

# A NEW US-AFRICA BLUEPRINT FOR TRUMP AMID CHINA'S RISE

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## Introduction

From the Democratic Republic of the Congo's minerals-for-security deal (Hendrix 2025) to Somalia's port access proposal (Reuters 2025) and Rwanda's offer to host deported migrants (The Associated Press 2025), African governments are leveraging the Trump administration's transactional approach to foreign policy (Agrawal 2025) and, by doing so, are signaling a new era in U.S.-Africa engagement in a context of China's expanding influence (Cannon 2025).

This dynamic shift is unfolding amid an interesting paradox. While Africa has historically been sidelined in American foreign policy priorities (Temin 2021), the continent is moving rapidly to the center of U.S. global priorities, many of which are already being leveraged by China (Cannon 2025). Driven by demographic growth, critical mineral reserves, and expanding markets—as detailed in “Realizing Africa's Potential” (Signé 2025)—Africa offers one of the clearest areas where U.S. interests and opportunities align.

The Trump administration now faces a critical oppor-

tunity. By embracing Africa's growing relevance and agency, it can craft a forward-looking strategy that delivers on its own foreign policy priorities: reclaiming leadership in global trade (prosperity), advancing American influence in a competitive world (power), strengthening regional and global stability (peace and security), and promoting core American ideals (principles). Given the scale of opportunity, this policy brief presents actionable recommendations on how the administration can act decisively across these four pillars and why doing so is both strategically sound and urgently needed.

## Why does this issue matter?

Despite waning U.S. engagement in Africa, the continent has only grown in strategic importance, reflecting key economic and demographic changes. The continent boasts 13 of the world's top 20 fastest-growing economies as of 2025 (IMF 2025). By 2050, one in four people in the world will reside in Africa (Sinha and Getachew

2024), which is expected to account for \$16.12 trillion in combined consumer and business spending (Signé 2020). Furthermore, the continent lies atop 30% of the world's critical minerals (Chen, Laws, and Valckx 2024) that are essential for electric vehicles, power storage, medical supplies, consumer electronics, and defense and military technologies—and thus the technological future of any modern economy (“Critical Minerals and the Future of the U.S. Economy” 2025; Rowan 2025). Competitors such as China are significantly outpacing the United States in overall investment, including foreign direct investment (FDI), infrastructure, and resource extraction, creating both geopolitical risks and missed economic opportunities for U.S. investors. The Trump administration should approach Africa with urgency, recognizing that U.S. engagement can drive security, strength, and prosperity for both Americans and Africans.

## What are the risks and opportunities?

### **POWER: RIVALRY AND GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION IN A CHANGING WORLD**

In the four years since Trump's last term, the world's engagement with Africa has risen with the emergence of new partnerships. China continues to engage extensively with Africa, having become the largest bilateral trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa—exceeding U.S. trade volumes by a factor of four in 2024 (Munyati 2024b; Ecofin Agency 2025a; “Africa,” n.d.), its largest bilateral creditor, the world's leader in the control of critical minerals. Additionally, China is now a major FDI contributor, exceeding the United States since 2013, reaching roughly double U.S. FDI (“Data: Chinese Investment in Africa,” n.d.). China continues to forge ahead in this leading role, with President Xi Jinping announcing \$51 billion in loans, investment, and aid to Africa over the next three years (Calabrese 2024).

China's involvement in Africa cannot be understated, but it is not the only country increasing its engagement with the continent. Russia has expanded its military presence, including signing agreements for new military bases, increasing weapons trade, and establishing an agreement with Sudan to establish a naval port in

the Red Sea (Knipp 2024). There have also been reports about negotiations between the Niger junta, who are looking for cash and weapons and Iran and Russia who are looking for uranium sales and access to the Imouren mine, which is home to one of the world's largest uranium deposits in the world (ADF 2024). Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, such as the UAE, whose imports and exports have increased by 30%, and Saudi Arabia, whose trade volume has increased in value 12 times over the past decade (Munyati 2024a), have also increased their military presence along Africa's Red Sea coast and have participated as peacekeepers in African conflicts. For example, Qatar has participated in peace talks between Ethiopia and Eritrea and acted as a mediator in the Somalia, and Sudan conflicts (Dent and Ferragamo 2024). The inclusion of Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Indonesia as members of the BRICS bloc (comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) also serves as a convergence of interests between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and some African countries (BRICS portal 2025; Plessis, Miridzhanian, and Acharya 2023). The Trump administration will be navigating a new terrain of partnerships and diverse interests on the continent this term, which will have a direct impact on U.S. interests and will require strategic engagement.

