

CHAPTER 14

Trump 2.0 and Africa: The Politics of Strategic Patience and Realignment

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Introduction

325

The United States' (US) relationship with Africa has historically oscillated between periods of strategic engagement and relative neglect (Malone and Khong, 2003). In other words, the African continent has been relegated to a peripheral role in US foreign policy (Bangura, 2007). Global security concerns, economic interests and ideological frameworks have all played key roles in shaping this relationship (Kalu and Kieh, 2013). The US's foreign policy toward Africa was traditionally marked by benign neglect, especially before World War II, when there was little interest in the continent (Malone and Khong, 2003; Owusu, 2020). Following the war, US involvement with African nations was largely shaped by efforts to counter Soviet influence, leading to selective engagement or disengagement with individual African countries (Cox and Stokes, 2018). A more consistent and meaningful US–Africa relationship began during President Clinton's administration, and this engagement grew stronger with significant bipartisan support (Falola and Njoku, 2020). The Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations maintained a largely consistent approach on key priorities on the continent (Kalu and Kieh, 2013).

326 In his first foreign-policy speech in 2015, the then Republican presidential frontrunner—Donald Trump, declared that ‘America First will be the major and overriding theme of my administration, adding that his foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American security above all else’ (Schultz and Fredericks, 2016). In line with this declaration, under President Trump’s first term between 2017 and 2021, the US–Africa relations experienced a notable departure from a multilateral and structured approach that had largely characterised previous US administrations such as particularly former President George W. Bush and Barack Obama (Iddris, 2018; Orefo, 2013). The ‘America First’ mantra, which prioritises economic opportunities over traditional aid-based partnerships, significantly deprioritised Africa in Trump’s first term (Baruwa, 2025). Thus, relations with African countries deteriorated to unprecedented levels, primarily due to the administration’s considerable contempt for international organisations and multilateralism, as well as its clear disinterest or arguable benign neglect of the African continent, and derogatory remarks allegedly directed at African states (Singh, 2024). Paying less attention to Africa resulted in diplomatic disengagement from the US’s obligations to the continent (Owusu, 2020). Despite its growing population and wealth in critical minerals, it can be argued that Trump does not see sufficient opportunity for mutually beneficial ventures with Africa. This explains why he allegedly referred to African countries as ‘shit-hole’ in 2018 and why diplomatic relations between Washington and many African states were strained and generally characterised by mistrust, tension, and neglect between 2017 and 2021 (BBC, 2018; Watkins and Phillips, 2018).

President Trump made over 20 trips to approximately 23 countries during his first term, however, he never stepped into Africa (Uhrmacher and Shin, 2018; United States Department of State, n/d). This is a sharp contrast with previous US presidents, such as Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and George Bush, who visited some African countries during their administrations, with many observers seeing it as the administration’s willingness to write off an entire continent (Olney, 2021; Toosi, 2025). This absence of top-level engagement was perceived by many African states as a signal of waning US interest in the continent (Olney, 2021).

Despite Trump's protectionist policies and a shift in rhetoric, some traditional US engagements with Africa continued in Trump's first term. For instance, military cooperation with the continent remained strong, especially through US Africa Command (AFRICOM), which supported counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa (Quessard, Heurtebize and Gagnon, 2020). For instance, in 2017, President Trump bypassed the 2013 Presidential Policy Guidance, reduced interagency coordination and gave theatre commanders the authority to approve both manned and unmanned air strikes, leading to a doubling of strikes in Somalia. He also maintained efforts to disrupt al-Shabab forces through sustained air strikes, carried out in coordination with African Union and Somali ground troops (Haun, Jackson and Schultz, 2021). Furthermore, initiatives such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) were preserved (Hare, Manfredi-Sánchez and Weisbrode, 2023). These reflected a level of institutional continuity in areas of security, health and trade. In 2018, when a formal Africa strategy—*Prosper Africa*—was launched, it centred predominantly on challenging African governments to choose the US over Russia and China for their economic, political and security relationships (Signé and Olander, 2019). According to the then US National Security Advisor, John Bolton, this strategy was organised around three main principles: prosperity (advancing US trade and commercial ties with nations across the region to benefit both the US and Africa); security (countering the threat from radical Islamist terrorism and violent conflict) and stability (Schneidman and Signé, 2018). However, significant cuts to foreign aid and proposals to scale back peacekeeping contributions are poised to undermine US soft power in Africa. This raises concerns over long-term commitment to development and humanitarian support on the continent (Aljazeera, 2025; Mathiasen and Martinez, 2025). In 2024 alone, Sub-Saharan Africa received over US\$50 billion in US foreign assistance. However, following Trump's decision to dismantle the US Agency for International Development, with seven of the eight countries most affected by these cuts located in Africa, there are concerns over the potential impact on the continent (Yade, 2025).

