

AFRICA POLICY BRIEF

Trump and Biden Presidencies Policies on Africa: A Prediction for Trump Second Term's Africa Policy

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Introduction

This essay will examine the positive and negative effects of both the Trump 1.0 and Biden Presidencies on the African continent. The findings of this analysis will help this paper to predict what a Trump 2.0 presidency could mean for Africa. Already before taking office, president elect Trump has had a significant influence on how US foreign policy is formulated and has given observers a sneak peak of his likely priorities in his next tenure as President. This essay shall be structured in a format that focuses on Trump's first administration's impact on Africa, positive and then negative, it will then review the impact (positive and Negative) of the Biden Presidency and will conclude with an overview of what might be expected from Trump's second term in office.

General Overview of America's Africa

Policy

The United States is the largest giver of humanitarian foreign Aid to the African Continent with over \$6.6 billion going to Sub-Saharan Africa in the fiscal year 2024 alone (USAID, 2024). Historically, the United States has had little interest in Africa Pre-World War II. Their interest in Africa peaked during the cold war era when the USA sought to curtail the influence of the Soviet Union around the globe. Even then the US

engaged on a bilateral basis with specific African countries of interest whom they did not want to fall under the sphere of influence of the Soviets (Owusu & Carmody, 2020). The post-World War II era saw the United States engage with Africa more with different administrations coming up with foreign policies targeting Africa. Specifically, according to Owusu and Carmody (2020), US engagement with Africa saw a surge under the Clinton Administration and continued steadily under Bush Jr and Obama. US aid came in the form of security and development aid with the famous African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), Bush's highly successful Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) in 2003 and Obama's Power Africa that saw over \$7billion allocated to Africa (Owusu & Carmody, 2020).

Trump 1.0 Positive Impact on Africa

Donald Trump is an unpredictable politician and no one knew exactly what to expect when he took office in 2016 for his 1st term. His rhetoric was concerning to many and constantly caused panic and criticism on a bi-partisan basis. Africa surely had no idea what to expect except the fact that Trump was determined to fundamentally change American Foreign policy. For starters, in the first three years of Trump's presidency, the continent continued to receive around \$7 billion

foreign aid from the US annually which was a maintenance of the status quo.

Trump 1.0 major focus on Africa came later in his administration when they launched the Prosper Africa initiative and the Development Finance Corporation (DFC). The former assists US companies wanting to invest in Africa while the latter funds development projects in Africa and around the world (Chibelushi, 2024). These projects were not closed under Biden and the DFC claims to have invested over \$10 billion in Africa (Chibelushi, 2024) and had a spending cap of around \$60 billion (Saldinger, 2020).

Prosper Africa initiative launched in 2018 was Trump's major policy towards Africa, this initiative was outlined and explained by his Security Advisor John Bolton (Saldinger, 2020). The initiative was touted as a key focus for the Trump administration. Additionally, to demonstrate the importance of Africa to the US, then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other officials visited the continent. Tibor Nagy, the U.S assistant secretary of state for African Affairs attempted to emphasize Africa's importance when he claimed that; the U.S seeks to strengthen and expand partnership with Africa and advised that Africa should be looked at through the windshield and not the rearview mirror (Saldinger, 2020). The rhetoric from the Trump 1.0 administration around Africa tilted positive after establishing the prosper Africa Initiative.

Nagy pointed out that U.S engagement with Africa would focus on five key areas; harnessing the potential of African youth, creating a level playing field for US companies and encouraging U.S businesses to transact on the continent, improving governance, Countering China's influence and increasing engagement with Diaspora communities (Saldinger, 2020). In a similar breath the acting assistant administrator for the Bureau of African affairs, Mr. Christopher Maloney emphasized that the U.S engagement with Africa would be focused on

building trade and commercial ties, protecting the U.S from security and health threats and helping African states progress towards stability and self-reliance. More positive rhetoric came out from administration officials with focus being on helping Africa on its own unique journey to self-reliance and showing Africa how the U.S is a major contributor to global health something that can be discussed while talking of China building something like a stadium (Saldinger, 2020).