In response to waning U.S. influence, the Trump administration should leverage global competition to expand private sector engagement, create stronger trade agreements, drive meaningful investment, and better people-to-people understanding and diplomacy, such that a geopolitical lens can be mutually beneficial for Africa and the United States. However, if leveraged inefficiently (for example, through unproductive investment or a retraction in engagement), it could mean a significant missed opportunity for U.S. prosperity, peace, and security.

### **PROSPERITY: SECURING AMERICA'S ECONOMIC FUTURE THROUGH TRADE AND INVESTMENT WITH AFRICA**

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for the Trump administration's Africa policy lies in the continuation and acceleration of private sector engagement on the continent. China has been able to translate its rapid acceleration in African engagement into tangible economic benefits: In 2023, China-Africa trade was \$240 billion

compared to \$47 billion for U.S.-Africa trade (Barrios et al. 2025). China continues to prioritize trade with African countries, having removed tariffs on imports in December 2024 for 33 African countries (Ecofin Agency 2024).

In contrast, the Trump administration's "Liberation Day" tariffs slapped 29 African countries with the baseline 10% tariff and 20 African countries with even higher tariffs, reaching up to 50% for Lesotho (Trump 2025b). Although these tariffs were soon paused, they caused uncertainty and panic for some African countries that rely heavily on trade with the U.S. and placed the future of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade deal into question. Yet by looking at Trump's stated goals, the aim to bring industrialization and manufacturing back into the United States means AGOA renewal and expansion might actually be in the administration's best interests, given over half of African exports to the U.S. were mineral fuels and precious stones in 2023 (Ryder, Lwere, and Eguegu 2025).

A potential AGOA renewal could open the door to meaningful revisions to make the policy more effective for both the U.S. and African countries, especially to boost utilization rates and promote U.S. companies (Signé 2022). However, its potential termination or narrowed use in service of geopolitical aims could hinder economic progress, weaken value chain strengthening, and further reduce the U.S. share of African trade. AGOA, which is set to expire in September 2025, can be used as either a foreign policy tool to penalize countries who do not meet U.S. standards on human rights or democracy, or as a business tool to advance U.S. private sector interests. Given the recent efforts of the U.S. State Department to commission fewer annual reports on issues of international human rights (Smith 2025), it is likely that any interest in AGOA from the Trump administration would focus on the latter. Regardless of the fate of AGOA, it is clear that the United States needs a reignition and reconfiguration of support for U.S. companies and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to further invest in Africa.

While the Trump administration has embraced a preference for bilateralism and transnationalism, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) presents a unique pathway for the U.S. to deepen relations with Africa. The AfCFTA creates one of the largest free trade areas

of the world and has the potential to increase foreign direct investment to the continent by between 111% and 158% by 2035 (Echandi, Maliszewska, and Steenbergen 2022). These next four years will be vital for the Trump administration to engage with the African Union to support regional integration which will ultimately decide whether the United States reaps the benefits of these unprecedented investment opportunities across Africa.

A key focus of the Trump administration has already been the quest to secure critical minerals. Africa, and in particular, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), has moved to center stage for this mission as the U.S. discusses a potential "minerals-for-security deal" between itself, the DRC, and Rwanda. Demonstrating Trump's preference for transactionalism within foreign policy, the U.S. responded to the DRC's proposal by proposing the negotiations for a peace deal between the two countries that would include an economic incentive for all three parties through a series of bilateral mineral deals (Home 2025).

In this area, the U.S. is lagging behind China, which has already been successful in leveraging African partnerships to cement its global leadership in dominance in rare earth metals, controlling "55% of global rare earth mining capacity and about 85% of rare earths refining," including refining "60% of the world's lithium and 80% of the world's cobalt" (Crebo-Reiker et al. 2024). China has focused its investments on mineral and metal trade, having increased African imports in these goods from roughly \$15 billion in 2010 to \$50 billion in 2021 while investing heavily in Chinese private sector refining projects, including lithium processing plants in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Morocco, and more (Usman and Csanadi 2023).

Global demand for these critical minerals will only continue to rise, as highlighted by Sara Way: "The International Energy Agency predicts that by 2050, the demand for nickel will double, demand for cobalt will triple, and demand for lithium will rise tenfold" (Way 2024). It is now estimated that of the 50 minerals classified as critical by the U.S. government, 12 are 100% net import reliant on foreign entities, and 31 are 50% net import reliant, with a large proportion of these coming from China (Foran 2024; Conte 2023). This dependence represents a significant security, foreign policy, and economic concern. The Biden administration at-

tempted to support U.S. mining companies, but the past four years have heightened competition, with new entrants, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, now also vying for control (Munyati 2024a).

