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Resetting US Africa Foreign Policy in Trump 2.0: Technology as a Driver

Jane Munga

The shift in US leadership signals an imminent change in US policy regarding Africa in the months ahead. This requires innovative thinking and strategies to align American interests with those of African nations in the context of ongoing global changes. Technology is increasingly influencing international relations and provides substantial political and economic advantages for both the United States and African nations. The United States seeks global technology leadership through its innovative, cutting-edge digital solutions, while African countries seek to develop their digital ecosystems to harness the benefits of technology. Already the continent has made inroads on digital partnerships with other countries, which has eroded US prominence in Africa's digital ecosystem. The United States needs to act fast and strategically to reassert itself as a technology partner of choice in African countries. It will require a new foreign policy that is proactive, driven by technology and implemented through a coordinated effort between the government and the private sector.

In the months ahead, the Trump administration is poised to formulate a new strategy for US engagement in Africa. To be successful, the approach must outline a clear plan for engagement that positions US interests alongside those of African countries. In this brief, I propose that US foreign policy towards Africa under the second Trump administration should include a component of technology in its design. Technology is increasingly shaping the world and has taken a central role in international relations, with countries around the globe seeking to adopt the latest technological advancements in hopes of reaping benefits such as the political power they can confer, or for their economic benefits as evidenced in Africa.

President Donald Trump has assumed leadership at a critical juncture – technology is poised to redefine the world, and countries are angling for supremacy in the artificial intelligence (AI) race. Additionally, Trump's ascent to power is beginning just as Africa's role in the international system has become more prominent, and an increasing number of countries are courting the continent. In the past decade China, India, Italy, Korea, the United States (US), Turkey and Russia have all hosted African Leaders summits, signalling a new recognition of the continent's potential. This has led to new players making inroads in African countries. It is widely acknowledged that the influence of the US on the continent has diminished, and alternative partners, particularly in the technology sector, have gained

stature. At the same time, the US seeks to establish American AI technology as the gold standard worldwide as well as to be the partner of choice for other countries. Yet, on the continent, US technology products are not the only – and often not the most popular – option. For instance, regarding mobile phones, most Africans communicate using devices made in China to access popular US made applications such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram.¹ However, other applications have recently gained prominence, such as Chinese-developed TikTok and African-designed utility tools such as Kenya's Safaricom money-transfer service platform, M-pesa.² Additionally, most of Africa's telecommunication infrastructure has been deployed by China thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has led to enormous investments by China across the continent in this domain. This indicates that in order for the Trump administration to make gains with any global technology ambition, the US will have to reposition itself on the continent to become the partner of choice once again. This becomes even more important when considering that Africa is poised to host a quarter of the world's population by 2050 – hence constituting an enormous user base. How this population engages with technology – as users (data providers) and as creators (innovators) – will be pivotal in shaping the global order.

This brief explores why a renewed US foreign policy towards Africa should include a focus on technology, providing two areas of engagement: AI and digital infrastructure. I contend that a foreign policy which includes technology will yield mutual benefits for the US and many African countries alike.

The US and Africa: From Neglect to Strategic Interest

The relationship between the US and Africa has its roots in the founding of the country. Despite this extensive history, US policy towards Africa is frequently referred to as a low priority in Washington, often regarded as an afterthought and lacking a coherent strategy.³ This is largely due to the focus of the US on great power politics, which has prioritized relations with globally influential nations while sidelining engagement with the African continent. As a result, US foreign policy towards Africa is often framed through the lens of countering rival powers such as China and Russia. This trend has become even more pronounced in recent years due to shifting global power dynamics, with China's economic and political rise positioning it as a key counterforce to US influence on the world stage. This is notably so in African countries, where China's advancements have in some areas overshadowed those by the US. Thanks to the BRI, China has made large investments in infrastructure, including information and communications technology (ICT). This has allowed China to permeate Africa's ICT sector and edge out other traditional players such as the US. For the US to gain prominence once again, a Trump 2.0 foreign policy will need to engage differently from previous years and make the right offerings. The US will need to drastically increase its presence and offer digital partnerships that provide African countries the infrastructure and resources to build digital ecosystems.