Economic engagement also saw limited innovation during Trump's

first term of presidency. While the administration launched the *Prosper Africa* initiative aimed at increasing two-way trade and investment, the programme struggled with clarity and lacked the robust funding enjoyed by earlier initiatives such as *Power Africa* (Campbell, 2024; Signé and Olander, 2019). Moreover, the emphasis on bilateral deals over multilateral engagement conflicted with Africa's increasing orientation toward regional integration through mechanisms like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Trump's second term, also marked by a foreign policy that favours bilateral treaties over multilateral ones, has already sparked cautious expectations among African leaders (Falola, 2025). For decades, many African countries have developed various security and economic partnerships with the US. Many of these unequal relationships have been reshaped over time, often in ways that did not favour the continent (Epps, 2012). This departure and Trump's transactional diplomacy in his first term often conflicted with Africa's preference for mutual respect and developmental cooperation. Additionally, his administration's limited engagement suggests that, like his first term, Africa may not be a priority in his second term (Baruwa, 2025).

As noted above, while certain long-standing programmes remained intact, the administration's broader foreign policy framework did not prioritise Africa as a strategic partner. While this remained the case, global powers such as China and Russia deepened their ties with Africa during Trump's first term and reduced America's influence and strategic focus on the African continent (Huang, 2024). Although President Trump's return to the White House is still in its early stages, some African observers fear he may once again diminish US engagement with the continent, as he did during his first term, while others believe his second term could bring both opportunities and challenges for Africa (Isike and Oyewole, 2024a). Consequently, this chapter aims to answer the following questions: How might a second Trump presidency influence the trajectory of US–Africa diplomatic and economic relations, particularly amid Africa's shifting global alliances? What role could strategic patience play in shaping a sustainable US foreign policy toward Africa in an increasingly multipolar world? How are African states recalibrating their foreign policy priorities

in response to perceived inconsistencies or disengagement from the US during Trump's leadership?

This chapter employs a qualitative research approach to address these questions and examine the dynamics of US–Africa relations during Trump's second presidency. Focusing on strategic patience and geopolitical realignment, data will be collected through secondary sources, including policy statements, official government communications, Trump's social media engagements, campaign manifestos, and scholarly articles, since 2016. Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase framework, Thematic Analysis will be employed to identify recurring themes, patterns and narratives related to diplomatic strategy and shifting alliances. The resurgence of a Trump presidency presents a critical juncture for US–Africa relations, particularly as African states increasingly assert autonomy through diversified global partnerships. Trump's previous unilateral and transactional approach left gaps in diplomatic engagement with Africa and raised questions about the US's long-term relevance on the continent. Thus, this chapter examines the implications of strategic patience by African states in a second Trump administration and explores how African states may recalibrate alliances in pursuit of mutual respect and geopolitical balance in an evolving international order. The next section of this chapter, therefore, examines the framework of understanding the subject.

329

US–Africa relations and the framework of strategic re/alignment

This section provides theoretical, historical and empirical perspectives and frameworks of understanding US–Africa relations, and the continent's strategic patience and re/alignment. It examines perspectives on the US's African foreign policy, the evolution of US–Africa relations and shifts in global power dynamics, the growing influence of China and Russia in Africa as a counterbalance to the US, and Africa and the doctrine of strategic patience.

Perspectives on the US's African foreign policy

Scholarly discourse on US foreign policy towards Africa is often analysed through various theoretical lenses, providing a foundation for evaluating shifts in US–Africa relations under different administrations. Schraeder (1994) offers a comprehensive theoretical analysis of US foreign policy toward Africa in the post-war era. According to Schraeder (1994), although it is commonly believed that US policymakers present a unified stance in African affairs, the reality is that Washington's foreign policy emerges from multiple centres of power, each capable of influencing policy in varying directions. The US foreign policy towards Africa has been historically influenced by the Presidents and their close advisors, the bureaucracies and Congress, and African affairs interest groups (Schraeder, 1994). This aligns with the pluralist perspective on foreign policy.

