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Introduction

Zainab Usman

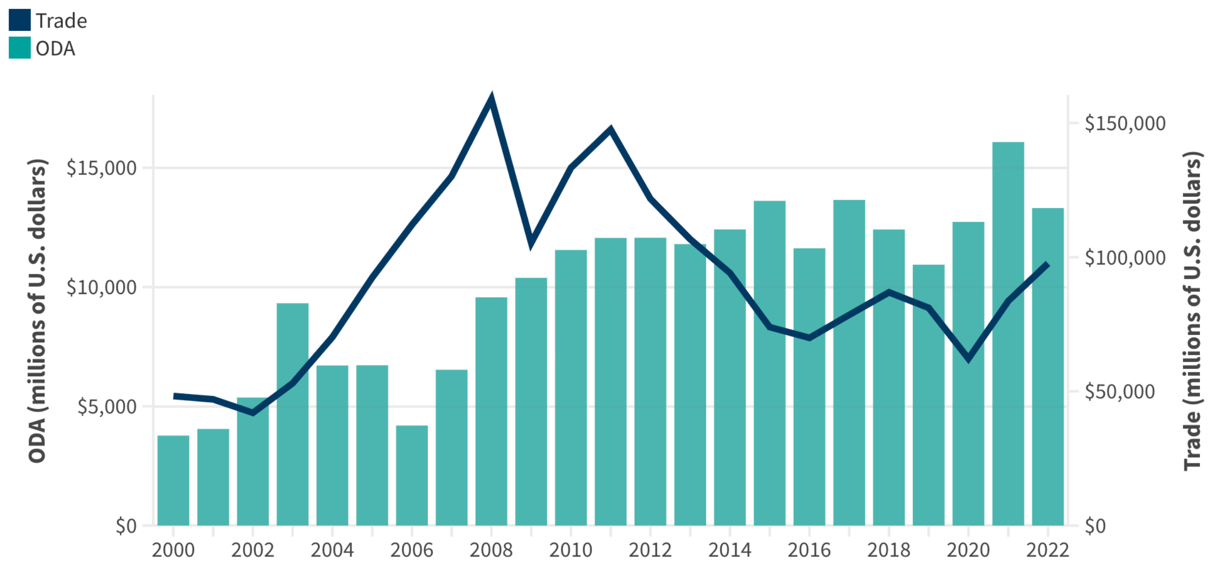
Background

America now frames its relations with the rest of the world, including Africa, through the lens of great power competition. Within this geopolitical context, recent U.S. national security strategies have in various ways underscored the role of the African continent in the pursuit of American strategic interests—whether for maintaining supply chain security, securing UN votes, or containing risks.[1] This recognition of Africa's importance to U.S. strategic interests is happening amid parallel efforts by other global powers. China is Africa's largest bilateral trading partner and investor in energy projects. Russia is negotiating new security partnerships with countries ravaged by terrorism in West and Central Africa. Türkiye has expanded its diplomatic engagement to nearly all of the continent. Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, among others, are important investors and brokers to various political movements in the Horn of Africa.

As Africa is increasingly recognized at the highest levels of American decisionmaking in new and dynamic ways, the tools of U.S. engagement with the continent largely have not caught up. U.S. economic engagement is still dominated by aid flows as two-way trade volume declines (see figure 1). After a decade of steep decline, U.S. foreign direct investment flows to Africa have only recently started to trend upwards (see figure 2). With a few notable exceptions, U.S. policy toward most African countries remains ossified in a framework of humanitarian interventions, crisis response, and an approach to democracy promotion excessively preoccupied with the ways that African institutions "fail" to meet idealized standards.

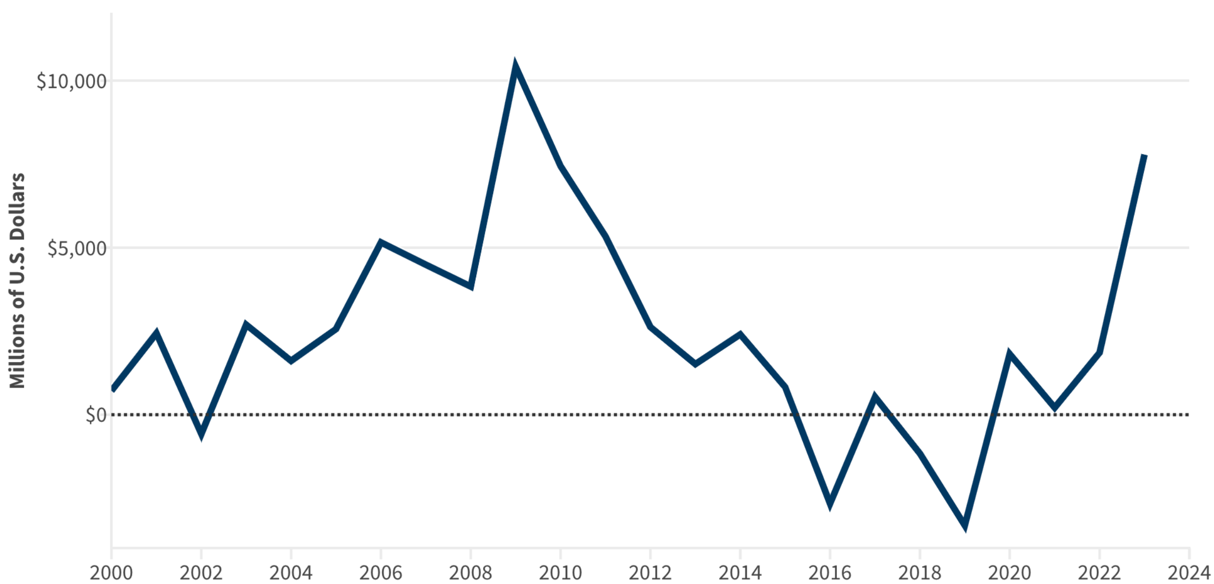
Relying only on high-minded humanitarian and governance ideals to inform much of U.S. policy toward Africa is undoubtedly noble and important. Yet, devoid of pragmatism and empathy, it can perpetuate the United States' structural inability to fully understand and engage with the legitimate material aspirations of Africans. Citizens of African countries,

Figure 1. U.S. Two-Way Trade Volumes with Africa Are Declining While U.S. Aid Flows to African Countries Are Increasing, 2000 to 2022



Source: Author's calculations derived from: "OECD Data Explorer," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), December 12, 2024, https://data-explorer.oecd.org; and "U.S. Direct Investment Abroad: Balance of Payments and Direct Investment Position Data," U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, July 23, 2024, https://www.bea.gov/international/di1usdbal.

Figure 2. After a Decade of Decline, U.S. FDI Flows to Africa Have Started to Trend Upwards



Source: Author's calculations derived from: "U.S. Direct Investment Abroad: Balance of Payments and Direct Investment Position Data," U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, July 23, 2024, https://www.bea.gov/international/di1usdbal.

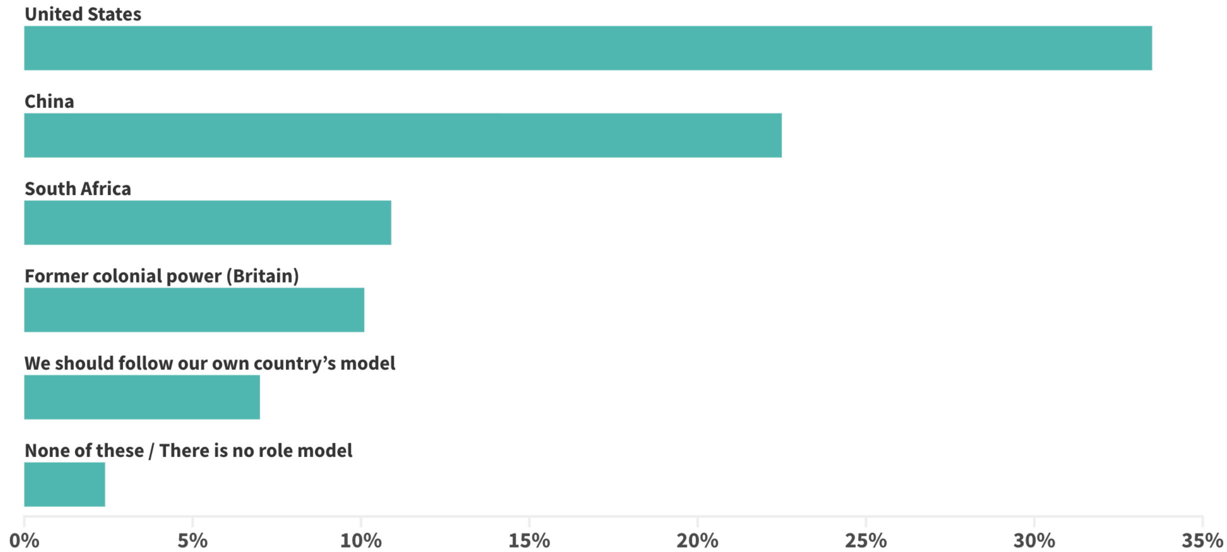
like their counterparts in Asia and Latin America, want inclusive growth, well-paying jobs, and decent housing. Africans have deep concerns around lack of affordable and reliable electricity, lack of clean cooking solutions, runaway inflation, declining purchasing power, multiple taxation, rising insecurity, and violent crime—concerns that coincidentally parallel concerns expressed by many American voters in the 2024 elections.

Even where U.S. policy tools and approaches are beginning to evolve, insufficient resources are devoted to shoring up this engagement with Africa. Unlike critical diplomatic positions in China, India, Southeast Asia, and Europe, positions associated with Africa tend to be unfilled. Many U.S. embassies on the African continent have no commercial officers or economic counselors. To quote Georgetown University professor Ken Opalo, "Africa policy continues to attract mostly people interested in democracy, governance, aid, and humanitarian assistance—all of which have contributed to making Africa a strategic backwater from Washington's perspective . . . [while certain other] regions attract mostly individuals interested in 'normal' bilateral/multilateral strategic cooperation/competition."[2] And according to former assistant secretary of state for African affairs Tibor Nagy, the American business constituencies that infuse pragmatism into U.S. policy toward Europe, East Asia, and South Asia are weak with regards to Africa policy as the space is instead largely occupied by humanitarian advocacy groups.[3] The responsibility here lies also with the lack of proactivity by segments of the African diaspora in the United States in advocating for robust commercial and pragmatic diplomacy. Overall, lack of resources reinforced by this ossified framework and absence of domestic business constituencies ultimately undercuts U.S. positioning, visibility, and relevance on the African continent.

Meanwhile, the African continent is changing rapidly in ways that defy both optimistic forecasts and pessimistic predictions. Africa has the world's youngest and fastest growing population, which, by mid-century, will have the second largest cluster of the world's working-age population.[4] The continent's fifty-four countries have signed on to the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which is the world's largest free trade area. Despite significant implementation challenges of the AfCFTA, the march toward regional integration is decisive. The African Union's Agenda 2063, a blueprint for the continent's industrial transformation, is reinforced by national-level strategies to reach middle- or high-income status by mid-century. Governments across Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia are designing strategies to harness their critical energy transition minerals for economic diversification and industrial transformation. Rwanda is emerging as an important leader in the global discourse on artificial intelligence (AI) governance. The recently commissioned Dangote refinery in Nigeria could meet West Africa's demands for refined fuels and petrochemicals, as could refineries at the construction or planning stage in Angola, Ghana and Uganda. In the Sahel, neither their elected predecessors nor the crop of current military juntas are protecting civilian populations in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from terrorist groups.

African citizens and most governments still prefer the U.S. model of development (see figure 3). As of 2021, the United States ranked higher than other global powers in the eyes of Africans as the best model for the future development of their country. Yet Africans are also

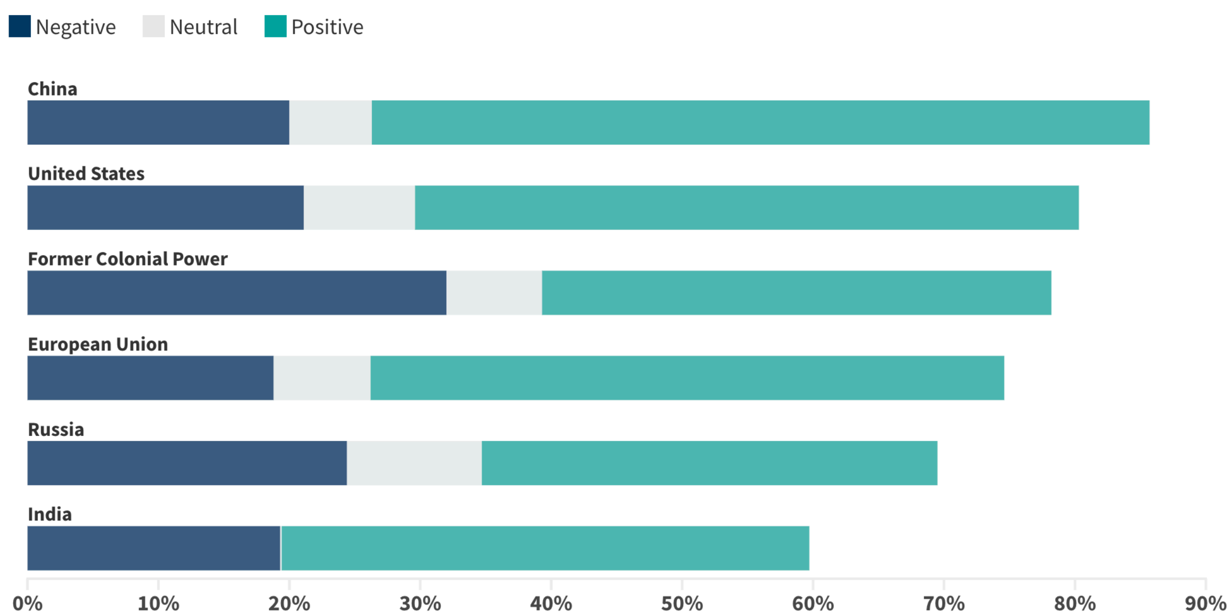
Figure 3. African Citizens’ Perceptions of the Best Development Model



Note: Respondents were asked “In your opinion, which of the following countries, if any, would be the best model for the future development of our country, or is there some other country in Africa or elsewhere, that should be our model?”

Source: “Afrobarometer Online Data Analysis Tool,” Afrobarometer, R8 Survey, 2022, https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

Figure 4. African Citizens’ Perception of Partners’ Economic and Political Influence



Note: The R10 survey includes respondents from Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Source: “Afrobarometer Online Data Analysis Tool,” Afrobarometer, R10 Survey, 2024. https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

welcoming other global powers as investors, commercial partners, and political allies. As of 2023, African perceptions of China's economic and political influence ranked higher than the U.S. (see figure 4).

The incoming U.S. administration of President-elect Donald Trump, with its decisive electoral mandate, should boldly reimagine the U.S. economic relationship with Africa in dynamic ways that advance U.S. strategic interests while being grounded in Africa's current realities. Supported by majorities in both houses of Congress, the incoming administration should design an updated policy framework for its Africa engagement focused on high impact areas, commit resources toward implementation, and staff crucial Africa-related positions with personnel capable of engaging with and driving this new agenda.

Objective

This compendium identifies areas where policy shifts by the next U.S. presidential administration, in reorienting the economic relationship between the United States and African countries, could both advance American strategic interests and engage with African realities. It draws on evidence-based research to identify high impact areas that could transform U.S. engagement in Africa and offers actionable recommendations that could inform implementation.

Scope

In putting together this compendium, we leveraged our network of experts and existing streams of work at the intersection of economic development and foreign policy toward repositioning, expanding, and deepening the economic relationship between the United States and African nations. The compendium:

- Focuses mostly on the relationship's economic dimensions, where the biggest gaps and the largest marginal utility for policy shift exists. This focus acknowledges the complimentary and expansive work from peers in other think tanks on governance, human rights, and democracy promotion.

- Identifies issue areas that are largely thematic in nature but illustrate how recommendations could be implemented in specific countries or subregions where impact could be most evident.

- Emphasizes various dimensions of energy policy given its critical role both to U.S. strategic priorities—for increasing domestic economic competitiveness, resiliency, and diversification of supply chains from competitors and adversaries—and Africa's economic development aspirations.

- Recommends selectivity when engaging with African countries so that the United States does not overextend itself across all issues and countries on the continent. Rather, the incoming administration should undertake and pursue to completion a few strategic connector projects that are high impact. This approach should also prioritize serious African partner countries that demonstrate their commitment to their relationship with the United States and step back from countries that are less engaged.

- Recognizes that while the frame of great power competition will shape much of Africa policy, the incoming administration should not abdicate the leadership incumbent upon the world's superpower to boldly advance initiatives that improve people's well-being and that do not actively worsen the plight of vulnerable African countries.

