AFRICA iN FACT

ISSUE 58 | JUL-SEP 2021
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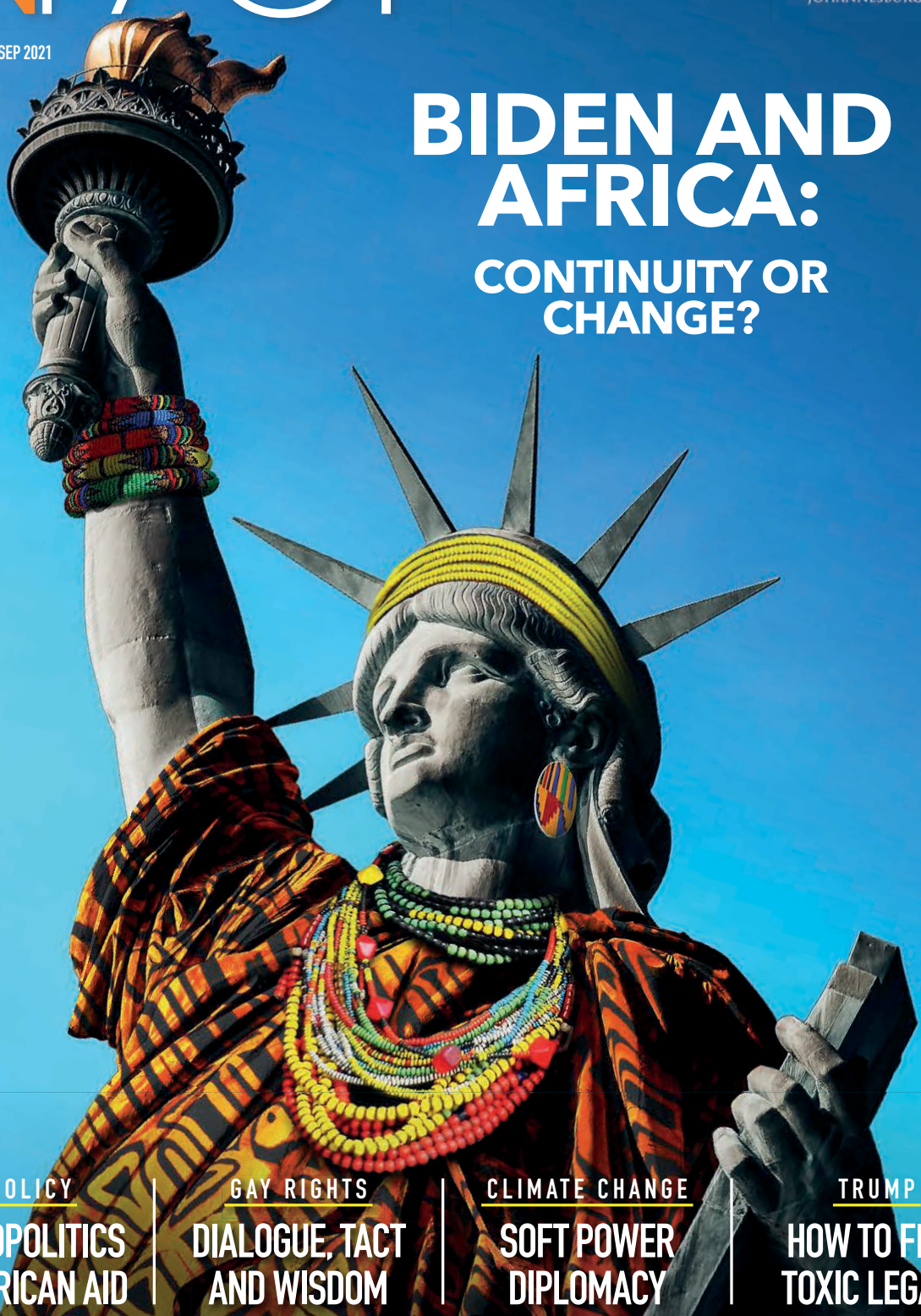
African Centre for the Study of the United States

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

BIDEN AND AFRICA:

CONTINUITY OR CHANGE?



US POLICY
THE GEOPOLITICS OF AMERICAN AID

GAY RIGHTS
DIALOGUE, TACT AND WISDOM

CLIMATE CHANGE
SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY

TRUMP
HOW TO FIX A TOXIC LEGACY

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Good Governance Africa

AFRICA in FACT

ISSUE 58

A partnership publication between GGA and the African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand

JULY 2021

African Centre for the Study of the United States
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG
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A new **VISION** for Africa?

This special edition of *Africa in Fact* provides perspectives on wide-ranging Africa-US intersections. The authors were part of the many virtual sessions convened throughout 2020 as webinars became a media platform of choice for a world blasted by a pandemic like no other. The objective is not to merely reflect on what went down but, more importantly, how Africa should approach the reigning superpower.

BOB WEKESA
is the acting director of the African Centre for the Study of the US at Wits University and a communications and geopolitics scholar
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The edition takes a "general to the specific" structure, from broad policy offerings to specific sectors, issues, and dynamics of engagement. Bob Wekesa sets off the discussion by framing the overarching contours of what a coherent policy framework for the recalibration of Africa-US relations would look like. He argues that such a framework needs continental, regional and national approaches across political, economic, and cultural issues.

Francis Kornegay rethinks Africa-US policy from an African American perspective, noting the unprecedented appointments and occupancy of African American leaders such Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Gregory Meeks, Karen Bass and Barbara Lee, of key legislative and executive US foreign policy installations. He argues for a confluence of the administration's ranking African Americans with their academia and civil society counterparts in reconceptualising Africa-US relations, to put these on a more productive path. Favouring a pan-African over a bilateral approach, he argues for the prioritisation

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PUBLISHED BY
Good Governance Africa
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of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) as a geostrategic route to Africa's long sought after integration. Kornegay finds that the Trump administration viewed Africa through extra-African interests, particularly pro-Israeli lenses, among others – and urges a drastic reversal in which Africa should be engaged with on its own terms.

In advocating a new vision for Africa-US relations, Arsène Brice Bado's article begins from the optimistic premise that Africa is an opportunity, not a problem. In this scheme of things, the US should privilege developmental partnership over charity. Reviewing Africa's relations in the international system over time, Bado argues that the independence era in the 1960s through the Cold War was a period of strategic importance, followed by a brief interlude of loss of importance after the end of the Cold War and an upswing in the new millennium. The article argues that the US has lost attractiveness on the continent, in part due to the securitisation of relations and neglect of human rights and democracy imperatives, with aid used as a tool for fighting terrorism. This, for Bado, is the source of the "problem" blinkers through which the US views Africa, a policy that the Biden administration should abandon and revert to a developmental partnership policy.

Sanusha Naidu's article weighs Africa's bilateral and multilateral approaches towards the US, and inclines towards the former as a strategy towards the latter. It begins by dissuading American policymakers from strategising to return to Africa as a means of shoring up its waning influence vis a vis the main geopolitical competitor, China. Citing data, the article propounds the bilateral avenue towards Africa-US multilateralism by pointing out that economic exchanges at the continental level are very low. Anchor countries - South Africa, Rwanda, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Morocco, Egypt, and Ethiopia – could serve as strategic arteries towards boosting trade in the five African regions, with big policy frameworks such as AfCFTA and AGOA leveraged, consultatively.

Philani Mthembu drills down to the implications of the Biden administration's foreign policy for South Africa, Africa, and the world. The article begins with the sobering recognition of the difficulties the Biden administration will have in reversing Trump-era policies and actions – relocation of the US embassy to Jerusalem, tense relations with China, frayed relations with Europe, support for Morocco over Western Sahara, an anti-multilateralism stance and domestic challenges, including extremism and racial tensions. In this context, the article calls for the lowering of runaway expectations by African nations about a quick reset of relations. Mthembu offers suggestions for South African and African officials: familiarise themselves with key Biden personnel and lay out a personal outreach to them; decide on concrete programmes (particularly the intersection of AfCFTA and AGOA) over lofty policies; and prioritise triangular continental projects with the support of entities such as USAID.

Beginning from the viewpoint that relations between Africa have been asymmetrical, Siviwe Rikhotso advocates African agency as the panacea in a bid to balance relations. The article's rationale for agency on the part of Africa is that foreign policy and diplomatic ambitions towards the US would assure access to global economic goods. To further justify African agency, the article synthesises the US foreign policy towards Africa, finding that, over the past three decades, the focus has been on military and foreign aid mingled with instances of ignorance about the continent as distinguishing features. Continentally, he points out that the AfCFTA is a clear example of African agency in economic and trade spheres, and argues that an Afrocentric policy framework is important because the Biden administration would not be too constrained by domestic imperatives to think for Africa. African agency would have to be forged in a take and give

compromise between competing national interests with alignment as the imperative.

Charles Prempeh approaches the African agency debate from a human rights angle, with specific reference to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) issues. With evidence from several African countries, the article analyses pro- and anti-LGBTIQ debates, with the former drawing their justification from western-inclined right-of-choice principals, while the latter invoke the ostensible un-African-ness of the practice. The American context is that, early in his presidency, Joe Biden issued statements supportive of LGBTIQ communities who had suffered reversals during the Trump administration, such as the drying up of aid to support their advocacy for recognition. Prempeh argues that the Biden administration should rather let the acceptance of homosexuality evolve over time in Africa, as happened in the West, rather than tying the issue to American aid.

Gilbert M. Khadiagala's focus on Africa-US security relations begins with a strong motivation for the need for openness and transparency, as security-related cooperation has hitherto been shrouded in secrecy and opaqueness on both sides. He notes the three areas in which Africa-US security is beneficial to Africa as: secure African societies as foundations of prosperity; lack of resources to meet security budgets as a motivation for US assistance; and the emergence of new and sophisticated threats such as terrorism where African incapacities require US support. Filled with rich historical narrations covering various conflict spots on the continent, the article captures various capacity building initiatives that African military installations have benefited from, including the initially controversial Africa Command (AFRICOM). Crucially, Khadiagala links the proclivity towards military assistance – particularly with a focus on counterterrorism – as having subverted a focus on democracy, with many autocratic regimes on the continent receiving military support despite their questionable human rights records.

Temesgen Tesfamariam trains his focus on the Horn of Africa region with regard to violent extremism. Finding that Ethiopia was favoured by US policy in the region, the article argues that this led to less than desirable consequences such as popular uprisings, endless border disagreements between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and a prolonged civil war in Somalia. After providing some compelling examples to back his claim, Tesfamariam goes on to offer recommendations on how the Biden administration could rework its relations in the region. One startling proposal is that terrorism has not been a fundamental threat to US interests in the region, although it has been a key motivator for US ostensibly favouring Ethiopia. To undo this apparently wrong-headed premise, he proposes America's involvement in conflict resolution (particularly between Ethiopia and Eritrea), not as a response to terrorism but as an approach to state-building.

Describing the 2020 US elections as a meltdown, Gideon Hlamalani Chitanga argues that developments in the US might have an impact on creating a new democracy-building and promotion approach towards Africa. This would be in the form of a shift in focus from methods of regime change to fostering democratic institutions. Arguing that America's democratic credentials were shaken to their core during the elections and even before then, he suggests that an approach towards creating resilient institutions in Africa would be far better seeing off undemocratic regimes. Among the points that he raises is that regime changes with US complicity or active involvement have led to conflicts that have lasted for years.

Amini Kajunju and Mohamed Keita bring a youth development perspective to the discussion. The motivation for a focus on youth and development in Africa-US relations is the African youth bulge, which can be a boon or a bane for the continent and the world. Drawing on youth-related data across Africa, the article argues that

African youth are susceptible to many activities that would be inimical to the continent. Indeed, Kajunju and Keita point out that African youth are already falling prey to recruitment by terrorist networks due to unemployment. Apart from places such as Cape Town, Lagos, Johannesburg and Nairobi, African youth are missing out on the digital economy due to a debilitating digital divide. Rather than merely rail against the challenges, the authors provide some interesting proposals centred on mining African youth as the continent's human capital. These include enhancing the quality of education so that African youth can find their way in the job market or be self-employed, an infusion of technology into every aspect of the education system, and improvement in vocational and technical education.

Philani Moyo directs his thoughts towards the contours and opportunities available in the environment and climate action sphere. Starting with a recollection of Trump's climate denialism and the reversal of gains made under the Obama administration, the article reaffirms the devastating effects of the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in 2017. The article provides pertinent arguments to uphold the fact that US policies and actions on climate are consequential to Africa. Moyo entertains optimism that the Biden administration would be more climate-friendly based on domestic and international actions that the new president took upon inauguration. The article offers several proposals for Africa-US partnerships, key among them the need for America to honour its obligations to the continent under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

This special issue concludes with Job Allan Wefwafwa's refreshing article on the place of social media in Africa-US relations. Key to the article is the similarities between Africa and the US with regards to social media, most of the platforms being American innovations. Wefwafwa takes stock of the fact that social media platforms such as WhatsApp were the major sources of viral news during the 2020 US elections. Equally, he notes the popularisation of American politics by Donald Trump via Twitter. After providing examples of African leaders attempting to muzzle social media, he links their undemocratic proclivities to Trump's fear-mongering and spread of pseudo truths as a political strategy. An aspect of Africa-US relations in the digital sphere that he finds problematic is insidious commercialisation, often to the detriment of African audiences.

This edition is a rich kaleidoscope on Africa-US relations and we hope readers will enjoy it.

Sadly, Francis Kornegay, one of our contributors to this issue of *Africa in Fact*, and a longstanding intellectual in the fields of foreign policy, geopolitics and global Africa, passed on during the course of production.

Bob Wekesa, July 2021

Refining **AFRICAN POLICIES** towards the US

A call for an African policy framework for its relations with America

By Bob Wekesa

The African Union Executive Council at AU headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2017
Photo: Government ZA

This article argues the case for an African policy framework with regards to the United States of America, as a strategic approach to redressing the many areas of asymmetry in relations. The absence of a coherent African policy or policies towards the US, against the background of past American policies towards Africa, is partly accountable for Africa's poor socioeconomic performance vis-à-vis the US.

The immediate background is that there was an unprecedented interest in Africa during the 2020 US election campaigns and the eventual election of Joe Biden as the 46th American president. Part of the interest arose out of dramatic developments that shocked the US and attracted rapt attention from around the world. Coming at a time when the US was being ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic, these developments rose in prominence, becoming top news events in Africa. To illustrate this point, a Google search of the keywords "Africa and the US Elections 2020", for instance, returned 300 million items in less than a minute, underlining the significance of the elections for Africa. Headlines such as "Contextualising the impact of the 2020 US elections on Africa", "The US election in November will be consequential for Africans" and "Stakes are high for Africa in US presidential election" became a sustained news menu on the continent. Virtual meetings held by African and American organisations, aimed at making sense of the elections for the continent, became a common occurrence.

In more respects than one, early predictions that the US elections would be messy were proven right. From the intemperate first presidential debate in September 2020 between then Democratic Party candidate, Biden, and the then incumbent and Republican Party candidate, Donald Trump, to the storming of the US Capitol buildings in Washington DC, it was evident that the US was a democracy under siege. After a series of controversies amid the new coronavirus pandemic, Biden won the 3 November, 2020 elections. This ushered in renewed optimism for the reinvigoration of Africa-US relations following the low level to which Africa-US engagements had sunk during Trump's presidency.

THE ABSENCE OF A COHERENT AFRICAN POLICY POSITION TOWARDS THE US IS IMPEDING THE CONTINENT'S PRODUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH A GLOBAL POWER

The fact that public interest in the landmark elections remained high across Africa was an indication that Africans had taken note of and cared about developments in the US. Indeed, broad public animation took forward-looking analyses and proposals after the 20 January, 2021 inauguration of Biden as president and Kamala Harris as vice president. Again, a Google search of the phrase, "The Biden administration and Africa", returned 42 million items in less than a minute, indicating that the discussion had progressed from electoral challenges to strategies on African stakes in the still relatively new administration. Media headlines that speak to the yearning for a policy framework regarding Africa and the US include: "The United States returns to Africa" by the American think tank Foreign Policy; "The end of apathy: The new African policy under Biden" by the German Institute for Global and Asian Studies, and "Biden's Africa blueprint copycats China's policy for continent", by the Chinese international media organisation Global Times.

That think tanks and intellectuals around the world are focused on the Biden-Harris administration's approach to Africa speaks volumes about the importance of Africa, not only to the US but to the rest of the world. These debates and discussions, however, raise questions around Africa's place in the discussions. To what extent, for instance, are Africans going beyond lip service to develop a policy framework towards the US? For, it is one thing to yearn for a policy reset from Washington DC towards the continent, and another thing altogether for Africa to develop a policy framework towards the US.

Fortuitously, the unrelenting curiosity in American electoral politics provides an opportunity for scholars and intellectuals focused on Africa-US relations to fill extant gaps and imagine new opportunities for coherent and mutually beneficial policy engagements. The absence of a coherent African policy position towards the US has long been identified as one of the factors impeding the continent's productive engagement with a global power whose foreign policy is so impactful on Africa's cultural, political, economic and security interests. Addressing this gap and exploring new opportunities for recalibrating and strengthening Africa-US ties requires new thinking and a proper understanding of the issues at play. This would help in laying the foundation for transforming the asymmetrical nature of Africa-US relations for the mutual benefit of both parties. Failure to seize this opportunity would be a missed opportunity for Africa to shape policy discourse towards the US.

What, therefore, are some of the potential ingredients for an African policy framework towards the US? Posing this question raises supplemental questions and issues. As has been debated in intellectual circles over the years, the US is a fairly homogenous entity, although the clashes and conflicts witnessed in the recent past indicate that the country is not in perfect harmony. On the other hand, Africa is a much more heterogeneous entity, comprising 55 nations each with their own claim to sovereignty. However, there are many factors of African homogeneity, including the spirit of Pan-Africanism and a shared history of colonial subjugation, to mention but two.

Even though the African Union (AU) is often denigrated as a toothless dog that barks without biting, the fact that the organisation is in place, implementing supra-continental policies such as Agenda 2063 being implemented through programmes such as the African Continental Free Trade Area, is evidence enough of some form of continental homogeneity. Indeed, a continental policy framework towards the US could serve to further strengthen the proclivity of the continent to unite.

At the same time, however, it has been appreciated that the continent is made up of regional economic communities, which ultimately illustrates close historical and cultural affinities within regions. The most visible communities in these respects are the Arab Maghreb Union, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, the Common Markets of Eastern and Southern Africa, the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Economic Community of West African States, the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development, the Southern Africa Development Community, and the Southern Africa Customs Union. The African diaspora has in recent years also been considered a region of the continent.

It is clear that tensions often arise between nations in these organisations and regions. Nonetheless, focusing on the problem areas within these regional organisations misses the point that they have had some successes in addressing issues within their geographical areas. It is therefore feasible that a continental policy framework towards the US can take both a continental approach and a regional approach.

In the debate over continent-wide, regional, and nation-specific policies, it must be reckoned with the fact that African nations have direct and bilateral relations with the US, as seen in diplomatic and ambassadorial representation. For instance, while African nations congregate as collectives at the AU and at the regional level, they also have their own interests, pursued under national foreign policies. While it may seem contradictory for nations to develop and articulate individual policies towards the US while pushing their own agendas towards the country, a closer analysis can show that the contradictions can be managed. An approach in this direction would be one in which a framework is developed at the continental level and adopted at the regional and

US President Joe Biden at Chatham House
Photo: Chatham House

national levels. Towards this end, Agenda 2063 – which has commonalities with the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and is the foundational document for the African Continental Free Trade Area – could serve as a starting point. The question would then be, how can Agenda 2063 and its 10-year plan be interpreted from the point of view of Africa's collective, regional and national interests in the US? The key point is that continental policies ought not to preclude regional policies and the latter need not be a reason for dispensing with national policies. After all, regions such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) have regional engagements with the US while at the same time, specific nations such as Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand have bilateral engagements too.

From the foregoing, it is feasible to think of an African policy framework towards the US as incorporating common positions and principles that can be agreed on at continental, regional and national levels. In this scheme of things, some leeway would be allowed for the continent, regions and nations to craft policies that would address their specific interests. Thus, the geographical negotiation in developing the framework would serve a horizontal purpose, while the specific issues across economics, culture and politics inform vertical interests. For instance, nations endowed with mineral and extractive resources such as Democratic Republic of Congo,

South Africa and Nigeria might have different priorities from nations that rely more on agriculture and services such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Rwanda. The unifying factor would still be that principles of fair trade across the productive sectors are the guiding light for the engagements.

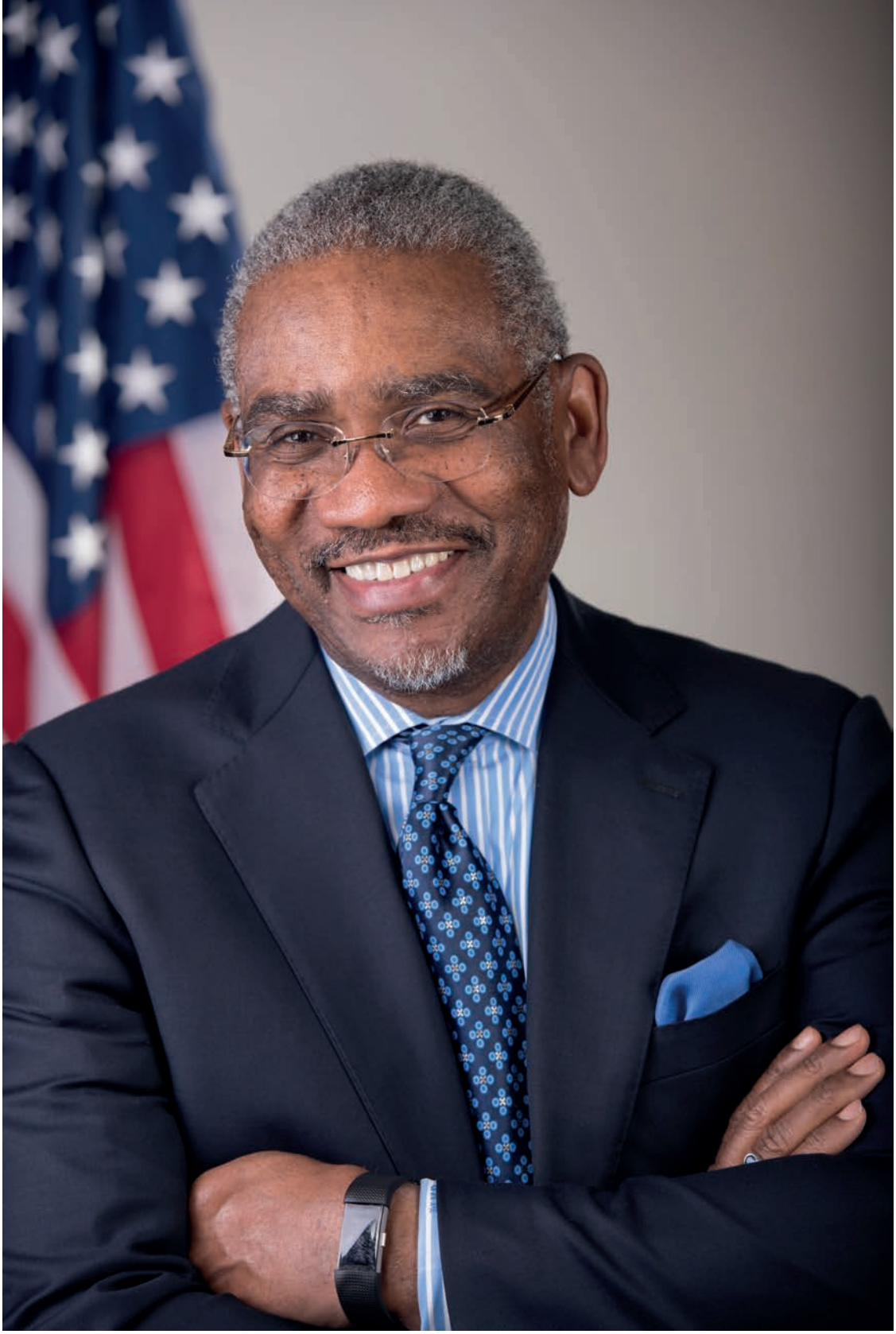
However, the geographical starting point to African policies towards the US does not comprehensively address the crucial issue of the analysis that would go into their formulation. Over the past couple of weeks and months, there has been a vibrant debate on the continuities and discontinuities of the US policy towards Africa under the Biden-Harris administration. Intellectuals have offered probabilities and hypotheses across policy issues ranging from trade and economics to geopolitics and constitutionalism, democracy and human rights; defence, military, deradicalisation, counter-terrorism, peace, and security; and environment and climate change, among others.