1 Jane Munga and Kyla Denwood, *How Will U.S.-China Tech Decoupling Affect Africa's Mobile Phone Market?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 October 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2022/10/how-will-us-china-tech-decoupling-affect-africas-mobile-phone-market?lang=en>

2 "The Top Smartphone Apps in Africa", *TechCabal*, 6 July 2022, <https://techcabal.com/2022/07/06/the-top-smartphone-apps-in-africa/>

3 Chris Olaoluwa Ogunmóḍedé, "For Biden and the U.S., Africa Is Still an Afterthought", *World Politics Review*, 1 November 2024, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/biden-us-africa-relations/>

The foreign policies of the last three US administrations towards Africa focused on democracy, security, economic growth and trade, and social development (see Table 1). However, beginning with the first Trump administration, the US began to reposition its foreign policy towards Africa to counter China and added technology as part of this agenda. It is important to note that US foreign policy towards the continent is, for the most part, bifurcated into Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa, as demonstrated during the administrations of Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden. This analysis focuses on US foreign policy regarding Sub-Saharan Africa during these two administrations.

Table 1: Overview of US Foreign Policy towards Africa from 2009 to 2025

<i>Administration</i>	<i>Obama-Biden (2009–2017)</i>	<i>Trump-Pence (2017–2021)</i>	<i>Biden-Harris (2021–2025)</i>
Foreign policy	2012 US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa	President Donald J. Trump’s Africa Strategy	2022 The US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa
Focus areas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen democratic institutions 2. Spur economic growth, trade and investment 3. Advance peace and security 4. Promote opportunity and development 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promoting prosperity in Africa and US through trade and commercial ties 2. Strengthening security by countering threats to US and Africa 3. Strive for stability: US foreign assistance to promote the advancement of self-reliance, stability and good governance 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Foster openness and open societies 2. Deliver democratic and security dividends 3. Advance pandemic recovery and economic opportunity 4. Support conservation, climate adaptation and just energy transition

Obama-Biden (2009–2017)

President Obama’s foreign policy towards Africa was outlined in the 2012 US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa. It positioned African countries “as partners with America” and focused on strengthening democratic institutions; promoting regional peace and security; engaging with young African leaders; and fostering development, trade and investment.⁴ To enhance relations between the US and African nations, Obama convened the inaugural US-Africa Leaders Summit, which brought together the largest assembly of African presidents with representatives of the US government. Additionally, Obama’s presidency included visits to seven African countries: Ghana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal and South Africa. This represents the highest number of visits by any sitting US president to the

⁴ “U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa”, Obama White House Archives, 14 June 2012.

region, contrasting sharply with the approaches of the Biden and Trump administrations. Among the notable accomplishments during Obama's tenure are the establishment of the Young African Leaders Initiative in 2010 and the launch of Power Africa in 2013, aimed at doubling access to electricity in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁵ The Obama administration did not focus on utilising technology as a foreign policy tool towards Africa.

Trump-Pence (2017–2021)

Under the first Trump administration (also referred to as Trump 1.0), foreign policy deviated from the Obama approach. However, it is important to note that there was common ground when it came to trade and security. In 2018 the Trump presidency launched an Africa strategy with the objectives of advancing “prosperity, security and stability” for both the US and African countries.⁶ The Trump strategy was influenced by geopolitics and designed to counter Russia's and China's commercial, security and political influence – including in Africa. This led to a techno-nationalist approach, with the Trump administration imposing regulations and controls that restricted trade with the Chinese semiconductor and telecommunications sectors and led to technology decoupling. Technology flows – in products and services – between China and the US were restricted on matters of national security. Countries allied to the US were encouraged to do the same. Nevertheless, these sentiments from the US government had minimal impact on African nations' pursuit of relations with China. Bilateral trade between China and Africa has consistently grown over the past two decades.⁷ During the launch of the new “Africa Strategy”, then National Security Advisor John R. Bolton indicated how “*Great power competitors, namely China and Russia, are rapidly expanding their financial and political influence across Africa*”, which was deemed as a deliberate and aggressive strategy that targeted the continent so as to gain a competitive advantage over the US.⁸ The US would thus take measures to counter this threat and collaborate exclusively with African countries that engage as strategic partners.

