

US-Africa Relations: Dissecting Geopolitics, Economic Cooperation, Soft Power Strategies in an Emerging Multipolar World

The United States and African Leaders Summit Presents Unique Platform in Washington

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As the White House gears up for the mid-December African Leaders Summit, several reports indicated that a few African countries might not attend. U.S. President Joe Biden plans to hold an African leaders' gathering in Washington as a further major step to strengthen geopolitical dialogue and multifaceted relations between the United States and Africa.

The White House National Security Council in November told Today News Africa the criteria for inviting African governments to attend the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit scheduled for December 13-15. While the primary goal is to host a broadly inclusive gathering of high-powered delegations from across the African continent, a number of African countries were blacklisted.

In a statement, four countries were not invited because they are suspended by the African Union (AU) following military coups and counter coups. Currently, four countries – Burkina Faso, Guinea, Sudan, and Mali – are suspended by the AU and were not invited. All the four countries not invited are currently run by strong men who took political power by the guns. The United States on its part recognizes most African nations, except a few like Western Sahara.

According to reports monitored by this author, the U.S.-African summit will discuss the emerging global order, changing geopolitical and economic issues and will also offer enormous funds for various development projects as well as for good governance and human rights. Under the plan, Washington says the summit will focus on existing challenges, especially those relating to peace and security, food security to climate change and poverty alleviation directions across Africa.

The high-level dialogue is expected to set the scene for reviewing the opportunities for the

United States and corporate leaders from various African public and private sectors, review thoroughly how to strengthen economic partnership between the United States and Africa.

That U.S.-Africa summit “will demonstrate the United States enduring commitment to Africa, and will underscore the importance of U.S.-Africa relations and increased cooperation on shared global priorities. Africa will shape the future – not just the future of the African people, but of the world. Africa will make the difference in tackling the most urgent challenges and seizing the opportunities we all face,” according to statement from Biden Administration.

Washington considers the United States collaboration with leaders from African governments, civil society, the private sector and the African diaspora would help tackle some of the existing and future challenges, especially in efforts to offer billions of dollars for various development projects including building badly needed infrastructure and support energy security for the population.

In terms of broadening trade and economic cooperation, according our monitoring sources, African leaders would be required to bring huge delegations for special sessions during the mid-December summit. Together with their potential American investors would examine ways for exploring and leveraging unto the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The AfCFTA aims at creating a single market with an estimated 1.3 billion population, and ultimately requires all kinds of business services and consumable products. Quite challenging though, but there are new legislations that stipulate localizing production and distribution inside Africa.

The United States government and private sector leaders, together with African political and corporate business leaders, have been consistently working over these years to share insights on critical issues and policies influencing the US-Africa economic partnership.

The U.S. Agency for International Development would be working close with African institutions and organizations, it would be working closely on the participation for Africans. During these past months, USAID has provided approximately \$1.3 billion in aid to the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are listed as beneficiaries, to help stave off mass starvation and deaths in the drought-stricken region of Africa.

Further to that, Dana Banks, White House Senior Director for Africa, said the White House administration has been pushing for the Prosper Africa Build Together Campaign that would drive billions of dollars of investment in Africa. Summit details will soon be announced further detailed information, according to Washington and the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA).

In August on her African trip, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said the long-planned trip is not part of global competition with either of America’s rivals, but it is part of a series of high-level U.S. engagements “that aim to affirm and strengthen our partnerships and relationships with African leaders and peoples.”

Her trip from Aug. 4-7 was followed immediately by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s visits to South Africa, Congo and Rwanda from Aug. 7-11.

“We’re not catching up. They are catching up,” Thomas-Greenfield said. “We have been engaging with this continent for decades, and even my own career is very much

evidence of that.”

Thomas-Greenfield first went to Africa as a student in the 1970s, and in her career as a U.S. diplomat she rose to be Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs from 2013 to 2017. Many American corporate business leaders have visited and investing significantly in various sectors in Africa.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has made resonating announcement that the foundation will spend \$7 billion, over the next four years, to improve health, gender equality and agriculture across Africa. Strengthening and supporting these sectors have become necessary due to increasing complains about lack of funds and worse, due to the negative impact of geopolitical changes.