Such policy analysis efforts are useful as they would provide information on the direction that the Biden administration is taking as a prerequisite to a policy response from Africa. However, a focus on what the US does towards Africa should not be the core of the continent's foreign policy formulation. African intellectuals have debated the concept and practice of African agency for many years. An African policy strategy towards the US provides an opportunity for Africans to use the agency they possess to propose clear interests towards the US, thereby opening an opportunity for negotiation. After all, the politics of policy development demand that a party looking to develop mutually beneficial relations should begin at home, with their own interests, before setting out to negotiate with the other party. In other words, Africa should approach the US as an actor rather than waiting to be acted on.

Perhaps a fundamental question in the whole issue of Africa's policy towards the US is the question of who should develop it. Just which actors and communities would be most strategic and proactive in shaping Africa-US engagements and the terms of engagement in the coming decades? It is easy to quickly conclude that policymakers, especially those from governments, should lead the way. However, as it has been pointed out, in some respects, government officials – who are often politicians or closely allied with political classes – may be more of an impediment to policy formulation than being facilitators. For instance, if an African policy framework towards the US is strong on issues of democracy and human rights, illiberal regimes on the continent might not sign on it. Also, governments may not necessarily have the intellectual tools to undertake the odious job of analysing documents and scenarios. Indeed, intellectuals working within academic institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector may be more proximate to the issues that need to be analysed in the course of policymaking.

THE POLITICS OF POLICY DEVELOPMENT DEMAND THAT A PARTY SHOULD BEGIN AT HOME WITH THEIR OWN INTERESTS

At the same time, however, a policy framework towards the US might not take off if governments dismiss it or stall implementation. All this suggests the need for building consensus on an agenda for engagement, drawing on informed knowledge, diplomatic experience, and expertise in various fields. Policy formulation and plans of action at the state and non-state levels, and at bilateral and multilateral levels, will require strategic consultation, networking and mobilisation. Africans will have to provide leadership for the project of building a coherent continental policy for engaging the US in a competitive and rapidly changing world order.



Rethinking US-AFRICAN RELATIONS

African-Americans in the US official foreign affairs establishment have the potential to shape relations between Africa and their country

By Francis A Kornegay, Jr

As the Joe Biden-Kamala Harris administration gets underway, there are important collateral developments that may give momentum to what has been a growing consensus on a much-needed rethinking of US-Africa policy. The ascension of New York congressman Gregory Meeks to chair the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the first member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) to occupy this strategic foreign policy gateway, is a major advance in African-American foreign policy influence.

Meeks should add much-needed political will to the chairmanship of the Africa Subcommittee, headed by fellow Black Caucus member Karen Bass, while veteran Caucus member Barbara Lee, who formerly served on the staff of Ron Dellums, takes over chairing the equally strategic House Appropriations Foreign Aid Subcommittee.

These developments are accompanied by President Biden appointing the former assistant secretary of state for Africa, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, as US ambassador to the United Nations. Never before has there been such a high-level pivotal concentration of forces among African-Americans in the US official foreign affairs establishment, with the potential to shape or reshape relations between Africa and the US and American foreign policy more broadly.

This historic black convergence at executive and legislative levels places major pressure on the occupiers of these roles to deliver long-awaited alterations in how the US relates to Africa, if not the world, more broadly. That said, what about the level of African-American intellectual and activist engagement outside government and within academia to interact with this new governmental cohort of African-American leadership in Congress and in the Biden-Harris administration? Hence, the propitious timing of the 19 February symposium, convened by Howard University's Center for African Studies on 'Rethinking US-Africa Policy and the Role of HBCUs'. This event could not have come at a more

New York congressman Gregory Meeks, 115th Congress (2018)
Photo: Kristie Boyd, US House Office of Photography

timely moment and in a more fitting venue of historical engagement in academic African area studies and African-American African affairs initiatives.

Howard University was the venue for the launch of the African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA) in 1970, in the aftermath of the African-African diaspora 1969 revolt at the Montreal African Studies Association annual international conference. This set in train an era of black academic activism in African and emerging African-American/black studies at American universities over the next decade.

Howard also hosted the CBC-sponsored African-American National Conference on Africa in what proved to be an aborted attempt to launch an Africa lobby but for the controversy of caucus members having signed on to Bayard Rustin's widely published 'Black Americans in Support of Jet Planes for Israel' in 1970. Otherwise, this momentum eventually lay the ground work for the

African heads of state during the African Union summit to establish the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Kigali, Rwanda, 2018
Photo: STR / AFP

caucus-led 'African-American Manifesto on Southern Africa' in the lead-up to the founding of the Trans-Africa Lobby for Black Americans and the Caribbean, spearheading anti-apartheid protest.

These developments are yet to be exhaustively critically assessed in understanding the lack of a mobilised post-apartheid protest African affairs activist constituency in 2021. This could prove the Achilles heel of black-led US-Africa policy progress during the Biden-Harris era.

We are now in a new day as we enter the third decade of the 21st century. There is an urgent need now to try and discern the current and future challenges facing Africa within the global strategic context and in terms of how US policy toward the continent may

require reconceptualising. With the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), this requires contextualising trade as a major, if not central component driving pan-African continental integration, and as a trajectory occurring within a dynamic geopolitical landscape of external influences interacting within the complex inter-African terrain of the African Union (AU).

The basic challenge is reshaping an Africa policy prioritising the strategic and geostrategic over the programmatic in as much as there already exists a proliferation of Africa programmes, some with more strategic significance and potential than others, none perhaps more so than in the area of trade and the future of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa); this is at a time when AfCFTA has been launched.

THE BASIC CHALLENGE IS RESHAPING AN AFRICA POLICY PRIORITISING THE STRATEGIC AND GEOSTRATEGIC OVER THE PROGRAMMIC

This is an area that strategically relates directly and urgently to the regional and continental integration imperative in defragmenting the colonial political map of an Africa of interdependent states of varying degrees of viability. Within this context, it is urgent that national sovereignty becomes shared sovereignty – a pan-African imperative. This challenge is at the very heart of the AU's Agenda 2063, which aspires to transform the continent in anticipation of the centenary of the AU's founding predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

Agenda 2063 should inform US-Africa policy in keeping with the AU's aspirational Continental Free Trade Area aim as the integrationist centrepiece for realising the African Economic Community as laid out in the Lagos Plan of Action.

This is where the Biden administration might consider focusing efforts within a context informed by the need to strategically, as well as programmatically, transition Agoa into a US-AfCFTA relationship that also factors in the fast-changing global geo-economic and geopolitical landscape of trade. Given the complexity of this challenge, the Biden administration should, in conjunction with the AU and the UN Economic Commission for Africa, begin engaging the CFTA secretariat in Accra, headed by South African Wamkele Mene, in a post-Agoa dialogue of transition into the next phase of Africa-US trade relations.

This should factor in a strategic role for the AU's regional economic communities (RECs). Such a dialogue would necessarily unfold against the backdrop of reviewing how Africa has benefited from Agoa while reversing the bilateralism of the Donald J Trump administration's highly politicised Africa trade agenda into one placing the AfCFTA at the centre of US-Africa trade strategy.

The Trump administration's bilateral 'trade reciprocity' approach in negotiating a trade deal with Kenya represented what was promising to unfold as a setback for African trade integration in moving beyond the unilateral trade preferences of Agoa. As a recent Brookings Institution analysis noted: "Although these negotiations could produce the first bilateral trade agreement between the US and a sub-Saharan African country, a shift from the regional preferential trade agreements to bilateral free trade agreements could undermine the growth of smaller countries, who may not be of enough economic interest to the United States. Bilateral agreements could also undermine efforts to create a regional economic bloc through the

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)."

Indeed, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta's decision to strike out on his own in spite of the CFTA generated no small amount of controversy within Kenya's trade community and in Africa as a whole. If Kenyatta's disruption of the fledgling CFTA was not controversial enough, the Trump administration's reported conditioning of the trade deal on Nairobi adopting a higher-profile pro-Israel posture amid Trump's Israel 'normalisation' drive, added additional fuel to the fire in reflecting Trump's complete disregard for Africa; and this is not to mention his veto of Nigerian Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala to head the World Trade Organization, leaving it in limbo until rectified by Biden.

It is too early to discern where the Biden administration may be headed in Africa policy, although suspending bilateral trade negotiations with Kenya is an obvious place to start pending the administration staffing up its Africa team at the State Department and undertaking a thoroughly comprehensive review of the Trump agenda and initiatives.

However, it seems safe to venture that the outgoing administration's Africa agenda had as much to do with its pro-Israel mid-east priorities in close collaboration with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield, February 2021
Photo: Angela Weiss, AFP

BILATERAL AGREEMENTS COULD ALSO UNDERMINE EFFORTS TO CREATE A REGIONAL ECONOMIC BLOC THROUGH THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA

in pursuit of its destructive "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran as it had to do with Africa.

Hence, its decision to violate international law and in recognising Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, bolstering the military wing of Sudan's fragile transitional government in manoeuvring Khartoum into "normalising" with Israel in exchange for delisting it as a state sponsor of terrorism, suspending aid to Ethiopia to force Addis Ababa into concessions to Egypt in mediating the stalemate over future operationalising of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

(GERD), and making the already problematic trade deal with Kenya conditional on high profiling Nairobi's already normalised relations with Israel.

Reversing these Trumpian geopolitical complications for Africa's strategic autonomy and integrity in relation to the Mideast and specifically, Persian Gulf sub-imperial aims, cannot be separated from a broader strategic agenda advancing the continent's aspirational 2063 economic integration revolving around CFTA implementation. For starters, breaking the logjam on Western Sahara by UN ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, through the Security Council, appointing a new UN envoy to mediate the implementation of a referendum to arrive at an equitable self-determination agreement that kick-starts the Arab Maghreb Union as a functioning regional economic community within the AU system and CFTA. However, at this point, it is unclear if the Biden administration is going to reverse Trump's decision to recognise Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.

There is a growing urgency to resolve the GERD standoff between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, where a pooling and sharing of sovereignty in the interest of Nile Basin regional cooperation should receive priority. Here, Ethiopia will have to concede on national sovereignty within the interdependent reality of the Nile conundrum. Resolving this stalemate has to happen in conjunction with securing Sudan's civilian democratic transition while addressing Ethiopia's crisis in Tigray, which is critical in its democratic consolidation and stability.

STABILISING THE HORN OF AFRICA IS CRUCIAL TO ADVANCING THE 'CAPE TO CAIRO' COMPONENT OF CFTA

All combined, stabilising the Horn of Africa is crucial to advancing the "Cape to Cairo" eastern and southern African tripartite FTA component of CFTA. This, in turn, has wider Afro-Asian geo-strategic economic potential of convergence with mega-trade trends in the East Asia/Indo-Pacific, where Biden will have to revisit the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, on the one hand, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership on the other, both of which factor in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) economic community. With Africa's demographic dynamism set to eventually overtake both China and India in population by mid-century, a CFTA-ASEAN Indian Ocean geo-economic convergence could reshape the global strategic landscape. But let's not leave out the Atlantic, where, if Biden can overcome the foreign policy establishment's North Atlantic bias in favour of a whole of transatlantic vision, CFTA relevance enters the equation as well. As such, Africa's diaspora, as well as Africa, itself has a major stake in affirmatively promoting accelerated regional and continental integrationist evolution.

How might these projections inform US-Africa policy and Africa-US relations? Perhaps a closer diplomatic and aid US-AU relationship might be the place to start given Washington's posting of an ambassador to the AU and an AU ambassador posted in exchange to the US. However, it is unclear how deep this relationship is and whether or not it might be upgraded into the centrepiece of US-African relations in a manner also factoring in a greater role for the AU's regional economic community (REC) pillars. These are in need of major strengthening and capacity-building as well as rationalising as building blocks for accelerated continental free trade implementation. This is where House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Meeks broke new policy ground in suggesting: "We should establish

dedicated US embassy country teams for the Regional Economic Communities, separate from the bilateral mission and staffed by representatives from the state department, US Agency for International Development, the department of defence, and the commerce department. America will not be relevant if we're not present in these bilateral and multilateral fora."

In relating such an RECs outreach to a post-Agoa transition, might it not be possible for such a transition into a CFTA-US agreement to involve regionalising the Agoa forum within the regional economic communities? Hence, the possibility for the Biden administration engaging the AU and its triumvirate governing partners in ECA and the African Development Bank (AfDB) in establishing a high-level AU-US Integration Forum accompanied by regional economic community-US forums for dialoguing and brainstorming possible differentiated regional phasings of Agoa into a US-CFTA architecture. Here, African "lessons learned" from the highly disruptive Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) experience imposed by the European Union might serve a valuable purpose in informing how the US and the AU, in conjunction with ECA and AfDB, might proceed in arriving at an equitable Africa-US trade regime, accelerating continental integration into the eventual African Economic Community. Perhaps a US envoy to the CFTA in Accra liaising with the US ambassador to the AU in engaging ECA and AfDB as well might be considered a possible nexus of US-AU diplomacy.

While the focus here has been on Africa-US trade relations, the same template might serve a purpose in the peace and security sphere as well. Operationalising the AU African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), including its maritime dimension, is critical to stabilising Africa's complex and fragmented inter/intra-state landscape for advancing economic integration within CFTA.

A STRATEGIC POLICY AGENDA WILL CALL FOR A NEW APPROACH TO CONSTITUENCY-BUILDING IN A DEPARTURE FROM THE PROTEST ACTIVISM OF THE 1970S AND 80S

On the American African affairs constituency side of US-African relations, advancing a strategic policy agenda reflecting Meeks' regional economic communities caveat will call for a new approach to constituency-building in a departure from the protest activism that animated the anti-apartheid-centred Africa lobby of the 1970s and 80s. This is where HBCUs could play a crucial role in developing Friends of ECOWAS, Friends of SADC and Friends of the East African Community and/or of IGAD (the Inter-Government Association for Development) as US-based complements to a revived SADC-US forum with similar forums for ECOWAS and other RECs. Such an approach could, in the process, strengthen ties between African-Americans of African immigrant descent and African-Americans of historical lineages as a reflection of black America's increasing diversity.

Finally, lessons learned from the 1970s and 80s would emphasise the need for a broad-based coalitional African affairs constituency, not one organised along the neo-Garveyite principles that have much to do with why there is no mobilised constituency at present. Such a constituency would also need to steer clear of the toxic ideological and paranoid politics intersecting with racial separatism of that period. Hence, the importance of an HBCU role in African affairs constituency renewal. The 19 February Howard University symposium might well have marked such a new beginning. GG

AFRICA is an OPPORTUNITY not a problem

Advocacy for a new vision of Africa-US relations

By Arsène Brice Bado

Most African countries gained independence in the early 1960s and have struggled to find their place in an international system where the most significant rules of the game were defined at the end of World War II without their having a voice. While Africa was a theatre of ideological war between the West and the East during the Cold War, today it is still a place of confrontation between the industrial powers, who compete fiercely for control of raw materials, materials the rest of the world increasingly depends on.

Platinum mine, Limpopo, South Africa
Photo: Ryanj93

Joe Biden's administration, which began work on January 20, 2021, should adjust the discourse and actions of the US to take into account the reality of Africa's strategic importance. It is time to recognise Africa as an opportunity and not as a problem or a burden. This implies the development of new relations between the United States and Africa based not on assistance but on partnership.

Africa's strategic importance has varied according to the international relations of each era. By the early 1960s, the end of colonisation and the independence of many African countries had increased Africa's strategic importance. In that period of the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union would strive, on the one hand, to ally the voices of these countries in intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations and, on the other hand, to enlist them in their ideological camps. Although most African countries officially declared themselves non-aligned, they had more or less displayed ideological leanings towards one of the two superpowers. Meanwhile, former colonial powers such as France and the United Kingdom fought to retain their influence on the continent by establishing special ties with their former colonies.

Senegal's Army General Amadou Kane (R) walks with US Army General Donald Bolduc of the US military command in Africa, AMISOM, during the inauguration of a military base in Thies, 2016
Photo: Seyllou / AFP

In the early 1990s, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Africa lost some of its geostrategic interest as other parts of the world attracted more attention. Some of the international aid previously provided to Africa was redirected to the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Similarly, already weak foreign investment declined in favour of Asia. Foreign powers stopped supporting dictatorial regimes, which, during the Cold War, had been considered allies. These powers and international organisations began to generate a new discourse on Africa based on democratisation, respect for human rights and good governance, all of which depended on

international aid. Black Africa, as a whole, was thus obliged to take responsibility for its own future, forced, politically, to democratise and, economically, to liberalise.

The transition from one-party to multi-party regimes and the disengagement of the state from the socio-economic sphere through the privatisation of enterprises and public services would sometimes result in socio-political unrest and even civil wars, with the international community becoming a passive spectator. The Rwandan genocide of 1994, in which foreign powers refused to intervene, leaving Rwanda to its tragic fate, is characteristic of the rest of the world's disinterest in Africa. This posture did not last long, however, since by the late 1990s, Africa had regained strategic importance, both for security and, above all, economic reasons.

The fight against terrorism, which has intensified since 2001, has increased Africa's geopolitical importance in terms of security issues for the US and other world powers. The US is increasingly involved in working on security challenges on the African continent, whose insecurity, terrorism, internal conflicts, migration and maritime piracy, for example, are increasingly affecting it. The US established an Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2008 to coordinate the many US military activities, bases and security programmes on the African continent.

For a long time, the US was perceived as a key player in Africa's development, and the continent had the sympathy of many beneficiaries. However, security issues have tended to impair development. The US's approach to Africa today is to say that security and development are inseparable and that the path to development should pass through the achievement of security. This "securitisation" of development is damaging for Africa, as security is used to qualify the pursuit of specific development initiatives or approaches, even at the expense of other considerations such as good governance, the protection of human rights, and meeting the basic needs of poor and vulnerable populations. Thus, development aid now tends to be put at the service, not of the development plans of African countries, but of the short-term objectives of American foreign policy, particularly the fight against terrorism.

THE SECURITISATION OF DEVELOPMENT AID SUGGESTS THAT THE US SEES AFRICAN COUNTRIES AS A PROBLEM OR EVEN A THREAT

Indeed, the securitisation of development aid suggests that the US sees African countries not as partners, but rather as a problem or even a threat. The US no longer sees development assistance to Africa as an end in itself, but as a way for the superpower to overcome its own global security concerns.

Such an approach to development through the security grid has a negative impact on development initiatives in Africa, for instead of sending technicians, engineers and other socio-economic development agents, the US sends more and more military personnel, or at least military equipment that will only increase the likelihood of violent confrontations. The Biden administration will therefore have to rethink the security development nexus for a better collaboration with Africa.

Africa has an immense supply of natural resources. "In the five continents of the world, Africa ranks first in terms of manganese, chromium, bauxite, gold, plutonium, cobalt, diamonds and phosphorus, second in copper, asbestos, uranium, graphite, and third in oil, gas, iron, titanium, nickel, mercury, tin, zinc, and precious stones," notes Ali

Rastbeen, a specialist in energy and geostrategic issues, and founder of the International Institute of Strategic Studies in France.

It is therefore necessary to put into perspective the discourse on the marginalisation of Africa, which is based on the fact that its contribution to world trade is minimal and is valued at less than 3% of the volume of world trade, according to the 2019 Report of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This small percentage is mainly due to the deterioration in the terms of trade. Philippe Hugon, a researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research in Paris, gives an illuminating example. He says that a pair of Nike shoes, which sells for $70 costs the producer $15 (of which only $3 go to the workers), $17 for advertising costs in the north and $35 in commercial margins. Without an adjustment in the terms of trade, Africa's contribution to world trade will remain marginal. This marginalisation does not mean global disinterest or global quarantine; on the contrary, we can speak of a real increasing dependence of industrialised countries on Africa in terms of the supply of raw materials. The call for fair trade towards Africa should be an imperative for industrialised countries such as the US.