Key Messages

Chapter 1—AGOA and Beyond: Reinvigorating and Repurposing the U.S.-Africa Trade Relationship, by Zainab Usman and Anthony Carroll

The new administration should proactively reimagine, reinvigorate, and repurpose the U.S.-Africa trade relationship for a mutually beneficial partnership that advances both U.S. and African interests in a new era of geopolitical competition.

Envisioning a new trade relationship could entail two things. **First,** the new administration could discuss with Congress the reauthorization of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). **Second,** the new administration could look at rebranding the program from AGOA to a strategic economic partnership with Africa that benefits both the United States and African nations. To implement these ideas, the incoming administration could take the following steps:

- Look at expanding AGOA or a potential strategic economic partnership with more countries.

- Restore the trade hubs program to increase AGOA utilization and support trade facilitation initiatives.

- Consider provisions for minerals critical to the manufacturing of components associated with U.S. strategic industries.

- Consider tax incentives for U.S. firms to encourage American investments in refining and processing minerals in Africa and other manufacturing activity for exports to the United States.

- Consider exempting strategic economic partnership beneficiaries from wide-ranging tariffs.

Chapter 2—Beyond the Lobito Corridor: Mobilizing U.S. Investments in Africa's Critical Minerals to Support Industrialization, by Zainab Usman

To provide a tangible high-impact alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in supporting industrialization objectives in Africa, the incoming administration should mobilize public and private investments in developing the African value chains associated with the future of the global economy, including those for the minerals and metals that are critical to the global energy transition.

A tangible alternative to the BRI in supporting industrialization objectives in Africa should entail two things. **First**, build on the momentum of initial phase of the Lobito Corridor project to incorporate the refining of minerals and the manufacturing of components for renewable energy and electric mobility hardware. **Second,** the administration should consider a corridor project in West Africa focused on building out the region's critical minerals value chains to meet U.S. strategic interests for diversifying supply chains and addressing African priorities for value addition. To implement these ideas, the incoming administration should take the following steps:

- Identify a West Africa corridor project for U.S. investments by consulting existing continental frameworks such as the African Development Bank's list of seventeen transport corridors.

- Negotiate pragmatic security partnerships with select countries in the region to help contain rising violence along the proposed West Africa corridor project.

- Mobilize U.S. technical expertise from the U.S. Geological Survey and the Department of Energy for collaborations across the existing Lobito Corridor and the proposed West Africa corridor projects.

- Mobilize U.S. public financing from the U.S. Export-Import Bank and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation to support American companies to invest in the Lobito Corridor and the proposed West Africa Corridor projects.

Chapter 3—Strategic Reorientation and Realignment of U.S. Health Aid to Africa, by Zainab Usman and Saskia Holman

The U.S. government is the largest donor of bilateral aid to the Africa, allocating billions of dollars annually toward health interventions. Despite the volume and breadth of U.S. bilateral development assistance for health (DAH) to Africa, it falls short of its potential and is increasingly diverged from the health security priorities identified by both African countries and the U.S. government. Recent initiatives to reform U.S. bilateral development assistance—including USAID's "Journey to Self-Reliance" and "Localization" efforts—indicate a growing consensus around fundamental principles. These include empowering local actors, strengthening systems, and enabling aid beneficiaries to become "partners" rather than beneficiaries in perpetuity. In that vein, an extensive review of U.S. and African policy documents reveals five crucial shared health security priorities that reflect some of these principles, that is, investing in health security; investing in strong, sustainable health systems; expanding and strengthen the healthcare workforce; building supply chains around regional vaccine manufacturing; and reorienting international partnerships to focus on recipient countries' goals. These five priorities can serve as the building blocks for a mutually beneficial realignment and reorientation of U.S. DAH to Africa.

The new administration should chart a new way forward for DAH to Africa that advances U.S. interests, supports African economic prosperity and opportunity, and promotes locally led development with the following action steps:

- Support the regional manufacturing of medicines and other products by U.S. companies in Africa.

- Generate international demand for health products manufactured by U.S. and other companies in Africa.

- Leverage U.S. influence in the global health community in advancing a vision for international partnerships that promote the philosophy of self-reliance among African partners.

Chapter 4—Constructive U.S. Engagement with West Africa and the Sahel, by Gilles O. Yabi

The countries in West Africa and the Sahel face significant challenges as insecurity at their northern borders with countries of the central Sahel has expanded or threatens to expand into their territory. The situation is compounded by a recent wave of military coups in the countries of the central Sahel—Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger—as well as a decisive rejection of France's military and political influence and a general decline in the presence and influence of Western countries in parts of the Sahel.

To advance U.S. security goals and support regional integration in West Africa, the incoming U.S. administration should take the following steps:

- Maintain engagement across West Africa by investing in a significant diplomatic presence on the ground.

- Acknowledge the demand for sovereignty on the part of decisionmakers and citizens in West African countries and for more balanced relations with all non-African partners, including the United States.

- Support initiatives to reform the Economy Community of West African States and create the conditions for Sahelian countries to return to the organization so that the region can take charge of its own collective security.

- Prioritize cooperation in strengthening human capital, with health, education, and vocational training as essential sectors, regardless of the political and security situation in West African countries.

Chapter 5—Deepening U.S.-Africa Ties With AI and Cybersecurity Initiatives, by Jane Munga and Sylvester Quansah

The rise of AI presents significant potential advantages, but these benefits can only be realized if safety issues and risks associated with AI are effectively managed. It is therefore critical to integrate initiatives focused on AI and cybersecurity into the incoming administration's vision for its digital partnership with Africa. These two policy areas present opportunities for the incoming administration to pursue initiatives that can enhance U.S.-Africa digital collaboration, consolidate achievements, and unlock new possibilities.

The United States should deepen its U.S.-Africa digital partnership with the following steps:

- Announce a dedicated project focused on supporting the creation and deployment of safe, secure, and trustworthy AI for sustainable development to close the AI access gap and unlock AI's potential as a powerful tool for digital collaboration.

- Mitigate the digital divide and combat cybercrime through collaborations between the United States and African countries on building secure and trusted digital infrastructure.

Chapter 6—Leveraging U.S. Influence in MDBs to Support Africa's Energy Security and Transition, by Zainab Usman and Alexander Csanadi

Multilateral development banks (MDBs) are important providers of development finance around the world. Yet, to date, they have provided inadequate support for energy security and the broader energy transition in low- and middle-income economies, particularly on the African continent. The results have been depressed growth in African economies and an increasing proliferation of other actors seeking to fill this vacuum. Ceding this ground would be to the ultimate detriment of U.S. interests.

The United States should leverage its role to steer the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and other MDBs toward promoting energy security in Africa for the purpose of fostering growth and maintaining the centrality of U.S.-led MDBs in global economic development. As the largest contributor to the World Bank and the second largest to the African Development Bank, the United States wields considerable sway over both institutions' policy directions.

Responsibility for leveraging U.S. influence at the MDBs ultimately falls to the Department of the Treasury, which issues policy guidance and represents the United States in voting sessions. The new U.S. administration should therefore:

- Adopt a flexible approach to supporting MDB-sponsored energy projects in Africa for the purpose of spurring economic development to achieve energy security.

- Encourage the MDBs to undertake more energy projects that contribute to energy security in Africa and the Global South.

Chapter 7—Energy Security Compacts: A New Approach to Advancing U.S. National Security Through Energy Investment, by Katie Auth

The United States needs a mechanism to address the acute energy concerns facing key partners around the world including those in Africa. This would build U.S. credibility and partnerships, deliver on long-standing promises for meaningful infrastructure investment, and help expand markets for U.S. technology in the world's fastest growing energy demand centers. The United States has great tools to support global energy, whether through direct investment, financial guarantees, commercial advocacy, or technical assistance. Unfortunately, capacity to bring those elements together in a way that solves big problems in specific countries is hamstrung.

The incoming administration should work with Congress to give the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) the mandate and capacity to implement Energy Security Compacts, as proposed by the Energy for Growth Hub, that could address the primary constraints to energy security in a targeted set of specific countries. MCC could also coordinate the rest of the interagency in contributing relevant tools and resources.

- The U.S. Congress should amend the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003 to do four things:

- Give MCC the mandate to implement Energy Security Compacts as a fourth business line alongside compacts, Threshold Compacts, and Regional Compacts.

- Give MCC the mandate to coordinate an interagency working group cochaired with the National Security Council (modeled on language in the Electrify Africa Act).

- Amend the language around MCC's country eligibility to create more flexibility.

- Ensure that Energy Security Compacts can be implemented over five to ten years, making investment in major infrastructure more viable.

Chapter 8—Bolstering U.S. Leadership by Improving Africa's Position in the International Financial System, by Nicolas Lippolis

Disappointment with the outcomes of multilateral cooperation and the appeal of better alternatives have in recent years contributed to the weakening of the Western-led institutions of global economic governance. Nowhere is this disappointment more palpable than on the African continent, where disenchanted governments have turned to new sources of finance, championed intra-continental trade, and sought a greater say over global tax governance. Particularly in the realm of finance, African countries' turn to China and other so-called new creditors ultimately runs counter to U.S. interests.

This incoming administration should consider initiatives to improve Africa's position in the international financial system to be able to cope with their social, economic, and environmental challenges. By helping its African partners tackle these intertwined challenges, the U.S. government can help reduce these partners' reliance on U.S. aid and forestall the mass migration potentially resulting from economic and political failures.

There are specific policy measures that the U.S. Department of the Treasury and other government agencies can support to have an immediate impact on Africa's financial woes:

- To increase international financial institutions' lending capacity, the United States can build on recent progress in allowing IMF Special Drawing Rights to be rechanneled towards MDBs.
- Streamlining the sovereign debt architecture will require finding instruments to compel all classes of creditors to promptly participate in restructuring negotiations and thus avoid the "too little, too late" problem.
- Tackling illicit financial flows requires building on recent progress in clamping down on money laundering within the United States and using the government's global influence to push for similar measures in countries that continue to facilitate money laundering. This would not only favor the United States in its competition for influence in Africa, but it would also stem the hemorrhaging of Africa's resources and thereby reduce African dependence on U.S. aid dollars.

Chapter 9—Halting Africa's Brain Drain Through Targeted Reform of the U.S. International Student Visa Regime, by Blain Solomon and Tani Washington

African applicants for U.S. student visas experience a very high rate of denials—nearly 60 percent. These very high denial rates of African student visa applications should be of concern as the United States tries to compete with China for the hearts and minds of young people in low and middle-income countries around the world. An increase in the presence of African students in the United States helps to strategically secure commercial, industrial, and often political footholds abroad. Additionally, African students seeking higher education and technical training abroad are likely to be highly skilled, high achieving, and highly motivated.

The incoming administration should make targeted reforms to the international student visa structure alongside programmatic innovation in broadening U.S. education access and partnership building. Visa reforms should build on efforts to strengthen programmatic initiatives like the Young African Leaders Initiative and the State Department's historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) administrative exchange program, which both increasingly reflect the United States' changing perspective on the role of global intellectual capital. To implement these ideas the incoming administration should take the following steps:

- Create a separate preferential visa class for students applying to graduate programs in STEM, which could include selective qualification for expedited visa appointments, increased and specialized staff, or waived or reduced visa fees.

- Design initiatives that directly engage major U.S. and African universities and technical institutions with one another, which would promote stronger U.S. capacity to develop domestic intellectual capital.

Chapter 10—Repositioning U.S. Diplomacy in Africa With Adequate Staffing and Resources, by Anthony Carroll and Andrew Danik

Over the past two decades, the United States' presence in Africa has been markedly diminished, affecting American visibility and influence on the continent. This decline of U.S. influence can be attributed to two factors. First, new entrants (including China, India, Türkiye, and the Gulf states) are displacing traditional powers on the continent (such as the United States, Europe, and Japan), in diplomatic, commercial, and security spheres. The second reason is self-imposed, namely that there has been a relative qualitative and quantitative decline in U.S. traditional, public, and commercial diplomacy.

To better position the United States to compete with other actors as a more visible partner to African countries, the new administration should bolster the size and quality of American diplomatic presence on the continent.

To bolster the size and quality of American diplomatic presence on the continent, the new administration should take the following steps:

- Expedite the appointments and confirmations of ambassadors to African countries.

- Consider political appointees with business or high-level political experience and an interest in Africa as ambassadors for the African countries where the United States has significant strategic interests.

- Review the State Department's recruitment, placement, training, and support for low- to mid-level foreign service officers to Africa. Diplomats serving in Africa should be rewarded, not penalized, for such service. Commercial training and support for those foreign service officers should be enhanced and updated regularly

- Deepen the U.S. Department of Commerce's engagement across Africa at all levels. This should include more engagement in sectors such as strategic minerals and with the U.S. business community outside of the Beltway, especially with the vibrant African diaspora.

Chapter 11—How the United States Can Compete With China for African Hearts and Minds, by Christian-Géraud Neema

President-elect Donald Trump's return to the White House could open a new era of U.S.-Africa relations because he campaigned on an ambitious domestic and foreign policy agenda. The administration's policy toward the continent will take place in a moment of renewed partnership between China and African nations. The September 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing revealed China's long-term engagement and strategy toward the continent. The regularity of FOCAC over the past twenty years reveals the consistency and commitment with which China treats its relations with Africa.

The new administration's approach to Africa should bring reassurance, consistency, and a forward-looking world vision. In this vein, it would be helpful for the new administration to avoid the debunked narrative of Chinese debt traps, which ultimately undermines the credibility of American strategy in Africa, with the following steps:

- **Reassurance:** Beyond the competition with China, the official narrative of the new administration should communicate that the United States is engaging with African countries for both parties' mutual benefits. Such reassurance can be provided with regularity and consistency of the U.S.-Africa Leadership Summit.

- **Consistency and Results:** A competitive approach to engaging with Africa will have to be bold, with promises to deliver concrete results for the continent. Keeping the Lobito Corridor project alive to prove America's consistency in Africa and encourage its private sector to invest in a continent often perceived as too risky for Western investments.

- **A Positive Vision for the Future:** The administration may take a series of moves to signal its intention to respond to growing calls for reforming the international system. Opening and engaging in an institutional dialogue with the African Union on this front would be a step in the right direction.

Chapter 12—Bolstering U.S. Strategic Partnerships With Africa Through High-Level Diplomacy, by Ramsey C. Day

High-level diplomatic engagement will be critical in establishing trust, clearly articulating the vision and intent of a modernized relationship, and promoting strategic dialogue between the United States and African nations.

As the new administration considers its agenda, three messaging priorities should guide its approach to Africa. First, define the goal of transitioning the relationship from aid-centric to a robust and diversified economic partnership as a top priority. Second, clearly communicate to all African nations that their respective level of commitment to modernizing their relationship with the United States will determine the level of American diplomatic engagement and development assistance. Third, the administration should emphasize its desire to help end conflicts, particularly in Sudan.

The Trump administration should pursue several high-level diplomatic actions to reinforce its messaging to African leaders:

- Host a U.S.-Africa business summit within the first two years of the administration on par with the 2014 and 2022 U.S.-Africa Leaders Summits but framed in a markedly different manner.
- Plan a presidential visit to Africa in the first year of the administration to set a positive tone for U.S.-Africa relations and acknowledge Africa's emergence on the global stage.
- Assign a high-profile digital transformation envoy to be housed in the National Economic Council at the White House to enable the administration to prioritize technological innovation and digital infrastructure in Africa and elsewhere.
- Emphasize security cooperation with two critical priorities promoting energy accessibility and security and ending the Sudan civil war.