These minerals will also play a key role in the development and deployment of emerging technologies. Given the United States' unique strength in technological development—but with the intensifying pressure from competitors like China—the U.S. needs to rapidly accelerate its partnerships with the public and private sectors across African technology and mineral value chains as the future of these advanced technologies will be shaped by its early adopters and researchers.

## **PEACE: DIPLOMACY, SECURITY, INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS, MULTILATERALISM, DIPLOMACY OVER MILITARY INTERVENTION, AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION THROUGH ORGANIZATIONS OR LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Since 2020, Trump's final year of his first term, six African countries have had military coups, and three African leaders have defied their constitutions to stay in power for another term (Afrobarometer 2024). Insecurity in the Sahel has deepened and become more complex in the past four years (Yabi 2024), while conflicts in East Africa have grown (Gavin 2024). Meanwhile, China and Russia have each been actively increasing arms sales to the continent amid civil wars in Sudan and Somalia and increasing threats in the Sahel (Parens and Clarke 2024). The previous administration made progress, approaching peace and security through a defense-diplomacy-development lens, launching new security initiatives, and investing in the United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) and the United States Central Command, which helps African nations fund military material, equipment, and training totaling \$250 million in security assistance (The White House 2022).

While the Trump administration is likely to prioritize commercial engagement, it should keep in mind that disengagement with peace and security could pose key risks to the safety, strength, and prosperity of both American and African people. The abrupt reduction in humanitarian aid could delay or worsen the conflicts in countries such as Sudan or Mali and could hinder the

progress that otherwise might be made through a “dual-investment approach” combining aid and investment to promote long-term stability (Drechsler 2024). The end of USAID has had immense effects on the economy of countries already struggling with insecurity, such as Nigeria, which has experienced an increase in terror-related attacks since the funding freeze has undermined its economy in the North East and minimized its ability to respond (Okoli 2025; Baba-Ibrahim 2025). Similarly, reducing the U.N. peacekeeping budget, which could complicate the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2719 meant to fund African Union-led peace support operations and scaling back the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), could reduce U.S. capacity to address security challenges (Resolution 2719 (2023) 2023). Disengagement could also leave more opportunity for the rise of violent extremism (Chin and Bartos 2024), threatening U.S. security and financial interests in Africa and increasing the risk of security threats at home (Center for Preventive Action 2024).

To minimize these risks, the Trump administration should instead focus on harnessing key opportunities, which include coordinating security assistance with investments in governance and economic development that could address the root causes of instability and strengthening partnerships with African-led organizations to enhance local ownership of peace initiatives.

## **PRINCIPLES: SOFT POWER, VALUES, DEMOCRACY, HEALTH, AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT**

Despite waning support for democracy (a 7% decrease on average across 30 African countries surveyed over the past decade), support for democracy in Africa remains robust. According to the most recent Afrobarometer data, two-thirds of Africans across 39 countries prefer democracy over any other system of government (Afrobarometer 2024).

Based on President Trump's actions so far, his engagement with African countries will focus more on economic deals over human rights or democracy initiatives and commercial engagement over humanitarian aid. After President Trump issued an executive order, “Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid,” which paused U.S. foreign aid and or-

dered a review to see which programs align with the administration's vision of foreign policy, Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that 83% of USAID's programs were terminated with the remaining moving under the State Department's purview (Trump 2025a).

The sudden withdrawal of aid in Africa has created a gap that China is likely to fill, which reduces the ability to achieve power-driven foreign policy goals and jeopardizes the implementation of power-driven and prosperity-driven initiatives. Rather than viewing aid and trade as fundamentally at odds, the Trump administration should work on pursuing better alignment between the two, recognizing the role that aid can play in creating an enabling environment for the pursuit of U.S. prosperity goals. For example, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which has saved over "25 million lives over the two decades since its inception [in 2003] by President George W. Bush," is described as "one of the most successful programs in global health history," whose historical bipartisan support has brought outsized returns at a cost less than 0.1% of U.S. current spending (Hart 2023; Moss and Kates 2023;). Yet its deadline for congressional reauthorization passed in March, leaving its fate uncertain, illustrating how the U.S. risks forfeiting soft power if principled engagement is neglected (Ratevosian 2025).