THE CALL FOR FAIR TRADE TOWARDS AFRICA SHOULD BE AN IMPERATIVE FOR INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRIES

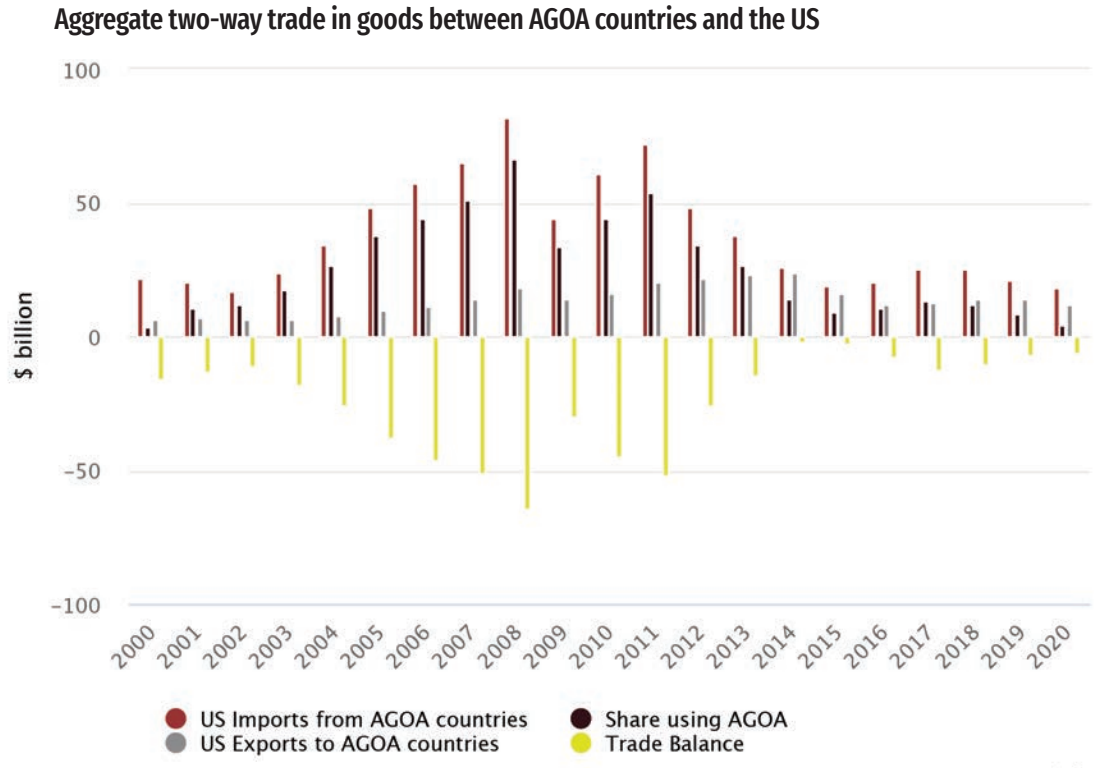
It is, therefore, necessary for the Biden administration to adjust trade relations with Africa so that the continent's trade in raw materials can be a source of development, not impoverishment.

In addition, rapid economic growth in emerging countries such as China, India and Brazil has led to higher commodity price inflation. The entry of these new industrial powers, and in particular China, shakes up the positions of dominance of the American and European powers on the African continent. At the same time, the US has stepped up its trade offensive in Africa, particularly with regard to oil, in order to reduce its energy dependence on Middle Eastern countries. All of this has transformed the African continent into a new field of rivalry between the industrial powers, at the expense of the African people. Instead of engaging in this game of rivalries between industrial powers, the Biden administration could instead help rebalance trade relations in favour of African countries, which do not ask for charity but a fair price for their raw materials.

Although Africa has a strong presence in multilateral organisations, its capacity for influence is limited by the rules of the game, which have often been defined by the great powers. It should be noted that by the time most African countries gained independence in the early 1960s, the Bretton Woods international financial institutions (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) had already been established in 1944, and the United Nations in 1945. Africa's place is no better in subsequent organisations, as these are often power relations that tend to assign to Africa an extra role.

The Biden administration could support the reforms that African countries are asking for in major international organisations such as the UN Security Council, the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization, etc. This is not a favour to be shown to Africa but a recognition of its rights.

The Biden administration could help establish new relations with Africa by restoring its complexity and importance in world trade. Indeed, Africa is often seen as a country, or even a large village that is almost homogeneous



Source: agoa.info

throughout the continent. This semantic violence projects onto the international scene a figure of Africa without relief and devoid of any complexity, leading to undue generalisations: what happens in one African country is easily generalised to all of Africa. This is the case with war, famine, poverty, pandemics, and a host of evils that suggest that Africa belongs to a world different from the rest of humanity. This semantic violence is present even in academic circles. Many academics who have researched in Africa have few qualms about presenting themselves as 'Africa specialists' although their research has focused only on one African country, and yet they are usually well received in scholarly circles. Indeed, few researchers renounce the title of 'specialist of Africa' in favour of the more humble and honest 'specialist of an African country'. But no one would claim to be a 'specialist on the American continent' after research, for example, in only Haiti, Bolivia or Canada.

Thus, various aid programmes are designed by so-called African specialists, and they ultimately prove to be of little benefit to Africa, if not destructive. It is important that the Biden administration listens more attentively to African experts in the design of programmes for Africa.

All in all, the new Biden administration is raising hopes after Donald Trump, who did not deign to even visit Africa. But it is important that relations between Africa and the US become relationships of partnership and not just assistance. The US has much to receive from Africa. But more equitable agreements are needed, free of prejudice, so that Africa and the US can discover the mutual benefits of their collaboration. GG


World Bank/IMF:
Stop Financing the
Destruction of
Ethiopia!
U.S. Government
United Nations
Bank / IMF

BACK in the FOLD

Biden's election offers a chance to reimagine the US-Africa relatioonship

By Sanusha Naidu

Even before Joe Biden's presidency could be confirmed by the US Congress, the debates surrounding the renewal of the country's Africa policy were gaining momentum. Given the chilly reception that Africa had to contend with under the Trump administration, the Biden-Harris government was seen as helping to turn the tide.

While the possibilities that a Biden government could represent a reinvigoration of the relationship, at the same time there were undercurrents in the discussion which hinted that US-Africa policy could not continue as usual. This was because the US engagement with Africa had become indecisive prior to the Trump presidency, when the traction of China and other emerging actors had become a strategic point of competition and rivalry.

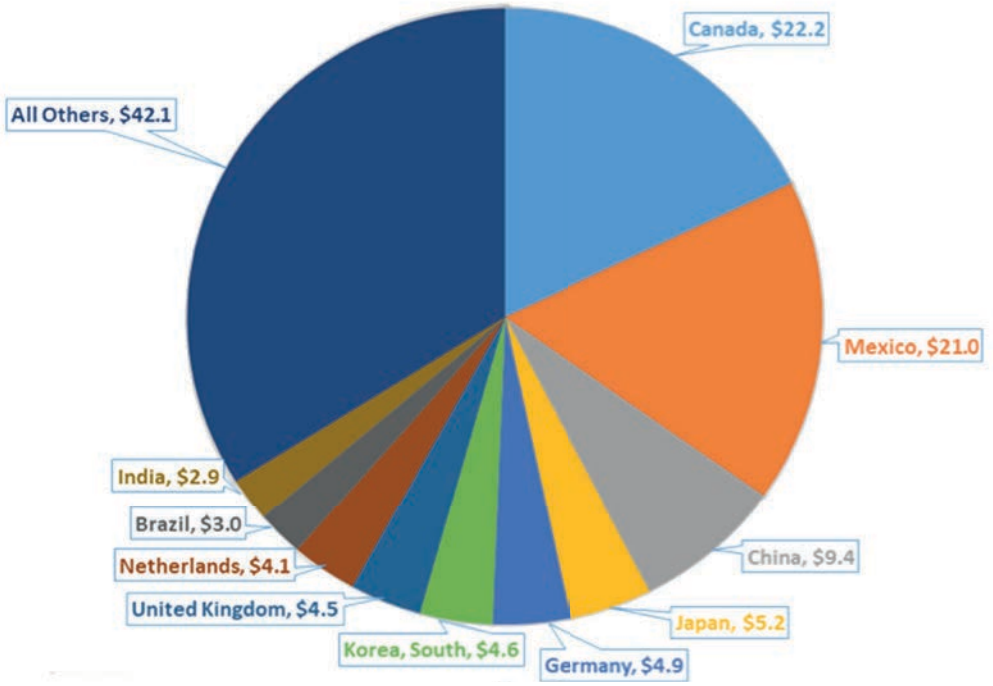
Nevertheless, Biden's election as the 46th president of the United States was as much about bringing the US back into Africa as it was about Africa returning to the US's ambit of tactical influence. This article analyses such an interpretation against the backdrop of how such a renewal of the US-Africa engagement will define the relationship beyond just a reaction to China in Africa, but also explores a policy relationship that underscored a sense of pragmatism based on an actual partnership of mutual interests.

In reflecting on what will in effect be a renewal of the US-Africa policy, the pertinent question is whether the Biden government will consider its own independent engagement with state and other political actors in Africa, instead of assuming that the relationship has to be pointed towards offsetting China's largesse across the continent.

With the above context in mind, this commentary will examine to what extent the US-Africa relationship can be reimagined from the bilateral to the multilateral engagement. So far, the optics of the narrative have been set against the perspective that the US needs to reprise its role in the continent. As far as this may be the immediate objective of the Biden administration, this commentary will argue that in consolidating its

Protestors take to the streets of Washington to protest US and World Bank funding of the Ethiopian Tigray People's Liberation Front, 2002
Photo: Paul J Richards / AFP

US exports, top 10 countries of destination, February 2021 ($ billions, not seasonally adjusted)



Source: US Census Bureau, Economic Indicators Division

Africa policy, the bilateral lens offers one avenue to reinvigorate the relationship and steer it towards the multilateral setting, which will afford Washington a complementary layer to advance its African engagement.

Most often in foreign policy analysis, the bilateral engagement sets the scene for the way a country will shape its interactions at a broader regional level. In the case of the US, this has more meaning and potential in informing Washington's relations with regional economic communities and more strategically with the African Union (AU).

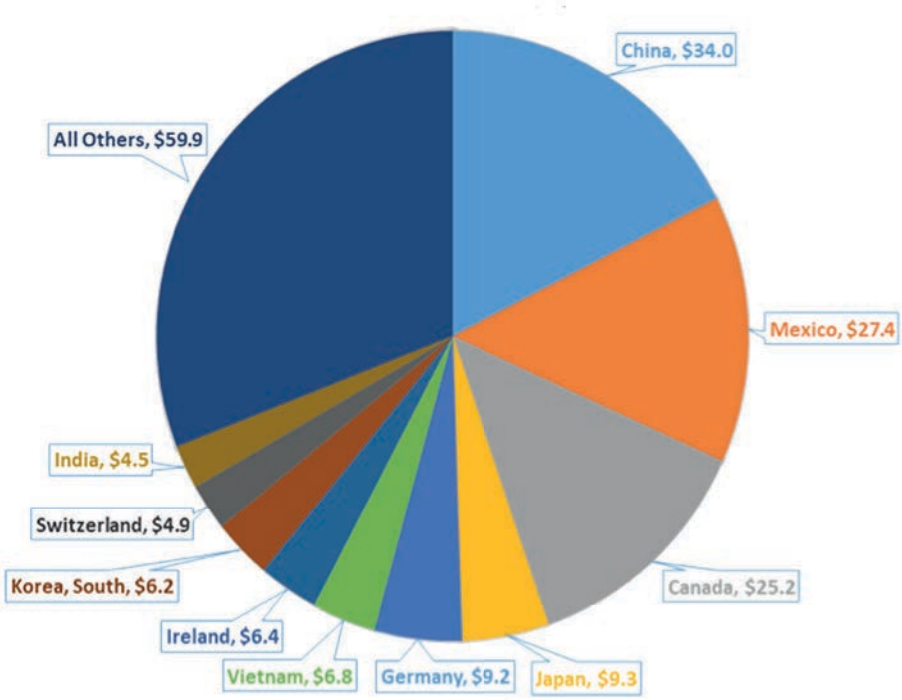
But the critical question is, which countries are considered as having sufficient tactical significance to reorient Biden's Africa policy? This will depend on both strategic influence and economic trajectory.

Currently, from a purely economic point of view, it is important to disaggregate the data in terms of who are the US's major import partners and how much the US sells to Africa. Yet more than this, it is also significant to understand where Africa fits in the US's global trading architecture. As the two figures below show, the continent has a negligible presence in the trade profile of Washington's global economic footprint.

If we further explore US imports from the continent over a 20-year period (1997-2020), we see they have shifted from a peak in 2007/2008 to a recovery in 2011 and then a steep decline to levels well below US$50 billion, as noted in the graph below. At the same time, exports from the continent over the same period have seen a steady weakening.

Clearly, the aggregate approach to the US's continental economic footprint seems to show a less convincing picture regarding how it will overshadow China's presence in Africa. Perhaps what is telling is that the bilateral engagement will provide more opportunities for the US in resetting its engagement with African stakeholders at the

US imports, top 10 countries of origin, February 2021 ($ billions, not seasonally adjusted)



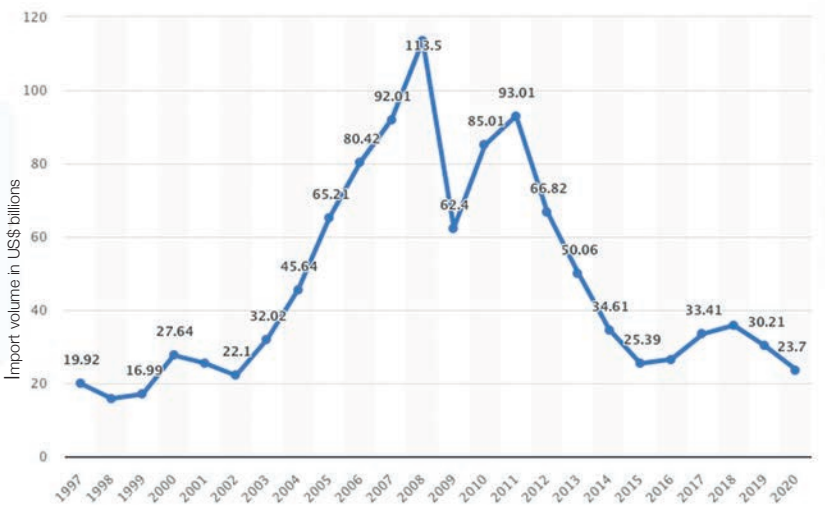
Source: US Census Bureau, Economic Indicators Division

multilateral level. For starters, thinking about localising engagements towards anchor states in regional economic communities will be a good point of departure.

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) will be the litmus test for this approach.

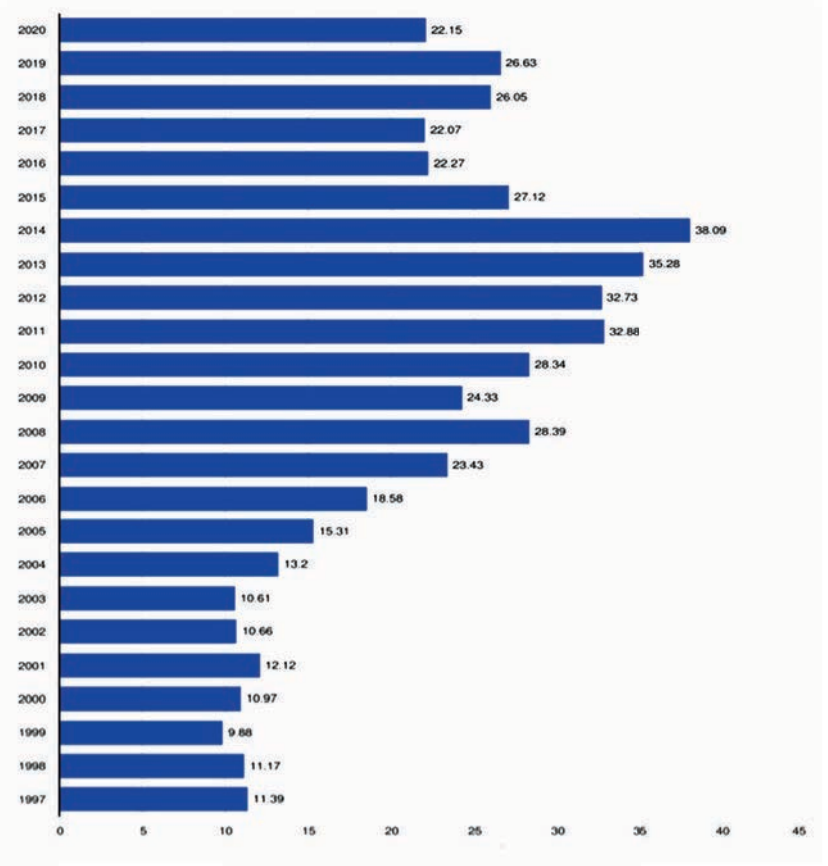
Assuming that Vice President Kamala Harris succeeds Biden as the first female black president, then the dynamics of AGOA and what defines its character and substance after 2025 will be

Volume of US imports of trade goods from Africa, 1997 to 2020 (US$ billions)



Source: US Census Bureau, US Department of Commerce

Volume of US exports of trade goods to Africa, 1997 to 2020 (US$ billions)



Source: US Census Bureau, US Department of Commerce

determined by how the negotiations are advanced in this interim period of the Biden presidency.

This is where a few beneficial options could be explored for both sides.

The first is that the Biden administration, with Harris leading the negotiations on AGOA, could set the pace for using its convening power to start the process of engaging with African anchor countries. These include South Africa, Rwanda, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Morocco, Egypt and Ethiopia. The AU Commission will initiate the strategic dialogue of cooperation and engagement of what a post-2025 AGOA format should incorporate as its focus in upping the ante on the economic front.

In this scenario, the directing of US foreign direct investment into regional infrastructure connectivity and transport projects will assist in strengthening regional economic integration programmes with a view to addressing how this will complement the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). Not only will this allow the engagement to be more consultative, but will allow the US to include a more collaborative engagement that takes into account African agency and what actually constitutes the continent's trade and investment needs. It will also allow for a more inclusive engagement between state actors and corporate stakeholders

to develop a comprehensive partnership of cooperation.

Of course, if the domestic architecture in the US shifts towards a Republican Party-led White House, then the situation around AGOA will have to be considered in this context. Therefore, to= this end, the window of opportunity needs to be seized upon now if the US-Africa relationship is to be recalibrated.

The second opportunity will be to look at how AGOA and the AfCFTA can be synchronised around the creation of regional value chains. Linking the investment around regional infrastructure corridors will open up the space for both the US and Africa to identify critical gateways that can support commercial activity around regional production spheres. The corridors, however, should not be seen as only serving the purpose of exporting to the US and global market, but should also be aimed at advancing the dynamics of regional markets that will serve the consumption patterns of Africa's growing population, and in this way, boosting inter- and intra-state African trade.

The third opening for the engagement will be to include a multi-track diplomacy tag to the relationship, where AGOA will serve to strengthen centres of innovation and knowledge hubs that will advance critical engagement on, among others, pandemic preparedness, climate action and sustainable food production. This will not only enhance the agenda on future work but also provide a platform for people-to-people collaborations and exchanges that begin with a discussion on the post-Covid architecture of a global political economy.

The final area where AGOA can serve as a significant enabler is to recognise the power of city-to-city diplomatic engagements. This is becoming an emerging space for socio-economic development finance aligned to local economic development programmes. It is an untapped market for both the US and African states to do well in shaping opportunities for young entrepreneurs, and crafting linkages with the Young African Leadership Initiative. It also represents a platform where harnessing the potential of Africa's youth can become a critical resource in advancing digital and technological investments in respect of a green economy.

HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF AFRICA'S YOUTH CAN BECOME A CRITICAL RESOURCE IN ADVANCING DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL INVESTMENTS

The bilateral engagement unlocks the potential for the way the US can manifest and rearrange its Africa policy. It offers pragmatic forms of engagement that are less rigid and geared towards looking at the continent outside of a macro lens.

But, indeed, the US's positioning on bilateral engagements has to dovetail with its multilateral expectations on the continent. In simple terms, this means that if Washington seeks to refocus its efforts in Africa towards a strategic engagement, then it has to be oriented towards understanding that Africa has strategic autonomy and Washington should not view itself as the arbiter in the continent's external affairs.

For a start, the multilateral space should not be interpreted as open season for Biden to use its arsenal based on its own form of wolf diplomacy in Africa. If this is the premise of a re-engaging policy towards Africa, then Washington is already beginning from a position of disadvantage. The primary test for Washington in its renewal with Africa at the multilateral level is to consolidate capacity and build resilience in its comparative advantage with the continent. And such an approach needs to go beyond rhetoric,

congratulatory messages to an AU summit or using the continent for military bases and other vested interests in terms of security.

So what is needed?

The most basic issue that will serve to reinvigorate the US-Africa relationship is to enhance the engagement around peace, stability and development. To this end the first point of departure is to remember that democratic politics will prevail as long as Washington realises that the winds of change for democracy reside with the citizens of Africa.

THE US SHOULD ENHANCE THE ENGAGEMENT AROUND PEACE, STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Second, the electoral landscape in Africa is complex and thus the US, like any other country, would do well to support the building of an institutional architecture that is based on African principles, norms and values rather than pronouncing for a particular brand of democracy.

Third, the notion of peace and stability, while intrinsic to the notion of electoral politics, has to be understood in the context of what are the root causes of intra-interstate conflicts and tensions. It will not be in the geostrategic interests of Washington to cast the material causes of conflict in Africa in the same light as it has done in the Middle East or on its own soil. Here, peace, stability and development should not viewed through a cursory framework. Rather, they should be measured against the backdrop of the material transformation debate of the socioeconomic politics of exclusion versus inclusion.

Finally, for this resilience to be truly reflected in the recalibration of the engagement with Africa it must also be transmuted into the way Washington embraces and prioritises the African voice and action in the global governance agenda aimed at reshaping the power dynamics of the multilateral system. It would be futile to talk about re-energising the engagement at the continental multilateral level while still enabling global conditions that hamper the continent's integration into the political and economic affairs of the international system.

The biggest difficulty facing Washington in redefining its relationship with Africa, from a strategic autonomy perspective, is China. It seems that the Biden presidency, like previous administrations, is having a hard time trying not to chase the Dragon's tail across the continent. By framing the narrative in this parochial way, Washington is enabling and strengthening China's Africa policy instead of stabilising its own identity on the continent.

It is important for Washington to consider that China, like any other external actor, is also undergoing its own metamorphosis in its engagement with Africa. While Washington may construe this as an opening, it would be wiser for the Biden presidency to look at this more from the basis of deepening its capacity and resilience based on the "Africa that we the people want" rather than the wants and interests of political and economic elites.

Seemingly, Washington's traction in Africa lies with the way the US administration pursues a mature and pragmatic engagement with continental state and non-state actors. Trying to circumvent Africa relations with other actors will be trivial. Redefining the bilateral and multilateral contours of the engagement with Africa offers Washington a more palpable roadmap for reimagining its African policy than trying to play catch-up with adversaries, and pushing back competitors. GG

Taming EXPECTATIONS

Foreign policy priorities under Biden: implications for South Africa, Africa and the world

By Philani Mthembu

Above: Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita (centre left) with Trump administration US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, David Schenker (centre right) in Dakhla, Western Sahara, January 2021
Photo: Fadal Senna / AFP

One of the major challenges for the United States administration under Joe Biden is the management of domestic and global expectations following the disruptive presidency of Donald Trump, whose actions at home and abroad continue to reverberate beyond his term in office. Many of the aftershocks will thus remain with the Biden administration.

Some of the foreign policy decisions of the Trump administration have had far-reaching implications across the world. Whether due to an aggressive trade war against China and some of its own transatlantic European allies, or through its decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem and recognise Israeli settlements in Palestine, some of these decisions will be difficult to backtrack on.