330 The US's security cooperation with Africa has expanded significantly over the past decade and a half due to Africa's growing strategic importance, with the most visible dimension of this engagement being the establishment of AFRICOM. This collaborates with the realists' perspective that the US engagement in Africa is driven by strategic interests, such as counterterrorism (Griffiths, 2016). In other words, this reflects the pursuit of US strategic goals without factoring in moral considerations. This approach aligns with what became known as the Nixon Doctrine—a revised containment strategy in which the US offered military and economic support to allied nations facing aggression, while refraining from taking on the main responsibility for defending the sovereignty of those states (Divon and Derman, 2017).

Similarly, some liberal scholars emphasise the role of institutions and trade in shaping the US–African relations (Cox, 2012). Over the past three decades, strengthening democratic institutions has become a significantly more prominent aspect of US foreign policy, gaining momentum in the years following the end of the Cold War. This emphasis on spreading democratic values stems from a longstanding tradition that views the export of American political ideals to advance US security and economic

interests and counter the expansion of soviet military and political power (Bouchet, 2015; Diamond, 1995, US Congress, 1998).

Evolution of US-Africa relations and shifts in global power dynamics

Bangura (2007) believes that Africa has always been at the bottom of US foreign policy priorities. This collaborates with Malone and Khong's (2003) view that the US has paid little attention to Africa. Olney (2021) suggests that the trend of benign neglect by the US was replaced with aggressive disdain during Trump's first term. However, it is necessary to observe that the US-Africa relations have historically oscillated between strategic engagement and peripheral interest, shaped largely by Cold War politics, global security concerns and humanitarian narratives (Falola and Njoku, 2020; Waters, 2009). In other words, since the end of World War II, US foreign policy has been guided by a threefold strategy focused on strengthening national security, broadening global economic prospects and advancing American values (Olympio, 2013).

331

During the Cold War, US involvement in Africa was primarily driven by ideological competition with the Soviet Union (Schraeder, 1994). After the Cold War, the US policy shifted towards promoting democratisation, economic liberalisation and counterterrorism, particularly after 9/11 (Bouchet, 2015). However, despite its noteworthy progress and rhetorical commitments, Africa has remained marginal in US foreign policy priorities, with US policymakers restricting the US politically and economically in areas of vital interest to the US (Laidi, 1990; Olsen, 2002; US Congress, 1980). Recently, the rise of China, Russia and other emerging powers has further reshaped Africa's global engagements (Van der Merwe, Taylor and Arkhangelskaya, 2016; Hamilton, 2023). The rise of these powers has prompted African nations to diversify partnerships and alignments beyond the US (Kagoro, Friesinger and Schlichte, 2024; OECD, ADB, UNDP and UNECA, 2011). This, in turn, has altered traditional power structures, challenged US influence on the African continent, and redefined Africa's role in global affairs (Kuznetsova, 2024).

The growing influence of China and Russia in Africa as a counterbalance to the US

In trade and investment, security, humanitarian aid and geopolitical interests, China and Russia have significantly expanded their influence in Africa in recent years (Hamilton, 2023). They have increasingly positioned themselves as counterbalances to the US presence on the continent. According to Rotberg (2009), Africa and China are currently in their third and most impactful phase of deep engagement –an era that holds greater potential for driving economic growth and reducing poverty than any previous efforts made through Western colonial rule or international aid initiatives. China, through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), has invested heavily in infrastructure, mining and energy projects, and at the same time, deepened bilateral ties across the African continent (De Kluiver, 2025). It also offers loans and development assistance with fewer or no conditions than the US or Western counterparts. It can be argued that this approach has appealed to many African states seeking bilateral engagements without the governance-related strings often attached to Western aid (Amusan and Oyewole, 2017; Falola and Achberger, 2013). These, among others, have created goodwill for China and enhanced its soft power in Africa.