Furthermore, Prosper Africa's secretariat is housed by USAID and Maloney pointed out that the policy also aims to mobilize U.S capacity to facilitate transactions and foster better policy environments for trade and investment (Saldinger, 2020). One of the touted potential for prosper Africa was the fact that it would be used by the U.S government to build a one stop shop for its more than 60 trade investment support services. The Prosper Africa Website has some claims in its results section which show that since June 2019, the U.S government has helped close over 2200 deals across 49 countries for a total estimated value of \$120.3 billion.

Furthermore, the initiative claims to have facilitated around \$9.7 billion in non-country specific, regional investment. Perhaps this could be the Initiative's and Trump's great legacy in dealing with Africa-fostering and facilitating private sector investments on the continent. These deals are broken down by sector with over 780 deals in agribusiness, 133 in financial services, 116 in Energy, 5 in manufacturing, 89 in industrial materials and 72 in aerospace and defense.

Trump's insistence on eradicating radical Islam can be viewed as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it leads to the demonization of entire Muslim communities, take for instance his Muslim Ban which affected many parts of Africa. However, on the brighter side, Trump's strong stance against radical Islam was essential to his support to Nigeria

which faced unprecedented attacks from the so-called Boko Haram terror group. A former Nigerian lawmaker explained to a Nigerian news outlet-Vanguard that Trump stepped up where Obama could not when it came to fighting terror in Nigeria. He armed the Nigerian government and approved the sale of Tucano jets to them and this greatly strengthened the West African country in their fight against Boko Haram (Chibelushi, 2024).

The trump administration supported stability on the African continent. This was majorly fueled by Trump's disinterest in starting new wars. The Trump administration played a crucial role in backing initiatives to end the civil war in Cameroon and also assisted Sudan in a moment of crisis after the ouster of Omar-al-Bashir (Campbell, 2020).

Furthermore, Melania Trump visited Ghana, Egypt, Kenya and Malawi in 2018 as she promoted her 'Be Best' child-welfare campaign and was a key proponent of anti-bullying. She also promoted maternal and newborn care in hospitals, education for children and emphasized the role the U.S plays in helping each country be self-sufficient (Campbell 2020).

Notable under the Trump administration was the alternative approach they took in dealing with Africa which perhaps resonated with many so-called Pan-Africanists. The administration's strategy sought to move away from the traditional format of foreign aid and instead focus on investment.

This drive aimed to create opportunities for the private sector to impact Africa's key development needs that would be key in addressing Africa's direst challenges (Scheneidman & Signe, 2018). This was well elucidated by the President of the African Development Bank during the first African Investment Forum in Johannesburg, Dr. Akinwumi; 'Africa is not going to be developed by aid. It will be

developed by investment' (Scheneidman & Signe, 2018).

Negative Impacts of Trump 1.0 Presidency on Africa

The negative impacts of the Trump first presidency in Africa can be categorized in slots of what could have gone wrong and what was not done. For the most part, Trump was criticized for his unfiltered rhetoric about Africa which many took offense to especially when he called African countries 'Shithole countries.' Also, the fact that he waited until 2018 to launch an official African strategy in Prosper Africa shows that he lacked any serious zeal towards engaging with the continent.

However, it must be noted that this was still two years earlier than the Obama administration as John Bolton pointed out in an interview with the Heritage Foundation (Heritage Foundation, 2018). Also, generally, majority of African countries viewed America in a negative light during the Trump administration with the notable exception of Nigeria (Campbell, 2020).

Another misstep by the Trump administration is in the framing of their African strategy which more or less focused on countering China and Russia's influence on the continent (Scheneidman and Signe, 2018). Africa is not a battleground for great power politics and labeling China as predatory does not bring the continent closer to the U.S. When it comes to trade and investment, the Continent and the African Union prefer a regional approach through the African Free Trade Area instead of a bilateral approach that the Trump administration prefers (Owusu & Carmody, 2024).