The US position on Morocco and Western Sahara is another situation that the Biden administration will be tested on. Having increasingly sought to withdraw from global institutions it played an integral role in establishing under Trump, the US administration will also have a difficult task convincing international partners that it can be relied on, and that the Trump phenomenon was just an anomaly rather than a sign of things to come. Domestic challenges in the US have also been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the country one of the most affected in the world. This is impacting on social cohesion and the ability of the new administration to effectively execute its key priorities.

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION HAS SOUGHT TO MEND ALLIANCES WITH TRADITIONAL PARTNERS

South Africa and its African counterparts may thus have to tame their expectations given that the Biden administration will, in the short term, be largely concerned with national questions related to the pandemic and challenges of social cohesion. The police killing of George Floyd and others like him, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the storming of the Capitol in light of the increased threat of domestic right-wing terrorism, have all unleashed a plethora of challenges that will likely occupy the new administration for some time. This will have foreign policy implications, and South Africa and its African partners will have to craft a strategy based on a few concise areas of convergence for African political, social, and economic actors.

It is thus important to proactively engage with state and non-state actors in the US on a set of key African priorities for the Biden administration to consider. Some of that will include efforts to reverse Trump-era policies on Israel and Palestine, Western Sahara, and mediation efforts in the Horn of Africa, made worse by Ethiopia's political conflict in the Tigray region. Given the longstanding links between South African stakeholders and members of the US anti-apartheid movement, it will be important to revive those ties at a non-governmental level in the early days of the Biden administration.

The Biden administration has made the pronouncement that "America is back"; however, it remains an open question what type of world the US is coming into. Indeed, sometimes it is assumed that the US can simply slot back in where it left off and be readily welcomed back. However, this is an unrealistic expectation, as many parts of the world have continued their economic and political objectives in the absence of the US as it withdrew from important treaties such as the Paris Treaty on Climate Change and the World Health Organization (WHO) in the midst of a pandemic. This has even caused strategic partners in the European Union (EU) to speak more about European strategic autonomy given the reality that the Trump phenomenon may continue to linger in the US for some time.

The Biden administration has thus sought to mend alliances with traditional partners and position the US to again become a respected power. However, this will not be a straightforward process as many parts of the world reflect on the possibility that a Trump-like presidency may happen again in the near future. In turn, some European leaders have been prompted to advocate for having greater control of the key value chains for the production

Lloyd Austin, Biden administration US Defense Secretary, April 2021
Photo: Kay Nietfeld / AFP

of high-tech goods that will be important for the future. What has also been apparent is that due to the fact that the Trump administration was belligerent and did not cultivate good relations with China, Biden will find it difficult to change the policy trajectory towards a more confrontational relationship, especially when the majority of the US population, both Democrats and Republicans, express distrust towards Beijing. This will likely constrain the Democratic Party government as it seeks to appear strong for the domestic population. This is especially the case given the reality that while the Trump administration spoke of a trade war, it could also be referred to as a tech war as the two countries seek to improve their competitiveness in the industries of the future.

AFRICAN STAKEHOLDERS SHOULD FAMILIARISE THEMSELVES WITH KEY PERSONNEL IN THE CURRENT US ADMINISTRATION

Having noted the domestic constraints for the Biden administration, it will be important for African stakeholders to familiarise themselves with the key personnel of the current administration, some of whom also served during the Obama government. This is important in crafting a proactive South African and African strategy towards the US that takes into account the track record of appointed officials and the domestic constraints the administration faces. Some of the important positions

US trade representative Katherine Tau, April 2021
Photo: Pool / Getty Images / AFP

that have already been filled include Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Chair of House Foreign Affairs Committee Gregory Meeks, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Administrator of USAID Samantha Power, and US Trade Representative Katherine Tai.

South Africa and its African partners will thus have to ensure the proposed agenda is not so broad that it limits the creation of concrete programmes. The proposed agenda could thus be limited to three key areas, namely economic development, regional integration, and geopolitics.

Under economic development, African stakeholders can already begin to envision and deliberate on a post-African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trading relationship with the US that factors in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). South Africa's diplomatic team in the US could thus already put out feelers to get a sense of the evolvingAmerican trade agenda, especially related to Africa. This would include a proactive engagement

with US counterparts at USAID to ensure continued support for development efforts on the continent, especially for the least developed countries (LDCs).

However, these discussions could also dwell on how South Africa and other African countries could work with the US on triangular cooperation projects. Indeed, South Africa has worked with USAID and Irish Aid on various triangular cooperation projects with potato farmers in Malawi and Lesotho. Given the growing importance of triangular cooperation to the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), these discussions could identify potential development areas on which to work together.

With the importance of regional integration to African efforts to play a more important role in global affairs, it will be important that it remains one of the key areas that African actors focus on in their relations with the US. AfCFTA will serve as a catalyst for ramping up efforts to accelerate regional integration. African stakeholders will thus need to be proactive in focusing US efforts towards catalytic projects that are able to galvanise regional integration efforts, including through the identification of cross-border infrastructure projects and providing support to customs officials to build the necessary capacity to enforce new trade rules.

Lastly, African stakeholders will have to raise geopolitical dynamics on the continent with the US, especially in rebuffing efforts to force African countries to choose between China and the US in their international engagements. African stakeholders will also have to ensure that issues such as Libya, Western Sahara, and Ethiopia-Egypt-Sudan mediation efforts on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project remain a priority in terms of moving away from some of the Trump-era posturing and decision-making.

With South Africa integral to African efforts to coordinate an effective COVID-19 response, it will be important for the country to build on this role. No longer being the chairperson of the AU, the country remains a champion of the African response to the pandemic in recognition of its role thus far.

South Africa should also build on its leadership role in the WTO, where it is leading efforts for a waiver on the intellectual property rights related to the production of vaccines, especially during a pandemic. This would allow countries of the global South, especially, to use some of their manufacturing capacity to upscale the production of vaccines to meet the current demand. While they are opposed by large pharmaceutical companies and many developed countries, these calls are gaining momentum among state and non-state actors across the globe. It is thus important to ask whether this momentum can be harnessed for a leadership role beyond the pandemic.

South Africa will however have to acknowledge that ground has been lost in recent years, and refocus its diplomatic efforts towards southern Africa, especially when it is preparing to chair the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Organ for Politics, Defence, and Security in August 2021.

Indeed, if South Africa loses any more ground in southern Africa, it will make it much more difficult for it to play an influential role in the African continent and beyond.

AFRICAN STAKEHOLDERS WILL HAVE TO ENSURE THEY ARE MOVING AWAY FROM TRUMP-ERA POSTURING AND DECISION-MAKING

Can we speak of AFRICAN AGENCY?

Should African states have foreign policy ambitions towards the US?

By Siviwe Rikhotso

The United States' relations with Africa, like most of its relations with other international actors, have always been dictated and directed by the US and its interests in the region, whether bilaterally or multilaterally. This has been the nature of its international relations since the multipolar system of World War I, that the bigger, stronger power "guides" the direction the relationship with a smaller, weaker power will take.

Former US president Barack Obama at the annual Nelson Mandela lecture in Johannesburg, South Africa, 2018

Photo: AFP

For as long as one can remember, relations between the US and African state actors have been on the US's terms to ensure that it benefits the most. Even after the advent of the unipolar international order, relations between the US and African states have been unilateral in that country will mostly achieve whatever national interest it has with regards to its African partner, and only after that can the latter enjoy any leftover benefits from the "partnership".

THERE HAVE BEEN OPTIMISTIC CALLS FOR RENEWED ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE US – INITIATED BY AFRICA AND ON AFRICA'S TERMS

However, one cannot blame the US for this because it always seemed that it was the one interested in Africa (not vice versa), the one with a foreign policy towards Africa, and therefore the one that would initiate relations between itself and Africa, even during the highly favoured tenure of former president Barack Obama.

Now that former president Donald Trump has left the White House, there have been optimistic calls for renewed engagements between Africa and the US – relations that would be initiated by Africa, on Africa's terms, that would benefit Africa the most if not equally with the US. This more than anything else, however, requires that African states have foreign policy ambitions with regards to the US, and the restrategising of certain national interests. To have relations (be they bilateral or multilateral) with the US (that will be of equal benefit to all partners) is an unofficial guarantee of access to the world economy. It is a means to becoming a notable player in transnational relations in trade, politics, and climate. For some international relations (IR) scholars, this could be considered a means of exerting African agency with regard to a dominant power and in IR generally.

Of course, the questions now are centred on why at this time develop a foreign policy towards the US? Should African states have foreign policy ambitions towards the US? Would the US be interested in an Afrocentric foreign policy framework, and why?

All of these are very important and straightforward questions that need answers, but the answers are unfortunately not so straightforward.

The US foreign policy framework with regards to Africa in the 21st century can be summarised and categorised into three former administrations, each with their perception of why and how the US should engage with Africa, either multilaterally or bilaterally.

The Bush administration's foreign policy towards Africa focused on military aid, conflict in Darfur in Sudan, sanctions on an anti-democratic Zimbabwe, humanitarian aid through the PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) programme for fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and food aid to the war- and famine-ravaged areas of Africa.

Similarly, the Obama administration was not so different in its foreign policy towards Africa: prioritising foreign aid for fighting terrorism (against the backdrop of the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York) and piracy in the Horn of Africa, supporting regime change in Libya and Egypt, food and military aid in conflict-ridden regions of Democratic Republic of Congo, and supporting the fight against the illegal trade in conflict minerals.

The Trump administration was different in its foreign policy, displaying an observable ignorance of Africa and redirecting its foreign policy ambitions towards other regions of the world. As evidenced by Trump's support for despotic rule in Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's Egypt, and general disregard for Africa, it is clear he had little interest in the continent and its issues, a characteristic that set him apart from his predecessors. His most

Former US president George W Bush at an event at the US Embassy in Kigali, Rwanda, 2008
Photo: Jim Watson / AFP

noted engagements with Africa were his controversial comments on Nigerian migrants in the US, and supposed “white genocide” in South Africa, which caused continental condemnation from leaders and officials. Trump’s non-democratic tactics and bilateral tendencies while at the helm of the White House were widely criticised by most democracies in the global North and South. Ultimately, even when considering the foreign policies of his predecessors, Africa was acted upon and seldom a part of the policies, but often the subject.

Nevertheless, some of the US's policy frameworks towards Africa were in good faith and made in the hope of assisting a suffering continent. President Joe Biden’s ascendance to the White House is accompanied by much optimism and high anticipation of a return to multilateralism and diplomacy, an approach that appears to be the opposite of Trump’s "America First" policy.

With this anticipated return to engagement with Africa comes the assumption, or hope at least, that Africa-US relations will not suffer like they did under the Trump administration, and that Africa will, for a change, be part of the engagements and arrangements, and not merely the subject of the US’s interests.

Owing to the "new Scramble for Africa", many outside powers (the US being one of them) have expressed visible interest in engaging with Africa once more. The sheer number of trade agreements various countries in the continent have entered into with external powers, as well as the very visible presence of dominant powers operating in Africa, as shown in the rapid growth in the number of embassies that have opened, are evidence of this. In this increasingly interpolar world order, Africa is projected (according to UN statistics) to become integral to the

world's trade and economy in the coming decades, and everyone seems to want a slice of the pie.

It seems Africa itself, with the desire of ridding itself of the legacy of aid, has become very active on the international scene. Since the advent of the 21st century, Africa has joined various international organisations, proposing ambitious policy frameworks of what it should aspire to, and leading the charge for institutional reform on multilateral and institutional forums like the World Trade Organisation, the United Nations Security Council, and the International Criminal Court, among others. Moreover, Africa has witnessed a rise in good governance practices and an increasing speed of democratisation, which has attracted an interest in forging partnerships from external players.

With this, it is imperative to ask, "Is there a need, now, for an African foreign policy framework towards a global economic hub and a dominant power?" and the simple answer is yes. Prior to the Trump administration, the US's foreign policy interests in the continent dictated Africa-US relations. However, during the Trump administration, those relations were frustrated because US interests appeared to be elsewhere and it only looked to Africa to counter China's (and by extension Asia's) presence in the continent, bilaterally or multilaterally, such as with the BRICS Development Bank.

ACFTA HAS BEEN ONE OF THE NOTABLE STRIDES AFRICA HAS TAKEN TOWARDS A CONTINENTAL OPEN-MARKET ECONOMY

In the past, Africa has used superpower interest and rivalry to its benefit by pitting superpowers (US and the former USSR) against each other while extracting aid. Now, a similar opportunity presents itself, mostly because with the US's renewed interest in the continent, President Biden seems in favour of a "mutually beneficial" partnership with Africa, as expressed in his virtual meeting at the African Union headquarters in January 2021. This appears to be unlike the last time there was superpower rivalry over Africa and only aid was extracted by African countries; perhaps now Africa can position itself in such a manner that it proposes long-term policies that would benefit Africans greatly and which would see African countries taking part in the continent's development agenda and trajectory.

Africa has been on the cutting edge of significant infrastructural and technological transformation and with this is quickly catching up to the globalised world. Its economies, while not yet big enough, have increased significantly over the past two decades, owing to the number of trade agreements it has entered into with the global North and South, either through foreign direct investment or multinational corporations having subsidiaries in the continent.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), which came into effect in 2018, has been one of the notable strides Africa has taken towards a continental open-market economy. It is giving small economies access to more trade, which could be used to negotiate (regionally, if not continentally) beneficial trade agreements with external players. This, together with the growing number of embassies in Africa, may give the continent some leverage against the US in terms of alternatives for trade, policy, technology, education, and cultural exchange agreements it can enter into, especially considering the US fear of China's growing influence in the region and in global affairs. This would be a clear indication of African agency, a phenomenon that has characterised much of Africa's behaviour and relations on the international scene lately.

The need for an Afrocentric foreign policy framework towards the US also arises out of the observation that there are some domestic priorities that the Biden presidency has to attend to before giving priority to US-Africa relations and partnerships. It is true that Biden inherited a deeply broken and partly collapsed democracy in the wake of Trump's rule from 2016 to 2020, and hence Biden has to focus inwards, restoring the integrity of America's democratic system and institutions before focusing on global issues. Thus, Africa must take this opportunity and initiative to develop and draft a policy framework detailing its interest in the US. African agency has been greater when the continent acted as a cohesive unit in its relationships with the rest of the world, and this time would be no different.

While bilateral relations may offer the best benefits, regional agreements, through the AU, can guarantee the most success. This has been, for the most part, Africa's preference in engaging with the rest of the world. With this new policy framework towards the USA, states like Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Kenya, may be helpful (with respect to the experience as international players, foreign policy resources, as well as being of geostrategic importance to their regions) in leading the charge on this policy framework.

As with many other regional agreements, this too would require significant aligning of national interests, compromise, and notable commitment to the policy framework. More than anything, this policy framework should go beyond proposals for economic trade agreements, encompassing environmental treaties as well as cultural, educational, technological and regional policy exchanges. This proposed policy framework may well be the next chapter in the realisation of Agenda 2063, Africa's blueprint for transforming the continent into a global powerhouse.

Obviously, whether this policy will happen while Biden is still in office is a matter for another time, but it can and should be hoped that this new "mutually beneficial" engagement between the US and Africa can outlive the Biden administration well into the new administrations that will succeed it, and hopefully see a rare foreign policy continuation towards Africa.

AN AFROCENTRIC POLICY TOWARDS THE US WOULD EPITOMISE AFRICAN AGENCY

African agency is possible with an Afrocentric policy – or rather, an Afrocentric policy towards the US would epitomise African agency.

The call for an African policy framework towards the US is certainly ambitious, but not impossible. It would no doubt contribute to the growing need for Africa to become an influential global player, to be an active as opposed to a passive international actor, and fulfil the vision of many former African leaders, theorised by seasoned African scholars.

While the accounts noted above agree strongly with scholarly views and perceptions on the way forward for Africa-US relations, they are not in any way considered the only preferred direction that these relations can and should take. They just highlight some of the many proposed routes and what this means for African agency in international relations.

As noted above, whether this policy will happen during Biden's time is another discussion, and there are no certainties that the US will accept the policy framework. However, nothing in history, at least in Africa's history, has been accomplished without application and optimism, and it is hoped that such a foreign policy framework will be developed and will be beneficial for Africa. GG

Contextualising the **homosexuality** debate

Biden and Africa: agency, human rights and homosexuality

By Charles Prempeh

Flanked by Vice President Kamala Harris (left) and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin (right), President Biden signs an executive order repealing the ban on transgender people serving openly in the military, January 2021
Photo Doug Mills-Pool / AFP

In this article, I discuss the administration of Joseph Robinette Biden Jr, the 46th president of the US, and his call for developing countries to liberalise and decriminalise their laws against homosexuality and the broader members of the LGBTQI+ community. In his first foreign speech in February 2021, Biden ordered all US government agencies active abroad to promote the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTQI+) people and come up with plans within 180 days. This policy is likely to affect many countries in Africa where the law works against the LGBTQI+ community. In this article, I discuss – through critical reflection and a review of extant literature – the complex issues of homosexuality in Africa, focusing in my conclusion on what needs to be done.

Homosexuals across the globe, and particularly in Africa, have suffered virulent attacks from mainstream conservative society for not conforming to the conventional construction of heterosexual social order. Often homosexuality is seen as an affront to hegemonic masculinity in Africa. In popular and academic discourses, entrenched positions, sometimes backed by polemical books, have confused the discussion on the subject. Religious leaders have parted company because they seem to have different ideological inclinations about homosexuality. Homophobia has received greater attention in the 21st century because many of the homosexual advocates argue that such homophobia could potentially lead to stigmatisation and social exclusion.

Discussion about homosexuality has always been subdued due to society's hostility towards its homosexual cohort. However, in 2006, the subject gained national attention as a group of people who identify as homosexual decided to host an international conference on LGBT in Ghana. The intended conference attracted comments from many Ghanaians, and particularly religious leaders. Conservative religious leaders, both from Islam and Christianity, called on the Ghanaian government, under the presidency of John Agyekum Kufuor of the New Patriotic Party, to reject the idea of leasing the land of Ghana for such a conference. There were back and forth discussions but

eventually the religious community prevailed, insisting that the government deny its permission for the conference to go ahead.

In 2011, the issue of homosexuality re-emerged. This time, then British prime minister David Cameron sent a caution to all African leaders, including Ghana, to liberalise their legal stance on homosexuality or risk losing British aid. The issue once again spurred Ghanaians on to debate homosexuality. Here, too, then president John Evans Atta Mills of the National Democratic Congress, stated publicly that he was not going to compromise Ghanaian culture and religious sensitivity to liberalise or legalise homosexuality in the country.

THE RHETORIC AROUND HOMOSEXUALITY CENTRES ON A DEBATE ABOUT WHETHER IT IS INDIGENOUS OR FOREIGN TO AFRICANS

The rhetoric around homosexuality centres on a debate about whether it is indigenous or foreign to Africans. This paper acknowledges the tension surrounding the homosexual debate. All the leaders of Africa who have bared their teeth at homosexual people have done so with the justification that the practice is un-African and an antithesis to African culture. Vasu Reddy in his article, 'Homophobia, Human Rights and Gay and Lesbian Equality in Africa', gives examples of homophobic tendencies in Africa, reporting that the former president of Namibia, Sam Nujoma, said: "Most ardent supporters of these perverts are Europeans who imagine themselves to be the bulwark of civilisation and enlightenment... we made sacrifices for the liberation of this country and we are not going to allow individuals with alien practices such as homosexuality to destroy the social fabric of our society. We are convinced that homosexuality is not a natural and objective from moral history but a hideous deviation of decrepit and inhuman sordid behaviour. In reality, lessons learned from the morals of our Namibian culture demonstrate that our morals are far more superior and acceptable to the vast majority of our people who adhered to Christianity... Homosexuality deserves severe contempt and disdain from the Namibian people and should be uprooted totally as a practice."

The late Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe also considered homosexuality to be very un-African and said that homosexuals were worse than dogs and pigs, who could differentiate between male and female. He considered the tolerance of homosexuality as a new form of cultural imperialism. In 1997, he is reported to have said: "Let the Americans keep their sodomy, bestiality, stupid and foolish ways to themselves. Let them be gays in the US and Europe. But in Zimbabwe, gays shall remain a very sad people forever."

In 2009, a marriage relationship between two gay people, Stephen Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga, was contracted in Malawi. However, the two were immediately arrested for breaching the country's anti-sodomy law, and sentenced to 14 years in prison. After intense pressure from international bodies and civil society, the Malawian president, Bingu wa Mutharika, was compelled to extend a presidential pardon to the two men in May, 2010. But, because he did it under duress, he stated on the day of their release that: "These boys committed a crime against our culture, our religion, our laws. However, as head of state, I hereby pardon them and therefore ask for their immediate release with no conditions. I have done this on humanitarian grounds, but this does not mean that I support this."

From the above, it is obvious that homophobia is to a large extent state-sponsored, with homophobic speeches often underscored by the assumption that the practice is un-

Annual Gay Pride at Zoo Lake, Johannesburg
Photo: SA Tourism

African, anti-religious, and illegitimate. By claiming that homosexuality is un-African and a demonstration of the cultural imperialism that came with the western hegemonic wave, these politicians are assuming, however tacitly, that homosexuality is a European invention that has been transposed to Africa to dilute African culture.

Even so, some scholars have challenged the premise of some homophobic speeches. Pro-homosexual advocates, including Vasu Reddy, Stella Nyanzi, Ann Swidler, Busangokwakhe Dlamini, Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe, and Thabo Mbisi, to mention but a few, have argued that it is homophobic tendencies that are foreign to Africans, not homosexuality. They assemble several evidences from different countries in Africa to assert that homosexuality has always been indigenous to Africans. They assert that Africans had always tolerated homosexuality until the advent of European colonisers. Dlamini argues that the colonialists did not introduce homosexuality to Africa, but rather intolerance of it together with systems of surveillance and regulation of its expression. Thabo Msibi in his article, 'The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa', argues that homophobia is used as a front to entrench patriarchy and heteronormativity as legitimate and fixed in African societies. He argues that "the renewed efforts to label same-sex desire as un-African represent a façade that conceals neoconservatism and resurgence of patriarchy, coated in the constructs of religion, nationalism, and law".

In his article, 'Homosexuality in the African Context', Busangokwakhe Dlamini argues that homosexuality has always been part of African culture, and that the practice is consistent with African spirituality, cosmology, and culture. He argues that homosexuality is not an invention or introduction of the West: the practice both preceded and survived the difficult times of

Gay Pride in Soweto, South Africa, 2012
Photo: Charles Haynes

colonialism, thereby discrediting the idea that it is a colonial import. Dlamini also affirms that the fact that we might not have an indigenous word to describe homosexuality does not mean that the practice never existed in Africa prior to colonialism. He thus argues that we should distinguish between practice and precept, arguing that homosexuality is not an affront to African traditional religions. Accordingly, he says, experts on ritual in traditional religions attach spiritual significance to sexuality. He argues that African traditional religions believe there is spiritual power in sexuality, with different types of spirituality associated with each of the biological sexes. It is, therefore, argued that it was Judeo-Christian sex values that suppressed homosexuality in Africa – shaping the passage of anti-homosexual laws.