The Trump 1.0 foreign policy approach was described as transactional foreign policy – designed to drive the “America first” agenda. This approach enhanced US economic relations via initiatives such as Prosper Africa, which was designed to support US investment across the continent. Additionally, in 2020 Trump announced his intent to negotiate a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) with Kenya.⁹ However, the Biden administration did not continue the FTA but transformed it into the US-Kenya Strategic Trade and Investment Partnership in July 2022. This changed the emphasis from removing trade barriers and ensuring duty-free access for goods between the two countries to negotiating commitments regard-

⁵ “Background and Factsheet: The President's Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI)”, Obama White House Archives, 28 July 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/07/28/background-factsheet-president-s-young-african-leaders-initiative-yali>; Obama White House Archives, “Fact Sheet: Power Africa”, 25 July 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/25/fact-sheet-power-africa>

⁶ “President Donald J. Trump's Africa Strategy Advances Prosperity, Security, and Stability Foreign Policy”, Trump White House Archives, 13 December 2018, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-africa-strategy-advances-prosperity-security-stability/>

⁷ “China-Africa Bilateral Trade Data Overview”, China-Africa Research Initiative and Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, September 2024, accessed 17 February 2025, <http://www.sais-cari.org/data-china-africa-trade>

⁸ “Remarks by National Security Advisor Ambassador John R. Bolton on the Trump Administration's New Africa Strategy Foreign Policy”, Trump White House Archives, 13 December 2018, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-national-security-advisor-ambassador-john-r-bolton-trump-administrations-new-africa-strategy/>

⁹ Liana Wong, *U.S.-Kenya Trade Negotiations*, Congressional Research Service, 22 May 2024, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11526>

ing standards.¹⁰ The shift in focus also delayed the partnership process, resulting in no agreement being signed by the end of the Biden administration. A second Trump administration is likely to see the revival of the Kenya-US FTA, advancing its original goal of establishing a free trade area and serving as a model for African nations.

Biden-Harris (2021–2025)

The Biden-Harris administration introduced another shift in Washington's foreign policy approach to Africa with the launch of the 2022 US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹ The strategy restructured the approach to Africa-US relations by focusing US foreign policy on commitments that included more engagements with African countries. The Biden administration hosted the second US-Africa Leaders Summit in December 2022. The summit signalled a re-energized engagement between the US and Africa, and it included US support for the African Union (AU) to be made a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a member of the G20 and a pledge for elevated US government involvement on the continent. The engagement culminated in Biden's inaugural and singular visit to Africa (Angola) in 2024.¹²

Similar to the Trump administration beforehand, the Biden administration singled out China's and Russia's activities in Africa – though less overtly – in the 2022 US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa, thereby indicating its intent to expose and highlight their negative effects. The administration recommitted to existing initiatives such as Power Africa, Prosper Africa and Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) to strengthen trade and commercial relations.¹³ In the Biden administration, technology became a key foreign policy engagement area. Digital transformation made its debut into US foreign policy towards Africa with the launch of the Digital Transformation with Africa (DTA) initiative.¹⁴ The DTA committed more than USD 900 million in financial resources to support Africa's digital economy and infrastructure, human capital development and the digital enabling environment. The technology-focused DTA marked a significant shift in US foreign policy towards Africa; however, its efforts faltered because of limited resources and insufficient instruments. An evaluation of the advancements that had been made by the second year indicated minimal progress.¹⁵ Whether the DTA will remain or be repurposed has yet to be seen.

¹⁰ Melissa Omino and Joanna Kahumbu, *The USKEFTA and the USKESTIP: A Fresh Start?*, 10 February 2023, Strathmore University, Center for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law, <https://www.theuskenyafightsights.org/stip/1/%20the%20uskefta%20and%20the%20uskestip:%20a%20fresh%20start?>

¹¹ "U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa," Biden White House Archives, August 2022.

