market in line with the goals of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the AU's Agenda 2063. However, Africa is struggling with developing its digital economy and driving digital transformation further because of the paucity of digital infrastructure and digital skills which are critical in building a digital society. While Africa had 1 internet user for 1500 people in 2000, as of 2022 there are more than 3 internet users for every 10 people with 33 percent of the continent's 1.3 billion population being internet users (Jensen, 2000; International Telecommunications Union, 2022). However, this is significantly lower than the world average of 63%. It is also lower than other developing regions such as the Asia-Pacific and the Arab States whose internet penetration rates are estimated at 61% and 66% respectively. Of the ten countries with the lowest internet penetration in the world, 8 are from Africa with penetration rates as low as 6.9% in Eritrea, 8% in South Sudan and 8.5% in the Comoros. About 50% of Africa's population do not use the internet despite living in areas covered by a network while close to 20% of the people live in areas without any coverage. Moreover, with a total of 79 data centres, Africa only has 1 percent of the world's approximately 8000 data centres. Data centres are critical infrastructure for the storage and processing of digital data which is the raw material of the digital economy. Without enough data centres, African countries will not be able to use the electronic data they produce for their own development. As a result of the digital infrastructure deficit, Africa struggles with very low internet speeds. The continent averages an internet speed of 8mbps which is way lower than the global average of 34.79mbps. According to a 2022 report by Endeavour, Africa's digital economy is valued at US\$115 billion and is projected to reach US\$720 billion by 2050. However,

this can only happen if African governments establish the right policies and partners with the right stakeholders.

The US and Africa have cooperated across the whole range of the digital ecosystem in order to develop the digital economy in Africa and also incorporate digital technology in their relations. US companies such as Google and Facebook are in the process of building undersea cables which will improve internet connection in the continent. For example, Facebook is building a 37 000km undersea cable which will traverse the entire coastline of the continent landing in 23 countries. The cable will provide about three times the total network capacity of the entire undersea cable network currently serving Africa which significantly increase the amount of data trafficked through Africa while reducing the data costs. Another US tech giant, Google, is building a US\$1 billion undersea cable in Africa which has established its first landing station in Togo, Nigeria, South Africa, and Namibia. The subsea cable is part of the company's efforts to expand digital capacity in Africa and improve connectivity. Apart from undersea cables, US companies are also actively investing in Africa's cloud and data centre market. In 2020, Amazon Web Services (AWS) launched its first cloud and data centre in South Africa, Cape Town. The data centre is aimed at providing lower latency rates and faster connectivity for developers, startups and enterprises, as well as government, education and non-profit organisations which will be a major boost to the development of Africa's digital economy.

Microsoft established its first data centres in Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa in 2019. The data centres will serve the data storage and processing needs of South African and African businesses and organizations while ensuring that they comply with the local laws and regulations governing the management of data. It is reported that the adoption of cloud services will enable digital innovation and the development of digital products by African start-ups. Google also opened its first data centre facility in Cape Town, South Africa in a bid to improve internet speed and the ease of data storage for local enterprises. Moreover, US companies are also investing in Africa's last mile infrastructure to connect consumers and businesses. For example, companies like Africa Cell have started building 5G networks in Africa. The tech giant, Google, was also involved in bridging the digital divide in Africa through the provision of 4G/LTE coverage using floating cell towers, in areas that were difficult to access and connect via terrestrial solutions, as well as in areas that were not commercially viable for service providers. The US-Africa Business Center which is linked to the US Chamber of Commerce holds an annual Digital Innovation Competition for African Startups for digital enterprises and start-ups seeking to find innovative digital solutions to Africa's challenges. The prizes are awarded to firms developing impactful digital products in the domains of fintech, social services and supply chain sustainability. Such competitions and initiatives are important in developing and growing digital talent in Africa. In what could be a signal of the future US-Africa trade, the US and Kenya launched the Trade and Investment Partnership early in 2022 that addresses the issue of digital trade. The trade agreement states that:

The United States and Kenya share an interest in fostering consumer, business, and worker trust in the digital economy, ensuring access to information, promoting the development and use of resilient and secure digital infrastructure, promoting competition and the participation of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and addressing discriminatory practices. The two countries will discuss measures

to support digital inclusion, including accessibility, and online consumer protection. The two countries will also monitor global discussions on emerging issues in digital trade which are of mutual interest.