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AGOA and Beyond: Reinvigorating and Repurposing the U.S.-Africa Trade Relationship

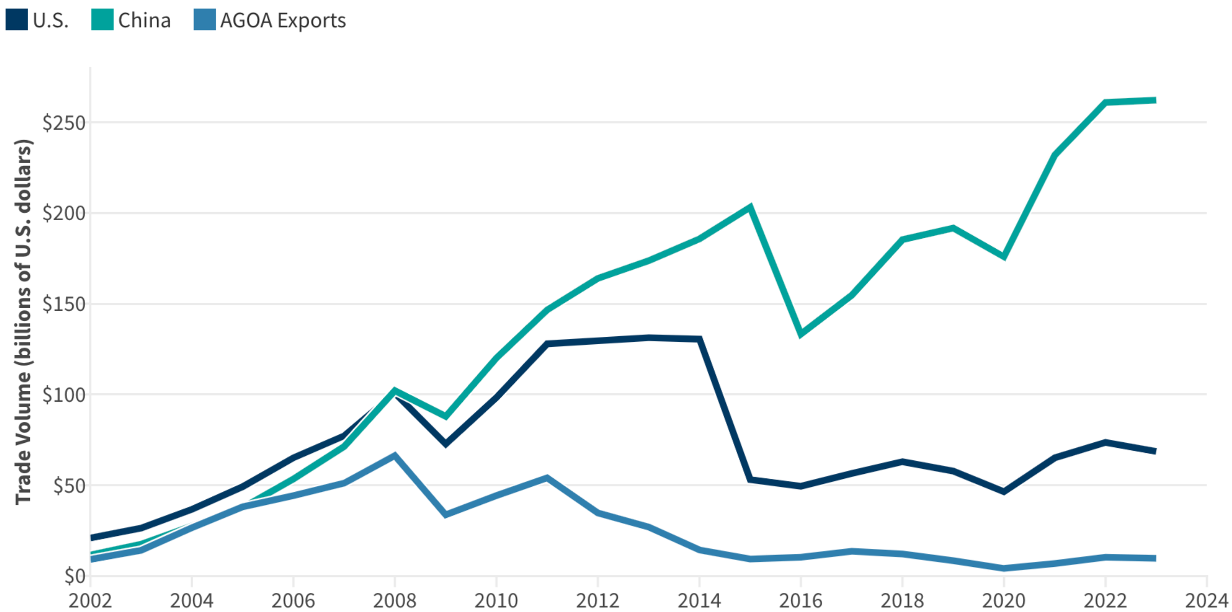
Zainab Usman and Anthony Carroll

The Issue

Commerce is the cornerstone of international economic relations, yet the trade volumes between the United States and most African countries are declining. Uncertainty around the future of U.S. trade preference programs—the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which is set to expire in 2025, and the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) trade program, will accelerate this trend. Amid this uncertainty, America's economic engagement with Africa and its positioning as a partner of choice for the continent could be imperiled in a more geopolitically turbulent world of fragmentation and competition.

The U.S.-Africa trade relationship is diminishing as the global trading environment rapidly changes. One major change has been China's rise. In 2009, China overtook the United States as Africa's top bilateral trade partner. During the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China announced that starting in December 2024, it would eliminate tariffs for goods from forty-three countries classified as the world's "least developed," thirty-three of which are in Africa.[5] It is worth noting that China's trade program offers much less generous product and country coverage than AGOA, African exports under AGOA are more diversified than African exports to China, and the U.S.-Africa trade relationship is characterized by a healthier trade balance with some African countries, even recording a surplus in several cases.[6] Another major change is the African continent's embrace of free trade. It has moved ahead, albeit slowly, with regional integration; fifty-four signatories and forty-eight countries have ratified the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), the world's largest free trade area by number of participating nations.

Figure 5. Africa's Trade with China and the U.S., 2002 to 2023



Source: Author's calculations based on data from: "2024 Biennial Report on the Implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act," U.S. Trade Representative, June 2024, https://ustr.gov/issue-areas/preference-programs/african-growth-and-opportunity-act-agoa/biennial-reports; and "UN Commodity Trade Statistics Database," UN Comtrade, January 6, 2024, https://comtradeplus.un.org/.

African countries are also consolidating commercial relationships with countries including India, Malaysia, Qatar, Singapore, Türkiye, and the United Arab Emirates, among others.

The uncertainty around the future of AGOA and GSP is driving a narrative that the United States is uninterested in expanding its commercial diplomacy on the continent and disengaged from Africa's economic development. Observers often contrast this perceived U.S. commercial disengagement from Africa with the vital role that America played historically through trade and investment programs in supporting the development of allies, including in Europe after World War II, and the East Asian economies of South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. This narrative of U.S. disinterest in Africa's economic development is further bolstered by recent suspensions of AGOA privileges that severely punished African workers (who tend to be young people and women) for infractions by their governments or other political elites. Persistent advocacies by some NGOs to incorporate even more stringent and impossible-to-meet conditions on African economies for accessing the U.S. market serve to further compound the lack of clarity on the timeline for the reauthorization of the program. Ultimately, the frequent use of AGOA to achieve wide-ranging socio-governance objectives subordinates and undermines the U.S.-Africa trade relationship by reducing confidence among foreign investors that market access is assured.

The new administration should proactively reimagine, reinvigorate, and repurpose the U.S.-Africa trade relationship for a mutually beneficial partnership that advances both U.S. and African interests in a new era of geopolitical competition.

Policy Recommendations

The new administration could discuss with Congress the reauthorization and repurposing of AGOA as a strategic economic partnership that benefits both the United States and African nations.[7] Through the National Security Council and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and working with Congress, the administration could establish a framework for reauthorizing AGOA. The program has historically enjoyed wide bipartisan support having been enacted and reauthorized by Republican-led and Democrat-led administrations respectively.

The new administration could look at rebranding the program from AGOA to a strategic economic partnership with Africa.[8] This potential rebranding, would convey the evolution of AGOA from the aid orientation that underpinned the Trade and Development Act of 2000 to a strategic economic partnership fit for today's geopolitical realities in which such trade programs should advance U.S. strategic interests. In this case, a repurposed trade relationship with Africa would be directly beneficial to U.S. interests of securing supplies of minerals and metals critical for electric vehicle (EV) batteries, semiconductors, renewable energy hardware, and defense-industrial applications vital to U.S. national security. It would also encourage two-way trade in digital services and help diversify pharmaceutical supply chains that currently depend on China.

With a population projected to reach 2.5 billion people in the next two decades and an expanding middle class, the African market should be attractive for U.S. goods and services as middle class continues to expand. For African countries, access to the U.S. market for their goods and services can help attract U.S. and other Western investors in refining and processing of strategic minerals and in other higher value economic activity, including agro-processing, pharmaceuticals, medicines, and other types of manufacturing.

Ideas for Implementation

In reimagining, reinvigorating, and repurposing the U.S.-Africa trade relationship for a new era of geopolitical competition, the incoming administration should consider the following.

- **Look at expanding AGOA or a potential strategic economic partnership.** is an opportunity to expand the trade relationship with more countries. One potential way the expansion could be achieved is by restoring the AGOA privileges of some countries and not overloading the program with lofty political provisions that African countries lack the capabilities to implement.[9] Other tools, such as targeted sanctions and visa bans on violating individuals and companies, can punish entities that violate political conditions and governance standards rather than suspending entire nations from the program in ways that harm U.S. investors and African factory workers. The program should expand its definition of "Africa" to include all countries that have ratified the AfCFTA.[10]

- **Restore the trade hubs program to increase AGOA utilization and support trade facilitation initiatives.** During the first years after AGOA's passage in 2000, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) established regional trade hubs that facilitated exports from eligible African countries. The trade hubs accomplished two goals: they increased African exporters' market knowledge and identified and often remedied non-tariff trade barriers that hindered exports to the United States and, within Africa, imports originating in the United States. While the trade hubs originally concentrated on textiles and specialty agriculture, they could be empowered to offer guidance to investors in the processing and exports of critical minerals to the United States. Furthermore, the trade hubs could be guided by Prosper Africa and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) to ensure adherence to strategic goals, monitor performance, and promote U.S. technology platforms in infrastructure, telecommunications, and mineral and industrial processing so that the United States does not cede leadership to Chinese or other competitors in setting standards for these activities.

- **Consider provisions for minerals critical to the manufacturing of components associated with U.S. strategic industries**. While reports indicate that the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) will in all likelihood be repealed under the new administration, it has provisions that may be retained. One particularly relevant provision restricts the imports of critical materials by manufacturers of EV batteries, semiconductors, renewable energy hardware, and defense industrial components to countries with a free trade agreement with the United States. If that should occur, consideration should be given within any reauthorization process to designate eligible African countries as the equivalent of free trade agreement countries for the purpose of trading minerals designated as critical.[11] Considerations should include ensuring that such benefits do not accrue to companies or individuals from entities of concern in China, Iran, or Russia.

- **Consider tax incentives for U.S. firms to encourage American investments in refining and processing minerals in Africa and other manufacturing activity for exports to the United States.** In line with the incoming administration's aim to reduce bureaucratic constraints to the private sector, Congress and the U.S. Department of the Treasury should consider offering tax and other fiscal incentives to American companies that seek to invest in African countries that export goods to the United States.[12] Particular consideration should be given to companies investing in the beneficiation of African minerals to reduce U.S. dependence on imports from China.

- **Consider exempting strategic economic partnership beneficiaries from wide-ranging tariffs.** Imports from Africa represent less than 2 percent of U.S. imports and therefore offer no credible threat to domestic industry. To achieve the aforementioned goals of reimagining, reinvigorating, and repurposing the U.S.-Africa trade relationship for a new era of geopolitical competition, the incoming administration should consider exempting African countries from the across-the-board tariffs it intends to apply to imports from countries it considers competitors and adversaries.

02

Beyond the Lobito Corridor: Mobilizing U.S. Investments in Africa's Critical Minerals to Support Industrialization

Zainab Usman

The Issue

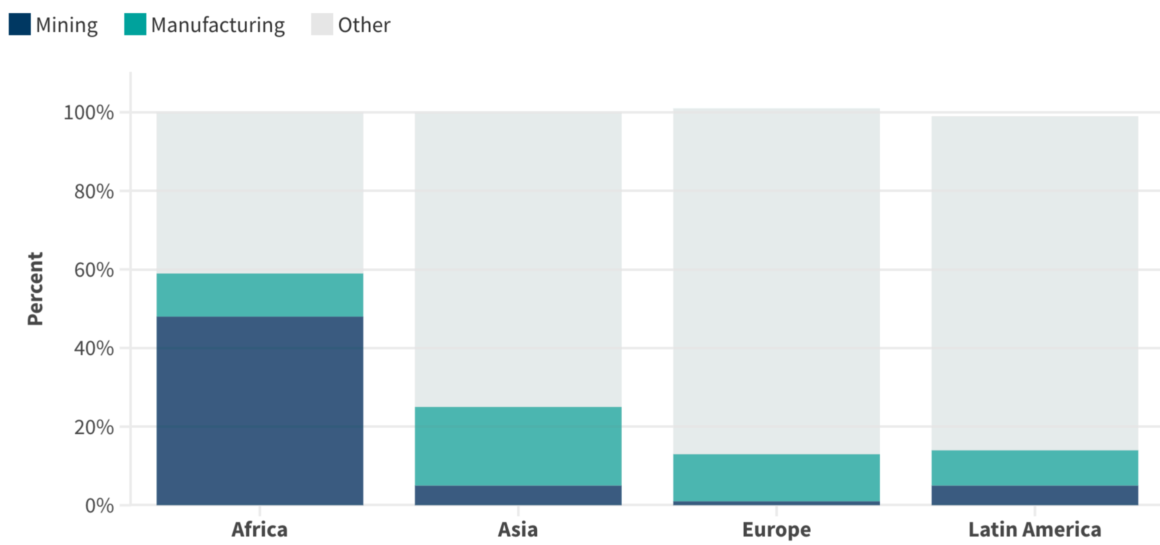
After several false starts, the United States is finally in the infrastructure provision business in Africa. The Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (PGI) is the U.S.-led alternative to China's vast investment activity, particularly under the banner of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), across Africa and many parts of the Global South. The PGI's flagship initiative, the Lobito Corridor project, supports transportation infrastructure across three African countries to galvanize the U.S. public and private sector toward investing in minerals extraction, agriculture, renewable energy, and other relevant activity along the corridor. The project represents "the most significant transport infrastructure that the United States has helped develop on the African continent in a generation" and promises to unlock regional trade and investment.[13]

Yet, U.S.-led infrastructure investment initiatives in Africa risk being seen as extractive and detached from the continent's economic transformation and industrialization aspirations in a way that ultimately undermines U.S. positioning. The core of the Lobito Corridor project involves moving raw minerals along the rail lines being refurbished in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and built in Zambia to the port of Lobito in Angola for shipment to the United States and other Western markets. This is within a context in which

U.S. (and indeed other Western) stock of foreign direct investment (FDI) is concentrated in extractive industries and unprocessed commodities (see figure 6). Some African stakeholders believe the project represents a new scramble for crucial minerals in ways that could reinforce Africa's decades-long relegation to the margins of the global economy as a supplier of unprocessed commodities to high income economies.[14] But African countries—collectively through the African Union's Agenda 2063 and individually through national economic strategies—aspire to industrialize their economies through manufacturing and the processing of their mineral endowments to reach middle- and high-income by mid-century.

By contrast, China has positioned itself to be in visible alignment to Africa's industrialization aspirations. Despite challenges with some Chinese investments, especially the accumulation of sovereign debt, Chinese intellectual and political elites frame China's infrastructure projects as enablers of increased productivity in African economies.[15] Chinese firms are also engaged in industrial activity on the continent. One study documented over 10,000 Chinese privately owned firms, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), operating in Africa, and "nearly a third are involved in manufacturing, a quarter in services, and around a fifth each in trade and in construction and real estate."[16]

Figure 6. Sectoral Composition of U.S. Foreign Direct Investment Stock by Region, 2010 to 2023



Note: "Mining" consists of oil, gas, minerals and metals extraction as well as support activities.

Source: Author's calculations derived from: "U.S. Direct Investment Abroad: Balance of Payments and Direct Investment Position Data," U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, July 23, 2024, https://www.bea.gov/international/di1usdbal.

During the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Chinese President Xi Jinping announced China's commitment "to deepen cooperation with Africa in industry, agriculture, infrastructure, trade and investment [and] promote exemplary, high-quality Belt and Road cooperation projects."[17] He also announced a "Partnership Action for Industrial Chain Cooperation" to incubate growth clusters on the continent and a "Partnership Action for Connectivity" that will carry out thirty infrastructure connectivity projects in Africa.[18] This followed similar high-level commitments at all previous FOCAC summits since 2000, as well as during Chinese bilateral engagements with individual African countries. Consequently, surveys conducted by Afrobarometer of ordinary Africans show high approvals for Chinese influence and leadership (see Introduction).[19] Of course it remains to be seen if China will follow through with these ambitious pledges to Africa as its own economy slows down.[20]

To position America as an effective competitor to China's numerous industrialization projects in Africa, U.S.-led infrastructure initiatives on the continent should better align with African economic transformation aspirations.

Policy Recommendations

To provide a tangible high-impact alternative to China's BRI in supporting industrialization objectives in Africa, the incoming U.S. administration should mobilize public and private investments in developing the African value chains associated with the future of the global economy, including those for the minerals and metals that are critical to the global energy transition. (See other chapters in this compendium for proposals for the health and pharmaceutical industries.)

First, the new administration should build on the momentum of the initial phase of the Lobito Corridor project by incorporating the refining of minerals and the manufacturing of components for renewable energy and electric mobility hardware. The Lobito Corridor project is a major milestone in U.S. efforts to invest in infrastructure in Africa as an alternative to China's BRI. While progress has been made in committing public financing, launching feasibility and project development studies, and providing technical assistance and debt financing,[21] the new administration should seize the opportunity to take this project to the next level. The project should facilitate the processing and refining of minerals and metals from Zambia and the DRC and mobilize investments from U.S. companies in the manufacturing of components for energy, mobility, and defense-industrial hardware for their own supply chains. This endeavor would significantly advance U.S. strategic objectives of building international supply chains with limited Chinese involvement and fulfill African needs for adding value to these commodities toward their broader aspirations for diversifying and industrializing their economies.

Second, the administration should consider a corridor project in West Africa focused on building out the region's critical minerals value chains to meet U.S. strategic interests for diversifying supply chains and addressing African priorities for value addition. West Africa's so-called lithium belt that includes Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and other resource-rich countries could be a good candidate for such a transnational initiative. This subregion is endowed with bauxite, copper, iron ore, lithium, manganese, nickel, and uranium, among other minerals, that are essential inputs to renewable energy, battery, electric mobility, and defense-industrial technologies.[22] This corridor project could have the following components: the exploration and precise mapping of reserves; the processing and refining of minerals; electricity access initiatives that align with the incoming administration's orientation toward boosting energy security by utilizing the region's abundant natural gas reserves; and the construction of roads and rail lines to transport refined minerals to export markets via the Atlantic Ocean. It would meet the U.S. national security priority of reducing its dependence on China for these refined commodities. It would also advance other U.S. strategic interests of competing with China in the region by supporting African needs for utilization of their resource endowments for increasing electrification, building out connectivity infrastructure, building out refineries for critical transition minerals before export, and eventually, manufacturing components for renewable energy and electric mobility hardware. This West Africa project would complement the Lobito Corridor project in central and southern Africa.