Russia, meanwhile, has focused on security cooperation, arms sales and security partnerships in Africa (Okafor, 2025). For instance, the Wagner Group's activities in countries such as the Central African Republic, Mali and Sudan reflect Russia's strategic use of private military contractors to expand influence without direct state involvement in the domestic politics of African states, unlike the US (Inwood and Tacchi, 2024). Since 2015, Russia has signed military cooperation agreements with 43 African countries (Karabektas, 2024). Recently, French sources reported the establishment of a new Russian military base in Burkina Faso (Gebrewold, 2024). Russia's military involvement across the continent varies in scope, including training personnel, supplying arms, and offering counterterrorism support (Gebrewold, 2024). Due to worsening security, rising terrorist threats, and the frustration and anger with former colonial

powers, some African countries are forming new alliances to protect their sovereignty (Banchereau and Donati, 2024). Recently, the Russia-backed Africa Corps was established to dislodge Western powers from Africa, serving as a clear example of this evolving shift (Inwood and Tacchi, 2024). In exchange, Moscow gains access to African military, civilian ports, air bases and strategically important natural resources (Inwood and Tacchi, 2024; Karabektas, 2024). Russia has also boosted its goodwill and soft power in Africa (Ogunnoiki, Ekpo and Oyewole, 2025).

Both China and Russia promote a model of engagement that emphasises sovereignty and non-interference in domestic politics, and this approach challenges the US, which often prioritises democracy, human rights and governance reforms. In other words, Russia and China offer an alternative to the conditional aid frameworks traditionally promoted by the US and other Western donors (Falola and Achberger, 2013). This has also resulted in competition between non-African powers on the continent and a reduction in dependency on the US.

Africa and the doctrine of strategic patience

Strategic patience involves the deliberate choice to wait in order to achieve specific objectives. It is considered strategic because it results from carefully weighing available options within severe limitations and determining that patience offers the most effective path forward (Curato, 2019). This approach reflects an effort to exercise what limited control remains in shaping one's own future. In diplomatic terms, it involves refraining from direct military action and instead relying on careful diplomatic measures to persuade an adversary nation to shift from a strategically risky or unfavourable position to a more secure or advantageous one (Rilwan, 2021). As it concerns the US, the term 'strategic patience' was originally introduced by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and most commonly describes President Obama's approach to North Korea. At the heart of this policy was the US position that it would refrain from entering negotiations with North Korea until the regime demonstrated clear and tangible steps toward denuclearisation (Binhong, 2018). The overarching objective of the policy was to achieve a verifiable end to

North Korea's nuclear programme through multilateral diplomatic efforts (Zhu, 2023). This stems from the belief that maintaining the status quo, though not ideal, is preferable to many possible consequences of taking action. According to Kwak and Joo (2016), President Obama brought a different perspective to the White House, prioritising multilateral cooperation over unilateral action and favouring diplomacy over military force. Although Obama was often criticised for lacking strategic vision, the idea behind the concept of strategic patience is that sometimes it is more prudent to exercise patience and pursue a long-term strategy than to resort to aggressive and short-term measures (Nakayama, 2015).

Strategic patience has been variously referred to as 'wait and see' or 'watch and complain'. Most times, it exemplifies the saying that 'good things come to those who wait'. Strategic patience requires one state to be stronger than another, and this power dynamic makes the doctrine of strategic patience effective. In other words, if two states are on parallel thresholds, none of them can be said to be indulging in strategic patience. Thus, in trade and multilateral relationships, strategic patience focuses on building long-term economic partnerships, maintaining consistent dialogue, and waiting for opportunities to open new markets, secure trade deals, or influence multilateral negotiations. The goal is often to ensure sustainable economic growth and integration into global systems, while striking a careful balance between national interests and regional development. Similarly, when applied to security and foreign policy, strategic patience typically involves focusing on long-term gains, relying on soft power, and waiting for the right moment to deter or avoid conflict escalation (Johnson, Kartchner, and Maines, 2018). Oftentimes, the policy of strategic patience is criticised by observers and policymakers as strategic passivity and an excuse for timidity (Goodby and Gross, 2010; Newsham, 2020). This accounts for why Trump favoured 'strategic accountability' in approaching North Korea in his first term (Zhu, 2023).