Also, Trump main instinct was to significantly cut foreign aid and this was only held back by bi-partisan resistance from Congress. Had his idea of cutting

development assistance by 30% been implemented, the cost to Africa would be enormous. It would affect the successful fight against HIV on the continent spearheaded by Bush's PEPFAR initiative which has benefited over 13 million Men, women and Children by providing ARV treatment (Scheneidman & Signe, 2018). The Trump administration exposed the continent to major risk to the African Continent when they asked congress to rescind \$252 million in Ebola funding and prevented U.S experts from working on the frontlines of the DRC during an Ebola outbreak. The administration also dismantled the global health security and biodefense directorate on the National Security Council (Scheneidman & Signe, 2018). Furthermore, aid cuts would have devastated the continent's service sector especially civil service which employs many young people and is heavily supported by foreign aid from the U.S.

Muslim majority countries in Africa such as Libya and Somalia were victims of Trump's sweeping Muslim Ban and this hindered immigration of people who might actually have been in danger. The ban was ignorant and insensitive especially given the fact that the U.S had a major role to play in the destabilization of both countries through invasion. Furthermore, the administration undermined security on the continent by threatening to withdraw support from UN peace keeping missions that they deemed ineffective (Scheneidman & Signe, 2018).

Whereas there is an argument to be made for reforming the UN and curtailing wastage, the solution is not in abandoning existing mechanisms completely but in providing better alternatives. Withdrawing UN funding would not help bring peace in conflict prone regions of Africa.

Trump never visited Africa while president and he only hosted few African leaders. This is an indication that to him, Africa was not a priority and this is further reflected in his rhetoric and the fact that his administration looked at Africa through the lens of

countering China even though the administration's officials kept saying the opposite. As for his direct impact on Africa, his presidency had a new and unique approach to engaging with Africa which put America front and center and the U.S only sought to only help African countries that were considered friendly to US interests. This is in a way blackmail because in the international arena, weaker states have to balance relationships with Major powers. Africa was lucky that Trump did not go through with most of his threats especially about cutting foreign aid due to in a large part pushback from congress.

The Impact of the Biden Administration on Africa

Positive Impact

Under the Biden Administration, no one expected any surprises and everyone expected the status quo or business as usual to take precedence. This was true for US foreign policy around the world and in Africa to be specific. For starters, the Biden Administration lifted the Muslim ban placed by Trump and this was important for both Somali and Libyan immigrants who sought a better life outside the hell the U.S had helped create in their home countries.

Biden took an ambitious approach when he decided through his 2022 Africa strategy to redefine the U.S view of the continent. In his strategy, Biden laid out what experts see as a modern, strategic and comprehensive vision for Africa that is not defined by charity and geopolitics (Hudson, 2024). The core driving force of this strategy as Hudson points out is the fact that by 2050, Africa will be the most populous region in the world with plenty of minerals to power a modern world and economy and with adequate voting muscle in global decision-making institutions to give the continent a consequential voice in global decision making. It is these facts that Biden feels necessitate re-engagement with the Continent as equal partners and that whenever global

decisions are to be made, African voices must be heard.

Biden's view of Africa in his strategy looks sober and wide eyed especially in light of the growing BRICS bloc and how the global south largely stood for or refused to stand against Russia in Ukraine. It could also be inspired by the growing influence of China in Africa and how its approach to Africa is working. No matter the reason, Biden's view is largely based in reality. And when it comes to optics, Biden definitely beat Trump on this. He held a U.S-Africa leaders' summit in 2022 where he made the bold assertion that the US was 'all in in Africa' and this I have to note could mean several different things both positive and negative for the continent. Biden promised to accelerate high-level exchanges (Hudson, 2024) with Africa and several cabinet officials have traversed the continent under Biden's administration. Where Biden was criticized for not going to Africa himself, he made up for this by visiting Angola in recent weeks.

Biden's Angola visits also so focus on assessing the unfinished Lobito corridor. This project is a \$1billion rail line with the aim of better integrating DRC, Zambia and Angola into regional and Global markets, develop green energy supply chains, spur investment in Agriculture, telecoms and additional sectors in underdeveloped regions of Angola (Hudson, 2024). Its during his Angola trip that Biden pledged \$1billion in humanitarian assistance to Africa aimed at addressing food insecurity, climate change and needs of refugees and internally displaced persons in 31 African countries.