Ideas for Implementation

To provide a tangible alternative to the BRI in supporting industrialization objectives in Africa, the new administration should:

- **Identify a West Africa corridor project for U.S. investments by consulting existing continental frameworks.** Drawing on the African Development Bank's list of seventeen transport corridors, the White House should consider the Dakar-Bamako-Ouagadougou-Niamey Corridor as the leading candidate for a large U.S. infrastructure corridor project.[23] This project promises to connect the three landlocked and mineral-rich countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger to Guinea and the port of Dakar in Senegal. Importantly, the countries within this mega corridor are endowed with critical transition and industrial minerals, including bauxite, iron ore, lithium, manganese, nickel phosphate, and vanadium. And since the region's endowments are underexplored, American expertise would be crucial. The incoming administration can draw on existing initiatives such as the African Renewable Energy Manufacturing Initiative (Africa REMI) to plan the constituent initiatives for this West Africa Corridor Project.[24] Africa REMI identifies opportunities for the end-to-end build-out of supply chains for solar photovoltaic systems and components for battery storage and electric vehicles through private investments, skills building, and local private sector development. These activities could integrate into Western clean energy supply chains and potentially reduce China's dominance in these areas.

- **Negotiate pragmatic security partnerships to help contain rising violence along the proposed West Africa corridor project.** The National Security Council should support efforts by countries in the region to contain rising incidents of violence perpetrated by extremists and criminal gangs. Recent military coups in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger, as well as the fraying of African nations' ties with France, may at first glance seem like daunting challenges. Yet, the situation is an opportunity for President-elect Donald Trump to lead in resetting relations with countries in the region that are still very pro-American and welcome the United States as their preferred economic and security partner, but have turned to Russia and increasingly China out of frustration with (real or imagined) U.S. disinterest to their plight.

- **Mobilize U.S. technical expertise for collaborations across the existing Lobito Corridor and the proposed West Africa corridor projects**. The new administration should offer American technical expertise—in geological surveys and mapping, data collection, analytics, and exchange programs associated with mining and geological sciences—to mineral-rich African countries along these two corridors. The mapping capabilities of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), research partnerships with the U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory, and exchange programs with world-leading U.S. universities such as the Colorado School of Mines cannot be matched by competitors in China, Russia, Türkiye, or countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council. Most importantly, the deployment of this technical expertise can help ensure American leadership in setting standards for African mineral-rich countries to adopt. To guarantee the adoption of American, rather than Chinese, standards, the incoming administration should work with African regional organizations, such as the African Minerals Development Centre, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), for harmonization in the mineral-rich corridor countries.

- **Mobilize U.S. public financing to support American companies to invest in the Lobito Corridor and the proposed West Africa Corridor projects**. The incoming administration should utilize, in a targeted and selective manner, American public sector funds to support U.S. companies operating at the technology frontier of mineral processing and refining and battery production to invest along the corridors. What America lacks in major global mining companies operating upstream, it makes up for in innovations by smaller companies at the frontier of new cost-effective and environmentally sustainable refining methods for cobalt, lithium, nickel, and other critical transition minerals. The U.S. Export-Import

Bank has a crucial role to play through its "single point entry for critical minerals" that provides streamlined access to financing support for U.S. companies in this area.[25] In addition to current investments in mining companies in G7 and other allied countries, the Development Finance Corporation should prioritize supporting American companies in refining and processing these minerals in Africa through debt and equity instruments as well as supporting the African companies that could be suppliers to these American companies. Such support could help these American companies scale up their innovative technology in refining and processing minerals across emerging markets.

03

Strategic Reorientation and Realignment of U.S. Health Aid to Africa

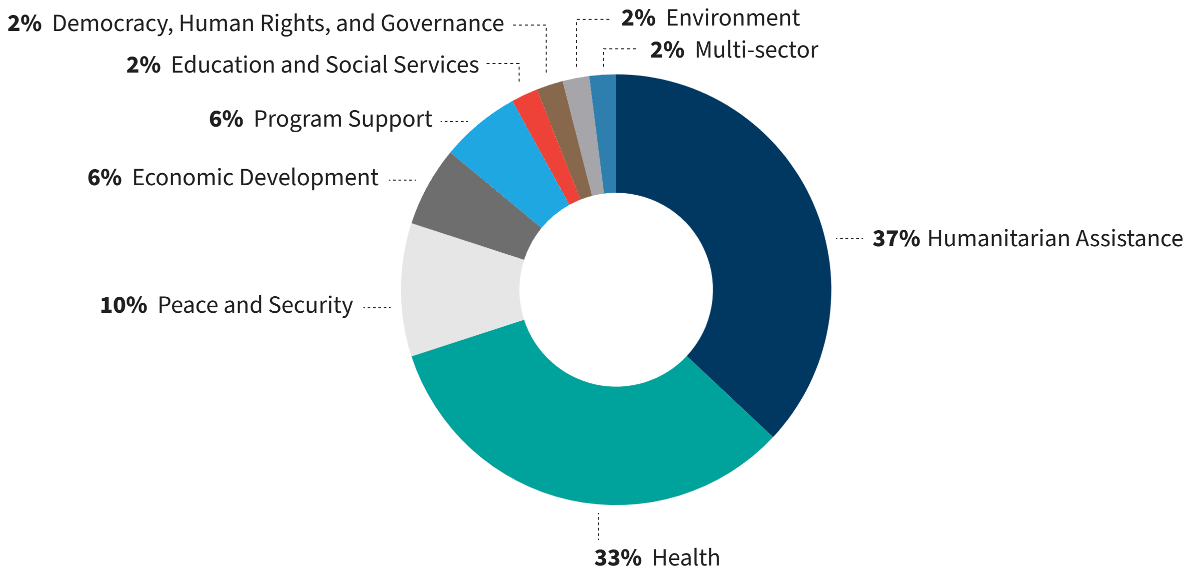
Zainab Usman and Saskia Holman

The Issue

The U.S. government is a major actor in global health and across the African continent. It is the largest donor of bilateral aid to the Africa,[26] allocating billions of dollars annually toward health interventions. In 2022, of the $17.2 billion the United States disbursed for development assistance for health (DAH) across fifty-three African countries, $5.7 billion, or 33 percent, was disbursed to health-related initiatives (see figure 7). Of this $5.7 billion, 93 percent went to disease-specific and reproductive health programming—including HIV/AIDS, malaria, maternal and child health, family planning and reproductive health, and tuberculosis—overseen by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).[27]

Despite the volume and breadth of U.S. bilateral DAH to Africa, it falls short of its potential. U.S. bilateral health assistance has increasingly diverged from the health security priorities identified by both African countries and the U.S. government.[28] U.S. DAH to Africa overwhelmingly focuses on infectious disease and reproductive health initiatives, which sometimes but not always include strengthening health systems. In addition, U.S. DAH structural interventions, including linkages to economic and social sectors, are sometimes insufficient. In a changing geopolitical environment where the United States aims to reposition itself in Africa as a partner of choice, the new administration should consider how to reorient the billions of dollars spent annually on DAH to serve both U.S. priorities for health security and the economic development needs of African countries.

Figure 7. FY 2022 Distribution of U.S. Bilateral Aid to Africa by Sector



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from: United States. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (US-AID), "Foreignassistance.gov," September 26, 2024. https://foreignassistance.gov.

Policy Recommendations

Recent initiatives to reform U.S. bilateral development assistance—including USAID's "Journey to Self-Reliance" and "Localization" efforts—indicate a growing consensus around fundamental principles.[29] These include empowering local actors, strengthening systems, and enabling aid beneficiaries to become partners rather than beneficiaries in perpetuity. In that vein, an extensive review of U.S. and African policy documents reveals five crucial shared health security priorities that reflect some of these principles.[30] These five priorities can serve as the building blocks for a mutually beneficial realignment and reorientation of U.S. DAH to Africa.

1. **Invest in health security.** Increased investment in African health security—defined by the U.S. CDC as "the existence of strong and resilient public health systems" that can "prevent, detect, and respond" to various disease threats[31]—would ensure strong and resilient public health systems that can prevent, detect, and respond to disease threats and public health crises.[32]

2. **Invest in strong, sustainable health systems.** Strong, sustainable health systems—defined by the World Health Organization as "all organizations, people, and actions" involved in "promot[ing], restor[ing] or maintain[ing] health"[33]—would allow African governments to proactively meet their citizens' health needs while adapting to and enduring health crises.[34]

3. **Expand and strengthen the healthcare workforce.** An expanded and strengthened African healthcare workforce would improve countries' capacities and skills necessary to address the continent's disproportionate disease burden.[35]

4. **Build supply chains around regional vaccine manufacturing.** A complete health product supply chain and developed regional vaccine manufacturing would ensure the continent's self-reliance in responding to future global health threats.[36]

5. **Reorient international partnerships to focus on recipient countries' goals.** U.S. and African stakeholders have pushed for a new approach to global health partnerships that considers the priorities defined by recipient countries.[37]

There is strong alignment between the United States and African nations across these five areas. However, further action could be taken. The potential policies, interventions, and action steps below could support U.S.-Africa priority alignment around DAH.

Ideas for Implementation

Africa's health systems continue to face structural challenges and global health partnerships that have a limited transformative impact. In the post-pandemic era, the new administration has the opportunity to chart a new way forward for DAH to Africa that advances U.S. interests, supports African economic prosperity and opportunity, and promotes locally led development with the following action steps.

- **Support the regional manufacturing of medicines and other products by U.S. companies in Africa.** The U.S. government should ensure that its bilateral DAH programs in Africa enable collaborations between U.S. companies and African stakeholders in developing local and regional health supply chains. This would include supporting the creation of a fully integrated supply chain to ensure sustainable African manufacturing of medicines, vaccines, and therapeutics. U.S. companies could invest in and support the growth of vaccine-supporting industries, including those that produce active vaccine ingredients, inactive ingredients, and consumables. Another component should be strengthening the raw material and intermediates supply chains that are crucial for vaccine production.

- **Generate international demand for health products manufactured by U.S. and other companies in Africa.** This can include:

    - committing to financing, through DAH, the procurement of African-manufactured vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics;

    - aligning the mission and direction of DAH with policy pathways for successful vaccine manufacturing outlined by African and global health stakeholders;[38] and

- using U.S. influence to create demand for and push for the procurement of African-manufactured vaccines, medicines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and health products among OECD countries, philanthropic and multilateral organizations, and vaccine-purchasing mechanisms.

- **Advance a vision for global health partnerships that promote the philosophy of self-reliance among African partners.** As the world's largest bilateral donor, the U.S. government has a lot of influence in the global health community. It can utilize its financial might and influence among the OECD-DAC countries and multilateral organizations to encourage global health partnerships that align with its "journey to self-reliance" by:

  - supporting Africa's self-reliance and leadership over global health security activities that affect the continent;

  - ensuring the philosophy, mission, and direction of U.S. DAH programs in Africa align with not only the continent's greater self-reliance but also an eventual ownership of global health security activities; and

  - supporting African leadership in the global health space, such as by advocating for global health summits and gatherings to be held on the African continent to ensure the full participation of African health experts.

With the consideration of the above, the U.S. government can enter a new era of health assistance to Africa that not only supports the continent's economic development needs but also ensures global health security for Africa, the United States, and the world.

04

Constructive U.S. Engagement with West Africa and the Sahel

Gilles O. Yabi

The Issue

The countries of the central Sahel—Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger—occupy a strategic position between West, North, and Central Africa. Since 2012, these countries have seen insecurity and violence by armed separatist and jihadist groups spread rapidly over vast territories and further south into border areas with coastal countries. In 2023, Burkina Faso was the country most affected by terrorism, according to the Global Terrorism Index.[39] Three other West African countries—Mali, Nigeria, and Niger—were in the top ten countries most affected by terrorism.

The continuing deterioration in the security situations in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger has fostered a high degree of political instability, with a spectacular reversal in just a few years of long-celebrated progress in democratization, expansion of freedoms, and the national armies' acceptance of the elected civilian governments' authority. From 2020, coups multiplied in the central Sahel, occurring twice in Mali and Burkina Faso, followed by Niger with the overthrow of president Mohamed Bazoum, who was one of the West African leaders most appreciated by Western partners, including the United States.

Between 2016 and 2019, the United States built an air base in northern Niger's Agadez region, establishing Niger as a privileged partner in terms of military cooperation and the projection of American forces in the region. However, faced with pressure from the military leadership following the coup in July 2023—which called into question military cooperation and the U.S. troops' presence—and despite diplomatic efforts, U.S. troops were forced to leave Niger.

The change in Sahelian states' external alliances and postures has indeed been spectacular, resulting in a brutal rejection of France's military and political influence and a decline in the presence and influence of Western countries. At the same time, Russia, Türkiye, and other countries have emerged as much more welcome players in a context where the priority of military leaders is above all to reconquer territory by confronting all hostile armed groups and to keep power. Russia is now the new preferred partner of the countries in the Sahel for military cooperation; its military commitment remains significant in Mali, while it is emerging in Burkina Faso and is limited so far in Niger.

Outside the Sahel, Guinea is also in transition under a military ruler who came to power in a coup that toppled president Alpha Condé, a civilian who changed the country's constitution to stay in power beyond term limits. In Ghana, peaceful general elections in December 2024 confirmed the country's democratic resilience, while a presidential election is expected in 2025 in Côte d'Ivoire. Uncertainties remain as to whether Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara will seek a new mandate, even though he has ruled the country since 2011 following a violent postelection conflict. General elections are also scheduled for Benin in 2026, in a context marked by restricted civic and political space.

An analysis of security, political, economic, and social developments in West Africa cannot ignore the overall trajectory of Nigeria, the region's demographic and economic powerhouse. Nigeria is the United States' second-largest trading partner and third-largest destination for U.S. foreign direct investment in Africa,[40] and its security and economic prospects will be decisive for neighboring countries, regional integration, and the future of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which is in a difficult situation after the announcement in January 2024 of the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from the regional community.

ECOWAS does not exist outside its member states, and the impetus to avoid continued fragmentation of the region over the next few years will largely depend on whether its member states' leaders commit to regional integration. It will also depend on how these countries' economic situations evolve, a major factor in political crises and instability because of young people's need for jobs, income, and hope for a better future. Partners such as the United States should take this reality into account and give a central place to political dialogue with and support to member states on both security and regional economic issues.

From the United States' part, after the bipartisan Global Fragility Act of 2019 was passed, the Joe Biden administration published the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (also known as the Global Fragility Strategy, or GFS) in 2020.[41] The Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa, published in August 2022,[42] reiterated an important aspect of the GFS, committing to use diplomacy, development, and defense as "tools to strengthen and enable partners to respond to the drivers of conflict . . . advance regional stability [and] provide internal security." Many of the countries identified for the implementation of the GFS are in Africa, including Libya, Mozambique, and "Coastal West Africa" comprising

Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Togo. These countries face fresh challenges as insecurity at their northern borders with countries of the central Sahel has expanded or threatens to expand into their territory.

Policy Recommendations

In order to support regional integration in West Africa and advance U.S. security goals, the incoming U.S. administration should:

- **Maintain engagement across West Africa by investing in a significant diplomatic presence on the ground.** This will help create a better understanding of the internal dynamics of the countries in the region. It will also improve U.S. relations with all segments of society, while continuing to contribute to the restoration of security, political stability, and economic and social development in the Sahel, Nigeria, and other countries.

- **Acknowledge the demand for sovereignty on the part of decisionmakers and citizens in West African countries and for more balanced and respectful relations with all non-African partners, including the United States, despite the extremely unequal economic balance of power.**

- **Support initiatives to reform ECOWAS and create the conditions for Sahelian countries to return to the organization so that the region can take charge of its own collective security.** Engage with individual ECOWAS member states on regional issues, especially those with more economic and demographic weight. Engagement should start with Nigeria, encouraging its leaders to take more responsibility as a regional power toward strengthening ECOWAS capacity to be the leading institution on strategic thinking on regional peace, security, and economic issues.

