
FEATURE AND TREND OF U.S. POLICY ON AFRICA IN A CHANGING WORLD

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The U.S. policy toward Africa has never been a priority in the foreign affairs of all U.S. administrations. While inheriting most of the policies from its predecessor, each administration also makes some mild changes to its Africa policy according to new situations. It is fair to say that the U.S. policies toward Africa are basically consistent and for the most part characterized by ideological infiltration. Since the beginning of the 21st century, as economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa continues to grow, the United States has got more anxious. Under the Trump administration in particular, the U.S.-China relationship was defined as strategic competition, which expedited the pace of strategic rivalry and confrontation between them on a global scale, and Africa was turned into a venue for strategic competition with China by the U.S. The Biden administration basically continued with its predecessor's Africa policy which highlights major country competition and Africa has been incorporated into the U.S. global strategy.

ADJUSTMENTS IN U.S. POLICY TOWARD AFRICA AFTER THE COLD WAR

As Africa rises, the U.S. has recognized more and more geopolitical and strategic values of Africa. Currently in particular, the U.S. views Africa as not only a venue for strategic competition with China, but also an important region for its economy and global governance.

The post-Cold War era sees the U.S. maintaining its policy toward Africa like during the Cold War and African affairs

have stayed in a lesser position in the U.S. diplomacy. But that doesn't mean the U.S. has ignored Africa. While constructing its global hegemony, the U.S. also worked to prevent any African country from seeking hegemony against it and adopted such prevention as a primary goal in its Africa policy. Nonetheless, each U.S. administration after the Cold War has only made mild changes to the Africa policy, which is characterized by moderate fluctuation and robustness. The specific characteristics are as below:

First, strategic orientation. During the Cold War, the U.S. intensified rivalry against the Soviet Union on a global scale and maintained strategic aid to African countries, which it believed would best serve its security interest. After the Cold War, due to its anti-terrorism strategic needs and demand for Africa's energy resources, and as emerging countries like China increased their economic investment in Africa, the U.S. recognized the need to strengthen aid to Africa to increase its influence there. Particularly since the Obama administration, the U.S. has gradually formed a view that China will pose a challenge to the U.S. in Africa. As a result, it focused on providing humanitarian and development aid to Africa, with an important strategic aim of promoting good governance.

Second, incremental enhancement. Since the Reagan administration, every U.S. administration has released iconic policy initiatives or cooperation priorities for Africa. The Reagan administration launched the "constructive engagement" policy in the hope of ending the apartheid regime in South Africa. The George H. W. Bush administration was committed to ending the civil wars in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Somalia. The Clinton administration launched the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which became the trade and investment cornerstone between the U.S. and Africa. The George W. Bush administration launched the PEPFAR, Millennium Challenge Account and other initiatives on combating malaria and supporting child education. The Obama administration launched the Power Africa and Feed the Future initiatives to alleviate the prolonged power and food shortages in Africa, and the Young African Leaders Initiative to nurture pro-Western leaders.



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken making speech on Sub-Saharan Africa Strategy in South Africa in 2022.

Third, political features. As African affairs were never a priority in its diplomacy, to cope with the competition between major countries in Africa, the U.S. relied more on approaches such as exporting values and promoting Western democracy. To that end, all U.S. administrations have pegged their aids to Africa with conditions on human rights and democracy, in an attempt to bring about economic institutional reforms in African economies, but in vain. Meanwhile, the democracy drive in African countries under the U.S. direction has failed to curb corruption in Africa. All these have indicated that the additional conditions have failed to achieve their desired results.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S NEW AFRICA STRATEGY

After taking office in 2017, President Trump declared the political goal of America First, which was also adopted to guide the U.S. foreign policy. As a result, the focus of the U.S. global strategy was shifted from anti-terrorism to major country competition. In December 2018, the Trump administration released the New Africa Strategy, which adopted containing China's and Russia's influence in Africa as its core goal. The Strategy was mainly implemented through the following approaches:

First, launching the Prosper Africa initiative to confront the so-called China model with the U.S. model.