For African countries, strategic patience can involve a willingness to wait for favourable circumstances or changes in the geopolitical landscape before taking decisive actions, as it concerns their relations with the US. The underlying idea is that these African countries are likely to achieve better outcomes by exercising patience and avoiding unnecessary risks

while Trump is still in the White House. This approach can create conditions that favour long-term stability and progress for the African continent. Under the second Trump presidency, African nations might navigate the evolving dynamics in US–Africa relations by leveraging strategic patience to balance their foreign policy decisions, avoid hasty alignments while waiting for favourable terms in US engagement. This approach aligns with the realist notion of long-term state interests in the face of shifting external pressures (Mearsheimer, 2003). It is on these bases that the next section examines the US–Africa relations under Trump.

Trump and the US–Africa relations

This section reflects on the US–Africa relations under Trump’s first administration, what changed under Biden and the situation for the new administration. In this process, this section also considers regional alignment and global power dynamics that influence the subject matter.

US–Africa relations in Trump’s first term

Trump administration’s most significant Africa policy during his first term was Prosper Africa, a policy aimed at assisting US companies seeking to do business in Africa (Campbell, 2020). Despite the Prosper Africa policy, the US–Africa relations experienced notable policy shifts characterised by reduced multilateral engagement, a preference for bilateral diplomacy, and decreased emphasis on democracy and development aid. In President Trump’s first term, his isolationist strategy and ‘America First’ foreign policy led him to advocate for the US Congress to reduce development programmes (Yade, 2025). Thus, his first term, marked by a foreign policy that favours bilateral treaties over multilateral ones, has already raised cautious expectations among African leaders (Falola, 2025).

Although First Lady Melania Trump visited some African countries to promote the Women’s Global Development and Prosperity initiative, Trump did not consider it necessary to visit any African country during his first term or throughout his tenure in the White House. Rather, he welcomed only two African heads of state – Muhammadu Buhari and

Uhuru Kenyatta of Nigeria and Kenya, respectively (Olney, 2021; Westcott, 2019). Scholars argue that Trump's engagement with the continent revealed a limited understanding of the issues facing African countries (Harvey, 2024; Westcott, 2019). Trump's limited engagement with African leaders and his hesitation to appoint key officials within the State Department were viewed as signs of America's declining interest in the continent (Westcott, 2019). Similarly, his administration failed to host a US–African summit like his predecessors (Isike and Oyewole, 2024a; Yade, 2025). Programmes such as the PEPFAR and Power Africa were deprioritised, while trade and security cooperation became more selective in line with Trump's 'America First' mantra.

It is also necessary to observe that discussion of the African continent was almost completely absent during Trump's second term presidential campaign, compared to his frequent mention of Russia, China and the Middle East (Schultz and Fredericks, 2016). It is safe to say that even though he launched the Prosper Africa policy, Trump was not personally involved in the initiative or other aspects of US–Africa policy, unlike his predecessors (Campbell, 2020). For instance, Ronald Reagan sponsored 'constructive engagement' to bring an end to apartheid in South Africa, while George Bush personally worked toward ending civil wars in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Somalia. Bush also launched PEPFAR and initiatives to fight malaria and to support girls' education (Campbell, 2020). Bush went further and established the Millennium Challenge Corporation to improve African infrastructure. President Bill Clinton sponsored the major trade and investment link between the US and Africa and AGOA, while President Obama's Power Africa and Feed the Future initiatives were designed to mitigate chronic electricity and food shortages on the continent (Maass, 2017). Considering his lack of interest in African affairs, Africans have come to see Trump's second term as 'business as usual' and expect nothing of substance from the new administration (Yade, 2024), with Trump's continued focus on economic self-interest and counterterrorism. These trends are expected to intensify and further marginalise Africa, or push for strategic re-engagement, depending on broader geopolitical considerations and domestic policy priorities of individual African states.

US-Africa relations: Continuity and change in the wake of Trump 2.0

Analysts believe that Trump inherited a declining US strength in Africa in his second term (Donati, 2024). The waning of US influence in Africa presents a challenge for Trump's second term, which must confront significant gaps in its understanding of a rapidly evolving continent that is increasingly aligning with China and Russia (Donati et al., 2024). Over the past few years, the US has faced a series of diplomatic setbacks in Africa, such as the loss of its key Sahel military base in Niger and the inability to secure an agreement with another ally to relocate the operational base (Radar Africa, 2024). As a result, the US finds itself without a strategic presence in the Sahel, where Russia-supported military juntas now dominate, while the region emerges as a global hotspot for terrorism (Radar Africa, 2024). Again, the Central African Republic, a gold-rich nation growing increasingly authoritarian, relies on Russian mercenaries for security even as it continues to receive millions in US aid (Okafor, 2025)