- **Prioritize cooperation in strengthening human capital, with health, education, and vocational training as essential sectors, regardless of the political and security situation in West African countries.**

05

Deepening U.S.-Africa Ties with AI and Cybersecurity Initiatives

Jane Munga and Sylvester Quansah

The Issue

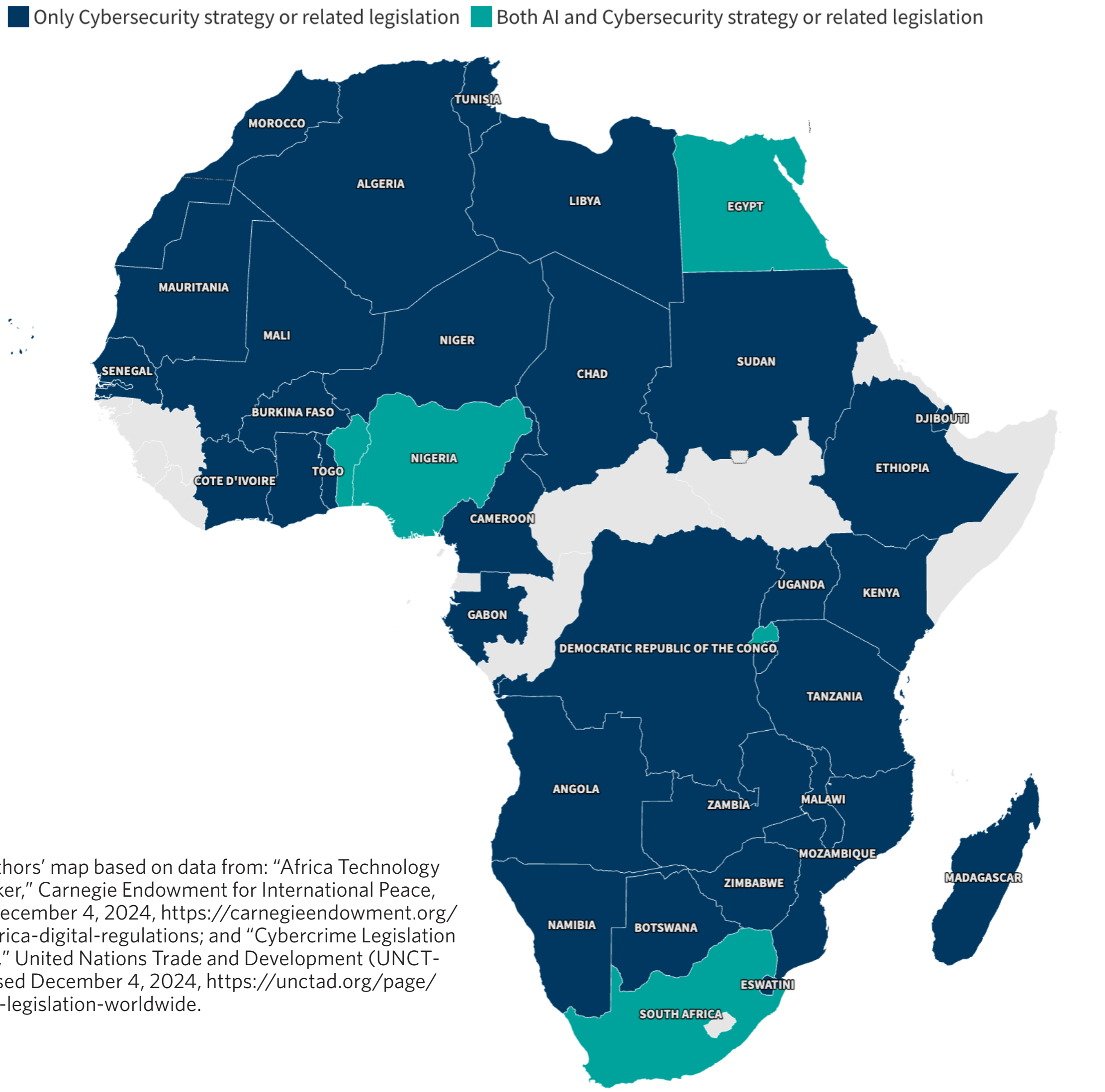
In the past two decades, Africa has experienced immense growth in digital technologies with significant impact on socioeconomic development. Technology has the potential to contribute up to $15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030, with $1.2 trillion gains in Africa, Oceania, and developing Asian countries representing a 5.6 percent increase in the region's GDP by 2030.[43] However, new technologies also bring new threats, to say nothing of existing challenges such as lack of access to affordable internet, digital devices, digital skills, and robust policy regimes.

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) presents significant potential advantages, but these benefits can only be realized if safety issues and risks associated with AI are effectively managed. Additionally, the interconnected nature of contemporary digital platforms presents cybersecurity risks that transcend geographical boundaries. An attack on one African nation could extend into another region, including North America, given the increased digital linkages between the United States and African countries. In 2023, Africa suffered the highest average of weekly cyber-attacks compared to other regions.[44] It is therefore critical to integrate initiatives focused on AI and cybersecurity into the incoming administration's vision for its digital partnership with Africa.

Policy Recommendations

African countries and the United States have identified AI and cybersecurity as key focus areas. These two policy areas present opportunities for the incoming administration to pursue initiatives that can enhance U.S.-Africa digital collaboration, consolidate achievements, and unlock new possibilities.

Figure 8. African Countries with Artificial Intelligence Strategies and Related Cyber Security Policies and Regulations



Source: Authors' map based on data from: "Africa Technology Policy Tracker," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed December 4, 2024, https://carnegieendowment.org/features/africa-digital-regulations; and "Cybercrime Legislation Worldwide," United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), accessed December 4, 2024, https://unctad.org/page/cybercrime-legislation-worldwide.

Ongoing Work on AI: Recognizing the vast potential of AI, the African Union published the "Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy" in August 2024.[45] African countries are also increasingly developing AI strategies. For instance, Nigeria launched a national AI strategy, while Kenya, Ghana, and Namibia are working on theirs.[46] In the United States, the government published several documents that position AI as a policy priority nationally and globally.[47]

Ongoing Work on Cybersecurity: Both the United States and African nations acknowledge the significance of safeguarding the digital environment for a thriving digital economy. The United States established its National Cybersecurity Strategy and the U.S. International

Cyberspace and Digital Policy Strategy, outlining its digital diplomacy agenda for cybersecurity.[48] The documents highlight the U.S. commitment to developing and deploying secure information, communication, and technologies—including infrastructure—both nationally and globally. The United States' emphasis on infrastructure is a marked difference from African countries' cyber policy approaches, which tend to focus on digital transactions and data aspects. At the continental level, the African Union's Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention) came into effect in 2024.[49] At the national level, forty-one African countries have cybersecurity-related policies and legislation.[50] Relatedly, all African countries with AI policies have cybersecurity related legislation.

The U.S. digital policy toward Africa has included initiatives such as the Digital Transformation with Africa Initiative, U.S.-Kenya digital cooperation, and elements of Prosper Africa and Access Africa, all of which have significantly enhanced digital collaboration between the United States and African countries.[51] The new administration now has the chance to engage on AI and cybersecurity to further enhance U.S.-Africa cooperation.

Ideas for Implementation

The United States should deepen its U.S.-Africa digital partnership with the following efforts:

- **AI flagship project.** To close the AI access gap and unlock AI's potential as a powerful tool for digital collaboration between the United States and Africa, the incoming U.S. presidential administration should create a dedicated project focused on supporting the creation and deployment of safe, secure, and trustworthy AI for sustainable development. This project should build on the Partnership for Global Inclusivity on AI's goal to harness the rapid advancement of AI to advance sustainable development globally.[52] Key components of such a project should include initiatives in AI governance, digital skills, and compute. AI governance initiatives should also create linkages with the U.S. AI Safety Institute to support robust AI regulatory frameworks across Africa. Digital skilling efforts could include programs with U.S. research institutions and private companies that focus on developing high-level skills for AI development. Initiatives should mobilize the private sector and other stakeholders to invest in the development of onsite compute infrastructure in addition to increasing access to third-party cloud computing services by American big tech companies.[53]

- **Initiative to mitigate the digital divide with secure digital infrastructure.** The incoming administration should work to boost collaboration between the United States and African countries on combatting cybercrime by developing secure and trusted information and communication technology infrastructure. It should mobilize resources through Prosper Africa or other agencies to support the deployment of U.S.-based connectivity infrastructure across the continent. This should include the deployment of low-earth orbit (LEO) satellites to achieve secure and universal internet connectivity. U.S. companies are on the cutting edge of LEO internet connectivity, but deployment is hindered by the lack of harmonized regulatory frameworks. The U.S. State Department should work with African countries to harmonize the regulatory regime for satellite connectivity.[54]

AI and cybersecurity present opportunities for the United States and African nations to deepen digital diplomacy, while also aligning all countries' strategic priorities. The emergence of AI presents opportunities for economic growth; however, realizing these benefits requires mitigation of associated risks. A deepened U.S.-Africa digital collaboration can help achieve this.

06

Leveraging U.S. Influence in MDBs to Support Africa's Energy Security and Transition

Zainab Usman and Alexander Csanadi

The Issue

Multilateral development banks (MDBs) are important providers of development finance around the world. Yet, to date, they have provided inadequate support for energy security and the broader energy transition in low- and middle-income economies, particularly on the African continent. The results have been depressed growth in African economies and an increasing proliferation of other actors seeking to fill this vacuum. Ceding this ground would be to the ultimate detriment of U.S. interests. The incoming administration—especially through the Department of the Treasury—should therefore leverage its influence in MDBs to support energy projects in Africa. In particular, the Treasury Department should seek ways to increase the volume and flexibility of support for energy projects in Africa and throughout the Global South.

The context across much of the African continent remains one of energy poverty. Roughly 600 million Africans currently lack electricity,[55] and financing continues to fall well short of the level needed to close the gap. Energy poverty compounds security challenges and undermines U.S. interests in at least two ways. First, as a constraint to economic activity and associated job creation, it contributes to the reservoir of unemployed and often disaffected youth across the African continent. Depressed industrial activity as a function of inadequate energy infrastructure also limits the extent to which complementary segments of emerging next-generation industries—such as midstream refining and processing of minerals like manganese, nickel, and phosphate—can be housed in these countries, thereby undermining U.S. efforts to diversify supply chains away from China.[56]

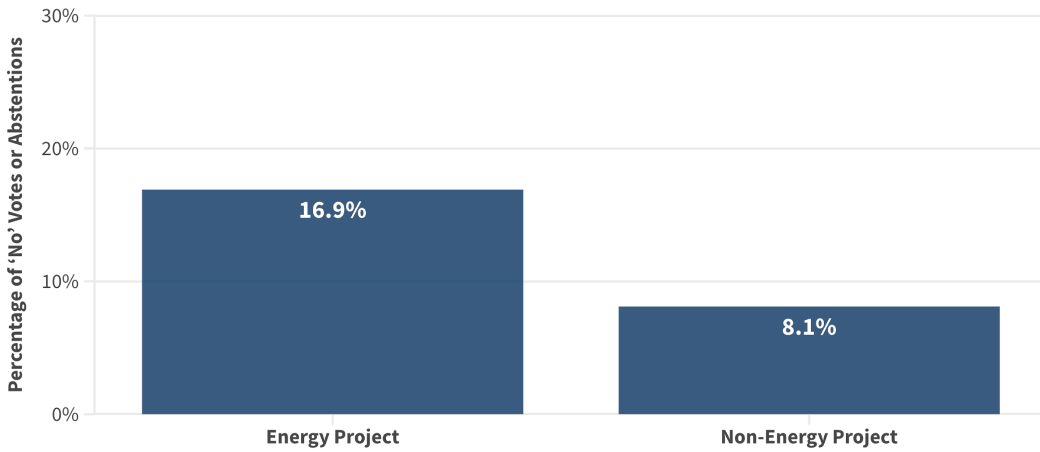
Second, energy poverty provides a vector through which U.S. competitors seek to gain traction on the continent, as with Russia's engagements on nuclear energy and broad Chinese investment.[57] Between 2012 and 2021, China provided over $53 billion in energy-related financing to African countries.[58] This was more than the United States ($31 billion) and the World Bank ($39 billion) over the same period. Although some argue that Chinese financing in Africa is declining, the more than $50 billion in commitments made at the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and planned expansion of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank on the continent signal an enduring commitment.[59]

Beyond direct U.S. competitors, the proliferation of energy investment vehicles risks making U.S.-led MDBs, as they currently operate, irrelevant. Examples include the African Finance Corporation, which was founded in 2007 and houses around $12 billion in total assets; Africa50, which was founded in 2017 and supports solar, hydroelectric, and other projects across a number of African countries; and most recently the new African Energy Bank, which is a collaboration between the African Export-Import Bank and the African New Petroleum Producers' Organization.[60] To be clear, the scale of the energy finance challenge in Africa necessitates a constellation of actors working in concert to bridge the continent's financing gap. And yet, abdicating the pole position of U.S.-led MDBs within this constellation ultimately cuts against U.S. interests.

Policy Recommendations

The United States should leverage its role to steer the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and other MDBs toward promoting energy security in Africa for the purpose of fostering growth and maintaining the centrality of U.S.-led MDBs in global economic development. As the largest contributor to the World Bank and the second largest to the African Development Bank, the United States wields considerable sway over both institutions' policy directions, although not necessarily over specific project proposals.[61] Analyzing the project-by-project voting patterns of U.S. executive directors nonetheless gives a window into how the United States has supported MDB-led energy projects. In general, the United States opposes projects relatively rarely: between January 2020 and May 2024, of the 6,521 projects presented for approval, the United States voted in favor of 5,816, or about 90 percent.[62] However, when considering projects focused on energy generation, transmission, or distribution—which themselves only constituted about 10 percent of all votes over this period—U.S. opposition was considerably higher.[63] The United States only declined to support non-energy projects about 8 percent of the time, but the analogous figure for energy projects is nearly 17 percent––meaning energy projects are more than twice as likely to face U.S. opposition.

Figure 9. U.S. Opposition Votes Against Projects Presented to MDB Boards, January 2020 to May 2024



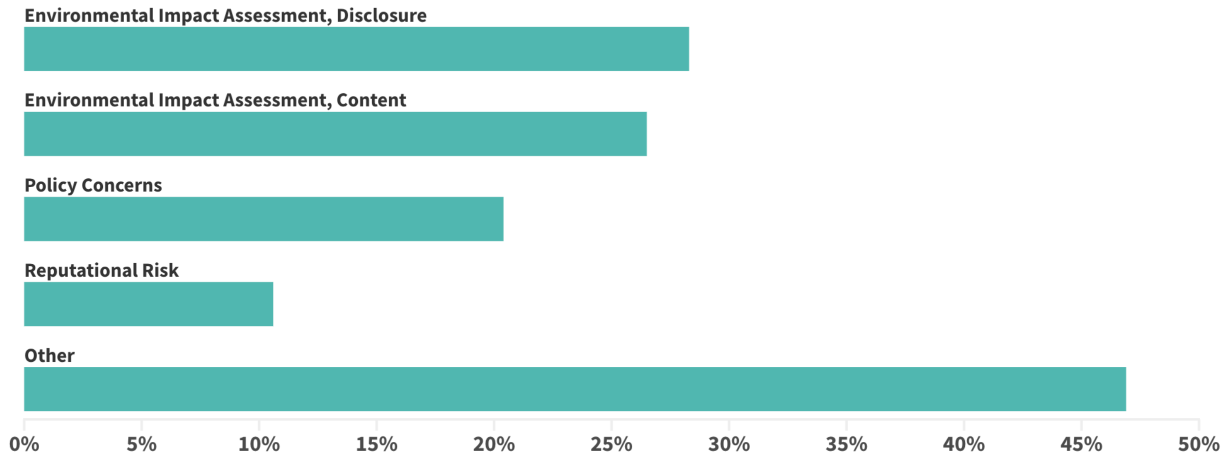
Note: Data include votes on projects from the World Bank, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Inter-American Development Bank, and International Fund for Agricultural Development.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data extracted from "Loan Review Votes," U.S. Department of the Treasury, January 2020 to May 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/international/multilateral-development-banks/loan-review-votes.

Given that U.S. opposition votes are often cast because of environmental concerns, which are plausibly more likely to be relevant for large energy projects, it is no surprise that these kinds of projects have a somewhat higher likelihood of garnering opposition votes. However, not all opposition votes are cast on the basis of substantive environmental concerns. Passed in 1989, Chapter 7 of Title 22 U.S. Code § 262m–7 directs U.S. executive directors not to support any MDB projects with sufficiently substantial environmental impact if an adequate environmental impact assessment has not been completed *and* been made publicly available at least 120 days before the board vote.[64] This disclosure requirement alone is the single most frequently cited reason for U.S. opposition to energy projects (see figure 10).

Interestingly, despite the ecological protection nature of U.S. Code § 262m–7, opposition to MDB energy projects has not been confined to large scale, potentially disruptive projects like hydroelectric dams or to transition fuel projects like natural gas. In fact, solar and wind projects have constituted roughly half of all U.S.-opposed MDB energy projects since 2020 (see figure 11). This may reflect the fact that solar and wind projects were far more common. Yet, it remains an interesting artifact that U.S. opposition to energy projects comprises mostly renewables projects and is heavily driven by a disclosure requirement rather than substantive policy.