While the two countries held different positions on the governance and regulation of cross-border data flows, they at least acknowledged the need to establish a common position on the issue so as to avoid trade bottlenecks. In its other trade agreements and on different multilateral platforms, the US has insisted on unrestricted cross-border data flows with no requirements of data localization while Kenya prefers a gradual regulation of cross-border data flows. US companies are also playing an important role in funding Africa's digital tech startups. Google released US\$4 million to fund 60 African startups under the Startups Black Founders Fund. The companies which were awarded funding under the scheme are involved in various sectors including agritech, fintech, smart health, smart transport, and e-commerce among others. Investment into Africa's tech startups will help develop the continent's digital ecosystem. US digital content providers such as Google, Twitter and Facebook have set up shop in Africa to take advantage of its potential in the digital market. For example, the microblogging site, Twitter, opened its African office in Accra, Ghana in 2021. Facebook opened its African headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2015 and opened a regional headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria, in 2020. Having offices on the African soil makes it easy for the social media giants to serve their growing African market where Facebook has more than 210 million active users.

While the digital technology sector presents great opportunities for US-Africa cooperation, Africa needs to be wary in dealing with the US in digital cooperation. By allowing the US companies and technology to dominate its critical information infrastructure, Africa risks losing both its digital and data sovereignty and becoming overdependent on the US for its digital technology. Already, this relationship is shaping up to be an unequal and unbalanced relationship which some observers have called digital colonialism. The US big tech companies such as Facebook, Twitter and Google are dominating Africa's digital advertising industry to the detriment of local companies. With millions of clients on their platforms the Big Tech companies control an incredible amount of data including billions of citizens' personal information which they use to rack in billions of dollars in advertising services. The companies' disproportionate power in the digital domain has even unsettled more powerful governments such as China, the EU, US, and the United Kingdom. These countries have passed a slew of measures including the UK's Digital Markets Unit (DMU), the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the new regulations adopted in China to rein in the Big Tech through increased oversight and taxation.

By 2019 Uber had registered 159 000 drivers and served over 5 million customers in Africa. Further, Africa has more than 210 million Facebook users representing 16 percent of the continent's population. Tens of millions of Africans are on Google, Twitter, WhatsApp, Zoom, Instagram, and Microsoft platforms. Millions of Africans' online financial transactions are captured by foreign service suppliers and stored in data centres outside the continent. The Big Tech companies control a significant amount of digital data created in Africa which has facilitated their domination of the digital services market. The data that is produced and generated by millions of Africans on the platforms of the big tech companies is used to create artificial intelligence products that generate billions of dollars for the companies while the millions of Africans who generate the data do not profit anything. Hence, Africa is caught up in a

biased and inequitable global data economy where its citizens and businesses supply the raw data that is captured, processed, and monetized by the US companies with little by way of economic gain flowing to African countries. This relationship resembles the 20th century economic relations between the Global North and the Global South whereby the latter supplied raw materials such as coal, tobacco, rubber, cocoa, and crude oil among others which fed the former's industries where value was added to the raw materials. Thus, the western countries accumulated immense wealth at the expense of the developing countries' raw materials.

The growing power of Big Tech in Africa has brought the debate on digital sovereignty and governance home. Several African governments have already had run-ins with the tech giants. There have been social media shutdowns in countries like Nigeria, Eswatini, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Senegal, and Zambia as the authorities tried to stem the flow of information. Kenya, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and the DRC had submitted unsuccessful requests for account information to Twitter in 2020. Nigeria, the largest economy in Africa, banned Twitter after the social media giant deleted a controversial tweet from President Buhari. Prominent Nigerian politicians went to the extent of accusing the Twitter Chief Executive Jack Dorsey of fermenting political instability in Nigeria when Twitter supported the #EndSars protests against police brutality in Nigeria. This has raised questions about the government's role in the digital space. In an attempt to assert their digital sovereignty, a number of African countries have passed laws aimed at governing the digital space. However, the Competition Commission of South Africa admitted that it is difficult to regulate the digital companies as the African governments do not have enough leverage over them. Moreover, companies such as Microsoft that operate data centres in Africa which store some sensitive data have a history of exposing their clients' data to the US government. In 2013, a former employee of the United States' National Security Agency (NSA), Edward Snowden released files exposing how the US tech companies have been availing users' data to the US government agencies for surveillance. The use of sensitive data to manipulate African governments and under their countries' sovereignty cannot be ruled out. Therefore, cooperating with the US on digital technology which involves embracing its technology and regulatory norms and standards may overtime become a national security risk which African leaders will have to think about carefully.

## 9. What to do? Recommendations

There are plenty of opportunities for collaboration with other players. Both parties want an Africa that is stable, whose people are educated, and whose resources will be accessible. America should take advantage of the fact that in Xi Jinping, it has a Chinese president whose commitment to multilateralism is total. Thus, multilateral efforts in Africa that will include players of consequence such as the two foremost economies, the European Union, Japan and the United Kingdom will not leave China out in the cold. America's own interests could be secured under a multilateral rubric. This would also benefit China whose investments in Africa are massive. The war on terror is another issue that could benefit from a Sino-American tandem.