While it is not farfetched to state that homosexual practices predate colonialism in Africa, it is true that the promotion of heterosexuality has become keenly associated with "African culture" and "African values". This is contrasted with the narrative that homosexuality is a foreign import. That most Africans take this view is routinised by the attempts by foreign diplomats in Africa and Western governments to directly encourage the decriminalisation of homosexuality. For example, on 31 January, 2021, the LGBTQI+ community in Ghana opened an office to advocate for change in the country's anti-homosexual laws. The event was attended by some foreign diplomats, including Tom Nørring, the Danish ambassador, Andrew Barnes, the Australian high commissioner, and the European Union delegation

in Ghana. While these western political elites may consider it justifiable to promote the rights of homosexual people, they regard it as important for them to be strategic by staying away from reifying the assertion that homosexuality is a foreign import.

However, it is important for the West to understand the current socio-cultural and religious spaces in Africa. Africa is largely a religious continent where secularisation of politics has not gone hand in hand with the secularisation of the public sphere. This implies that the African public sphere – where laws governing sexuality are made – is not neutral.It is infused with religions that seek to shape popular and private discourses. In the end, secularisation in many African countries follows the line of Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah's, quest for a fusion of the three religious traditions of Africa – Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions – to shape the public sphere. Nkrumah, a voluble Pan-Africanist, framed this creative eclecticism as consciencism.

It is also necessary for the West to understand how the idea of human rights operates in Africa, where "primitive" solidarity is very strong. In Africa, the idea of human rights is deeply rooted in human relationality, i.e., in communitarianism. The individual is not individual *qua* individual. This is captured in the Ubuntu philosophy: "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am". It is also reiterated by the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin who stated that "Men are largely interdependent, and no man's activity is so completely private as never to obstruct the lives of others in any way." All this points to the fact that the rights of homosexuals – while their assertion may appeal to the West and Biden – need to be situated in context, since rights must be communally shared. The construction of human rights as a social construct is reinforced by the construction of sex as a medium of recreation and procreation. So, many Africans – backed by Christianity and Islam – frown on sexual practices used solely for recreation (as homosexuality is profiled) without eventual procreation (considered a divine-cultural mandate on human beings).

It took centuries of secularisation, beginning in the 17th century – the secularisation of knowledge – to the mid-20th century – the secularisation of morals – before homosexuality was decriminalised in the West. This was against the background that the practice was common in the Graeco-Roman civilisation – the acclaimed source of western civilisation. This implies that the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the West evolved over time and converged with the scientific revolution, which significantly shaped its socio-religious landscape and sexuality.

THE AFRICAN PUBLIC SPACE IS INFUSED WITH RELIGIONS THAT SEEK TO SHAPE POPULAR AND PRIVATE DISCOURSES

Against this background, it is necessary for the West to allow Africa's sexual ethics to also evolve, as both the West and Africans strategically discourage the abuse of homosexuals. Making the decriminalisation of homosexuality a precondition for aid will only deprive the continent of much-needed socio-economic development. As it is, the continent displays the impact of slavery and colonisation in poor sanitation and squalid living conditions, poverty, conflicts, partisan politics, and corruption. Amid all of this, it is important for dialogue, tact, and wisdom to be employed with regard to the complex issues around homosexuality.

Towards new **APPROACHES & PERSPECTIVES**

US-Africa security relations

By Gilbert M Khadiagala

As the new United States administration of President Joe Biden embarks on a review of US-Africa relations, it is important to reflect on the security policies that should undergird this relationship. Although both bilateral and multilateral security cooperation feature prominently in the US's engagement with African countries, these matters have always been opaque and shrouded in secrecy.

This article suggests that there is a need for a shift in US policy to emphasise transparency in security engagement with African countries as well as more selectivity in allocating security assistance. A transparent and selective approach should reinforce the democratic governance promotion posture of the Biden administration. For their part, African recipients of security assistance should also be transparent and accountable to their citizens about the purposes of security assistance and its implications for national budgets.

Security cooperation benefits Africa and the US in three primary ways. First, there is broad consensus that secure states and societies are the foundations for democracy, development and prosperity. The legacy of civil wars in Africa reveals that once violence destroys the socioeconomic infrastructure that protects societies, it can take decades for recovery and reconstruction. Second, the majority of African states may, in the short to long term, never mobilise sufficient resources to achieve security without assistance from external actors such as the US. While the Cold War heightened Africa's dependence on military support from a wide range of external powers, the security needs persisted as African countries and sub-regions confronted the spectre of civil wars, starting in the 1990s. In the post-Cold War period, the US, alongside its western allies, took on an increasingly large burden of security assistance to African countries who sought to take advantage of the new aid opportunities. Third, new and emerging security threats such as terrorism and radical Islamism have arisen in the context of weakening state capacity and porous borders that require well-equipped and resourced security forces. The convergence of these factors obligates the givers and recipients of security assistance to be more open and upfront about its purpose.

US Foreign Military Financing for Africa (FMFA) covers a wide range of programmes such as transfers of military material, tactical combat training, joint military exercises, military education for officers, and defence institution building. In addition to the Department of Defence (DOD), which administers most of these programmes, the Department of State runs its own security assistance programmes to African countries. Starting in 2005, some US National Guards have formed partnerships in capacity-building with African countries. The most notable cases are South Africa, with the New York National Guard, and Rwanda with the Nebraska National Guard.

Since the Clinton administration (1993-2001) advanced the policy of capacity-building for African militaries to participate in peacekeeping, selected African militaries have received substantial US training and equipment through programmes such as the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program (ACOTA), and the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), funded under the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. In the aftermath of 9/11, the US increased its counterterrorism footprint in Africa through the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) and the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn Africa (CJTF-HOA), part of the US Africa Command in Djibouti. With the formation of the US Africa Command (Africom) in

Ethiopian soldier in the northern Tigray region near the Eritrean border
Photo: Maco Longari / AFP

Soldiers take part in a US African Command training course in Djibouti, 2009
Photo: Kelly Onteverios, CJTF-HOA Public Affairs

2007, the US suggested to African countries the possibility of stationing it in Africa, but, with the exception of Liberia, most countries rejected this offer. Nonetheless, the majority of African countries have gradually embraced various forms of military cooperation with Africom. Even its most vociferous critics, such as South Africa, have welcomed military engagements with Africom. Some observers have noted that the command's senior leaders frequently travel to African countries and have had more interactions with their leaders than any other officials from the US government.

Various US administrations have consistently allocated FMFA to a majority of its African allies in response to need, absorptive abilities, and other considerations. The only change came when President Donald Trump (2016-2020) did not request military assistance for African countries, with the exception of Djibouti, which hosts the CHJTF-HOA. As democracy promotion and antiterrorism became central planks in US policy toward Africa, various administrations imposed sanctions, including withholding military support to African countries they accused of egregious human rights violations and supporting terrorist groups. In the late 1990s, the US Congress enacted the Leahy Laws, which prohibit the US Department of State and Department of Defence from providing military assistance to foreign security force units that violate human rights. In the Horn of Africa, the Clinton administration blacklisted Sudan because of its support for terrorist organisations and destabilisation of its regional neighbourhood. Eritrea, under the authoritarian rule of Isaias Afwerki, was also targeted for supporting extremist groups in Somalia. In southern Africa, the US Congress imposed sanctions on

Zimbabwe in the early 1990s because of gross human rights violations; these sanctions still remain despite the ousting of the Robert Mugabe government in 2017.

Sudan, Eritrea, and Zimbabwe, to some extent, epitomise US attempts to realign the values of democratisation with its military and security policies in Africa. But these are the exceptions to the broader policy, which has departed from this realignment. As a result, for the most part, countries with authoritarian leaders and a history of human rights abuses have received military assistance, especially when they have been at the forefront of counterterrorism efforts. Typically, US proponents of working with security forces in authoritarian countries have invoked the "socialising effect", whereby the US military ostensibly inculcates the values of democracy, human rights observance and professionalism in the participating African militaries. In the long term, therefore, this inculcation helps these countries as they make the steady transition to democratic societies. The record of socialisation for better governance is decidedly mixed: while US military engagements with some African armies may have prevented them from disrupting the democratic transitions of the 1990s, there are also many cases of US-funded militaries that have been complicit in coups d'état and unconstitutional changes of government. Egypt's military stands out for its long-standing relationships with the US military and its perennial proclivity for denigration of civilian institutions. In addition, the Malian military, which had received US training led the military coup that overthrew the civilian government in 2012.

Widespread US military support for undemocratic African regimes that have been useful in counterterrorism campaigns is evident in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. It is indisputable that terrorist organisations are a threat to the security and livelihoods that African countries cherish. This means that counterterrorism is, at heart, an objective that both the US and Africa can collectively pursue without too much contestation. However, counterterrorism efforts that hinge on indiscriminate support for authoritarian regimes invariably undermine the legitimacy of these initiatives and, even worse, fuel the constituencies that provide succour and support to extremist organisations.

COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS THAT HINGE ON INDISCRIMINATE SUPPORT FOR AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES INVARIABLY UNDERMINE THE LEGITIMACY OF THESE INITIATIVES

Years of US involvement with Uganda's military and security forces in counter-insurgency in the Horn and Great Lakes regions have not enhanced their respect for democratic norms nor their responsiveness to human rights. As the February 2021 elections demonstrated, President Yoweri Museveni has consistently used Uganda's participation in UN peacekeeping in Somalia to trample on domestic opposition and militarise society to extend his more than 30-year rule. Opposition groups claimed that Ugandan army units, trained by the US military in 2014-15 and deployed in Somalia, were redeployed in Kampala before the elections to intimidate them. The Biden administration needs to be applauded for its April 2021 decision to impose visa restrictions on Uganda's security forces for their interference in the elections. This decision followed similar sanctions the Trump administration imposed on Tanzanian officials who botched the 2020 elections.

These actions should signal the departure from blanket US military engagement with undemocratic regimes in Africa. But for the policy to be sustainable, the US will need to apply it consistently and impartially, particularly within sub-regions that face the same circumstances. Thus, once the US imposes visa bans on the Ugandan military, there is every reason to do the same when the Paul Kagame regime in Rwanda uses the military against domestic opponents.

THE HORN OF AFRICA HAS ALWAYS PRESENTED A DILEMMA FOR US POLICY

The Horn of Africa has always presented a dilemma for US policy in Africa, particularly in reconciling support for democratic governance and the pursuit of counterterrorism strategies. But this is also understandable in light of the tremendous security implications of Somalia's 30-year descent into anarchy; the emergence of Al-Shabaab in 2006 and its virulent Islamist agenda has compromised democratisation and security as values that are important for the long-term stabilisation of the region. Regional actors, including the African Union, have also prioritised the objective of military defeat of Al-Shabaab as an essential step in the creation of a functional state in Mogadishu. In the initial phase of counter-insurgency strategies, the US relied primarily on Ethiopia under former prime minister Meles Zenawi, who did not have any pretensions to democratic credentials. In the post-Meles period, the regime of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has remained a critical supporter of US policy while promoting fundamental reforms in governance at home. Before the disastrous Ethiopian military intervention to stop alleged secessionism of the Tigray region in 2020, Ethiopia was on a trajectory to become a credible regional actor the US could continue to depend upon in its efforts to stabilise Somalia.

With Ethiopia engulfed in internal conflict, the US strategy on counterterrorism has fallen back increasingly to the CJTF-HOA, based in one of the most undemocratic regimes in the region. Although Djibouti's authoritarian and clan-based ruling class afforded the US easy entry into the region, in the long run, there needs to be debate on the sustainability of this engagement if there are no fundamental alterations in domestic politics. In his last days in office, Donald Trump signalled an eventual withdrawal of US troops from Djibouti. This move, however, was motivated less by concerns about the regime's authoritarianism and more about US withdrawal from endless external military forays. The Biden administration has the opportunity to refocus US security policy towards promoting both democratic governance and security collaboration. There is already a regional template that the US can draw upon: Ethiopia under Abiy had shown that regional leadership on counterterrorism can proceed alongside building domestic confidence that strengthens democratic institutions. Equally critical, in addition to fighting Al-Shabaab terrorism, the stabilisation of the Horn of Africa will require the gradual recognition of the statehood of Somaliland and international efforts to mediate outstanding bilateral issues between Hargeisa and Mogadishu.

The Sahel region also presents many challenges for coherent US policies in Africa. The destabilisation of a whole swath of territory from Libya's borders into Chad poses formidable obstacles to policymakers. The problems are compounded by the multiplicity of states, Islamist groups, regional institutions, and international actors that prevent consistent approaches. The core Sahelian countries – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – have been ravaged by several extremist forces, such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which gained prominence after the collapse of the Libyan government of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, and the onset of the Malian civil war in 2012.

In response to these security threats, these countries formed a platform in 2014 called the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel). Although the US and other external players have assisted the G5 Sahel in counterterrorism initiatives, recent reports suggest that these efforts have not improved security in the region. Instead, things are only getting worse, particularly for civilians.

Similarly, the combination of food insecurity, conflicts, terrorism, displacement and climate change have spurred countries in the Lake Chad Basin - Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria - to coalesce into a regional joint multinational task force to launch military strikes against Boko Haram and other insurgents. These countries have also been recipients of security assistance from the US and western countries. But like the Horn, critics have charged that military assistance to largely undemocratic regimes in Benin, Chad and Cameroon has undermined the insurgency campaigns and emboldened terrorist groups. Chad, the star player in both the G5 Sahel and the Lake Chad Initiative, has been embroiled in a governance crisis since its long standing dictator, Idriss Deby, was killed in April 2021 by rebel forces, enabling his son to unconstitutionally take power. Should Chad descend into more violence, it will be an apt lesson on the dangers of the US aligning itself with countries with dubious governance credentials.

In a stark acknowledgement of the failure of regional counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel, Nigeria's President Mohammed Buhari invited the US on 27 April, 2021 to consider moving Africom to Africa to better support the fight against rising insecurity. This invitation was a radical departure from the previous position articulated by major African countries to oppose US military bases on African soil. Although most Nigerian commentators described the invitation as a precursor to US "recolonisation" of Africa, it represents a remarkable shift towards transparency and honesty in African engagements with the US military. After all, African governments have routinely accepted US security assistance, and Africom has been visibly active on most regions of the continent; the relocation of Africom to the continent potentially gives African countries some measure of control on what it does and how it operates.

US-AFRICA SECURITY RELATIONS NEED TO BE ANCHORED ON TRANSPARENCY

At national levels, a new narrative on US-Africa security relations ought to be anchored on transparency in defence spending. While critical due to the growing security needs, defence spending in the majority of African countries has always been controversial because governments often do not provide accurate and precise information about it. Neither do they adequately explain the trade-offs between security and social investment. In the absence of this information, ordinary citizens tend to be sceptical about defence spending, deriding it as wasteful. To get around this problem, African governments need to sensitise their publics on the significance of defence spending, including how much security assistance they obtain from external sources. Open budgetary governance around defence and security allocations would do three things. First, strengthen civilian, particularly legislative, oversight over the military, an essential component of democratisation and stable civil-military relations. Second, enhancing accountability in defence spending helps citizens appreciate why governments need to invest in well-resourced security forces, ultimately making them core stakeholders in defence and security. Third, it would enable the US to make better choices in the allocation of security assistance to African countries. By this logic, countries making steady progress towards democracy and governance would deserve more security assistance than the laggards.

On the HORNS OF A DILEMMA

US involvement in Somalia's civil war stimulated its multilateral engagements in the region

By Muema Wambua

The United States is a leading player in shaping peace and security interventions in Africa. In the wake of growing multilateralism after the world wars, the US increased its dominance in the international system, principally influencing the interactions of states and non-state actors through the United Nations. While the US remained covert in its operations in Africa during the world wars, the period after WWII marked a shift in its foreign policy orientation in Africa. This article reviews US interventions in Africa by analysing its episodic multilateralism and reversals to unilateralism, and the implications for peace and security in the post-Trump era. The first section examines US unilateralism in interventions in Africa in the independence era, while the second explores its shift to multilateralism at the end of the Cold War. The third section highlights US defiance of multilateralism in Africa in the era of the Global War on Terror, while the fourth foresees a return of multilateralism in peace and security interventions anchored within a revitalised African agency.

Protests against the presence of French and American military bases accused of inertia against jihadist attacks in Niamey, Niger, 2019
Photo: Boureima Hama/ AFP

At the end of WWII, the US built alliances in Africa with a view to securing resources and preferential access to markets, for instance its intended support of Egypt in the funding of the Aswan High Dam in 1952, against British and French interests in the Suez Canal. The US setting up of military bases in French Morocco was also viewed as an encroachment of French interests in North Africa, especially the control of oil deposits in Algeria. While avoiding antagonising its allies, US interventions in Africa in support of rebel movements increased its military presence, which rather than alleviating conflicts tended to exacerbate them. In the case of Congo, DRC, the US, in support of Belgium, instigated regime change that led to a protracted civil war, after the eventual assassination of prime minister and independence leader Patrice Lumumba in 1961.

In West Africa, the US strengthened its strategic alliance with Liberia by providing military and financial assistance to the Samuel Doe regime. Elsewhere in southern Africa, the US supported white minority control over Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia, with its policy of free marketism against the communist expansion championed by the Soviet Union. The US also supported the white minority rule apartheid regime in South Africa with a view to protecting companies operating there. In addition, the US provided military and financial support to Unita in Angola and Renamo in Mozambique, and funded South Africa's domination of Namibia to protect its companies involved in mining.

THE HORN OF AFRICA HAS ALWAYS PRESENTED A DILEMMA FOR US POLICY

In the Horn, the US supported Ethiopia with military aid in the 1970s before switching alliance to Somalia after the Soviet-led Marxist regime change. After the 1974 coup that led to the overthrow of Haile Selassie, diplomatic relations were severed during the reign of Mengistu Haile Mariam. After the coup, the US switched allegiance and in return supported Somalia by providing weapons to the Siad Barre

US marines break down a door as they search for snipers in Mogadishu, Somalia as part of the 'Restore Hope' UN task force operation
Photo: Alain Bommenel / AFP

regime. It later withdrew aid from Somalia during the presidency of George H Bush, citing human rights abuses. In addition, the US supported Sudan with a view to countering Libya's Muammar Gaddafi's expansionist interests in the Horn, and also to suppress the Soviet's expansion in the region. As a strategic partner, the US built military bases in Sudan where it would lay its operations against Libya, besides its intention to counter Omar al-Bashir's links with Islamist radicalists, especially the CIA protégé, Osama bin Laden, who had established al-Qaeda bases in Sudan and in the Persian Gulf.

At the outset of the decade, the US's involvement in the civil war in Somalia stimulated its multilateral

engagements in the region. Its coordination of the United Task Force (UNITAF), which was a multinational force sanctioned by the UN in 1992 to create a conducive environment for humanitarian intervention in Somalia, marked its foreign policy shift to multilateralism in the region. In addition, US involvement in United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNISOM) II, following the failure of UNISOM I to re-establish order after the ouster of Barre, renewed its impetus towards multilateral cooperation in peace interventions in Africa.

While the US Central Command's coordination in Operation Restore Hope – with a US personnel strength of 25,000 – highlighted its lead in multilateral cooperation in Somalia, its intervention was, however, viewed as an attempt to protect the oil concessions of US firms under the guise of humanitarian intervention. The transfer of UNITAF's mandate to Unisom II augmented US interventions in enhancing stability in Somalia, until the Black Hawk Down episode in the Battle of Mogadishu, where 18 US soldiers who had raided the capital to capture allies of the Somali warlord Farah Aideed were killed, effectively ended its intervention in the mission.

US UNILATERAL ACTION GAVE IMPETUS TO THE EMERGENCE OF AL-QAEDA AFFILIATED AGENCIES IN THE HORN

Despite intelligence reports elsewhere in Rwanda indicating that Hutu and Tutsi militias were preparing for war, President Bill Clinton's administration's complicity to intervene, deliberately, perhaps retreating from the failed intervention in Somalia, demonstrated the US's ambivalence in terms of multilateralism. Despite Clinton's apology at Kigali Airport in March 1998, the US's non-intervention in Rwanda marked a reversal of its earlier initiative to advance multilateralism in Africa. Its quest to withdraw UN troops who were deployed in Rwanda after the signing of the Arusha Accords in 1993, as well as its deliberate effort to block the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorisation of deployment of troops to counter the atrocities, depicted a foreign policy shift, a complete reversal in its interventions for peace in Africa. Despite the Clinton administration's impetus towards multilateralism in peacekeeping, the US's failure to augment the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda's (UNAMIR) 2,500 troops, with an open opposition to aggressive peacekeeping, enhanced a non-intervention that facilitated the 1994 genocide.

The George W Bush administration increased reversals to unilateralism in US foreign policy towards Africa. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, besides other attacks elsewhere in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, the US intensified its security operations in the region, especially in the Horn. As the US has strategic interests in Somalia, it has used its naval and air facilities installed in Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti to advance its operations in the Horn and the Middle East. The Bush administration's unilateral action, especially in its defiance of the UNSC and its Nato allies, and in its quest to wage the global war on terror, gave impetus to the emergence of al-Qaeda affiliated agencies such as al-Shabaab, which accelerated insecurity in the Horn.

US multilateralism in the region was reinvigorated by the Barack Obama administration, especially in Libya, in 2011. Following UNSC's resolution condemning the use of lethal force by Gaddafi against civilians, the US and its Nato allies, as well as South Africa and Nigeria, unabashedly voted in the affirmative in a subsequent resolution authorising military intervention. In response,

the US, Britain and France launched air strikes, eventually ending operations in October 2011 after the eventual killing of Gaddafi. This operation caused devastation, especially in the destruction of civilian infrastructure and military installations. While the intervention was targeted at countering Libya's supposed state-sponsored terrorism, it gave rise to new factional violence and violent Islamist militias that accentuated insecurity in the country. The US's continued surveillance of violent extremism in Africa stretched throughout the Trump era, with the emergence of extremist groups in the Sahel region as well as militants associated with the Islamic State extremist group in Mozambique.

The interventions discussed above demonstrate that the US plays a critical role in advancing peace and security in Africa. However, the imbalance between Africa and the US in terms of operations demonstrate the region's weak leverage in peace and security interventions. The US has invested billions of dollars in strategic security installations in Africa. The Africa Command, Africom, founded in 2007 with 29 military bases in 15 different countries in the region, has remained central in security interventions. With 6,000 troops in Africa in 2020, the US has been critical in counterterrorism operations. In addition, the US military presence, military alliances and joint operation centres have increased intelligence-driven operations that have enhanced security in the region.