337

In early 2021, the Biden administration sought to realign US–Africa relations by rebuilding trust, while also reaffirming the US commitment to addressing African priorities on the global stage (Singh, 2024). This shift was guided by a clearer and more coherent strategy for engaging with the continent, most notably outlined in the August 2022 *US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*. The strategy identifies four key objectives to shape future relations with African nations: fostering open societies, strengthening democratic governance and security, advancing economic opportunities and supporting climate adaptation (The White House, 2022). Additionally, President Biden pledged significant political commitments to Africa, of which many remain unfulfilled (Isike and Oyewole, 2024b). Biden promised to visit the continent during his term, which he fulfilled when he visited Angola in December 2024 (Isike and Oyewole, 2024c). He also supported the unrealised two permanent seats for Africa on the United Nations (UN) Security Council and actualised the African Union's (AU) inclusion in the G20 (Isike and Oyewole, 2024b; Lawal, 2024). Besides President Biden's last-minute visit to Africa, the renewed focus on the continent during his tenure was reinforced

through numerous high-level official visits to the region and the convening of the US–Africa Leaders’ Summit in December 2022 (Isike and Oyewole, 2024c; Singh, 2024). Biden also supported developmental aid to Africa, including the Lobito Train Corridor that will connect the Atlantic with the Indian Ocean (Isike and Oyewole, 2024b). However, these efforts were not enough to reverse a diminishing American presence on a continent that has historically been viewed as a low priority by US foreign policymakers.

In Trump’s second term, US–Africa relations may reflect both continuity and change across diplomatic, economic, and security engagements. Currently, there has been sustained emphasis on counterterrorism cooperation. According to key members of Trump’s administration, countering Islamist terrorist groups around the world is a top priority for the administration (Matibe, 2025). Similarly, limited development aid and transactional economic policies have characterised Trump’s second presidency. President Trump’s minerals-for-security deal with Ukraine and the proposed deal with the Democratic Republic of the Congo demonstrate the emerging transactional foreign policy approach of the US (Lawal, 2025). Trump’s tariffs that are designed to address trade imbalances and pause on all US foreign aid obligations show a reduced internationalism and multilateral collaboration in Washington, DC (Buchwald and Liptak, 2025). Diplomatically, the US under Trump may continue its unpredictable rhetoric, while African nations increasingly seek alternative global partnerships. Economically, pressure may rise on the side of the US to counter China and Russia’s growing influence in Africa. Overall, strategic patience will shape how these continuities and changes influence long-term relations between the US and Africa during and after Trump. Nevertheless, Africa’s strategic realignment is likely to accelerate in a second Trump presidency.

Trump 2.0 and Africa’s realignment, partnerships and cooperation

This section addresses the options and strategies of African countries in political, economic and military alignment and realignment, partnerships and cooperation under Trump’s second presidency. It explores (1) Africa’s

economic realignment, security partnerships and military cooperation, (2) Africa's strategic engagement with multilateral and global institutions and (3) strategic patience in Africa's waiting-out US diplomacy and strengthening other partnerships.

Africa's economic realignment, security partnerships and military cooperation

Following Donald Trump's victory, there has been much speculation on how the US government would either choose to intensify its rivalry with China in Africa or pursue selective cooperation to help offset Beijing's influence (Falola, 2025; Isike and Oyewole, 2024a). From dismantling the US Agency for International Development, to banning visitors from many African countries, Trump's second presidency appears to be abandoning these nations to deal on their own with development challenges ranging from battling AIDS to weak education systems. The US is also expected to close several embassies in Africa, and some reports suggest that Trump wants to scale back America's military operations on the continent (Toosi, 2025). As noted earlier, while the Trump administration is retrenching globally and imposing tariffs worldwide, no region appears to matter less to the White House than Africa. Trump's policies are likely to encourage African governments to invest more of their own funds in public services, thereby making them more responsive to citizens' needs (Toosi, 2025). In a second Trump presidency, Africa's strategic realignment is likely to accelerate, with trade, investment and security increasingly shifting toward China, Russia and perhaps Europe and emerging powers, such as India, Türkiye, Brazil and Arab countries. As US engagement remains transactional and unpredictable, many African nations are deepening economic ties with China and Russia.