In June 2019, Karen Dunn Kelley, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of Commerce declared the launch of Prosper Africa at the 12th U.S.-Africa Business Summit in Mozambique, which called on U.S. and African businesses to strengthen cooperation, encouraged private investment in Africa, and defined the goal of doubling U.S. investment on the African continent. In effect, Prosper Africa encourages African leaders to choose the so-called high-quality, transparent and sustainable U.S. investments as alternatives to China's state-directed initiatives. As of early November 2020, the initiative had enabled the U.S. to conduct over 280 transactions with over 30 countries and regions in Africa with the total trade volume reaching 22 billion U.S. dollars. Most of these projects were on infrastructure, credit and financial services, and sectors including energy, agriculture, transportation, healthcare, technology, and pandemic control were covered. However, the Trump administration still attached numerous political conditions to these policies, such as requiring recipient countries to carry out democratic reforms in the political system, conduct market-oriented reforms in the economy and promote good governance by civil societies in social governance. The Trump administration's economic and trade policy toward Africa was still America first, with politics taking precedence over the economy and the United States' interests served more than Africa's.

Second, hedging against China's economic influence in Africa. In February 2020, during his visit to Africa, the then U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo repeatedly abetted African countries to be wary of and take actions against China's economic activities in Africa by making insinuations about China-Africa relations. Backed up by its power of discourse, the Trump administration kept playing up China's influence in Africa in its implementation of the New Africa Strategy. Although such propaganda does not cost much, it is highly provocative and could extensively influence the African society, generating pressure on African governments from the bottom up. In addition, in 2018, the Trump administration enacted the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act (BUILD), and the United States International Development Finance Corporation (IDFC) was established as a new foreign aid agency thereunder. The Trump administration's New Africa Strategy encourages private businesses to invest in Africa, and attempts to out-compete

the Belt and Road Initiative by integrating the tools of investment, aid and trade, thus hedging against China's influence growth in Africa.

Third, increasing strategic competition with China and Russia in the field of African security to maintain its strategic advantage in Africa. By the beginning of 2020, the U.S. had already deployed over 20 military bases in Africa. Moreover, President Trump granted AFRICOM more autonomy, allowing it to take preemptive military actions without his approval. The then U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper has also admitted that the U.S. dispatches security aid staff to Africa to better compete with China and Russia in Africa.

The Trump administration's New Africa Strategy aims to maintain the U.S. influence in Africa and strengthen the ability to carry out strategic competition with China in Africa under the guidance of America First. However, this strategy has not received positive response from African countries due to its overemphasis on U.S. interests. In addition, President Trump often failed to show enough respect to African leaders, causing many African leaders to avoid visiting the U.S., for they knew they were unlikely to be met by the President, and even if they were, they might be slighted. President Trump's inclination of white supremacy has also dealt a serious blow to the prestige and soft power of the U.S. in Africa. In fact, the histories of British and French colonization in Africa have both indicated that in the context of relative decline of hegemony, great powers will quickly lose their influence in Africa if they fail to take the matter seriously. The U.S. will be no exception. The fatal weakness of a policy whose true purpose is about major country competition would inevitably be exposed as time goes by.

BIDEN'S AFRICA POLICY SINCE TAKING OFFICE AND ITS FUTURE PROJECTION

The Biden administration has continued with the Trump administration's strategy of major country competition, identifying China as a competitor that poses a serious challenge to America's prosperity, security and democratic values. Its Interim National Security Strategic Guidance depicts China as the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international

system. The U.S. security and foreign policy with institutional prevention as its core is pushing the international situation towards a more volatile and uncertain future, which is also reflected in the situation in Africa.

To repair relations with African countries, President Biden switched focus back to trade and human rights issues and even lifted the Trump administration's travel ban on six African countries within hours upon taking office. President Biden also said he would reconsider bilateral trade talks with Kenya, suggesting a possible renewed focus on supporting the African Continental Free Trade Area. In a video address to the African Union summit in February 2021, President Biden reiterated the United States' strong focus on human rights in Africa, recommitted the U.S. to value diplomacy, and in particular, severely criticized the alleged abuses in Ethiopia, Cameroon, Zimbabwe and Egypt. The State Department also made a high-profile claim to promote democracy and human rights in Africa. The U.S. even signed a joint statement at the UN Human Rights Council, calling on Egypt to end its repression of freedom of expression and assembly, which was seen as an unusual move against an African ally.