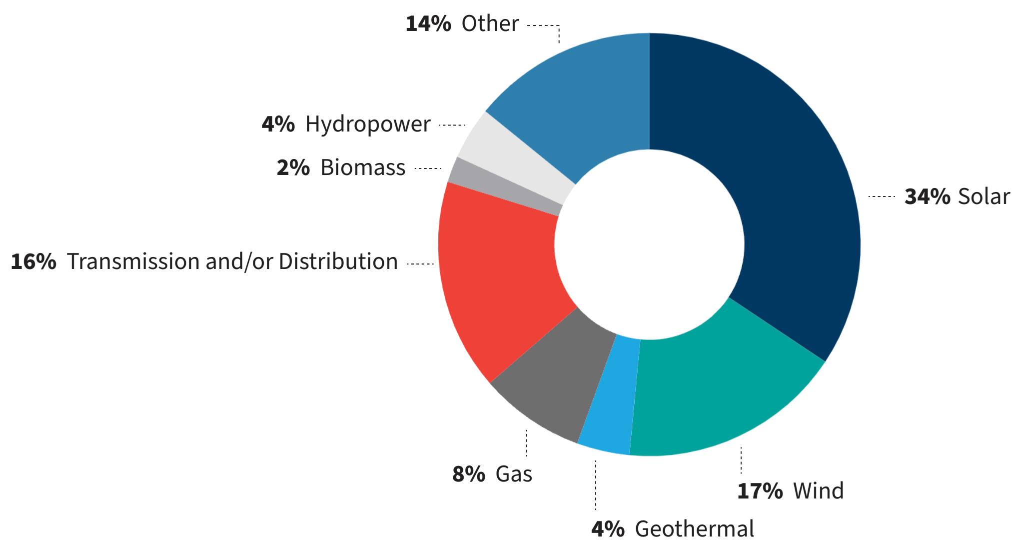
Figure 10. Reasons Cited for U.S. Opposition Votes Against Energy Projects Presented to MDB Boards, January 2020 to May 2024



Note: The disclosure and content requirements are stipulated in 22 U.S. Code § 262m–7, also known colloquially as the Pelosi Amendment. Opposition votes comprise both 'No' votes and abstentions. "Other" reasons include human rights and labor considerations, guidance regarding fossil fuels, restrictions arising from the National Defense Authorization Act and concerns regarding technical or financial viability. Some opposition votes cited more than one reason.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data extracted from "Loan Review Votes," U.S. Department of the Treasury, January 2020 to May 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/international/multilateral-development-banks/loan-review-votes.

Figure 11. U.S. Opposition Votes Against Energy Projects Presented to MDB Boards by Type, January 2020 to May 2024



Note: Some projects involved more than one energy type. Opposition votes comprise both 'No' votes and abstentions.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data extracted from "Loan Review Votes," U.S. Department of the Treasury, January 2020 to May 2024, accessed December 12, 2024, https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/international/multilateral-development-banks/loan-review-votes.

Moreover, beyond addressing rigidities in support for energy projects, there is also the matter of scaling up overall resources. As mentioned above, there remains a gap in energy finance across the African continent, and the leading actor filling that gap is China. In an era of "polycrises," expanding the World Bank's effective resources without relying on advanced economies, including the United States, to divert additional financing away from their individual interests is crucial.[65] Taking steps to both scale up energy finance and increase flexibility around energy projects will help retain the relevance of the U.S.-led MDB system in navigating the global energy transition.

Ideas for Implementation

Responsibility for leveraging U.S. influence at the MDBs ultimately falls to the Department of the Treasury, which issues policy guidance and represents the United States in voting sessions. The new U.S. administration should therefore:

- **Adopt a flexible approach to supporting MDB-sponsored energy projects in Africa for the purpose of spurring economic development to achieve energy security.** The Treasury Department in the incoming administration could issue a new guidance note that clearly communicates flexibility regarding the energy sources and technologies that U.S.-supported MDBs can finance. Nuclear energy in particular should receive attention, and support should go beyond financing to include technical assistance and cooperation where relevant. Such an action could result in progress in filling the vacuum of energy financing in Africa that other financiers are occupying.

- **Encourage the MDBs to undertake more energy projects that contribute to energy security in Africa and the Global South.** In addition to increasing the flexibility of U.S. executive directors regarding voting on energy projects, the United States should also encourage the MDBs to scale up their energy programming more generally. Secure, reliable energy access should be framed as a foundation of other development goals, including educational attainment and industrial upgrading, and given commensurate focus in the portfolio of the MDBs.

Conclusion

Ultimately, ensuring the U.S.-led MDBs occupy the leading role in supporting Africa's energy transition serves U.S. economic and security interests. With respect to security, energy poverty can, at the micro-level, cultivate conditions amenable to extremist interests and, at the macro-level, open the door for state actors with opposing interests to the United States to gain influence.

Economically, scaling up energy generation and access levels in African countries unlocks industrial activity, leading to economic growth and ultimately increased demand for U.S. commercial and consumer products, thereby helping to alleviate trade imbalances at least in the medium- and long-term. Furthermore, rather than abandon the MDBs to focus on bilateral assistance, as some have argued,[66] the United States should double down on its support for these institutions. The United States may be the single largest financial contributor to the World Bank, but U.S. contributions still only amount to less than 20 percent of the bank's assets. Commanding the plurality of voting shares nevertheless allows the United States to direct more funding than it need supply bilaterally, a good deal for the U.S. taxpayer.

07

Energy Security Compacts: A New Approach to Advancing U.S. National Security Through Energy Investment

Katie Auth

The Issue

Investing in global energy solutions—particularly in countries facing energy poverty—is not merely good development policy. It is key to U.S. diplomacy, economic partnerships, and national security. More than ever, core U.S. interests depend on bolstering the energy security of key allies, including in Africa. Examples include the following:

- **Mineral-rich countries that could be major partners in diversifying global energy supply chains but need reliable, affordable power to drive mining, processing, and manufacturing.** For instance, Zambia accounts for about 4 percent of global copper supply and wants to expand production.[67] But extended drought conditions have made power less reliable and more expensive, threatening the sector's growth.

- **Countries in which energy poverty constrains economic activity and job creation, triggering instability and unrest.** Electricity outages contribute significantly to unemployment across sub-Saharan Africa.[68] Power shortages and rising energy costs have contributed to recent unrest in major economies including Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa.

- **Countries dependent (or at risk of dependence) on energy from geostrategic competitors.** Russia has signed nuclear partnerships with Egypt and Nigeria, and many African countries rely heavily on Chinese investment and equipment.

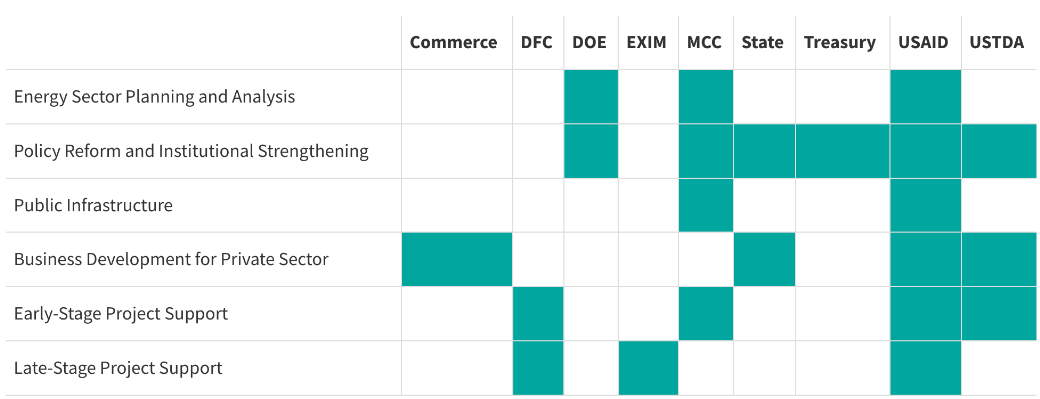
The United States needs a mechanism to address the acute energy concerns facing key allies. This would build U.S. credibility and partnerships, deliver on long-standing promises for meaningful infrastructure investment, and help expand markets for U.S. technology in the world's fastest growing energy demand centers.

The United States has great tools to support global energy, whether through direct investment, financial guarantees, commercial advocacy, or technical assistance. Unfortunately, capacity to bring those elements together in a way that actually solves big problems in specific countries is hamstrung by a few critical gaps. First, a project-by-project approach is piecemeal—not transformative. In general, U.S. development finance tools are designed to invest in individual energy transactions across hundreds of different markets—not to consider a specific country's holistic energy needs and identify a portfolio of investments to address them. Second, at least ten agencies have tools to support energy infrastructure and reform, but they too rarely get deployed in a way that proactively connects them to other U.S. resources. Third, the United States needs to provide more early-stage market support for the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to invest at scale. Most lower-income countries (including in Africa) have very limited pipelines of investment-ready commercial deals. Finally, strengthening public infrastructure (like grid networks) is a vital prerequisite to enabling energy investment at scale, but the United States has very few tools to put funding directly into these types of projects.

Policy Recommendations

The incoming administration should work with Congress to give the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) the mandate and capacity to implement Energy Security Compacts, as proposed by the Energy for Growth Hub, that could address the primary constraints to energy security in a targeted set of specific countries. MCC could also coordinate the rest of the interagency in contributing relevant tools and resources (see figure 12).[69]

Figure 12. Energy Security Tools Across U.S. Agencies



MCC is an underappreciated tool for supporting global energy infrastructure, with a model that fills many of the gaps in the broader U.S. development finance ecosystem, including a holistic, country-specific approach codesigned and led by the partner country, the ability to fund crucial public infrastructure, and a mechanism to hold partners accountable for tough reforms. But far too often, it has operated in relative isolation from the rest of the interagency. Energy Security Compacts would harness the agency's unique tools to anchor a broader U.S. package.

MCC and the National Security Council (NSC) would co-lead a process of country selection, identifying cases in which energy security investments would advance shared goals. MCC and the country would then jointly assess the highest priority energy security needs and negotiate a five to ten year bilateral compact, anchored by a significant MCC grant and complemented by interagency contributions in the form of project investments, guarantees, and technical assistance. The compact would be implemented on the U.S. side by an interagency working group co-led by MCC and the NSC.

For what this might look like in practice, consider Zambia. The country is central to U.S. efforts to diversify global energy supply chains. But severe drought conditions threaten hydropower supply, making power unreliable and expensive for mining operations and foreclosing the potential to develop globally competitive processing or higher value manufacturing. In an Energy Security Compact, the United States and Zambia would jointly identify top priorities for ensuring that power is reliable and affordable for both the mining sector and broader economic activity. MCC could put grant capital into crucial enabling infrastructure like the Zambian grid. DFC could provide direct investment in generation assets. The U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) could support early-stage projects. And, crucially, Zambia would need to commit to achieving a set of energy sector performance standards and/or policy reforms. This effort would not replace regional energy initiatives like Power Africa, because Energy Security Compacts serve a very different purpose: harnessing resources to tackle acute challenges in a small set of particular markets. Other potential African candidates might include Angola or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This model could also be applied outside Africa, to Latin America, Southeast Asia, or Eastern Europe.

Ideas for Implementation

Congress should amend the Millennium Challenge Act of 2003 to do four things:

1. Give MCC the mandate to implement Energy Security Compacts as a fourth business line alongside compacts, Threshold Compacts, and Regional Compacts.

2. Give MCC the mandate to coordinate an interagency working group cochaired with the NSC (modeled on language in the Electrify Africa Act).

3. Amend the language around MCC's country eligibility to create more flexibility.

4. Ensure that Energy Security Compacts can be implemented over five to ten years, making investment in major infrastructure more viable.

Current political dynamics make new appropriations difficult. But U.S. foreign policy has far too often mistakenly assumed it can do big things without new funding. Success will require the administration to work with Congress to increase MCC's appropriations to enable two or three pilot Energy Security Compacts.

Conclusion

The United States has never been more aware of the fragility of crucial supply chains or of the interconnected nature of the global energy system. Harnessing the power of MCC to coordinate U.S. support for key allies presents a path toward mutual resilience, security, and prosperity.

Ø8

Bolstering U.S. Leadership by Improving Africa's Position in the International Financial System

Nicolas Lippolis

The Issue

Disappointment with the outcomes of multilateral cooperation and the appeal of better alternatives have in recent years contributed to the weakening of the Western-led institutions of global economic governance. Nowhere is this disappointment more palpable than on the African continent, where disenchanted governments have turned to new sources of finance, championed intra-continental trade, and sought a greater say over global tax governance. Particularly in the realm of finance, African countries' turn to China and other so-called new creditors ultimately runs counter to U.S. interests. Moreover, given traditional U.S. dominance over the main institutions of global economic governance, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), recourse to alternative, Chinese-dominated institutions also undermine the United States' ability to project power overseas in defense of its national security interests.

Policies to improve African countries' position in the international financial system will be key to strengthening the economies of America's partners on the continent. Reckoning with their sources of economic vulnerability is essential to prevent political turmoil that might undermine their reliability and prompt a shift toward alternative solutions provided by U.S. competitors. A deft combination of actions on the multilateral and bilateral fronts can magnify the effectiveness of U.S. actions to support African economies while sharing the burden with other countries and requiring fewer contributions from taxpayers.

This chapter lays out proposals for how to strengthen the U.S.-Africa economic relationship by improving Africa's position in the international financial system. It addresses the mobilization of financing from multilaterals, sovereign debt, and the tackling of illicit financial flows, which jointly deprive African states of the funds required to cope with social, economic, and environmental challenges. By helping its African partners tackle these intertwined challenges, the U.S. government can help reduce these partners' reliance on U.S. aid and forestall the mass migration potentially resulting from economic and political failures.

Policy Recommendations

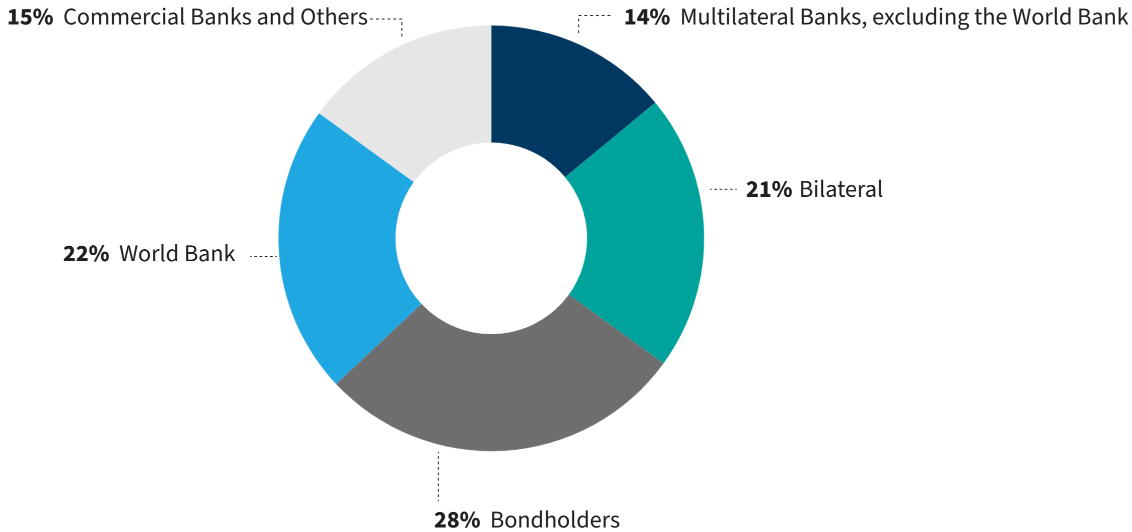
Improving the financial stability of the United States' key African partners first requires mobilizing more official finance to help them cope with the challenges posed by demographic growth, urbanization, and climate change. While the United States and its G7 partners have made some progress in closing the gap with China in the provision of official finance, this is mostly because of a drastic fall in Chinese overseas finance (see figure 13). In fact, figure 13 shows that Western-led multilateral development banks (MDBs) have increased their volumes of financing only more recently, and more timidly, than G7 governments. Reforms to MDBs will be required to mobilize more financing and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of lending operations.[70] These reforms, detailed below, would come at a very limited cost to American taxpayers and would help fortify the financial standing of U.S. allies on the African continent, thereby increasing the attractiveness of partnering with the United States.

Figure 13. As Chinese Overseas Lending Declines, G7 Bilateral Flows Are Increasing

Note: Figures include both Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Other Official Flows (OOF), consisting mostly of concessional loans.

Source: Author's calculations based on data extracted from "OECD Data Explorer," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), December 12, 2024, https://data-explorer.oecd.org.

Figure 14. Decomposition of 'Sub-Saharan' Africa's External Sovereign Debt Stock by Creditor, 2022



Source: Author's calculations based on data extracted from "International Debt Statistics (IDS)," World Bank Group, February 29, 2024, https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/debt-statistics/ids.

As much as increased international financial institution (IFI) financing is essential for helping African countries deal with their present challenges, reforms will have limited effects if new funds are used to repay existing creditors. This is a real risk in a region where half of the countries are in debt distress or at risk of it.[71] Financial stability is unlikely to be achieved without significant debt relief. However, most African countries are reluctant to restructure, given how costly it is to do so under the current international debt architecture, a problem that the G20's flagship Common Framework for Debt Treatments has not been able to overcome.[72] Negotiations have stumbled upon conflicting definitions of "comparability of treatment" (or what constitutes equivalent restructuring terms for different types of debt) and poor information sharing among relevant parties. Underlying these difficulties is the perception that debt negotiations are being weaponized for geopolitical goals.[73] But even though the rivalry between Chinese and Western official creditors has certainly contributed to the slow pace of debt negotiations, a lack of burden-sharing by the private sector and multilaterals' refusal to participate in debt relief have also hampered restructuring efforts.[74] Yet, as figure 14 shows, it is precisely bondholders and multilaterals—particularly the World Bank—who are the main holders of Africa's $500 billion in external sovereign debt. Here, the U.S. government can help clear these obstacles through domestic law and through its influence over the IFIs, as discussed below.