Besides strategic operations, imbalances in funding demonstrate the US's leverage in peace and security interventions in Africa. While the AU envisages endowing the Peace Fund with

Trump era US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper at the Pentagon, Washington, 2020
Photo: Jim Watson / AFP

$400 million from mandatory contributions by member states by 2021, the fund has received $55.9 million since 2017, thereby creating a gap that attracts foreign funding. The funding of UN peacekeeping is premised on the GDP of member states, and the US is the largest contributor with an annual contribution of $2 billion. Hence its apparent opposition over the AU's quest for burden-sharing in peace interventions in Africa. In 2018, the US opposed a UNSC resolution on the financing of AU-led peace support operations which were financed by UN contributions. The US opposed this resolution, which was sponsored by Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia, on claims that AU-led peace operations should not receive more than 75% of the overall cost of UN-funded operations.

Despite the joint US-Africa Terrorism Task Force, established in 2020, the US's scaling down of operations in Africa, specifically Trump's order for the withdrawal of troops from Somalia, underscores the need for Africa to reinvigorate the APSA. In addition, the US's intention to reduce its troops fighting extremists in the Sahel, as announced by defence secretary Mark Esper, reinforces the need for Africa to strengthen its counter-terrorism strategies.

In response to Trump's order for scaling down US operations in Africa, President Joe Biden has called for increased Africa-US partnerships. Addressing the AU Summit 2021, Biden argued that the US was ready to partner with Africa "in solidarity, support and mutual benefit". This partnership, Biden advised, would foster peace and security in the region.

coordination between regional economic communities in peace and security interventions. The operationalisation of the PSC, the Continental Early Warning System , as well as the African Standby Force, has improved the AU's leverage in early warning and preventive diplomacy, while initiating peacekeeping interventions beside mediations led by the Panel of the Wise.

Fifth, AU member states should lobby for improved burden-sharing in peace interventions. The AU's deployment

THE AU SHOULD STRENGTHEN ITS INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PEACE TO ENSURE PREVENTATIVE DIPLOMACY THAT WOULD CENTRALLY PLACE ITS AGENCY IN INTERVENTIONS

How, then, should Africa enhance its agency in fostering multilateralism in peace and security interventions in the Biden era?

First, besides supporting US-led interventions, the AU should strengthen its infrastructure for peace, especially the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), to ensure preventive diplomacy that would centrally place its agency in pre-emptive interventions. Second, the AU should deploy the principle of non-indifference, or enforce the R2P (responsibility to protect) regime, in pre-emptive deployment of its forces to counter security threats that attract foreign interventions. Third, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) needs to strengthen its intelligence-gathering capacity in the quest to counter violent extremism, especially in the Horn and the Sahel, with renewed partnerships with key allies like the US, who would provide strategic intelligence for interventions.

Fourth, the AU should strengthen its peacekeeping capabilities. Strengthening of the APSA has, for instance, improved

of interventions, for instance in Burundi (2003), Sudan (2004), and in Somalia (2007), as well as support in the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (2007), Central African Republic (CAR) (2013), and Mali (2013), demonstrates its renewed quest to effect "African Solutions to African Problems". It is in seeking further multilateral cooperation that the AU would build capacity to fill intervention gaps that attract external military interventions.

Sixth, despite such operational capabilities, APSA suffers major inadequacies, especially in its financing. Besides the funding by the US, the EU has since 2004 funded the APSA through the African Peace Facility, APF, by channelling its funds – €2.7 billion – through the AU. The unpredictable funding of APSA with a change of focus of major donors, for example the EU, and Congress's decline in funding peace operations in CAR and Western Sahara, underscores the need for the AU to mobilise more funding for its peace interventions.

In conclusion, operational and financial challenges have constrained Africa's agency, creating imbalances in Africa-US interventions in the region. It is in strengthening the AU's capacity for preventive diplomacy, and capacity in peacekeeping deployment – in terms of operations, technical capacity, and financing – that Africa will increase its ability to reshape multilateral engagements in peace and security interventions in the region. GG

a new ADMINISTRATION in a new POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

What lies in store for the US in the Horn of Africa?

By Temesgen Tesfamariam

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (left) and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki celebrate the reopening of the embassy of Eritrea in in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in July, 2018
Photo: Michael Tewelde / AFP

The 9/11 terrorist attack changed the United States security strategy globally. The event took place a decade after the end of the Cold War and before the US and its allies in the West had truly enjoyed the triumph of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, the attack bestowed on the US a new purpose as a global leader: in its view, world states were now either friends or foes, and in extreme cases, were listed as an axis of evil or good. This labelling forced several countries to choose on which side they should stand. Driven by wrath and neoliberalist adventure, the US designed a new security strategy, with creating anchor states as its core objective.

Ethiopia's Tigray region

6% of the country's population

1975 - 1991: The **Tigray People's Liberation Front** launched a **war against Ethiopian dictator** Mengistu Haile Mariam and topples the regime

1991 - 2018: The **TPLF dominates the ruling alliance** until the election of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018

2019: The TPLF goes into opposition, refusing Abiy's merger of the ruling alliance into a single party

Sept 2020: The Tigray region **holds its own elections.** Addis Ababa deems the regional government illegitimate

Nov 2020: Abiy **accuses the TPLF of attacking national army bases**, which the TPLF denies. Addis Ababa launches a **military offensive against Tigray**

AFP

In line with this strategy, the US appointed Ethiopia to be an anchor state in the Horn of Africa, to act as a trusted ally whenever the US's interests in the region were at risk. It consulted with Ethiopia in bilateral venues even when the matter at hand was relevant to other regional states. This included issues that had serious direct implications for national security. It enabled Ethiopia to enjoy special treatment and allowed it to pursue its own interests and, in some cases, do harm to other states in the name of preserving the interests of the US.

After the US established its post-9/11 security strategy, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) regime in Ethiopia became the face of US foreign policy in the Horn of Africa. Choosing one country as an anchor might be an unreliable approach, but choosing Ethiopia under the TPLF regime made the choice more devastating because it was a leadership group that had lost the basic elements of nationalist character. Allowing this group to police the region meant unleashing untamed authority.

The popular uprising in Ethiopia, endless border disagreements between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and prolonged civil war in Somalia, were consequences of this policy.

When the war commenced in May 1998 between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the US under the Clinton administration tried to settle the conflict according to international custom: it sent a special envoy to mediate between the parties. In spite of this effort, the war continued for two years of carnage and destruction. Nevertheless, the US was proactive and became one of the guarantors of the agreement. However, following 9/11, the US changed its strategy, choosing Ethiopia to be an anchor state in the region. Using this privilege as leverage, Ethiopia began to alter its commitment to the final and binding agreements, and to the implementation of a border decision by an internationally recognised boundary commission.

The US's new strategy had similar effects in Somalia: it worsened the state of war instead of improving it, and thus, the approach again proved to be largely futile. When the long-standing civil war in Somalia took a different shape under the Islamic courts in 2006, the US allowed Ethiopia to act in Somalia as Ethiopia saw fit. Historically,

Ethiopia and Somalia had been enemies, so sending Ethiopia to Somalia was not a smart decision if the intention was to pacify the country. Inevitably, the outcome was that the suffering of the Somali people was doubled, and the regional security crisis was made worse. As a result, Somalia became a breeding ground for anti-foreign intervention resistance, which further increased the harm that Ethiopian and US policy caused in the region.

The US strategy gave the TPLF regime a free hand over Ethiopia's people. Its government issued an Act that was similar to the Terrorist Act of the US, using it as a front to try and purge all internal dissent in the name of terrorism. Subsequently, leaders of opposition groups, journalists and activists were accused of terrorism and were sent to prison, where they faced torture. Some of them were forced into exile. This political strategy became an important instrument to reproduce despotism and authoritarianism in Ethiopia. In the meantime, development and democratisation processes became the casualties of the security crisis, largely forged by perceived risks of terrorism.

It is worth noting that TPLF has been the embodiment of the US's foreign policy in the Horn of Africa for the past two decades. Such representation indirectly made the US strategy the main reason that the region's peace and security was compromised and its development project hampered. In one way or another, the existence of the US in the region through the TPLF regime was found to be unfriendly to the basic interests of the people of the region as it provided substantial support to an unscrupulous political clique.

In attempting to save the TPLF regime in Ethiopia, the US inflicted much harm on the popular struggle in the country. When internal and external oppositions fought to overthrow the TPLF regime, the US did not only disregard their struggle, it became the regime's ally in silencing them.

US policy in Ethiopia also went wrong with its approval of the so-called Anti-terrorism Act, which the TPLF adopted while practically designating anti-state social forces as terrorists and subjecting them to state punishment. Terrorism served the regime as a Trojan horse to win the support of the US in its move against internal dissent in Ethiopia and external competition against Eritrea and Somalia. The attack against the Somalia Islamic court movement in 2006, the UN sanctions on Eritrea in 2009, and the muting of the Ethiopian popular uprising were some of the outcomes of the irresponsible TPLF-initiated measures that the US allowed to take place.

THE TIGRAY PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT HAS BEEN THE EMBODIMENT OF US FOREIGN POLICY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA FOR THE PAST TWO DECADES

Understandably, the US's approval of Ethiopia's Counter-terrorism Act presupposed that there was a real terrorist threat in the region. However, historical facts reveal that terrorism had never been a security threat in the Horn of Africa. These claims were a misconception because the US failed to clearly identify the difference between true terrorism that threatens US interests in other regions, and the form of resistance in the Horn of Africa. The latter is a condition that emerged in response to the lack of legitimate political platforms.

The real security threat in the region is an expansionist state in Ethiopia, as its desire for dominance over the region has resulted in recurrent crises for centuries. Ethiopia's imperialist legacy has remained and still causes political and security threats

in the region. When terrorism appeared as a global security agenda, it supplied the TPLF regime in Ethiopia with the perfect ulterior motive. And this became the source of despotism, authoritarianism and recurrent economic crises in the region. This approach, instead of solving the problems, has reproduced the crisis over and over again.

How should the US then act in the post-TPLF era in the Horn of Africa? The coming of Joe Biden as US president, and the removal of the TPLF as an important political force in the region, presents a golden opportunity for the US to reconcile with the region's people by devising a more mutually beneficial policy. To this end, four points would assist the process:

First, the US has to recognise that terrorism has never been a fundamental threat to its national interests in the region. The issue in Somalia has been less to do with terrorism and should not be treated as a matter of terrorism. In fact, its legitimate grounds as a form of resistance against foreign intervention in a globalised world should be recognised. Actually, the fundamental threat to the US's security interests has been the conflicts between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and between Somalia and Ethiopia since World War II, all related to Ethiopia's expansionist ambitions. The US's efforts must focus on settling these conflicts and encouraging a gradual state-building process that involves all actors indiscriminately.

Second, the US must avoid special treatment of member states in the region. Instead of treating them collectively and appointing just one anchor, it should recognise that the region accommodates more than one state actor and it must apply a bilateral approach. The US's insensitive foreign policy in the region has damaged its relationship with Eritrea, for example. Once it decided to administer Eritrean affairs through Ethiopia and let Ethiopian interests outweigh those of Eritrea, the latter has painstakingly worked for the failure of the US in the region. Now, with the fall of the TPLF, the US's most favoured political group in the region, Eritrea has remained a critical actor with which the US should deal carefully if its interests in the region are to be protected.

Third, the US must acknowledge change in Ethiopia. In 2018, a popular uprising overthrew the long-standing TPLF government. This change may have a trickle-down effect in regional security and development progress if it is well managed. As the change emerged through a gradual process, speeding up now may take the process to an unprecedented scale of disaster nationally and regionally. Hence, for the sake of Ethiopia and the region, the US should

Workey Tadele, a radio operator, at the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) near Guba in Ethiopia, 2019
Photo: Eduardo Soteros / AFP

encourage the new government, as well as the people of Ethiopia to have faith in the change, and allow it to increase socio-economic transformation. If it sees this occasion as an opportunity, the US can redeem itself of its misdeeds in the last two decades; it must use this chance wisely if the future is to be prosperous.

Fourth, the US should look beyond the region's security dynamics and support national and regional development initiatives. Despite interstate and intrastate ethnic conflicts that overshadow the potential for development, initiatives like the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will encourage public confidence in the future. How the US views this matter will always have a determining effect on how its interests are accommodated in the region.

Supporting the construction of the dam does not imply embracing a new ally. Nor does it mean abandoning an old one. Owing to the magnitude of the

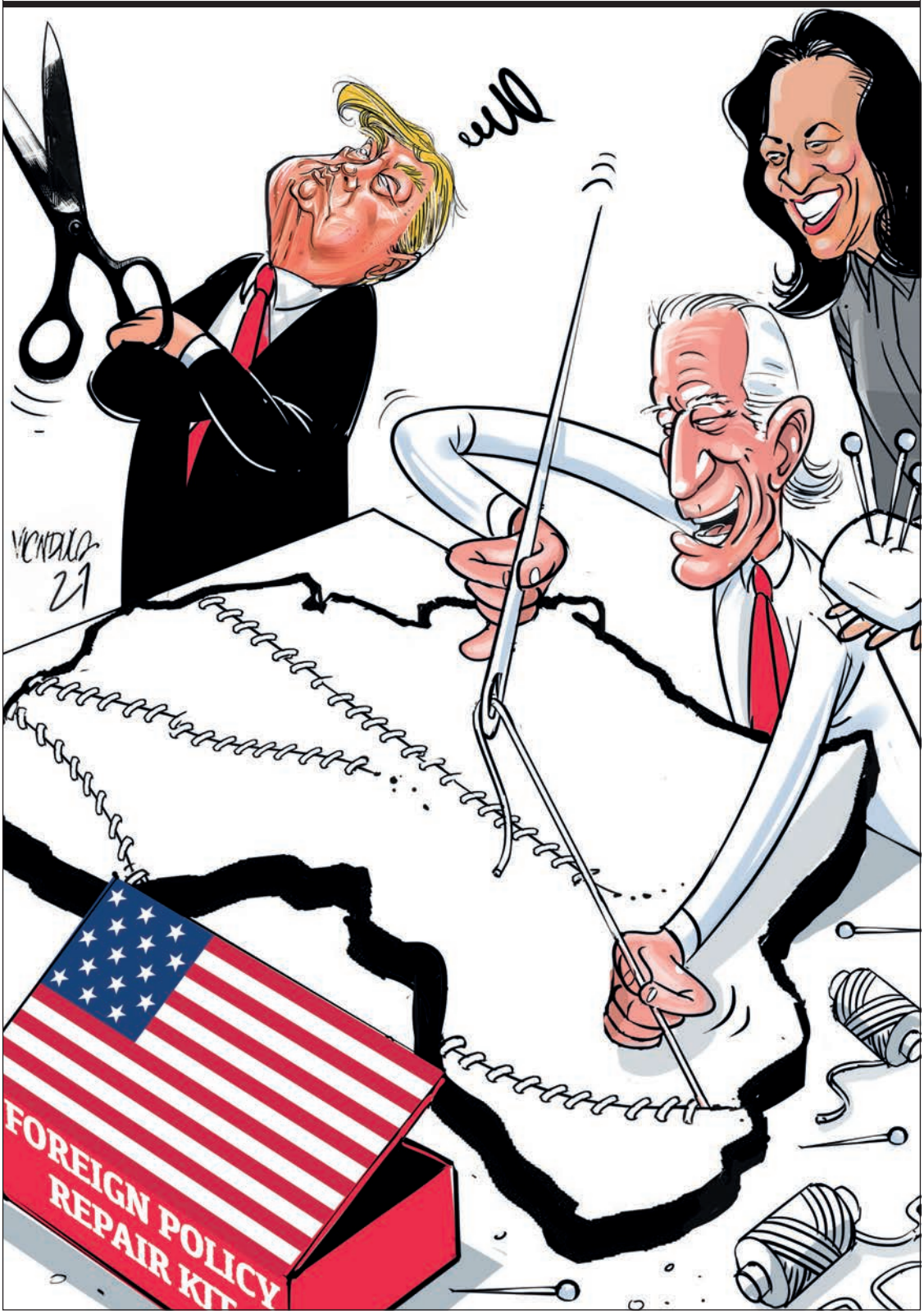
A group of Tigray protestors calling for action against the Ethiopian government gather outside the UN building in New York, 2021
Photo: Spencer Platt / AFP

matter, the US cannot afford silence or alignment to one side. This is because, firstly, from a geostrategic point of view, the Horn of Africa is a political and cultural border where the Arab and African worlds meet. Choosing sides does not only have implications for the relationship among regional states but also the relationship between Arab and African states. Secondly, the region is becoming increasingly attractive to newly emerging global powers. The US is no more viewed as the sole global power because alternative powers are evolving with which regional states can choose to stand.

In summary, the four propositions outlined above call on the new US administration to abandon the security strategy it adopted in the region post 9/11. Instead, it should devise a new policy that acknowledges the presence of different state and non-state actors with vested national and regional interests. Such change in foreign policy will not only revive the popularity of the US in the region but also arm it with essential stratagems in the competition against other desperate global powers. GG

CARTOON

By Victor Ndula



a window of OPPORTUNITY

Implications for American democracy promotion and influence in Africa

By Gideon Hlamalani Chitanga

The 2020 election meltdown in the United States may have dented the role and influence of America as the chief promoter and protector of democratisation in Africa. However, the resilience of US political institutions in the face of immense systemic pressure from the Trump presidency opens a window of opportunity to how the US can refocus its approach towards Africa.

Democracy is anchored in the practice and norm of regular free and fair elections, which are vital for political legitimacy, peace and stability. Accordingly, the meltdown of the US 2020 presidential election caused in many Africans a mixture of alarm and glee, depending on how one views the role of the US in global affairs. The live-streaming of the chaos; violence; deep partisan polarisation and persistent aberrations from the democratic process, far detached from the rule of law; human rights and democracy underlying the US foreign policy towards Africa, raised plenty of scepticism abroad, subsequently battering the country's reputation as a leading global democracy.

Former US president Donald Trump
Photo: Gage Skidmore

But did the internationally reverberating chaos of the 2020 election substantially whittle down US influence on democratisation in Africa? If we take the view that this election demonstrated the fragility of democracy itself in any society, and the fact that US democracy survived the Trump-Biden transition because of its strong resilient autonomous institutions, the US may well take the step to tactically shift the focus of its democratisation thrust in Africa from the much-resented regime change approach to gradually fostering strong democratic institutions.

Post the US elections, two narratives have emerged: first, the severe threat to American democracy from former president Donald Trump's dictatorship, domestically and internationally derailing the US's role as the oldest and leading democracy and, secondly, pointing to the resiliency of the country's democratic institutions.

MODERATES FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM CONCEDE THAT THERE IS A NEED FOR POLITICAL REFORMS IN THE US

Moderates from both sides of the debate concede that there is a need for political reforms in the US to insulate its democratic-political system from new or emerging domestic threats. This should be achieved by adjusting the political system to new realities, while mitigating the deep societal polarisation at the heart of the explosive political demonstrations that characterised the Black Lives Matter movements and, later, the violent attacks at the Capitol, as well as Trump's rejection of the election outcomes, which undermined the legitimacy of the electoral process, the results and the incumbent Biden administration.

While the first narrative is evidence of a political system in crisis, facing failure and generating international anxiety amongst its citizens and partners abroad, as well as a satisfying moment of arrival from its critics, the latter view demonstrates the strength of US democracy, particularly its autonomous democratic institutions, in mitigating rowdy populist pressure from the deeply entrenched presidentialism on the US democratic system.

The call for reforms in the world's oldest and biggest democracy, in spite of the resiliency of its institutions, draws attention to the fact that democracy is not a state of regime change that a state or society arrives at, but rather, a process characterised by continuous

Police officers in riot gear line up as protestors gather outside the Capitol building in Washington, January 2021
Photo: Tasos Katopodis / Getty Images

reforms to build consensus and accommodation in order to mitigate violent political mobilisation, which will threaten democratic institutions and political stability.

Beyond and outside regime change, the US can better promote democracy by supporting endogenous democratic institutional development and resiliency in Africa as medium- to long term-democracy promotion to foster the preservation of democracy and political stability through democratic transition and consolidation.

US elections are important to Africans for various reasons, including interest from both sides in collaborating on issues of mutual geopolitical and economic interest. Based on the US's long history of domestic stability, policy practitioners have argued that democracy is the most stable political system, hence they have recommended democratic reform and institutionalisation as key to the promotion of

Riot police clash with Trump supportors after they stormed the Capitol building in Washington, January 2021
Photo:Roberto Schmidt / AFP

peace, political stability and democracy in Africa, and a major issue for cooperation.

The Trump administration's chaotic, if not disinterested foreign policy approach towards Africa, dramatised by the former US president's "shit hole" reference to African countries, lacked a coherent broader strategy and was characterised by huge staffing gaps. There was a lack of experienced personnel in strategic public policy institutions. In spite of these factors, citizens in African countries, their governments and leaders, as well as civil society, still look to the US for democracy support and political inspiration.

Successive US administrations have fine-tuned their foreign policy and diplomatic obligations towards Africa to enhance their growing interest in the continent, as China moves ahead to consolidate its global diplomatic, geopolitical foothold and access to Africa's

rich natural resources. The US is also concerned with the growing threat of terrorism to American interests, which may worsen political instability in Africa.

The US contributes huge sums of aid to African countries to sponsor democratic reforms, promote peace and stability with emphasis on free and fair elections, rule of law and respect for human rights. The US has also taken advantage of slowly but surely growing liberalisation and pluralism in Africa to provide electoral assistance and capacity-building for a broad range of institutions. However, the US emphasis on support committed to fostering democratic governance, promoting political activism and challenging authoritarian regimes is loathed by undemocratic African government's who believe that the American emphasis on regime change is a mask for externally driven political change to promote its own interests in the continent.

African social movements, activists, academics and practitioners, impressed with the longstanding stability of the US democratic system, look to this model of democracy for inspiration and support in the course of their own struggles for freedom and inclusive participation in government. However, they are mostly pressed to the wall by domestic authoritarian regimes who view them as western agents advancing the American regime change agenda.

In equal measure, the US has faced extensive scrutiny in Africa for political duplicity, aggressively pushing democratic rule and the rule of law abroad, foisting regime change on nations without necessarily practising democracy at home. Critics further cite domestic democratic deficits amongst US high-handed efforts to promote its own style of democracy in much of Africa as arrogant and contemptuous of historical democratisation struggles that should be supported to encourage home-grown democracies.

Unsurprisingly, the implications of the 2020 US election for democratisation processes in Africa will be debated more than any previous one. The democratic deficit characterising the Trump presidency will provide propaganda cannon fodder for African despots and critics of American democracy, weakening cooperation towards enhancing domestic agency for democracy in Africa.

While the US has used the demonstrative force of its strong domestic institutions and the legitimacy of its resilient, stable and democratic political and economic system as an example to

the developing world, including Africa, the chaotic 2020 election provides parallels with cycles of disputed elections in many African countries. This has undermined faith in democratic institutions and has pointed the finger of authoritarian culpability to the main sponsor of democracy, the US. The failures of the US electoral process resonate far beyond its shores.