According to Hudson (2024) Biden also made a commitment to reform global governance institutions such as the UN Security Council, The IMF and World Bank. This follows pleas from the global south to be better represented and have their voices heard in these institutions. During his US-Africa summit, Biden assured African leaders that their

voices belong to the table and in every room where global decisions are made. He further reiterated this commitment during the 2022 UN General Assembly and supported reforming the UNSC by adding representatives from Africa (Hudson, 2024). He even doubled down this year by calling for Africa to not only have one but two UNSC seats.

Negative Impacts of Biden Administration in Africa

The Negative impacts of Biden's administration in Africa come from promises unfulfilled or ambitious plans unrealized. First off, the US-Africa summit was largely a debacle and more of a show than actual summit where groundbreaking deals are made. Many African leaders complained of being bundled into buses like children and not getting an opportunity for one-on-one meetings with Biden (Hudson, 2024).

The promise of reforming global governance institutions is also mainly empty rhetoric given the fact that Biden made these promises years into his administration and has no chance of implementing them especially after losing an election. Putting African representatives on the UNSC is also empty rhetoric which does not address the real power gap issues that African countries are concerned about. The U.S wants to give security council seats to African representatives but without the Veto power which basically as the South African Daily Maverick (Murithi, 2024) editorial noted, "US non-proposal would relegate the African continent's 1.4 billion people to the category of permanent second-class citizens without any significant decision-making power on a UNSC that allocates 60% of its agenda to issues relating to Africa."

Furthermore, Biden's Angola visit came too little too late as he postponed many opportunities to visit the continent until at a time when he was irrelevant and ousted from Office. That truly shows his priorities regarding Africa. Additionally, the administration has been largely silent on the Sudan crisis that is bound

to make an untold humanitarian catastrophe on the continent even worse. Biden even held meetings with the UAE leader whose country is seen to be a major sponsor of one of the warring sides in Sudan and the meeting did not yield any major action points on resolving the crisis (Hudson, 2024). The sanctions on Russia also irritated the global south since they caused a major raise in Oil prices and other goods on the continent. The Biden administration has done nothing to address this spillover effect of the administration's reckless sanctions regime.

Generally, Biden's administration will be remembered for its promising rhetoric that was not based in reality. The language was right but the actions remain wanting. Despite what the administration claims, all this approach towards Africa is in response to the growing influence of China and Russia on the Continent.

The U.S through the war in Ukraine and Gaza realized the potential influence of Africa in the future in decision making institutions and it would rather be in control of this influence instead of leaving it to countries like China and Russia. Just like Trump, Biden's Africa policy is one that is not for African interests but for American interests. While this is normal in real politick, both administrations should stop gas lighting Africans with false promises of its importance to them when in fact the continent is seen as a battle ground for world dominance.

Predicting Trump 2.0 Presidency Impact on Africa

Trump's consistent America first Agenda does not bode well for Africa. He is one of those rare president's that follows through with their promises if not checked. This time Trump comes to power with a clearer vision and a huge mandate from the American people who gave him control over all branches of government. This mandate is not like the one in 2016, he is likely to try and fulfill most of his

promises. Trump to be clear has not demonstrated any clear-cut hostility towards Africa as a continent. However, his threat not to renew AGOA when it expires in 2025 (Chibelushi, 2024) are concerning.

He also promised to levy a universal 10% tariffs on all foreign goods coming into the United States, this literally spells doom for African countries.

Also, he has doubled down on his anti-immigration rhetoric which could affect many asylum seekers and people fleeing poverty on the continent. His threat to slash foreign aid and which is backed by Elon Musk who is in charge of DOGE (Department for government efficiency) also is not good news for a continent that depends heavily on foreign aid from developed countries.

However, Trump might be driven by the policy to compete against China in Africa and this could result in favorable policies on Africa from the administration. He already initiated investment through the DFC which has been good for Africa and this could be expanded in a bid to counter what the U.S calls China's influence.

Should Trump's anti-war instincts persist, Trump may be good for Africa by not igniting any conflicts on the continent just like in his first term. He has already threatened the BRICS bloc which is a major lifeline of the global south. If he sparks a trade war with the Bloc, it could significantly affect countries in Africa.

This Trump administration will be very different from the first one and at best no one can accurately predict what is to come as that is Trump's preferred mode of operation.

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