While debt restructuring will go a long way toward ensuring more resources stay in Africa, a repeat of the boom-bust cycles that have characterized the continent's economic fortunes in the past can only be avoided if capital flight is effectively tackled.[75] At the root of the illicit financial flows that underlie capital flights are the services offered by the "offshore world."[76] Although much of this activity takes place in the island- and city-states traditionally associated with offshore financial centers, it is to large metropolitan economies such as the United States and the United Kingdom that many of these illicit financial flows are directed.[77] Even with respect to the smaller offshore centers, the United States is far from powerless, as it can use its overwhelming power over the international financial system to compel recalcitrant jurisdictions to comply with its policies.[78] Not only would addressing illicit financial flows benefit ailing African economies, it would also dovetail with global policies to curb profit-shifting and tax avoidance, thereby allowing the U.S. government to reduce the tax burden on its own citizens.

Ideas for Implementation

Although far-reaching reforms to global economic governance are likely to offer the most sustainable route to resolving many of Africa's financial woes, there are specific policy measures that the U.S. Department of the Treasury and other government agencies can support to have an immediate impact:

- To **increase IFI lending capacity**, the United States can build on recent progress in allowing IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) to be rechanneled towards MDBs.[79] It now behooves holders of SDRs, which are distributed according to the shares held in the IMF, to give permission for this rechanneling to take place. Given many high-income countries' reluctance to repurpose SDRs in this way, the U.S. Treasury can take the lead in coordinating between them and support the direct allocation of SDRs to MDBs in the future.[80] Together with other measures, such as the ongoing review of Capital Adequacy Frameworks, or even recent proposals to sell part of the IMF's gold reserves,[81] these measures would allow MDBs to increase their lending capacity without the need to deploy much additional taxpayer money, while simultaneously advancing U.S. strategic goals.

- **Streamlining the sovereign debt architecture** will require finding instruments to compel all classes of creditors to promptly participate in restructuring negotiations and thus avoid the "too little, too late" problem.[82] Given that most Eurobond issuances take place under New York law, the "Sovereign Debt Stability Act," currently under review in the New York State Assembly, would help ensure greater private sector participation in debt restructurings.[83] While the federal government does not have power over New York legislators, it is likely that adopting favorable public positions can influence the balance of opinion in favor of the bill. Meanwhile, the U.S. Treasury can wield power over MDBs, which it could encourage to reconsider the idea that their "preferred creditor status" shields them from participating in debt restructurings.

- Finally, **tackling illicit financial flows** requires building on recent progress in clamping down on money laundering within the United States and using the government's global influence to push for similar measures in countries that continue to facilitate money laundering.[84] This would not only favor the United States in its competition for influence in Africa,[85] but it would also stem the hemorrhaging of Africa's resources and thereby reduce African dependence on U.S. aid dollars. To that end, the United States can apply tools it has often used in the past, including domestic tax laws, the unilateral adoption of regulations by the Treasury, and other measures intended to restrict access to the U.S. market.[86] More generally, the U.S. government should pay attention to African countries' demands for a global tax regime that does not put them at a disadvantage when collecting cross-border taxes.[87]

The author would like to thank Anahí Wiedenbrüg for comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

09

Halting Africa's Brain Drain Through Targeted Reform of the U.S. International Student Visa Regime

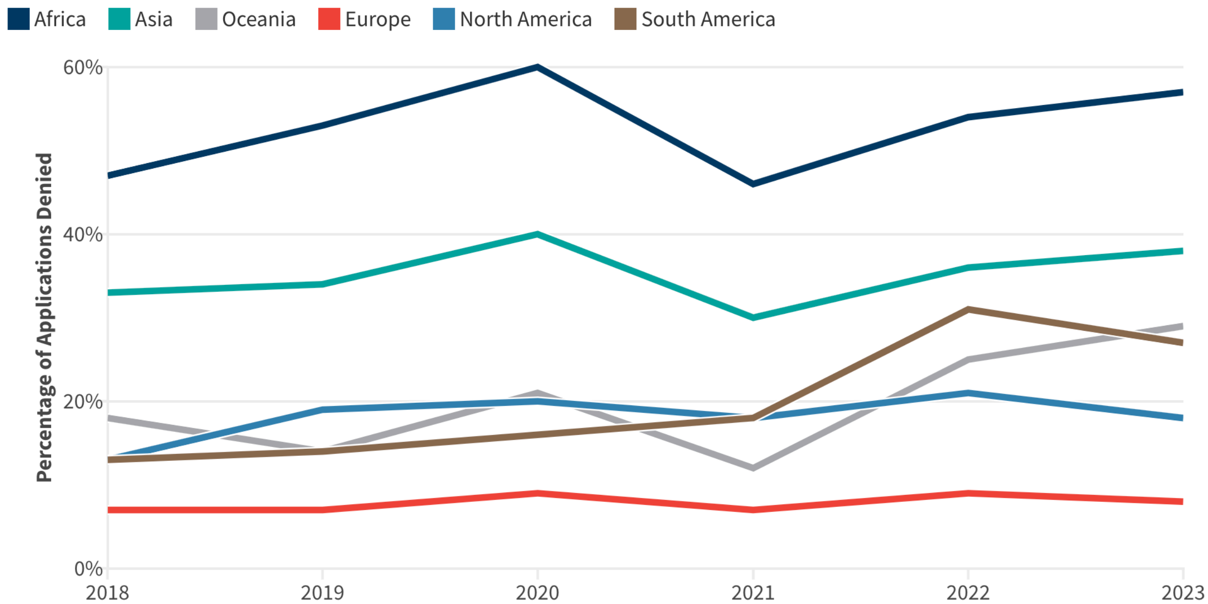
Blain Solomon and Tani Washington

The Issue

The current U.S. visa system can be better structured to support the incoming administration's national security priorities, with particular emphasis on tools to increase and strengthen bilateral relationships with African partners. A targeted reform of the U.S. student visa regime can offer a more efficient path to operationalize an already highly selective pool of nonimmigrant global leaders. The exchange of intellectual capital and human capacity is as much a trade relationship as any other, and empowering skilled African youth to gain formal or technical education in the United States will benefit both the American economy and students' home countries.

Notably, other countries—both U.S. allies and competitors—are receiving more African students than the United States. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's 2023 analysis, "What Are the Top Global Destinations for Higher Education for African Students?," found that France and China surpassed the United States in hosting foreign African students.[88] Middle powers like Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia also featured within the top ten countries for postsecondary education abroad. Ironically, in so far as it concerns the international student population in the United States, China currently sends more foreign exchange students to the United States than any other country and remains the largest source of U.S. international students, even though Africa's youth population is several times larger than China's.[89] An effort to update the U.S.-Africa educational partnership would help reposition the United States' educational soft power on

Figure 15. U.S. Student Visa Denial Rate by Region



Source: Bhandari Rajika, O'Haire Hilary, Landry Shelley, and Welch Jill, "An Analysis of Visa Denials and International Student Flows to the U.S.," Shorelight Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, May 2024, https://shorelight.com/student-stories/shore-light-and-presidents-alliance-report-shows-disproportionate-f-1-visa.

the continent. Moreover, a May 2024 study found that the United States denied nearly 60 percent of African student visas in 2023 (see figure 15).[90] In fact, of the top fifteen nations where U.S. student visas were denied at an increased rate, African countries constituted the lion's share at 80 percent.

These very high denial rates of African student visas to the United States should be of concern as the United States tries to compete with China in low and middle-income countries around the world. By 2050, more than 25 percent of the global population will be African.91 An increase in the presence of African students in the United States helps to strategically secure commercial, industrial, and political footholds abroad. Additionally, African students seeking higher education and technical training abroad are likely to be highly skilled, high achieving, and highly motivated. It is also important to note that the continent's vast natural resource landscape empowers an essential suite of U.S. consumer technologies and global energy supply chains. Student visas serve as a platform for building intellectual and technical alignment, and those who can contribute greatest in U.S. educational or technical programs are also those who, upon returning home, can forge the strongest diplomatic ties between the United States and their home country's energy, technology, and trade sectors.

Policy Recommendations

The incoming administration should make targeted reforms to the international student visa structure that occur alongside programmatic innovation in broadening U.S. education access and partnership building. Visa reforms should build on efforts to strengthen programmatic initiatives like the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) and the State Department's historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) administrative exchange program, which both increasingly reflect the United States' changing perspective on the role of global intellectual capital.

First, the new administration should create a separate preferential visa class for students applying to graduate programs in STEM,[92] which could include selective qualification for expedited visa appointments, increased and specialized staff, or waived or reduced visa fees. The reputational harm posed by the persistent and widening disparity in denial rates for African student visas compared to other regions may be detrimental to America's ability to partner with a new generation of the African professional class and intelligentsia, especially if they are being trained by competitor countries like China. Per recent surveys, America's popularity among young Africans has already started to lag perceptions about China, with 82 percent of African youth regarding China favorably in 2024 compared to 79 percent in 2020.[93] In contrast, 79 percent of African youth had favorable views toward the United States in 2024 compared to 89 percent in 2020.

Distinguishing STEM graduate degree student visa applicants and providing them preferential windows for acceptance is beneficial to U.S. interests. Reforming the disparity in visa acceptances for this demographic will more immediately catalyze the number of skilled experts returning to the African continent that the United States can engage with. In support of tailoring student visa reform along postsecondary lines, immigration law already recognizes a distinction between F-1 degree and M-1 vocational student visa programs. The difference in sophistication acknowledged between vocational and degree programs brings into question why a similar distinction does not exist between bachelor's and graduate degree programs. The imperative for a distinction between bachelor's and graduate recognition within the U.S. student visa regime is especially apparent within the STEM context, where graduate degree programs extend a sizable gap in expertise and professional deployment.

Moreover, preferential status for STEM graduate degree seekers could promote local investment into African collegiate and professional ecosystems for bachelor's degrees. This has the potential to address U.S. immigration concerns while counteracting a possible African brain drain as graduate degree seekers tend to be older with more established ties to their home country.

Second, the incoming administration should design initiatives that directly engage major U.S. and African universities and technical institutions with one another, which would promote stronger U.S. capacity to develop domestic intellectual capital. The U.S. Bureau of African Affairs' University Partnerships Initiative (UPI) between the Kwame

Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the Texas International Education Consortium, and Iowa State University stands as an example ripe for replication. Carnegie's recent publication, "Realizing the International Potential of the CHIPS and Science Act's Technology Hubs," also provides a detailed account of initiatives that support bilateral technical relationships with individual African countries and cities.[94] These initiatives were created by the U.S. Africa Command State Partnership Program, which encourages the development of economic, political, and military ties between U.S. states and partner nations. Seven of the United States' thirty-one technology hubs are located in states currently enrolled in the State Partnership Program. Leveraging these existing tech hubs provides a unique opportunity to create similar relationships with other institutions across the country, like the Department of Energy's seventeen national labs. Study centers, such as the West African Research Association in Boston, Massachusetts, and the West African Research Center in Dakar, Senegal, further illustrate an existing interconnected framework. Overall, leveraging sister cities, typically centered around facilitating cultural ties, can provide the bedrock for establishing further bilateral state-specific educational relationships.

Conclusion

Through visa reforms, the backing of preexisting leadership initiatives, and the establishment of subnational technical partnerships, the United States can help accelerate a youth-driven sense of African self-determination and the capabilities needed to advance effective and strategic alliances. Conscious of national security concerns, U.S. support for increased scholarships and exchange programs are contingent on there being streamlined pathways for students to return to their home countries and act as intellectual ambassadors.

Importantly, the ideological outlook that the U.S. academic landscape affords can also build a consensus around global governance, international cooperation, and economic and political systems. Young, educated Africans who are obligated to return to the continent could provide a source of preemptive, value-based diplomacy that could offer long-term mutual benefit across trade, economic, and geopolitical objectives. Bilateral partnerships around education will be a critical step in the right direction toward ensuring growth in ways that amplify aligned interests.

10

Repositioning U.S. Diplomacy in Africa with Adequate Staffing and Resources

Anthony Carroll and Andrew Danik

The Issue

Over the past two decades, the United States' presence in Africa has been markedly diminished, affecting American visibility and influence on the continent. This chapter discusses the causes and magnitude of this decline and offers remedies to reposition U.S. diplomacy on the continent so that America becomes a more visible partner in an era of great power competition.

This decline of U.S. influence can be attributed to two factors. First, new entrants have displaced traditional powers on the continent, including the United States, Europe, and Japan, in diplomatic, commercial, and security spheres. These new entrants include China, India, Türkiye, and the Gulf states. And after a decrease in influence and engagement after the end of the Cold War, Russia reentered the stage in this decade. While its commercial influence is small, Russia has proved its ability to disrupt ties through the use of opaque security arrangements and widespread disinformation campaigns. As discussed elsewhere in this compendium, China has displaced both the United States and European powers, not only in the commercial sphere but in influence as well. The second reason for the decline in U.S. influence in Africa is self-imposed, namely that there has been a relative qualitative and quantitative decline in U.S. traditional, public, and commercial diplomacy.

How U.S. Diplomatic Presence Fell Behind in Africa

During the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. diplomatic influence in Africa was ascending as the former colonial powers on the continent were in retreat. This ascent was partly motivated by competition with the Soviet Union but also because of aspirations to inculcate new African democracies with American values. As a result, the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other affiliated agencies were able to recruit highly motivated Americans for diplomatic and other international positions. Many of these new hires had field experience and deep local understanding developed through service with the Peace Corps and various academic and humanitarian institutions.

However, since the end of the Cold War, there has been a decline in ambition of U.S. engagement with Africa and a concomitant decline in the appeal of African assignments to advance personal professional careers within the State Department. Moreover, since the 1990s, there has been a retreat of U.S. diplomatic engagement at the interpersonal level within foreign countries, owing to concerns over personal security that leave American diplomats behind near-fortress walls. This tactic ignores the criticality of personal relationships to diplomacy on the African continent.

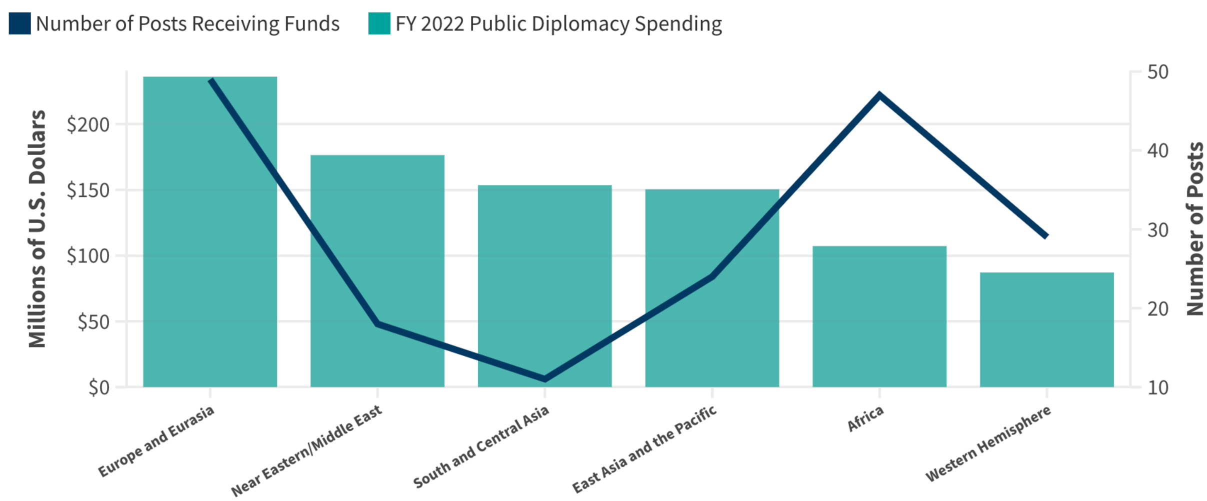
Apart from these constraints, the laxity of diplomats in the field has been interpreted by Africans as a lack of interest in the continent, despite exhortations from U.S. leadership that "Africa matters."[95] Observers have remarked that it is hard to discern a consistent thread of U.S. policies toward Africa. Rather, there is a preoccupation with crisis management, to varying degrees of success, and the assertion of social-value based agendas that are often at variance with many African cultures. This pattern of missteps has enabled competitors to disparage U.S. intentions toward Africa, despite decades of humanitarian aid success with programs such as the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund.