¹² "Fact Sheet: Accelerating the U.S. – Africa Partnership After the 2022 U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit", Biden White House Archives, 13 December 2023, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/12/13/fact-sheet-accelerating-the-u-s-africa-partnership-after-the-2022-u-s-africa-leaders-summit/>

¹³ "Fact Sheet: Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment at the G7 Summit", Biden White House Archives, 20 May 2023, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/fact-sheet-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment-at-the-g7-summit/>

¹⁴ "New Initiative on Digital Transformation with Africa (DTA)", Biden White House Archives, 14 December 2022, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/digital-transformation-with-africa/>

¹⁵ Jane Munga and Ebele Monye, *Tracking Progress of the U.S. Digital Transformation with Africa Initiative*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11 March 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2024/03/tracking-progress-of-the-us-digital-transformation-with-africa-initiative?lang=en>

Trump 2.0: A New Trump Foreign Policy towards Africa?

The Trump administration is no doubt signalling a forthcoming change in Washington's strategy towards the continent, with evidence already emerging via the slew of executive orders, some of which directly affect African countries. Most notably, the dismantling of the US Agency for International Development and the freeze in funding for aid programmes worldwide have abruptly halted numerous aid projects across the continent. Although it is impossible to forecast, it is reasonable to anticipate that US foreign policy towards Africa under Trump 2.0 will change drastically compared to Biden's approach and most likely resemble the first Trump presidency.

This may involve a renewed emphasis on geopolitical strategies aimed at countering China and Russia on the continent, alongside a transactional approach to foreign policy. Trump's ongoing emphasis on domestic interests – *America first* – indicates that relationships and obligations will depend on the benefits they offer to the US,¹⁶ as will the interests and engagements of the US in foreign policy. This will undoubtedly influence US foreign policy towards Africa, potentially paving the way for renewed bilateral engagements, including the Kenya-US FTA. This approach provides – at least some – African countries with the added opportunity to engage bilaterally, and to advance their unique national interests through their own foreign policy arrangements with the US. Initiatives such as the US-Africa Leaders Summit might be paused again, like in the first Trump presidency, though a recent bill aims to establish the Leaders Summit as a legal fixture – however this will most likely be repealed by Trump.¹⁷ A Trump 2.0 foreign policy may also negatively impact the country's backing of the AU to become a permanent member of the UNSC, a legacy initiative of President Biden.¹⁸ Additional initiatives related to the UN may also be affected, bearing in mind that the first Trump administration sought to cut funding for the UN.¹⁹ A re-emergence of this foreign policy approach could see the US pulling out of recent initiatives of the UN, which now include technological efforts such as the Global Digital Compact and the proposals from the AI Humanity report to establish a global fund for AI.²⁰ Despite these potential changes, I posit that the case for a Trump 2.0 digital collaboration with the continent is essential for Trump's agenda.

The Trump administration has reaffirmed its commitment to leadership in the area of technology. A recent executive order seeks “to enhance the US global AI dominance through AI innovation”.²¹ The executive order formalizes the US commitment to maintaining and advancing its leadership in AI to foster human well-being, economic competitiveness and national security. The US has also indicated that it recognizes the need for partners to

16 “Establish an America First Foreign Policy”, America First Agenda, accessed 19 December 2024,

<https://agenda.americafirstpolicy.com/strengthen-leadership/establish-an-america-first-foreign-policy>

17 Julian Pecquet, “Congress Looks to Cement Regular US-Africa Leaders Summits”, *The African Report*, 13 December 2024, <https://www.theafricareport.com/371378/congress-looks-to-cement-regular-us-africa-leaders-summits/>

18 Michelle Nichols, “US Supports Two Permanent UN Security Council Seats for Africa”, *Reuters*, 13 September 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-supports-two-permanent-un-security-council-seats-africa-2024-09-12/>

19 Laurel Wamsley, “Trump Administration Touts a Smaller U.N. Budget (and Takes Credit for It)”, *National Public Radio*, 26 December 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/26/573483336/trump-administration-touts-a-smaller-u-n-budget-and-takes-credit-for-it>