These African nations are drawn by China and Russia's infrastructure financing, non-conditional aid and consistent diplomatic presence (Falola and Achberger, 2013). For instance, China's initiatives, such as the BRI, offer long-term partnerships that contrast with perceived US disengagement. This shift reflects Africa's pursuit of diversified partnerships that prioritise mutual benefit and development needs

against one-sided and unequal relationships with the US. Thus, as noted earlier, the US risks further diminishing its influence unless it redefines its approach to African economic engagement. Some African officials have responded to Trump's transactional approach by increasing their interactions with other partners. China invests significantly in African infrastructure and resource extraction and has been the most apparent gainer of this recalibration. As the world's largest bilateral lender, China has emerged as the leading provider of infrastructure financing and the second-largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa (Bo, Lawal and Sakaariyahu, 2024). The Beijing Action Plan of 2025–2027, adopted at the close of the 2024 FOCAC summit, features a pledged investment of US\$50.7 billion to support various areas of Africa's development, including infrastructure projects and security cooperation (Think BRICS, 2025).

Russia has also become more visible, particularly by disseminating anti-Western sentiment, engaging in aggressive diplomacy and expanding Russian paramilitary forces and mercenary groups (Karabektas, 2024; Ogunoiki et al., 2025). Despite its relatively limited economic interests, Russia exerts significant political influence in Africa, with numerous bilateral military cooperation agreements in place with African countries that often result in the deployment of Wagner soldiers (Okafor, 2025). Russia's growing military footprint in Africa is reflected in its arms sales to African countries, which have increased to far outweigh other major arms suppliers to the continent. Between 2018 and 2022, Russia was the leading arms supplier to Africa, accounting for 40 per cent of the continent's weapons imports (Karabektas, 2024). Aside from Russia and China, Africa is likely to engage with multilateral institutions to mitigate the impacts of an unpredictable and transactional Trump administration.

Africa's strategic engagement with multilateral and global institutions

Global institutions and multilateral coalitions are filling the gaps left by weakening conventional power systems in Africa. In other words, they are promoting a multipolar world and lessening reliance on the US and the Western financial institutions. One of the ways African countries

have traditionally sought to exert greater global influence is through collective action within the AU. However, African states may not see the possibility of engaging with the new US administration through the AU, since Trump generally prefers bilateral deals over multilateral ones. Additionally, most African institutions are not unified in their approach to dealing with the Trump administration (Toosi, 2025). Recently, the AU has been strengthening its relations with international organisations with a focus on representing African interests on global platforms (Okeke, 2025). The AU's admission into the G20 in 2023 represented a major acknowledgement of the continent's growing influence in global economic governance (Delea, 2024). Similarly, the European Union (EU) is Africa's major trading partner—a partnership that focuses on investment, job creation, digital transformation and sustainable development (Adebajo, 2012). The AU–EU Partnership also supports the AfCFTA. In security, the EU also funds the African Peace Facility, which supports AU-led peace operations in conflict zones such as Somalia and the Central African Republic (European Commission, 2018). Additionally, the 2022 AU–EU Summit, which reinforced cooperation on global health, education and green energy transition, is backed by an over €150 billion investment plan under the EU's Global Gateway strategy (AU, 2022). In 2007, the European Commission noted that Africa has become central to international politics, a subject of development concern, and an independent political actor (European Commission, 2007). According to the European Commission (2007), Africa holds significant weight as a political voice, an economic powerhouse, and a source of human, natural, cultural, and scientific potential.

Like the EU, the growing influence of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) + (Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates) has made it an alternative economic bloc for Africa. The addition of new partner countries, including Algeria, Nigeria and Uganda, in the 2024 BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, demonstrates a fundamental shift in global economic power dynamics and presents African countries with unprecedented opportunities to diversify their international partnerships (Agbetiloye, 2024). The BRICS+ investments can unlock African entrepreneurial potential, stimulating