Persistent absences of senior diplomats have not only imperiled the United States' image, but they have also had deep security implications. For example, there was no U.S. ambassador in Niamey in 2023 while Niger experienced a coup d'état and rising terrorist threats. As a result, Niger has welcomed Russian support to wage a hitherto unsuccessful military campaign against terrorists, sending U.S. troops packing. This failure to fully engage with Niger resulted in broken diplomatic ties and the wasting of hundreds of millions of dollars of American defense expenditures.

Apart from ambassadorial appointments, the foreign service has been unable to fill many mid- and lower-level positions, often with the result that existing staff assume additional roles. This stretches already thin budgetary and human resources, compounding the problem further.

In the realm of public diplomacy, the United States' financial commitment is grossly insufficient. U.S. public diplomacy spending—"federal money allocated towards activities and programs that focus on engagement with foreign audiences to strengthen ties, build trust, and promote cooperation"[96]—on Africa is restricted to forty-seven of the fifty-four countries on the continent and totaled just $95 million in FY2022, the second lowest among all regions (see figure 16).

Figure 16. U.S. Public Diplomacy Spending by Region



Note: In addition to individual countries, the European Union is also a recipient of public diplomacy funds, whereas the African Union is not a listed recipient of funds. "Posts" refers to public diplomacy divisions associated with U.S. missions in individual countries or regional organizations.

Source: Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, "FY 2022 Comprehensive Annual Report on Public Diplomacy & International Broadcasting," U.S. Department of State, January 1, 2023, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023_ACPD_Annual_Report_508C_v2-1.pdf.

Critics of PEPFAR have noted that the United States rarely gets credit for humanitarian largesse, but that is partly a failure in public diplomacy. While China has established Confucius Institutes across Africa and offers scholarships to tens of thousands of young Africans, the success of the Young African Leadership Initiative (YALI) is a bold example of the durable power of U.S. education.[97] Besides, U.S. education institutions continue to top global rankings of quality and prestige.

Furthermore, in terms of U.S. commercial diplomacy, Africa is not a priority. The U.S. Department of Commerce has scant presence on the Africa continent, with only twelve of the eighty international commercial offices located on the continent. Chinese consumer products have filled the void, as are increasingly Turkish and other Asian brands and vendors.[98] The United States is now belatedly realizing the importance of Africa as a supplier of strategic and critical minerals and now depends on China for many essential materials for the technology and defense industries.[99] The Gulf states are also heavily investing in African mining and mineral processing.

Policy Recommendations and Ideas for Implementation

To better position the United States to compete with other actors as a more visible partner to African countries, the new administration should consider the following recommendations to bolster the size and quality of American diplomatic presence on the continent:

- **Expedite the appointments and confirmations of ambassadors to African countries.** Save a handful of relatively large economies, these positions should be filled by experienced career foreign service officers with existing security clearances whose confirmation should be fast-tracked by a Senate that is fortuitously in political alignment with the White House.

- **Consider political appointees with business or high-level political experience and an interest in Africa as ambassadors for the African countries where the United States has significant strategic interests.** Such an approach would support the incoming administration's inclination to engage fewer countries at a deeper level. History has shown that African countries often respond well to ambassadors who bring experience and access beyond that of the foreign service. The U.S. ambassador to Kenya under the Biden administration, Meg Whitman, is an example of an appointment that was widely appreciated by a critical segment of Kenyans as she brought both experience and a private sector network to her position.[100]

- **Review State Department recruitment, placement, training, and support for low- to mid-level foreign service officers to Africa.** Diplomats serving in Africa should be rewarded, not penalized, for such service. Commercial training and support for those foreign service officers (FSOs) should be enhanced and updated regularly. The placement of FSOs as "Regional China Officers"[101] should be rebranded as "strategic monitors," and they should be given commercial training as Iran, Russia, the Gulf states, Türkiye, and India also increase their commercial and security engagements in Africa.

- **Deepen the U.S. Department of Commerce's engagement across Africa at all levels.** This should include more engagement in sectors such as strategic minerals and with the U.S. business community outside of the Beltway, especially with the vibrant African diaspora.

11

How the United States Can Compete with China for African Hearts and Minds

Christian-Géraud Neema

The Issue

The U.S.-Africa relationship is entering a new phase of unknowns and uncertainties. President-elect Donald Trump's return to the White House could open a new era of U.S.-Africa relations because he campaigned on an ambitious domestic and foreign policy agenda. Overall, these uncertainties are intrinsically rooted in the possibility that every four years, a new administration in the White House could make significant policy shifts and even reversals. These uncertainties are reinforced by the contrasting nature and position of the two major U.S. political parties on various global issues.

Where does the incoming administration stand on Africa? Should the continent expect a continuation of Donald Trump's 2018 Africa strategy, a modification of Joe Biden's strategy, or an overhaul of both plans and a launch of a new one?

Under the new administration, the bipartisan consensus on countering China and Russia presence and expansion in Africa will remain an important driver of U.S. policy toward Africa. The administration's policy toward the continent will take place in a moment of renewed partnership between China and African nations. The September 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing revealed China's long-term engagement and strategy toward the continent.[102] The final declaration and Beijing's 2025–2027 action plan encompass China's plans for Africa's development and industrialization needs, as well as both parties' hopes for a reformed international system, with the inclusion, for instance, of Africa as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

The regularity of FOCAC over the past twenty years reveals the consistency and commitment with which China treats its relations with Africa. Despite a wide range of issues related to Chinese loans to African nations, the billions of dollars invested in infrastructure and other sectors have undeniably helped drive economic growth of many countries and did not create—with the notable exception of Zambia—a so-called China debt issue.[103] This reality contrasts with the "Chinese debt trap diplomacy" refrain, debunked countless times by experts,[104] that remains key to narratives in Washington about China in Africa.

Policy Recommendations

The new administration's approach to Africa should bring reassurance, consistency, and a forward-looking world vision. In this vein, it would be helpful for the new administration to avoid the debunked narrative of Chinese debt traps, which ultimately undermines the credibility of American strategy in Africa.

Reassurance

The uphill battle for a constructive policy toward Africa will be to convince African countries that U.S. engagement is about Africa and America first; it is not a relationship that should be viewed solely through the prism of China, Russia, or any other actors. While U.S. engagement with the continent will naturally be about U.S. interests, it should also be about Africa itself and the United States' concrete offer to address economic and development needs. The insistence from African leaders that they will not take sides and that Africa will not be the battleground of a new Cold War between the West and China reinforces the need to not make the competition with China the centerpiece of U.S. policy in Africa.[105]

Reassurance will start with the narrative. Although the new administration has expressed its hawkish position toward China while engaging Africa, the official narrative should emphasize the independent merits of engaging with the continent. The messaging must be clear, without any ambiguity, that the United States is engaging with African countries for both parties' mutual benefits. Another way to communicate reassurance will be through the regularity and consistency of the U.S.-Africa leadership summit. Making this a regular event will help convey the extent to which the United States values its relations with Africa.

The absence of such a reassurance will accelerate the erosion of the United States' image and soft power on the continent. Despite wide-held positive perceptions of America in Africa, the United States has been losing ground in the hearts of many African citizens who now see China's economic and political influence very favorably (see figure 1 in chapter 1). Putting excessive pressure on African countries to align with Washington will also likely backfire in a continent where there are calls for political independence and noninterference. The wave of recent coups in West Africa and the unprecedented expulsion of Western diplomatic and military personnel from Niger have shown Western powers, as discussed in Chapter 5, can fast become unpopular and derided. Results of recent surveys corroborate that reality.[106]

Consistency and Results

A competitive approach to engaging with Africa will have to be bold, with promises to deliver concrete results for the continent. The Lobito Corridor project as discussed in Chapter 3, one of the most important and ambitious American-backed initiatives in Africa in recent years, has the potential to mark the return and the commitment of the United States to the continent. What has been framed as the United States' first tangible step to compete with China in Africa can be a building block of the new administration's vision for supporting Africa's economic development. Implemented correctly and beyond the scope of the geopolitical narrative, the project will help unlock southern Africa's regional trade and boost integration.

Abandoning the project may signal to the continent that the United States is an unreliable partner in the long term, which may weaken any commitment or promises the new administration makes. If such an abandonment were to happen, it would be devastating for U.S. image and prestige when one considers that between 2000 and 2023, China built over 130 hospitals, 100,000 kilometers of highways, over fifty stadiums, and almost 100 ports in Africa, according to the 2021 China's State Council White Paper on China–Africa relations.[107] In contrast, it is hard to find a major infrastructure project built and financed by the United States in Africa. This sense of unreliability in delivering tangible projects could permanently damage African perceptions of the United States. Criticism of the quality of Chinese infrastructure in Africa will only be valid if backed with real and good infrastructure built or backed by the United States. This is why the new administration needs to keep the Lobito Corridor project alive to prove its consistency in Africa and encourage its private sector to invest in a continent often perceived as too risky for Western investments.

A Positive Vision for the Future

The new administration will have to reckon with the reality that Global South countries, especially in Africa, are calling for a reformed international system that is multilateral and fair to all, not only to the powerful.

Ignoring these calls and preserving the current status quo will not win Africa's hearts. China, which has pledged to support Africa's demands for integration into the UN Security Council, is positioning itself as the partner Africa needs in an international system that both China and Africa want to be different.

The administration may take a series of moves to signal its intention to respond to growing calls for reforming the international system. Opening and engaging in an institutional dialogue with the African Union on the continent's demand would be a step in the right direction. By doing so, the new administration could prove that it is paying attention and that Africa matters.

However, trying to punish South Africa for its sovereign right to maintain relationships with Russia and China and hold its stance on the war in Gaza—which was supported by many in Africa—might signal that the administration is not interested in a constructive vision of the future and that it is instead focused on maintaining a status quo that suits its interest. This kind of stance would further pave the way for China's narrative for change in Africa to gain ground.

12

Bolstering U.S. Strategic Partnerships with Africa Through High-Level Diplomacy

Ramsey C. Day

The Issue

The diplomatic relationship between the United States and Africa has varied significantly by country, but several common characteristics have been present for the past sixty years. The United States has historically focused on issues of security, development, and humanitarian assistance in Africa. The continent has traditionally ranked lower on the U.S. foreign policy priority list than other regions, but demographic, geostrategic, and economic developments in recent years suggest the continent should play a more prominent role in American foreign policy. As the United States seeks to reinvigorate its engagement, the need for a thoughtful approach to strengthen diplomatic ties and facilitate mutual economic growth has never been clearer. The incoming U.S. administration presents a unique opportunity to redefine, modernize, and strengthen the U.S.-Africa partnership in ways that benefit both parties.

High-level diplomatic engagement will be critical in establishing trust, clearly articulating the vision and intent of a modernized relationship, and promoting strategic dialogue between the United States and African nations, both individually and collectively. Regular visits from high-level U.S. officials and the inclusion of African leaders in discussions of global significance convey a message of respect and acknowledgment of the continent's increasing importance to American interests. Prioritizing strategic engagement, rather than lecturing, will foster collaboration on pressing issues such as job creation, digital transformation, critical minerals, two-way trade and investment, good governance, inclusive energy policies, and security cooperation.

These diplomatic efforts should aim to clearly convey the new administration's vision for redefining U.S.-African relations and elevate the voices of African leaders in global discussions, ensuring their perspectives shape initiatives that impact the continent and the relationship.

Policy Recommendations

As the new administration considers its agenda, several messaging priorities should guide its approach to Africa.

First, define the goal of transitioning the relationship from aid-centric to a robust and diversified economic partnership as a top priority. This entails not only linking continued investments in democratic governance, health programs, and humanitarian aid to American values but also helping to establish Africa as a viable and attractive economic destination for American commercial investment. These efforts should also emphasize the importance of African nations working with the United States on economic policy reform, digitization, and an all-of-the-above energy approach to ensure inclusive access to energy to fuel the continent's economic growth.

Second, clearly communicate to all African nations that their respective level of commitment to modernizing their relationship with the United States will determine the level of American diplomatic engagement and development assistance. Any expectations that President-elect Donald Trump will continue to support historical levels of foreign assistance in traditional sectors through traditional methods in the absence of a clear commitment to the reforms necessary to modernize the relationship are likely to be met with disappointment. To demonstrate a commitment to long-term engagement, it will be essential for African countries to establish clear goals with measurable outcomes and understand that American engagement, both in diplomacy and development, will be aligned to U.S. strategic and security interests.

Lastly, the administration should emphasize its desire to help end conflicts, particularly in Sudan. It should communicate its willingness to engage diplomatically and with African leaders and multilateral institutions to hold perpetrators of war crimes and human rights violations accountable.

Ideas for Implementation

The Trump administration should pursue several high-level diplomatic actions to reinforce its messaging to African leaders:

- **Host a U.S.-Africa business summit.** A pivotal step in enhancing U.S.-Africa relations would be to host a U.S.-Africa business summit within the first two years of the administration. This flagship event, on par with the 2014 and 2022 U.S.-Africa

Leaders Summits, but framed in a markedly different manner, would serve as a platform for government officials, private sector leaders, and leading entrepreneurs from the United States and Africa to discuss economic opportunities and partnerships on the continent. By showcasing African markets and investment potential, the summit could attract U.S. businesses looking to expand their footprint in Africa, particularly for high-profile initiatives such as the Lobito Corridor project (see Chapter 3 on the subject). Subsequent engagement in critical infrastructure projects, digital transformation, and entrepreneurship could catalyze economic activity and illustrate the commitment of both sides to a new era of relations that will ultimately benefit both the United States and African nations.

- **Plan a presidential visit to Africa in the first year of the administration.** A high-profile presidential visit to Africa within the administration's first year would set a positive tone for U.S.-Africa relations and indicate how important redefining the relationship is to the United States. Such a visit could demonstrate a genuine commitment to strengthening ties, acknowledge Africa's emergence on the global stage, and send a message to adversaries that the United States is prioritizing its engagement on the continent and doing so in new ways beyond conventional foreign aid programs. The visit should include high-profile public speeches, as well as meetings with a diverse range of African leaders, including business executives, entrepreneurs, civil society, and young leaders, to showcase shared values while reinforcing the narrative of economic partnership rather than aid dependency.

- **Assign a high-profile digital transformation envoy.** The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) along with other cutting-edge digital technologies and the role they will play around the globe, particularly in Africa, in driving economic growth and development cannot be understated. By appointing a high-profile digital transformation envoy, perhaps akin to the "climate czar" role played by John Kerry in the Joe Biden administration, to be housed in the National Economic Council at the White House, the administration can prioritize technological innovation and digital infrastructure in Africa and elsewhere. This so-called czar could facilitate partnerships between U.S. tech companies and African governments, focusing on areas such as internet access, cybersecurity, tech entrepreneurship, and the AI regulatory landscape while also playing a coordinating role for U.S. government agencies engaging in digital transformation policy, assistance efforts, digital diplomacy, and the promotion of commercial opportunities, as discussed in the digital partnership chapter (Chapter 6).

- **Emphasize security cooperation with two critical priorities:**

  Promoting energy accessibility and security. African nations are increasingly becoming metaphorical battlegrounds for geopolitical competition, and the United States must play an active role in ensuring the countries' energy security. Collaborating on energy security initiatives not only mitigates regional conflicts but also strengthens economic ties by creating partnerships to achieve abundant energy sources to fuel African job creation and economic growth. The approach should be founded on the all-of-the-above principle to diversify energy sources with the goal of ensuring affordable, reliable electricity for all citizens across the continent. By helping African nations secure their energy independence, the United States not only alleviates security concerns but also positions itself as a preferred partner in the energy sector as discussed in the chapters on multilateral development banks (Chapter 7) and energy security compacts (Chapter 8).

Ending the Sudan civil war. The civil war in Sudan is a scourge on the continent far too reminiscent of bygone eras and not reflective of Africa's aspirations for alleviating poverty and being a global player through greater integration into the international economic system. The administration should leverage its diplomatic weight and the economic aspirations of African leaders to apply maximum pressure to both belligerents and their international backers to end the civil war in Sudan. The administration should name a special envoy to signal America's intent to engage directly in resolving the conflict.

Conclusion

Bolstering U.S.-Africa relations through skilled and savvy diplomatic engagement presents a variety of opportunities to realize mutual growth and cooperation. It will also enable the United States to redefine its relationships with African nations from a donor-to-recipient approach to one rooted in the pursuit of mutually beneficial economic interests and reflective of shared values. High-level diplomatic engagement must be the foundation of this transition.

Prioritizing economic initiatives such as a U.S.-Africa business summit and playing a leading role in the continent's digital transformation will drive the administration's anticipated objectives and help advance the mutual desire to modernize the relationship. Finally, ending pervasive conflicts, particularly the civil war in Sudan, is a prerequisite to achieving many of the goals and priorities introduced in this chapter and should be paramount to both African leaders and American diplomats.

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