It will further continue to invest in researchers, entrepreneurs, innovators and healthcare workers who are working to unlock the tremendous human potential that exists across the continent, according to the statement, noting that the Russia-Ukraine crisis was reducing the amount of aid flowing to the continent and created global instability. It appeals to global leaders to step up their commitments to finding solutions to multiple problems in African countries.

Noteworthy to reiterate here that President Biden has held several summits since his inauguration in January 2021. For instance, on December 9-10, 2021, President Biden held the first of two Summits for Democracy, which brought together leaders from government, civil society, and the private sector in a shared effort to set forth “an affirmative agenda for democratic renewal and to tackle the greatest threats faced by democracies today through collective action.”

Now the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit comes just a few months after Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken unveiled the new U.S. policy for Africa in South Africa in August. The new policy says that the United States will pursue four main objectives in Africa. The four objectives in the new strategy are fostering openness and open societies, delivering democratic and security dividends, advancing pandemic recovery and economic opportunities, and supporting conservation, climate adaptation and a just energy transition.

The new strategy begins by acknowledging that

“Sub-Saharan Africa plays a critical role in advancing global priorities to the benefit of Africans and Americans,” and that it “has one of the world’s fastest growing populations, largest free trade areas, most diverse ecosystems, and one of the largest regional voting groups in the United Nations (UN).”

To realize its ‘openness and open societies’ objective, the U.S. will promote government transparency and accountability, increase the U.S. focus on the rule of law, justice, and dignity, and assist African countries to more transparently leverage their natural resources for sustainable development.

For democracy and security dividends, the United States will focus on

“working with allies and regional partners to stem the recent tide of authoritarianism and military takeovers, backing civil society, empowering marginalized groups, centering the voices of women and youth, and defending free and fair elections, improving the capacity of African partners to advance regional stability and security

and reducing the threat from terrorist groups to the United States Homeland, persons, and diplomatic and military facilities.”

The mid-December Summit has already gained wide popularity among African leaders and, for the second time, will be the biggest U.S.-Africa gathering in Washington since former President Barack Obama hosted African leaders in 2014.

In addition, Obama also started the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) which brings every year a group of young Africans to the White House. Until today, YALI continues to run various educational and training programmes including seminars for Africans. The Times Higher Education index indicated that approximately 43,000 Africans have currently enrolled into and are studying in American universities.

Angolan President, João Lourenço, in an interview with Hariana Veras, White House correspondent, praised President Joseph R. Biden Jr. for hosting the U.S.-Africa Leaders’ Summit, saying that it will help create a win-win partnership between the United States and Africa, accelerate industrialization, increase direct foreign investment and further cement the already good collaboration between Angola and the United States.

According to that report, he pointed to assertiveness of Biden administration’s focus on trade and investment in Africa, highlight America’s commitment to Africa’s security, its democratic development, and its people, as well as emphasize the depth and breadth of the United States commitment to the African continent.

The Angolan leader advised that the Russian and Ukraine war should open the eyes of advanced countries to lead efforts in increasing investment in more alternative energy sources besides the traditionally used energy sources. As the Russia-Ukraine war rages in Europe and its ramifications are extended to other parts of the world, including in Africa, Lourenço called for increased food production and investment in African nations, saying that the global food crisis has badly affected Africa.

Despite some negative criticisms, African leaders continue sourcing different kinds of economic assistance and support provided by the United States. It shows the United States remains an indispensable power and will, by and large, play its appreciable eternal role in the emerging the new world order. It has the strategic mechanism, experience and confidence to influence the future.

The African leaders are mostly western-oriented, support the global status quo, admire the incomparable never-failing practical soft-power of the United States and in turn, maintain long-term geopolitical interest with the West. Within the context of the geopolitical realities, the United States and its leadership still have strong sustainable political, economic and cultural ties with African countries.

It is certainly true that western and European systems classically appeal more to Africans. But the stark reality is that with abundance of natural resources, Africans must reflect on their current foreign policy and approach vis-avis with ultimate goals of building of large-scale sustainable development for 1.3 billion population, and so must necessarily be guided by the African Union Agenda 2063.

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