The Biden administration has also reshuffled its Africa policy team. Judd Devermont, director of the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, who is also a former senior CIA official and national intelligence officer for Africa, was appointed to the National Security Council to disentangle the decision-making process on Africa policy. In a July 2021 speech, Dana Banks, senior director for African affairs on the Biden administration's National Security Council, pledged consistency to the Trump administration's Prosper Africa initiative, saying the initiative would be the centerpiece of the U.S. economic and commercial engagement with Africa. She reiterated that the initiative would bring African and U.S. businesses together, stimulate the U.S. and African private sector, and increase bilateral trade. In August 2022, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, during which he rolled out a new U.S. strategy toward Africa. It can be seen that the Biden administration seeks to deepen consensus and strengthen cooperation with African allies and multilateral organizations, in order to serve the economic recovery of the United States while consolidating relations with African allies, thus securing an advantage in

its strategic competition with China in Africa. Next, the Biden administration is expected to adopt the following policies:

First, strengthening the aid of COVID-19 vaccines to Africa. At present, the novel corona virus variants are raging in Africa, largely due to insufficient vaccines aided to Africa from the international community, particularly from the West. It is estimated that COVID-19 vaccines aid to Africa will not be fully available until 2023, and the U.S. is still acting slowly.

Second, actively bringing in U.S. private businesses to Africa. The Biden administration continues to strengthen the U.S. economic position in East Africa through the International Development Finance Corporation and Prosper Africa initiative. In the eyes of the U.S., the influx of private companies into East Africa will undermine China's investment projects there, and East African leaders will also be cautious about Chinese investment in the region. As economic ties between the U.S. and Africa get closer, they believe, African media and civil societies will increasingly speak out against Chinese investment.

Third, continuing to provide bottom-up development aid to Africa and promoting Western democracy and the rule of law. The Biden administration redirected its annual aid for health projects in West Africa to aid for promoting democracy, human rights, and social governance. Meanwhile, to reduce China's and Russia's influence in Africa, the Biden administration is expected to leverage its discourse advantage to publicize opaque investments and supply chains, and support civil society organizations to investigate and hold accountable opaque investments. This would effectively squeeze China's investment in the region.

Fourth, strengthening the alliance system and maintaining hegemony through multilateral mechanisms. Through strengthening ties with the Economic Community of West African States, the Biden administration seeks to have dominance in the bloc and promote the rule of law, defense of human rights, and independent judiciary. Southern Africa is the region of the greatest concern to the United States on the African continent. The Biden administration will continue to support South Africa's regional leadership role and coordinate with SADC to address issues like debt through multilateral dialogues.

Fifth, pursuing an active public diplomacy by in-

creasing investment in academic, commercial and cultural exchanges to compensate for the insufficiency of official diplomacy. The most important part of this attempt is the training of the young generation. The Biden administration has proposed to prioritize support for U.S. enterprises that launch businesses in Africa, strengthen and expand coverage of exchange programs such as the Young African Leaders Initiative and the Africa Tourism Leadership Forum and Awards, enhance academic exchanges between U.S. and African universities, and expand market for private college education.

In a nutshell, most of the Biden administration's Africa policy is a continuation of its predecessor, particularly the Prosper Africa initiative and the concept of major country competition in the New Africa Strategy. It encourages investment in Africa from private U.S. businesses to rival against China's investment, focuses more on health, education and infrastructure in terms of aid, and hopes to help American democracy take root in Africa by fostering civil forces, thereby reducing China's influence in Africa.

However, African attitudes towards the Biden administration's Africa policy are divided. On the one hand, influenced by the American democratic values, many Africans support Western democracy. As Afrobarometersurvey data shows, 70 percent of Africans from the sample countries support the Western democracy. On the other hand, however, U.S. aid to Africa is perceived by these countries as either lip service or with additional political conditions. In the final analysis, the U.S. never really cares about the development of Africa as a whole. Instead, it used Africa as a tool for geopolitical gamesmanship and promoting Western democracy. Moreover, racial injustice at home is seriously undermining the United States' image as a beacon of democracy in Africa. Young people in Africa can easily see the tragic scenes of police brutality, gun violence and mass shootings in the U.S. through social media platforms. In Kenya, protesters knelt outside the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi to protest against not only the killing of George Floyd, but also the abuses by Kenyan police. Derek Chauvin's guilty verdict even made the front pages of many newspapers in Africa. As a result, young Africans are increasingly showing a preference for a more independent Africa. In the long run, the United States' influence in Africa will wane. 