THE FAILURES OF THE US ELECTORAL PROCESS RESONATE FAR BEYOND ITS SHORES

As the US is a global power, the state of its democracy, the manner of its elections, their outcomes and processes of transfer of power, are important to transitioning and consolidating democracies, as well as ambiguous regimes in Africa struggling with democratic change. The captivating optics of the US democratic process capture the attention of both critics and proponents of the system. Many Africans follow the processes and political rituals of US democratic contestation – from the campaigns and voting to the announcement of the election results and transfer of power to the new regime.

Many Africans view US election campaigns as democracy at work. The public debates on national media, reflecting important contestation over ideas and policies, are an important socialising effect for many African proponents of democracy. Learning from the US free market of ideas, Africans have started to demand official presidential debates between the main candidates vying for national office as competitive elections become a norm. At the same time, pressure is mounting for more policy and political accountability, as well as for leaders to display political maturity.

The 2020 US election exposed the fragility of American democracy, and democracy in general, something the West thought it had long gotten past and which may be a major problem abroad, particularly in Africa.

Trump's belligerence, and the deep political polarisation he caused, triggered domestic partisan violence, culminating in an unprecedented attack on the Capitol by a mob backing his Republican Party faction. The US faced the real possibility of a blocked transition and transfer of power as the former president refused to concede. Through this action, Trump exerted intense pressure on US democratic institutions, exposing the country's political system and the basic machinery of its democracy as dysfunctional and broken.

The presidential election was plagued by long queues, ballot-counting delays, disputed election results and recounts, which are regularly witnessed as part of electoral fiddling in Africa. Even after the recount and official reconfirmation of Joe Biden's victory, Trump refused to concede the race or recognise the president elect, leaving a cloud of disputed legitimacy hanging over the new administration. Furthermore, the Trump administration refused to help with an orderly transition and transfer of power, while his supporters pulled every stunt to drag out, frustrate, block or even overturn the results, widening adversarial domestic political division and polarisation.

The anarchical attack on the Capitol, just as Congress was in the process of certifying Biden's victory, made a mockery of the rule of law and jeopardised the peaceful transfer of power, the most challenging aspects of democratic transition in many African countries. Where many African regimes have not brazenly rigged elections, triggering post-election violent conflict, incumbent authoritarian regimes have simply blocked the transfer of power, impeding any process of political change to retain the incumbent or enable a faction to remain in charge

of the state. Examples are Kenya in 2007, 2013 and 2017 and Zimbabwe in 2008, 2013 and 2018. Obstructing the process towards a peaceful, democratic transfer of power continues to be a major problem in Africa, a major source of political violence, uncertainty and instability. The chaos of the US election therefore undermined its global influence and right to continue to weigh in on cases of disputed legitimacy in Africa. This left the main sponsor of democracy reeling under aspersions that chaotic authoritarianism was undermining its role as the global torchbearer of democracy.

The state of democracy in Africa is worrying; drivers and proponents of democratisation need moral and political support that is genuine and legitimate.

The Freedom in the World 2019 report flagged the widening global onslaught on democracy and pluralism, and the spread of harmful influence to new corners of the world. It also described how chief executives in the US, the world's largest democracy, were willing to break down institutional safeguards and disregard the rights of critics and minorities in favour of populist agendas.

African countries continue to experience cases of democracy backsliding centred on disregard for the rule of law, the violation of human rights, flawed electoral processes and shrinking democratic space. While countries like Ethiopia have made some progress with regard to political reforms, the majority of African countries, including Benin, Senegal, Nigeria, Guinea, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Uganda, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Burundi, Benin, Cape Verde, Chad, Djibouti, Gambia, Libya, Niger, Republic of Congo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, and Zambia face fewer prospects for democracy as their leaders apply various authoritarian strategies to entrench their hold on power.

The Biden administration is therefore facing huge international expectations and obligations to protect democratic norms and practices in Africa that will compel the country to continue to support democratisation in the continent. But how and with what leverage can the new US leadership strongly back democratisation in Africa?

The biggest lesson, and maybe point of leverage for the US in support of democracy going forward, is the realisation that democracy is perennially fragile, and its survival depends on strong, stable and autonomous institutions.

US institutions have demonstrated themselves to be resilient and strongly anchored against unprecedented pressure on American democracy, insulating the country's political system from direct assault by the former incumbent. The Biden-Harris administration should therefore rethink democratisation in Africa, from mere regime change to domestically-driven medium- to long-term institutional reform more commensurate with genuine multiparty politics, political accommodation and inclusive democracy.

THE BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION SHOULD RETHINK DEMOCRATISATION IN AFRICA FROM MERE REGIME CHANGE TO INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

US support for democracy is suspected of being a means for hostile regime change by using and supporting elections as key events to remove African governments hostile to US interests. Certainly, regime change has triggered serious and debilitating violent conflicts without necessarily fostering democratic installation and stability in many African nations, instead having the effect of undermining citizens' confidence in elections and multiparty democracy. GG


WITS
UNIVERSITY
JOHANNESBURG

Police detain a student during a mass protest of the Fees Must fall movement at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, 2016
Photo: Discott

Educating for ECONOMIC GROWTH

The axis between learning and economic development

By Amini Kajunju and Mohamed Keita

Africa's youthful population may have contributed to the continent's better fortunes with regard to Covid-19 deaths, but the pandemic has also increased the pressure on governments to deliver jobs and basic public and social services, including education. The development and integration of the continent's potent human capital, especially the youth, should be the driving force behind African policymakers' engagement with the US.

In Africa, the median age is 19 years, compared with 38 in the US and approximately 40 in Europe. According to the Brookings Institute, by 2050, there will be more young people entering the labour force in Africa than the whole world combined. McKinsey, in its Africa at Work report, opined: "Africa's labour force will grow by 122 million during this decade, and will be the largest in the world by 2035."

In the Sahel, the US and allies in the region are fighting terrorist groups taking advantage of, among many things, government's failure to deliver services to marginalised communities and the abundance of unemployed young men who harbour a feeling of powerlessness. Military intervention has proved to be incapable of solving this problem. Worse, according to the 2021 Africa Development Dynamics report, in some parts of Mali, Burkina Faso

and Niger, extremist groups are collecting taxes and fees from communities in exchange for provision of security and services. In Senegal, young men have taken to the streets to protest the arrest of an opposition leader whom they believe advocates for them. Some of them have destroyed buildings, homes and businesses, which they perceive as symbols of the current power structure, out of anger for a government that has not looked out for them.

From Tunisia to Uganda, and from Sudan to Guinea, young people have been at the forefront of socio-political protest movements that echo similar demands: jobs! At the same time, thousands of young men – and some women and children – have risked their lives on deadly voyages to Europe in search of a better life.

Recently, riots erupted in South Africa led by students attending one of its best public universities, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). The National Students Financial Aid Scheme is currently underfunded and cannot support new students. With police and students clashing, the riots led to the death of a 35-year-old bystander. To put this issue into perspective, in 2021, Wits received 70,000 applications for 5,000 available placess, and will educate 35,000 registered students. In 2019, it provided $66 million in financial aid. According to the Africa Development Dynamics report, the number of African youth with a secondary or tertiary education could reach 233 million by 2040. Active African tech hubs doubled from 314 in 2016 to 643 in 2019. Despite this progress, the same report notes that too few youth benefit from job opportunities in the

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIGITAL ECONOMY JOBS ARE FEW AND DISPROPORTIONATELY CENTRED ON A HANDFUL OF LARGE URBAN CENTRES

digital economy. There are several reasons for this: 70% of Africa's young people (1.4 billion) live in rural areas, where only a quarter of the population have internet access, per a 2019 Gallup study. Opportunities for digital economy jobs are few and disproportionately centred on a handful

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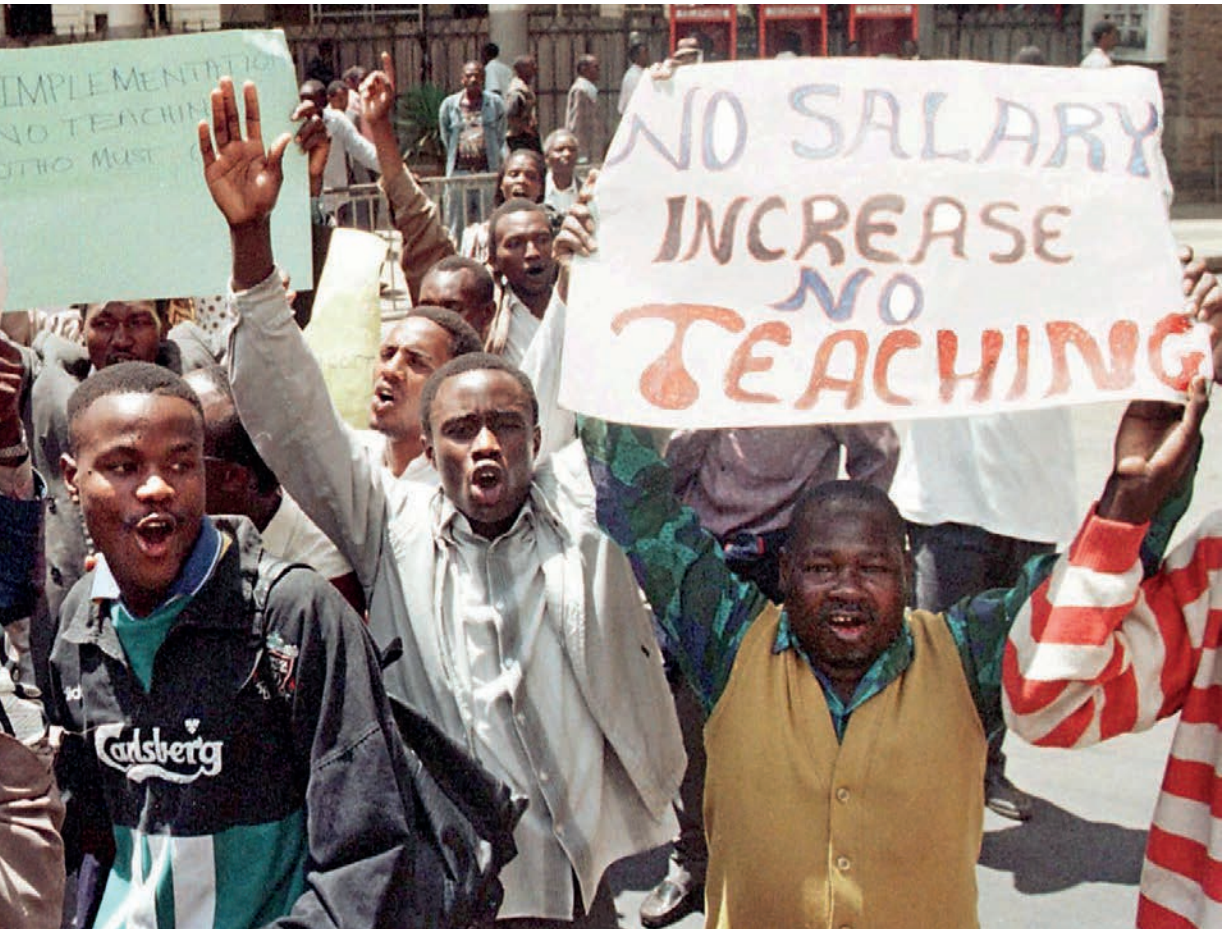

Striking Kenyan teachers march through Nairobi in a demand for higher wages
Photo: Alessandro Abbonizo / AFP

of large urban centres. For example, Cape Town, Lagos, Johannesburg, Nairobi and Cairo account for almost half of the most dynamic start-ups on the continent.

As much as 85% of the venture capital funding for Africa's start-ups went to only four countries between 2015 and 2019.

High-potential entrepreneurs operate in a fragile funding ecosystem, which hinders their ability to scale up or be able to innovate. Only 17% of Africa's early-stage entrepreneurs expect to create at least six jobs, the lowest percentage globally. They face hurdles in obtaining loans from local banking systems.

As a result, three quarters of educated young people aged 15-29 end up in the informal economy (85% of employment in Africa is informal) in which only 16% use the internet regularly. Since the formal sector is not creating enough jobs, most entrepreneurial activities are small and informal, and wages are unstable. People

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are doing the best they can and maybe have gone as far as they can go without a government's consequential intervention and planning. Unless African governments act, self-employment or informal work will likely remain the mainstay for most of Africa's youth for a long time to come.

If one is looking for an excellent example of how investment in education transformed a poor country into a wealthy one, one need only look to South Korea. In the 1950s, it was a poor country. However, through visionary leadership and government actions, authorities spent as much as 22% of its budget on education. These investments paid off: today, South Korea has one of the most educated populaces and the 11th largest economy in the world, and currently spends about $20.9 billion on education, about 5% of its budget.

Investment in education can also lead to massive employment, not just in education but in other connected industries such as technology, construction, business services,

Learners at a school in Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan
Photo: Laura Pannack / Oxfam

and hospitality. The United States offers the perfect example: New York City is the country's financial capital and some of its biggest employers are banks. However, the city's Department of Education is the largest public-sector employer, with 135,000 employees, including 75,000 teachers serving 1.1 million children in 1,722 schools. Several years ago, when tech-based multinational Amazon was looking for new headquarters, it prioritised cities with large university clusters. New York City was one of the top finalists.

A research document titled 'The economic impact of universities: Evidence from across the globe', by Anna Valero and John Van Reenen, states: "We find that a 10% increase in the number of universities in a region is associated with about 0.4% higher GDP per capita."

The US offers African countries a perfect illustration of how to drive economic development, through its world-class higher education system. Since 1950, an estimated 1.6 million African students have attended American colleges and universities. In 2019, African students contributed about $1.7 billion to the US economy.

Since 1950

1.6 MILLION

Africans have attended American colleges and universities

In 2019 African students contributed

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to the US economy

The Trump administration set the direction for international development agency USAID "to end the need for foreign assistance" and mandated that all USAID programmes "support a country's journey to self-reliance". This dovetails with many Africans' desire for an end to aid, and more agency in their own affairs. Furthermore, USAID's education policy affirms that "quality education is the greatest investment a country can make in its future and its people. It is the enabler for all other development sectors."

QUALITY EDUCATION IS THE GREATEST INVESTMENT A COUNTRY CAN MAKE IN ITS FUTURE AND ITS PEOPLE

Outlined below are seven fundamental reforms for African governments to implement to accelerate human capital development, which will in turn create millions of jobs, accelerate economic development, and meaningfully reduce poverty. These reforms offer opportunities for partners such as the US to offer support in higher education, private-sector development and technology innovation.

First, Africa's number one asset is its human capital. Investments in human capital development require governments to have sufficient revenue from tax collection.

Every government has three required mandates: collect enough taxes and fees to fund public goods, protect citizens from internal and external threats, and create an enabling environment for prosperity.

According to a 2021 report for the World Bank and UNESCO, two-thirds of poor countries are cutting education budgets due to Covid-19. In 2018-2019, high-income countries spent $8,501 per youth on education compared to $48 per youth in low-income countries. No real impact can be made from a low tax base to fund the education of millions of youth. In addition to being deeply undesirable as a way to fund public good, there is not enough foreign aid to close the gap.

Former Credit Suisse CEO Tidjane Thiam recently said African governments needed to encourage the creation of domestic firms. He went on to say domestic firms signal to the rest of the world that the country is a good place to do business. Diversified economies are the best job creators, with many firms of different sizes and across sectors employing low to highly skilled individuals. All firms create a robust tax base that can be used to pay for public goods like investment in education, health, roads and broadband internet.

Second, train teachers for the 21st-century economy to increase the quality of learning and outcomes in elementary and secondary schools.

Teachers are the backbone of any effective educational system. Without adequate training, professional development and pay, teachers will not have the motivation or skills to teach. Students will be inadequately prepared. McKinsey commissioned a report about the best school systems around the world, which found that at the core of the most effective schools were well-trained and well-paid teachers.

Third, implement a 21st-century curriculum from primary to university.

A 21st-century curriculum filled with local content while keeping an eye on global trends that is rooted in the following principles: technology, liberal arts, science, technology , engineering and mathematics (STEM), research and development (R&D), upgraded learning tools and concepts, a culture of inquiry, teamwork and research, and the development of problem-solvers and leaders.

As the world is scrambling for a Covid-19 vaccine, only 1% of global investment in R&D is spent in Africa, and the continent holds a tiny 0.1% of the world's patents. Of the medical research that does occur, much of it fails to prioritise diseases or

health problems that are most pressing for Africans. Put simply, there are not enough scientists in Africa.

The continent currently has 198 researchers per million people, compared with 428 in Chile and more than 4,000 in the UK and the US. To achieve just the world average for the number of researchers per capita, the continent needs another million new PhDs.

Countries that have invested in STEM have experienced global prominence. Studies estimate that between 50% and 85% of US GDP growth in the past 50 years can be attributed to advancements in science and engineering.

Fourth, infuse technology into every aspect of the education system and close the digital divide.

Every public school, from primary to university, should have the most updated computer labs for experimentation and learning, as well as preparation for a more digital future. Studies show that the arrival of high-speed internet in a region leads to a positive increase in the employment rate, regardless of the level of education, and better performance of firms in terms of productivity, sales, market growth and financing. For example, in Kenya, the mobile money revolution, which cut across rural and urban populations, went from employing 307 people in 2007 to more than 240,000 in 2020. It also led to the growth of small to medium enterprises. Technological innovations in rural agriculture can improve yields, linkages between markets, and financial inclusion.

Fifth, require age-appropriate entrepreneurial education for every student.

The private sector is the backbone of a thriving economy. Providing entrepreneurial education will motivate those who are inclined to use this education to build companies. To support entrepreneurs, establish an institution such as the US's Small Business Administration.

Sixth, renovate and expand the physical facilities of all existing public education institutions, from primary to university.

There are 428 researchers per million people in Africa

As opposed to 4,000 researchers per million in the US and UK

It is difficult to learn in classrooms and buildings that are collapsing. Public educational facilities must represent the goals and dreams of a nation. A 21st-century curriculum requires upgraded and functioning physical facilities.

Finally, initiate public and private vocational and technical education programmes.

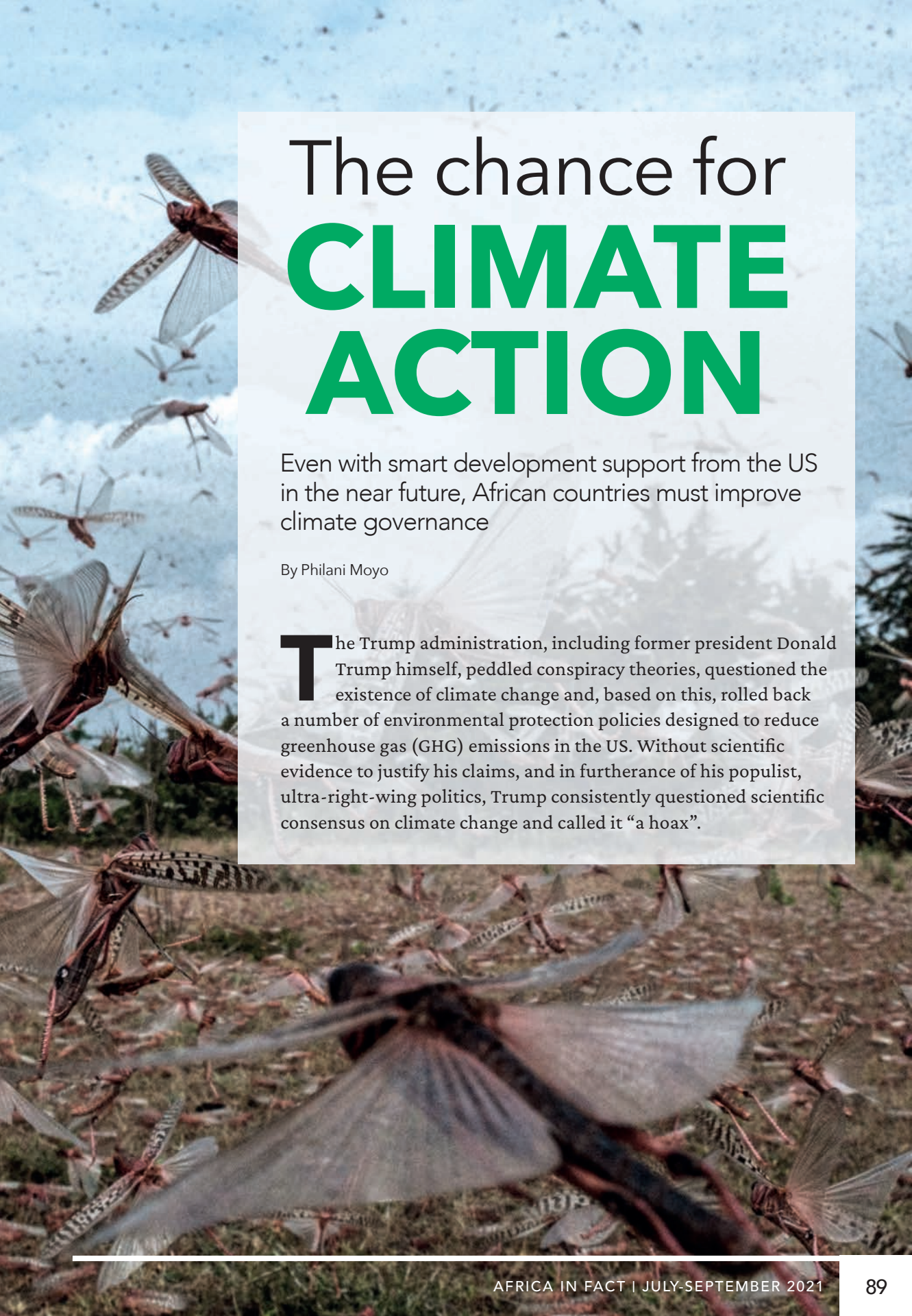
A country that makes things and grows food that the world wants gets rich: it's simple. Therefore, establish technical colleges that teach the competencies and skills required for 21st-century industrialisation and manufacturing. This includes producing more skilled labourers, such as welders, electricians, plumbers, drafters, construction workers and machine operators, as well as teaching digital skills.

ANY INTERVENTION IN EDUCATION NEEDS TO BE COUPLED WITH INVESTMENTS IN ENERGY, WATER AND HEALTHCARE

Finally, for any intervention in education to be successful, it needs to be coupled with substantial investments in energy, water, healthcare, transportation, and agriculture. Young people are desperate for a government that is committed to undoing a history of economic disinvestment and mismanagement, to restoring democracy, and to the provision of public goods.

All of the above are activities that the US has done relatively well for its domestic population, and it would therefore make a fine partner to Africa as the continent attempts to achieve similar goals. GG

Locust swarms in Kenya, 2021
Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba / AFP



The chance for CLIMATE ACTION

Even with smart development support from the US in the near future, African countries must improve climate governance

By Philani Moyo

The Trump administration, including former president Donald Trump himself, peddled conspiracy theories, questioned the existence of climate change and, based on this, rolled back a number of environmental protection policies designed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the US. Without scientific evidence to justify his claims, and in furtherance of his populist, ultra-right-wing politics, Trump consistently questioned scientific consensus on climate change and called it "a hoax".