Outside of the State Department and USAID, soft power initiatives are being reevaluated for potential cuts or termination. Often considered one of the most influential soft power tools the U.S. has ever created, the Peace Corps, operating in over 60 low-to-middle income countries worldwide, has also recently come under threat from the Trump Administration's Department of Government Efficiency. Despite the program's meager cost of less than 0.1% of the federal budget, it has served to improve U.S. international relations through reputation-building and value-driven engagements for almost 65 years (Magu 2018; Keller 2025).

This retreat from principled engagement is further illustrated by the administration's planned withdrawal from the African Development Bank and African Development Fund, which would cut \$555 million in U.S. contributions (Ecofin Agency 2025b). These institutions have long played a critical role in financing infrastructure, promoting regional integration, and

supporting African-led development, which are precisely the kinds of efforts that align with both America's values and its long-term strategic interests.

Aligning American values with African-led governance goals should not be understood as opposing a transactional foreign policy. On the contrary, it can actually promote it by creating trust, opening markets, and reinforcing U.S. credibility at a minimal cost, representing a strategic advantage rather than a concession.

## Policy recommendations

Given the current global and national contexts, Trump's record on the continent, and his rhetoric and actions thus far, his administration seems most aligned to pursue engagement aligned with the power and prosperity drivers. These drivers, especially in areas of convergence for all four, hold immense potential for Americans and Africans alike if strategic policies are delivered effectively.

### **GRAND STRATEGY AND POWER IN AFRICA: WINNING THE GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION TO SECURE US NATIONAL INTERESTS**

Given Africa's increased quantity and depth of partnerships with countries worldwide, beyond China and Russia, the Trump administration must counter geopolitical interference with a stronger offer of investment in mutually beneficial sectors and partnerships rather than through a wholesale retraction of engagement. To do so, the Trump administration should appoint a U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Africa who can serve as both a signal of respect and as a negotiator for stronger partnerships with the continent ("U.S. Trade and Investment in Africa" 2021). Presidential and high-level visits can be a critical tool signaling for U.S. investors to engage, which can advance mutual interests.

The administration should rapidly accelerate its private sector investment and engagement in strategic areas, including critical minerals, which will require strategic, long-term partnerships that leverage the United States' advantages, including technological innova-



tion and non-extractive business models, to counter China's influence and strengthen U.S. industries and security. To do so, the administration can look beyond just access to minerals themselves to consider leveraging technological innovation to strengthen refining and processing capacity for critical minerals on the continent, which will build trust and collaboration without sacrificing the promotion of U.S. interests.

Similarly, the Trump administration should leverage its competitive advantages in technological innovation to benefit from a key area where the U.S. could outcompete China and Russia: developing Africa's natural energy resources. The U.S. could play a major role in developing infrastructure to meet key African demands to close the energy gap while also making inroads into the critical mineral value chains used to power energy technologies. Strategic partnerships with regional and continental actors, such as the African Union Development Agency, can help the administration identify and harmonize regional projects for the United States in areas such as energy, transport, and food security. The Trump administration should work with the African Union to support Africa's regional integration through infrastructure development, which will bring mutual benefits to the U.S. including diversified supply chains, in alignment with the prosperity driver ("U.S. Trade and Investment in Africa" 2021).

## **WINNING THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC PROSPERITY RACE IN AFRICA: ADVANCING US TRADE AND INVESTMENT INTERESTS**

The Trump administration should confront rising economic competition through increased investment in key areas for industrial development where the U.S. has competitive advantages, creating new opportunities and building trust for U.S. investors.

To do so, the Trump administration should consider a slower approach to dismantling existing agreements and work to build on existing momentum to increase overall private sector engagement on the continent.

The dismantling of USAID also took down Prosper Africa (Cook and Williams 2020), a flagship U.S.-Africa trade and investment initiative created under the first Trump administration and continued throughout the

Biden administration. The initiative has helped facilitate 1,852 deals with an estimated value of \$86 billion across 49 countries ("Foresight Africa: Top Priorities for the Continent 2025-2030" 2025). As the Trump administration considers what, if anything, will replace this important business catalyst, the next iteration should focus on enhancing the pacing, coordination, and representation challenges that can arise through better coordination of the tools across government agencies to achieve greater business opportunities for U.S. and African investors. By focusing on agility, the Trump administration can support U.S. corporations that are interested in investing globally but otherwise can suffer from lengthy disbursement processes.