20 Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies, United Nations, accessed 20 December 2024, <https://www.un.org/digital-emerging-technologies/>

21 “Removing Barriers to American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence”, The White House, 23 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/removing-barriers-to-american-leadership-in-artificial-intelligence/>

achieve its goal. During the AI Action Summit in Paris, US Vice President JD Vance stated that

*“[...] just because we’re the leader doesn’t mean we want to or need to go it alone of course. And let me be emphatic about this point: America wants to partner with all of you, and we want to embark on the AI revolution before us with a spirit of openness and collaboration”.*²²

This posturing by the US provides partnership opportunities for countries to engage with the US in expanding its model to other countries’ own use of AI. Across Africa, countries are seeking to expand their use of AI through innovations and applications that can bring social and economic development. They are seeking digital partnerships that can provide the resources they need. These dual ambitions highlight the convergence of aspirations that should be harnessed through a technology-inclusive foreign policy between the US and African nations.

Technology: The Opportunity for Resetting US Foreign Policy towards Africa in Trump 2.0

The AU’s Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want – the continent’s blueprint to achieve sustainable economic growth – recognizes the critical role of ICT as an enabler for achieving economic transformation.²³ Additionally, the AU’s Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa prioritizes digitally enabled socio-economic development, and the Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy outlines a plan for the continent’s commitment to leveraging AI for development and prosperity.²⁴ Across the continent, efforts to integrate technology in daily lives have become a priority, and digital development is now commonplace in national and continental agendas. To achieve these objectives, numerous African nations are actively seeking appropriate partners to enhance their digitalization initiatives, thereby providing new opportunities for digital partnerships and collaborations.

Many African nations lack the necessary resources to achieve their digital agendas and consequently seek partnerships with development agencies, banks, regional and international intergovernmental organizations, multinational technology companies and other nation-states. In the last decade, African nations have engaged in digital partnerships with various partners such as the World Bank, the US, Europe and China. China has made the largest contribution towards infrastructure investments in Africa and now maintains a dominant presence in the deployment of mobile and fibre-optic networks.²⁵ Despite China’s inroads, other partnerships have taken root in the continent, such as the DTA launched by the Biden administration. Other collaborations include those with the European Union (EU), which seeks to invest EUR 150 billion through the Global Gateway Africa–Europe Investment Package through various forms of connectivity and infrastructure, and more than EUR 8 mil-

²² “Remarks by the Vice President at the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit in Paris, France”, The American Presidency Project, UC Santa Barbara, 11 February 2025, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-vice-president-the-artificial-intelligence-action-summit-paris-france>

²³ “Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want”, African Union, 10 June 2013, <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>

²⁴ “The Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020–2030)”, African Union, 18 May 2020; “Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy”, African Union, 9 August 2024.

²⁵ Hong Bo, Rodiat Lawal, and Rilwan Sakariyahu, “China’s Infrastructure Investments in Africa: An Imperative for Attaining Sustainable Development Goals or a Debt-Trap?”, *British Accounting Review*, 26 August 2024, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0890838924002361>

lion through the AU-EU Digital for Development Hub.²⁶ Although the impact of these initiatives is not clear, the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has had significant influence in the data governance frameworks, acting as a model and source of inspiration for national and regional strategies. Other partners that are using digital collaborations to shape Africa's digital ecosystem include India, which has enhanced its presence on the continent by using digital public infrastructure as a tool for digital transformation.²⁷ These partnerships have profound implications for African citizens. They help increase access to the internet, enable the digitalization of government services, grow e-commerce, and shape digital norms as well as Africa's relationships with other countries. Nonetheless, they also bring forth additional challenges related to cybersecurity and intensify pre-existing disparities stemming from the digital divide.