Some of his senior officials shared this non-scientific ideological position and propensity to question climate science. Among them was Kelly Craft, the US's former UN ambassador, who argued that "there are scientists on both sides that are accurate", while the former director of the Office of Management and Budget, Mick Mulvaney, was of the view that federal funding for climate science is "a waste of your money". Similarly, Ryan Zinke, the former secretary of the interior, was a proponent of increased shale extraction and oil pipelines without due care for GHG emissions and the effects of the energy industry on global warming. Unsurprisingly, these neoliberal, pro-big business views strongly influenced the Trump administration's climate policy.

One of Trump's the first executive orders targeted reversing former president Barack Obama's climate policies, such as the Clean Power Plan (CPP), which sought to reduce GHG emissions in the US's energy sector. Trump's Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) replaced the CPP in June 2019, thereby dismantling a climate-conscious plan with clear regulatory action pillars and emission reduction targets. The ACE, a pro-big business policy, was deliberately less ambitious in enforcing emission targets. In fact, it argued for between 0.7% and 1.5% reduction, very different from

Activists protesting Trump's response to climate change project images of flames and commentary on the side of the Trump International Hotel in Washington, 2020
Photo: Jemal Countess / Getty Images

the 32% below 2005 levels by 2030 proposed in the CPP. Consequently, emissions increased during the Trump era, given the administration's open support for the biggest emitters in the oil and power sector. This affected global mitigation efforts and had direct negative implications for adaptation and the livelihoods of many in the global South, and more so in Africa.

EMISSIONS INCREASED DURING THE TRUMP ERA, AFFECTING GLOBAL MITIGATION EFFORTS

When it came to global climate decision-making platforms, the Trump effect was seismic. Based on climate denialism, with overt support for and from oil and energy companies, he pulled the US out of the Paris Agreement in 2017. By withdrawing from this legally binding international treaty, the Trump administration effectively absolved the US's biggest polluters from adhering to global emission targets, and set the path for abandoning his government's climate finance contributions under the UN's Financial Mechanism. While some might interpret this as "political gamesmanship", the fact is this was blatantly derisive of long-established global climate negotiation and action platforms. His executive actions were also about protecting the interests of big businesses in the coal, crude oil and other high emissions sector, regardless of the environmental pollution and climate crisis they perpetuate. While the Trump era, which weaponised its superpower standing to destabilise global climate action platforms and institutions, is gone, it certainly provided lessons on how destructive unrestrained executive power of the American presidency can be to the global climate agenda.

As the 46th president of the US, Joe Biden, Trump's successor, settles in office and defines his climate agenda, it is important to explore his initial steps and make meaning of the direction he is taking, specifically in relation to the African continent.

From the onset, the Biden administration has shifted and refocused the US's climate change agenda. Domestically, significant steps in realigning or setting up institutions to lead climate action are underway. Gina McCarthy, former head of the Environment Protection Agency in the Obama administration, was appointed as the first White House national climate adviser. As the domestic climate czar, McCarthy's portfolio includes spearheading aggressive policy changes that will lead to unprecedented carbon cuts as the US attempts to transition to a greener, low-carbon economy. To achieve this, the goal is to transform the country into a clean energy economy through eliminating pollution from fossil fuels by 2035, transition to a carbon-free national electricity grid by 2035, and decarbonisation of the entire economy by 2050. This pronouncement is not hollow climate politics; it is backed by a US$2 trillion plan for new infrastructure, some of which will create clean-energy jobs in the solar and electrical cars sectors. In all likelihood, even though transformation of the energy economy will not happen at the speed desired by the Biden administration, there are signs it will progressively change since the private sector is investing heavily in the growing solar and wind energy sector in anticipation of lucrative returns.

REGAINING CLIMATE DIPLOMACY TRUST IS AT THE EPICENTRE OF BIDEN'S DECISION TO REJOIN THE PARIS AGREEMENT

This market-driven growth, for all its notable green credentials, is hardly surprising given the profit motive driving private-sector investments in this and other emerging profitable green sectors. Further, although there are promising signs of gradual decarbonisation, it would be amiss to give an impression that this transition will be seamless. As we know, there are many American big businesses, specifically in the fossil fuels, aviation, automobile and manufacturing industries, that have been largely reticent to transition to greener clean production and technology as this directly affects their business models and profits.

The US's domestic climate actions under Biden cannot be divorced from the African climate action agenda. There is a continuum directly linking their domestic actions with climate mitigation and adaptation on the African continent. This nexus is direct, because a net-zero carbon American economy pursued by the Biden administration will alter the amount of GHGs emitted into the atmosphere, hence reduction in global warming, to some degree, in the long term. Beyond climate mitigation benefits, perhaps re-entry of the US into global climate diplomacy is the headline-grabbing and defining moment.

Regaining the climate diplomacy trust broken under Trump is at the epicentre of Biden's decision to rejoin the Paris Agreement, the flagship accord in climate actions on record. This re-engagement builds on his inauguration speech of 20 January, 2021, in which he pledged, "we will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again. Not to meet yesterday's challenges, but today's and tomorrow's", which include the climate emergency.

He followed this up in his first foreign policy speech on 4 February, 2021, when he directly focused on climate change: "On day one, I signed the paperwork to rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement. We're taking steps led by the example of integrating climate objectives across all of our diplomacy and raising the ambition of our climate targets. That way, we can challenge other nations, other major emitters, to up the ante on their own commitments. I'll be hosting climate leaders – a climate leaders'

US President Joe Biden participates in the virtual Leaders Summit on Climate at the White House, Washington, April 2021
Photo: Jim Watson / AFP

summit to address the climate crisis on Earth Day of this year."

This ambitious agenda of global climate cooperation and action signals how America now views and approaches this existential threat as opposed to climate denialism under Trump from 2016-2020. For the Biden administration, this revitalisation of climate diplomacy is a central element of its foreign policy agenda in which it is repositioning itself as a beacon of the "free world" that must lead in climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience.

To drive this point home, in January 2021, Biden appointed senior Democrat and former secretary of state John Kerry (2013-17) as the first special presidential envoy for climate change. Not only is Kerry America's climate diplomat, but he also sits in the National Security Council as a climate change principal, a first in the US's national security establishment. This not only emphasises the security conflict implications emerging from the climate emergency but also reiterates how responses to it must be based on cooperation at a global level.

While progressive climate messaging is good politics, and perhaps attractive "green talk", ultimately what matters most are tangible actions on the ground, specifically in the Global South. Therefore, the real test for the Biden

administration will be what it does to enhance climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience-building in Africa.

First, in terms of mitigation, close attention must be paid to the practical actions to be undertaken in reducing GHG emissions by the US's industrial behemoth and its oil-energy complex. Failure to reduce emissions will render the objective of decarbonising America's economy by 2050 hollow political rhetoric, with snowball effects on the continued global warming that is devastating lives and livelihoods in Africa. It will also reduce the chances of achieving the Paris Agreement's goal "to limit global warming to well below two, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels".

AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS MUST IMPROVE THEIR CLIMATE GOVERNANCE AND ACTIONS

Secondly, at a global level, the Biden administration has the capacity to use its soft power to appeal to other major polluters in the G7, as well as China, India and Russia, to lower their emissions in line with Paris Agreement targets. Complicated as this is in geopolitics, for this non-coercive soft power diplomacy to work, the US must lead by example through lowering its own emissions and thereby building a powerful example for other major polluters and the Global South to observe, learn from and emulate. At the risk of oversimplification: such global cooperation in lowering emissions, hence enabling mitigation, is one of the primary factors that will determine whether meaningful progress will be made towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 (climate action) by 2030.

Thirdly, as one of the biggest polluters, the US has a responsibility to honour and implement the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's principle of "common but differentiated responsibility based on respective capabilities" in technically, technologically and financially supporting adaptation interventions in Africa. In this regard, the Biden administration's commitment to climate action in Africa also has to be evaluated based on actual climate finance to be expended through the UN's Climate Finance Mechanism or its international development agencies, such as USAID. The level of climate financing will also be a practical indicator of their commitment to climate justice given the US's economic, social, moral, political and legal responsibility to provide some form of reparation to African countries at the 'coal-face' of climate impacts.

Lastly, African governments must also be proactive in implementing their endogenous mitigation, adaptation and resilience programmes within the geopolitical matrix within which the US remains the superpower.

While climate-smart development support from the US, and other Global North countries, will remain important for the near future, African governments must improve their climate governance and actions. This includes channelling adequate locally generated resources towards practical implementation of their climate adaptation policies and resilience-building strategies at local community level, where the poor and vulnerable continue to adapt in perilous environments.

To enhance these local resilience-building efforts, African governments must also use their persuasive and administrative power to attract the private sector into public-private partnerships in local climate-smart development initiatives. Although they may be contested given the profit motive that largely drives private-sector decision-making, such public-private partnerships have the potential to drive mitigation efforts in the African oil-energy sector, while also providing important funding, technology and technical expertise for resilience-building at local community level.

GLOBALISED DESIRES

The digital divide between Africa and the US is shrinking fast

By Job Allan Wefwafwa

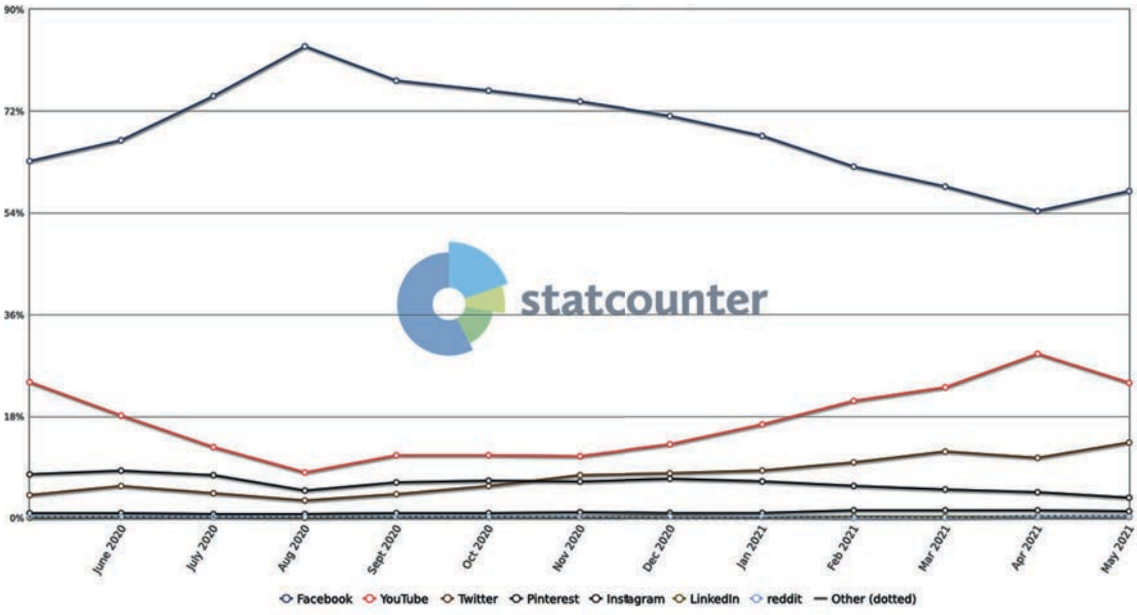
There is an excitement that comes with one's Facebook post getting many likes within hours, or with a WhatsApp status that quickly elicits many views and chats. It prompts a nice feeling and temporary addiction to keeping tabs on how many more friends are reacting to the post or status. Social media power is anchored on emotions, and these capitalism-driven technologies ensure emotional arousal.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg at the launch of Facebook News
Photo: Drew Angerer /AFP

The people who invented social media technologies did not, however, envisage the commercialisation of their inventions, or that they would be emotionalised. The inventors' humanitarian ideas were later hijacked by influential people in society, who saw social media's potential to wield power and make money. Today, both inventors and influential people decide how we use social media. Mark Zuckerberg, Andrew McCollum and their two roommates' intention to use Facebook to check out cute girls at Harvard University decades ago has influenced, among others, the "slay" kingdom and queendom culture. Slays refer to the self-appointed social media trendsetters; usually, in terms of looks more than content. Similarly, Brian Acton and Jan Koum's idea of WhatsApp was to enable people to post their status on phones to let others know they were available for chats. As a result, its ease of operation has enabled the technology to become the most used social media all over the world. The commercialisation aspect was brought in by the influential people, who bought shares in the technologies as investors to enable growth. Societal elites, including politicians and business people, loved that the social media technologies emotionalised people more than they engaged them in sober discourse on issues affecting them.

Although Twitter was the most used social media during the 2020 US electoral campaign, WhatsApp led in spreading the Twitter messages both in the United States

Social media statistics in Africa, May 2020 - May 2021



Source: Statcounter Global Stats

and on the African continent. As the most used social media in Africa, the latter provides a platform for electoral dialogues across continent, challenging political governance highhandedness in the region.

In the US, Donald Trump's use of social media popularised American politics in Africa and globally, but also increased the vulgarisation of the engagements. Arguably, American and African elites are aware and afraid of how people use the power of social media to hold them accountable. This has made them use the medium to vulgarise political debates to dodge people's sobriety on public interest issues. Even though scholars argue that people use social media for collective emotionalisation, which helps them overcome fear and confront political injustice across the globe, this does not guarantee healthy debates on the platforms. After all, the unseating of long-serving presidents during the 2010 Arab Spring did not bring with it any better political engagements. Neither did it safeguard purported better democratic values in the affected nations. The technologies preoccupy people with more emotions than logic. This betrays Tim

AMERICAN AND AFRICAN ELITES ARE AWARE AND AFRAID OF HOW PEOPLE USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE

Berners-Lee's original intention – to create a World Wide Web (WWW) that would be committed to values of public welfare, serving as a universal medium for sharing information. He hitherto envisaged the technology as a medium free of commercial interests and power wielding.

Governments across the globe are strengthening control over content on social media. The new practices of corporate surveillance and exploitation are at all-time highs. For instance, in Africa, governments attempt to regulate social media technologies, allegedly on grounds of public interest, especially on the pretext of national security. During the last elections in Nigeria and Ghana, incumbent presidents (mis) used social media during political campaigns for their re-election bids far more than any other entity in their countries. The incumbents infiltrated opposition parties and tracked their activities. In Kenya, the 2017 elections witnessed the first incumbent's high-tech electoral malpractice, which was later nullified by the country's Supreme Court. During the elections, the country's incumbent used social media to rig the elections, ostensibly using ghost accounts to stamp virtual majoritarianism. However, in a dramatic turn of events, the very same social media was used by the opposition to collect evidence of the incumbent's electoral malpractice, which upon presentation to the court, led to the nullification of the election.

A loose comparison can be drawn between Africa and US electoral politics, in which Trump alleged through social media that his opponent, Joe Biden, had rigged the 2020 elections. The comparison points to the fact that the digital divide between the US and African nations is shrinking fast. Knowledge drawn from the comparison would be handy to analyse the Biden administration's policy on Africa. With many social media technological similarities, converging interests may be identified and mutual benefits harnessed to better both continents.

CORPORATE SURVEILLANCE IS A SUBVERSION OF THE TECHNOLOGIES FROM THE INVENTORS' ORIGINAL INTENTION

Besides the similarity in terms of political administrations, another outstanding similarity is in the corporate surveillance. This is one of the direct results of the influential people's subversion of technologies away from the original intentions of the inventors. The influential people advance globalised commercial interests. American author Mark Manson's first chapter in his motivational book, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*, refers to social media as "the feedback loop from hell". He argues that social media posts

A laptop at the entrance to the Cambridge Analytica offices in London. Facebook expressed outrage at the British firm's misuse of its data

Photo: Daniel Leal-Olivas / AFP

from friends entrap people into a daily struggle to meet certain desires. It makes them strive and break down with self-hate in pursuit of the social-media set standards of success. They then regard themselves as losers after comparing themselves against others' material acquisitions. Their biggest fear is that the social media world will perceive them as losers if they don't have material

possessions to flaunt. They will engage in impulse expenditure, usually on credit, to acquire and flaunt the latest acquisitions, for friends to affirm that they are not losers. The commercialists love it so. The desire to flaunt material acquisition has been made even more popular through the universalisation of human wants such as holidays, expensive cars, and exclusive parties, among others.

THE DESIRE TO FLAUNT MATERIAL ACQUISITION HAS BEEN MADE POPULAR THROUGH THE UNIVERSALISATION OF HUMAN WANTS

Today, American and African citizens have similar desires, popularised through social media. They plan grand weddings because their friends had colourful ones the previous weekend. They hire limousines for short trips to take photos because a friend got a Ferrari on their birthday. Kenyan netizens will remember the saga of city lawyer Steve Ogolla, which culminated in an emotional con and financial loss to the tune of US$5000. Had it not been for the materialistic lure of social media, he would not have fallen victim while trying to impress the purported intellectual suitor, Dorcas Sarkozy.

Social media's culture of showing off can preoccupy people so much that many focus only the on approval of their peers and miss out on realistic assessments. Such ecstatic materialism is reminiscent of a classic Russian play by Nikolai Gogol, *The Government Inspector*, in which he satirises material greed. Although the play was written long before social media was invented, technology has aided corporate surveillance that in turn enables aggressive commercialisation, resulting in globalised materialism. Social media has rejuvenated human desires that are as old as man himself, and presented new opportunities for having these desires met.

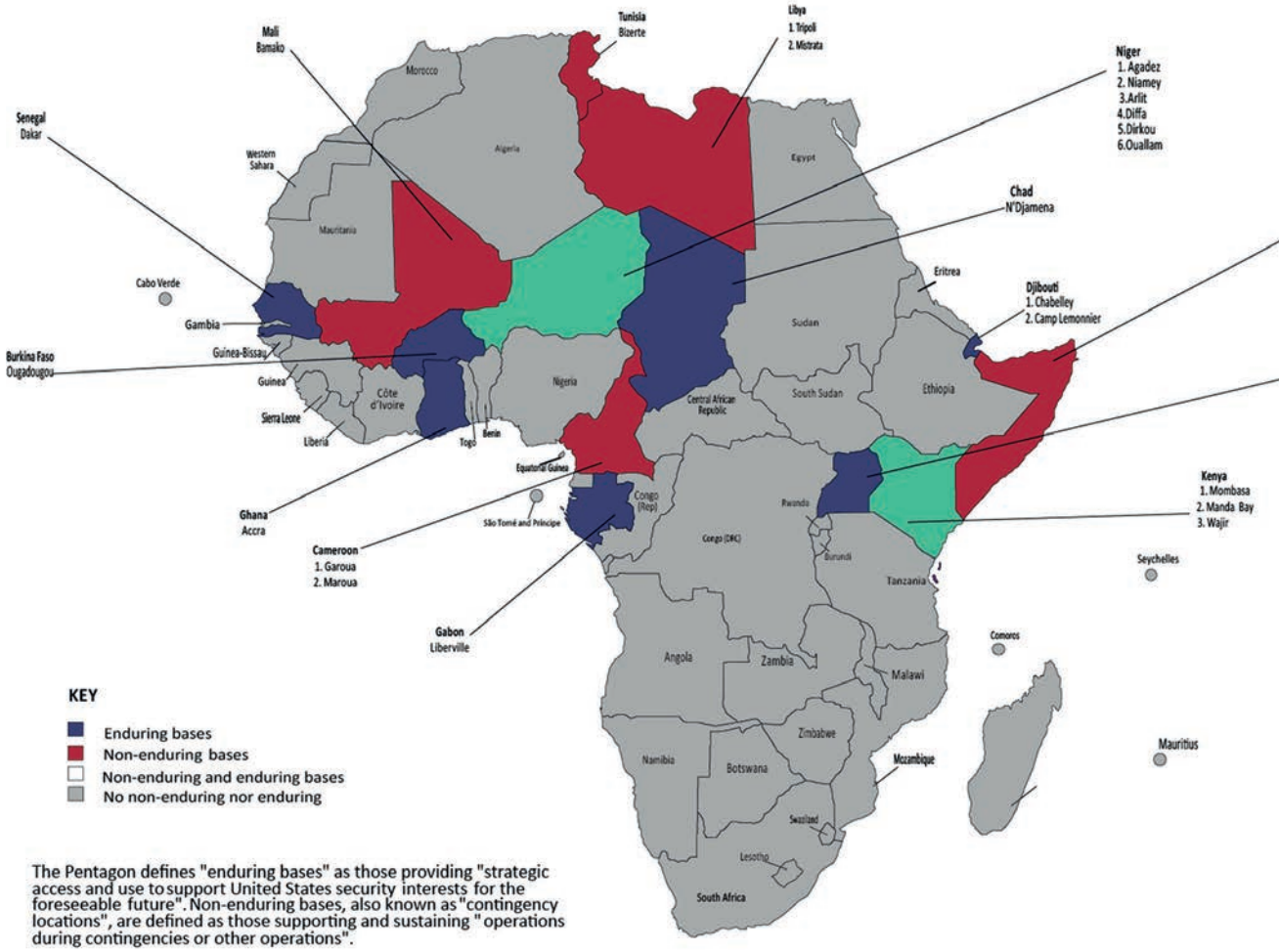
For instance, the 2019 highest-paid person on YouTube was a nine-year-old. This may make a Kenyan musician who has spent decades figuring out how to earn a living from YouTube break down. But such is the life that social media allows mankind across the globe. It is full of mixed fortunes and endless opportunities. It creates a job for a young man in Africa, but subjects him to walking a delicate balance between using his earnings to buy online nudes and sending the money to his poor and ailing parents upcountry. It is amoral.

For instance, the "emotionalising" power of social media has made the desires of *nyalgunga* or *owe-ingo* (typical rural setting in Kenya) dwellers similar to those of a New York or Paris superstar. It has expanded the capitalist market by globalising human desires. While the *nyalgunga* dweller of the 1990s may have wished to inherit his grandfather's fishing dhow and catch more fish, to attract the beautiful widow who refused him publicly the last time he made advances, today he desires a 100-inch digital TV screen.

The *Owe-ingo* dwellers 1990s desire may have been to clear the thicket on a fertile hillside and plant more millet in the next season to fill his granaries, and lure the elusive secondary schoolgirl into marrying him as his third wife. But today he wishes for a holiday in Dubai or to attend a live Chelsea match in London.

The influential people, the "investors" and commercialists are happy with this since they are the regional authorised dealers in the TV brands the dwellers will buy, and they have shares in the airlines that will fly the dwellers to Dubai and London, should their life desires come true. GG

AFRICA BY THE NUMBERS



The Pentagon defines "enduring bases" as those providing "strategic access and use to support United States security interests for the foreseeable future". Non-enduring bases, also known as "contingency locations", are defined as those supporting and sustaining "operations during contingencies or other operations".

Source: The Intercept, showing map provided by the Pentagon.
https://theintercept.com/2020/02/27/africa-us-military-bases-africom/

US military presence in Africa in 2019

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