In terms of trade, there are also opportunities for cooperation. The breakdown of the Doha Round showed just how injurious lack of coordination between the United States and China could poison international trade initiatives – with global consequences. Both sides want to trade with Africa, a continent that is ripe to purchase all manner of goods from the world's premium industries. America and China could form informal and maybe later formal networks through which they could hammer out ways of trading with Africa – for the benefit of all parties.

The United States should also not dismiss out of hand institutions such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative. With the change of administration from Trump to Joe Biden, the United States had an opportunity, not to necessarily tinker with its interests, but its style. Biden appreciates America's obligations to helping the world achieve coordinated multilateralism. China has continued its decades-long tradition of sending its Foreign Affairs minister to Africa for his first trip of any calendar year. Xi Jinping has also managed to get domestic validation of his leadership, and so he is likely to look more outward in his remaining years in power. This offers America an opportunity to court China and use its intent towards satisfying mutual interests.

China's rise, and America's reaction to it have already shown that there are bound to be disputes between the two partners. This is expected but it has to be resolved in a manner that is constructive, and by using international instruments that are at the disposal of both sides. The two countries will continue to have disagreements on issues such as engaging African governments that have controversial human rights records, and the intent of both countries to have military and security influence on the continent. Above we wrote about the need for multilateral coalitions in tackling international challenges. The same could apply to the resolution of disputes. The US could thus use multilateral platforms to iron out differences with China.

Technology is another arena that will form a central part of America's engagement with Africa. On this score, as on many others, the US will seek to discourage Africa from accepting and using technology that comes from other players. A formula that could win African converts is one that accepts African sovereignty in choosing with technologies it prefers.

The Biden Administration has demonstrated some understanding of African sovereignty concerns. Antony Blinken, the incumbent Secretary of State has made two highly publicised visits to the continent. In addressing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Blinken announced a new approach to America's foreign policy in Africa. He emphasised the importance of partnership in Africa-US relations. He also acknowledged that Africa, as the youngest continent, will shape the global future. This, he should have recognised, could be a blessing or a curse for the future. It could be a curse if Africans still struggle to find gainful employment. The many young people could be a ticking time bomb if they are not provided for with good governance and other amenities. As alluded to above, what happens in one corner of the world, say Africa, will impact on other parts of the world.

There are specific themes that the United States can use to entrench itself more responsibly in Africa. Its actions over COVID-19 vaccines exposed the insular tendencies that were at the time in keeping with American sentiments of isolationism. While the United States, EU members, and Canada were



hoarding vaccines, other players such as China were not only helping Africa to acquire vaccines, they were also adding to vaccine manufacturing capacity. Eventually, America donated more than 90 million doses to 48 African countries, thereby salvaging some of its repute. In addition, the support that America gave to South Africa and Senegal to manufacture vaccines was crucial. It helped to consolidate America's stated intent of helping Africa to transform from being a vaccine recipient to be a manufacturer.

COVID-19 also plunged some African countries into the first recession in 25 years. It also condemned 49 million Africans into extreme poverty. American diplomacy has been very convincing in trying to work with Africa towards economic recovery. It supported cancelling the debt of 32 African countries. The US has a platform such as DFC on which it could mount an economic engagement with Africa. The DFC has to be more creative, and it has to bring on board private interests from the United States. In addition, there has to be more emphasis than hitherto has been the case on small-scale and medium-sized enterprises, and women-led initiatives. Africa has the distinction of having women as the more entrepreneurial demographic, and hence it would be a cruel loss of opportunity if their talent is not harnessed.

The continent is not only teeming with human resources, but it also has blueprints such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, covering one of the biggest trade areas in the world. It also has one of the biggest trading blocs of the United Nations. It comprises 28% of UN voters. Africa, thus, and as Joe Biden conceded, is crucial to advancing the values of global players. To meet global challenges such as the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), engaging Africa is an inescapable necessity.

COVID-19 and its resultant economic fallout demonstrated that Africa continues to suffer the tragedies that are not of its making, and hence needs to call upon responsible partners to work in concert with the continent. The environment is another crucial issue on which industrialisation of more affluent countries had led to environmental degradation in Africa. The United States and China specifically have to come with fair means through which to help Africa stave off the devastating effects of environment damage. This is not a matter that should be driven by competition, and the display of who a responsible player is. It is a matter of global importance for which the United States should be a responsible player.

Despite having the second-largest rainforest in the world, Africa's environment is under threat. Environmental damage is already being an accelerant of conflict in African societies where pasture and arable land are rapidly vanishing. This has been a source of conflict in Chad and Nigeria, where pastoralists and crop-based farmers have been jostling for dwindling land resources. What usually starts as a land dispute usually morphs into a clash of cultures and religions, and could as well attach itself to extremist violence. The United States has all the incentive to help Africa in this matter, as it fits into America's global fight against terrorism. The United States should act in a manner that acknowledges the role of Africa in solving global challenges.