additional investment across the continent, generating employment, driving economic growth and reducing poverty (Lo and Hiscock, 2014). Deepening ties with BRICS+ is also likely to encourage other global economic powers to reassess their engagement with Africa and boost their investments in the region (Lo and Hiscock, 2014). While Trump's 'America First' approach (characterised by scepticism towards international institutions) may further marginalise Africa in US foreign policy, BRICS+ offers African countries an alternative platform for increased international status, economic cooperation and development (Sánchez and Brühwiler, 2016; Stuenkel, 2020). Institutions such as the New Development Bank, BRICS's financial arm, aim to provide an alternative and more flexible terms for African states seeking to escape the dollar-dominated global financial system (Ekanem, 2025). This shifting economic engagement demonstrates the geopolitical aspirations and growing desire of African countries for diversified global partnerships in an unpredictable and changing global order. It also reflects Africa's willingness to strengthen global partnerships while waiting out President Trump's era.

Strategic patience in African diplomacy - Waiting out US policies while strengthening other partnerships

As noted earlier, Trump's second presidency is expected to closely mirror his first term, which was marked by unexpected developments and big announcements, producing volatile and unpredictable relations (Falola, 2025). Hence, African states must embrace this precarious international environment with a growing sense of common destiny and responsible regional engagements (Ogunnubi and Oyewole, 2020). Here, strategic patience is expected to play a crucial role in African diplomacy and relations with the US, enabling states in the region to navigate complex international dynamics while safeguarding their long-term national interests. Rather than reacting hastily and confrontationally to global shifts and pressures from Trump's administration, African nations are expected to adopt measured and deliberate approaches to foreign policy, such as

waiting for favourable conditions, building coalitions and leveraging global partnerships to their advantage.

Faced with the potential for a continuation of transactional diplomacy and reduced multilateral engagement under a second Trump presidency, strategic patience will enable African countries to respond to US foreign policy shifts with caution, pragmatism and strategic recalibration. One way to do this is to adopt a strategy of ‘waiting out’ US policies by maintaining minimal engagement with the US. They can also strengthen ties with alternative powers like China, Russia and emerging multilateral institutions such as the EU and BRICS+, while advocating for more respectful and mutually beneficial partnerships (Isike and Oyewole, 2023a). This will likely mitigate the uncertainties of US policy and maintain agency on the global stage. This approach will further enable African states to safeguard their interests without direct confrontation with the Trump administration. According to Falola (2025), the future of Africa is no longer solely dependent on the desires of a foreign superpower. In other words, it is time for a new phase in which Africa and the US recalibrate their connections within a bigger and more complex global context (Falola, 2025; Isike and Oyewole, 2023a).

343

Conclusion, policy implications and recommendations

President Trump’s return to the White House has ushered in a transformation of US domestic and foreign policies, especially as it concerns US relations with Africa. Africa’s rapid population growth, accelerating urbanisation, and emerging economic opportunities make the continent a focal point of increasing geo-economic interest in the face of these changes. Although the future remains uncertain for Africa in an ever-changing global economic order capable of shaping Africa’s development trajectory, African states navigating global power shifts under Trump’s second term should adopt strategic patience. First, these countries should continue to strengthen ties with emerging powers such as China, Russia and other regional blocs. This will largely ensure economic and security benefits while minimising dependence on the US as an

economic and strategic partner. Second, African countries are expected to actively engage in multilateral institutions. Doing this will demonstrate Africa's growing influence in the global arena. Third, by prioritising regional integration and leveraging Africa's collective bargaining power, African states can maintain autonomy and resilience in an unpredictable geo-economic environment and ensure that their developmental needs are met, regardless of shifts in US policies.

With the rising international backlash against Trump's tariffs and other foreign policies, the administration may be compelled to appreciate the growing complexity of the international order, including relations with Africa. Besides, while Trump's transactional approach largely emphasises short-term gains, future US leadership may seek to rebuild multilateral engagement with African countries in traditional areas such as the promotion of democratic institutions, sustainable development and security partnerships. Till then, African countries are expected to continue to assert their relevance, strengthen ties with Europe, China and Russia and diversify alliances with emerging powers. They are also expected to leverage regional integration and collective action on the global stage. It is imperative to note that the evolving balance of power between the US and China will significantly shape Africa's diplomatic strategies during and after Trump's second presidency. And given the uncertainty surrounding US foreign policy under Trump, many African countries are likely to adopt a cautious, wait-and-see approach, prioritising strategic flexibility and strengthening ties with alternative global partners until the end of Trump's second term.

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