Given the vital importance this administration has placed on trade, it must carefully weigh its next steps for the renewal, replacement, or dismantling of AGOA. By focusing on boosting utilization rates of AGOA while aligning it with regional trade initiatives including the AfCFTA, the administration can unlock even more lucrative opportunities for U.S. businesses. In alignment with both the power and prosperity drivers, the administration should leverage AGOA's upcoming renewal to incorporate a Critical Minerals Agreement (CMA), which will boost development of and investment in advanced technologies and renewable energy sectors in both Africa and the United States and reduce the United States' dependency on China for critical minerals.

The U.S. should prioritize investing in AI and other emerging technology value chains in Africa, including partnering with African governments to develop privacy and cybersecurity plans, investing in digital and physical infrastructure gaps, and critical mineral value chains, all of which will accelerate private sector opportunities and strengthen national security for the U.S.

This administration should also continue to push for the spread of digital technologies and energy across the continent. This will provide unique business opportunities for the U.S. public and private sectors, including corporations involved in clean energy generation and financing, while improving socio-economic outcomes in Africa (Office of the Press Secretary 2013).

## **MAKING AMERICANS SAFE AT HOME AND ABROAD: ADVANCING NATIONAL SECURITY THROUGH PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Taken at face value, it may seem that isolationist, transactional, and competition-driven approaches have inherent contradictions between their objectives when it comes to peace and security. For example, if the isolationist “American first” approach dominates, the Trump administration might not engage with AFRICOM, whereas if an approach focused on competition with China dominates, this could mean that AFRICOM is maintained or expanded as a lever for competition. However, because of how inextricably linked traditional security, including counterterrorism efforts, are with broader prosperity and power goals, the Trump administration should recognize how these drivers work together and prioritize initiatives that meet shared objectives. Robust support for counterterrorism will, in turn, unlock greater economic opportunities for U.S. investors. The Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth’s visit to AFRICOM’s headquarters during his first overseas trip in office is an important first step that should be built upon for U.S. engagement in regional security (U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs 2025).

Instability and fragility, both a cause and effect of conflict, breed transnational threats to the U.S., including terrorism and pandemics. To minimize these threats, the Trump administration should focus on harnessing key opportunities, which include coordinating security assistance with investments in governance and economic development that could address the root causes of instability while strengthening partnerships with African-led organizations to enhance local ownership of peace initiatives, expand African capacity to confront regional threats before they impact U.S. interests. This includes consistent support for the African Union’s peace and stability efforts. By promoting regional integration and accelerating trade, the U.S. can play a leading role in creating jobs for the growing youth population that can reduce radicalization and create long-term stability in countries and markets for U.S. investors. The restructuring of the State Department and any potential subsequent closing or downsizing of consulates and embassies on the continent could have a significant negative effect on the ability to leverage

these relationships for mutually beneficial economic growth and continued and improved security (“Building an America First State Department,” n.d.; Wong, n.d.). Therefore, the administration should carefully consider how each of these decisions may affect the security of Americans at home and on the continent.

## **PRINCIPLES AND SOFT POWER: WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS TO ADVANCE NATIONAL INTERESTS IN AFRICA**

Although the Trump administration’s engagement with African countries will likely focus more on economic deals rather than human rights or democracy initiatives, by aligning the principles driver with the prosperity driver, mutual goals can be met. To do so, the Trump administration should focus on aligning trade and investment policies with democracy and good governance initiatives where possible and consider how funding for development aid to Africa can be coordinated in alignment with the other drivers, recognizing that aid can be an important tool of soft power with high returns on investment. For example, given its history of bipartisan support, impressive outcomes, and its role in strengthening the U.S. soft power, the Trump administration should support continued funding for PEPFAR. Strengthening American principles within engagement with Africa can act as an enabler for greater power and prosperity-driven goals.

## **Conclusion**

The Trump administration and African leaders alike should look for areas where these drivers converge and lead to action. While principles and peace might not be the leading drivers, they could complement power and prosperity or could help accelerate decisionmaking processes. While challenges remain related to all four of these drivers, meaningful engagement with Africa offers the U.S. a clear path toward achieving its strategic objectives. With this in mind, U.S. and African policymakers can make strategic moves forward over the next four years to achieve mutual goals and continue to make meaningful progress on meeting economic prosperity goals.

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# About the Program

The Brookings Africa Growth Initiative (AGI) works to inform new policies and models for better development outcomes in Africa through rigorous research and analyses, convenings featuring African voices, and direct engagement with African partners.

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