Africa's digital partnerships are expected to continue expanding for the foreseeable future, as African countries seek to enhance their AI capabilities and promote AI innovation. Over the past decade, countries across the continent have formulated technology-related strategies aimed at fostering national ecosystems through domestic investments and international partnerships. The Trump administration should leverage this opportunity being provided by African countries, which are actively seeking partnerships to develop their digital ecosystems. In fact, it is in the best interest of the US to actively engage with African nations if it is to advance its ambitions of becoming the "partner of choice" in AI and establishing its technology products as "the gold standard" for these countries. As noted earlier in this brief, Africans are continuously looking elsewhere for digital partnerships, and if this trajectory holds, the outcomes will be detrimental for US ambitions. This, however, calls for a radically different approach from the US in its relations with Africa – an approach that disrupts the status quo. US foreign policy towards Africa will need to be shaped differently and presented differently. A collaborative approach between the government and the private sector is essential to ensure that US technology products are widely available and accessible across the continent. African countries must develop their digital economies, which requires access to US products and financing to fulfil the demand.

The US must reposition Africa as a new frontier for engagement, with the intention of providing African countries with US cutting-edge technology products. It is essential for the US to take an active role in building Africa's technology ecosystem in the critical areas of digital infrastructure, computing, AI models and digital skills, among others. This calls for increased US digital partnerships with multiple layers of engagement: government-to-government, government-to-business, business-to-government or a combination of all three. These partnerships must be reframed to make US technology and design accessible to Africa's digital builders, including innovators, researchers and developers. In the next section, I elaborate two focus areas for this partnership: AI and digital infrastructure.

26 "EU-Africa: Global Gateway Investment Package", European Commission, accessed 18 December 2024, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/initiatives-sub-saharan-africa/eu-africa-global-gateway-investment-package_en; "AU-EU Digital for Development (D4D) Hub: Shaping a Joint Digital Future", European Commission, accessed 18 December 2024, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/projects/au-eu-digital-development-d4d-hub-shaping-joint-digital-future_en#:~:text=Project%20duration,89.1%25%20of%20the%20overall%20budget

27 "Building Africa's Digital Future: A Blueprint for Accelerating Digital Public Infrastructure", 16 October 2024, accessed 21 December 2024, <https://dpi.africa.com/building-africas-digital-future-a-blueprint-for-accelerating-digital-public-infrastructure/>

Artificial Intelligence

China's influence on the continent has not occurred by chance: It has resulted from a coordinated strategy involving the Chinese government, technology companies and financial institutions. For the US to realize its ambitious goals of advancing AI technology and maintaining its competitive edge, it must adopt a comparable strategy in its engagement with the continent. US leadership in AI through companies such as Nvidia, Meta, Amazon, Google and Microsoft is helping to develop new, groundbreaking AI models for a variety of use cases in areas such as health. Partnerships that support access to US-based models such as OpenAI, Anthropic and Llama can help design and build new products for the continent. This would not only distribute US designs globally, but also develop new business opportunities that can drive economic growth. Additionally, this would help refocus the continent's current drift towards China, which has become an even greater necessity with the allure of DeepSeek-R1.²⁸

Trump 2.0 can provide the preferred partnership that enables the US to enhance its global influence on AI across the continent, while simultaneously contributing to the establishment of Africa's AI ecosystem. The Trump administration can draw on resources from the Partnership for Global Inclusivity on AI (PGIAI) for its AI initiatives in Africa. During the 2024 UN General Assembly, the US – in partnership with major tech companies – introduced the PGIAI to assist developing nations in leveraging the advantages of AI.²⁹ This digital diplomacy initiative opens up pathways for repurposing an AI initiative that includes Africa. The Trump administration has come on board with a strong private-sector partnership, evidenced by the “Stargate” project, which seeks to build AI capabilities in the US.³⁰ Though it is a US-based endeavour, the Stargate model offers the US a framework that can help shape its technology-focused foreign policy globally.

Digital Infrastructure

Effective AI deployment requires a strong digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet. Affordable, accessible and reliable infrastructure is the cornerstone for realizing a comprehensive digital transformation. Yet, a significant digital gap persists within Africa. Across the continent, approximately 38 per cent of Africans use the internet, with the digital divide being due to costs, skills and the lack of connectivity in some regions.³¹ As AI continues to advance, the need for specialized infrastructures such as data centres and computing facilities is becoming increasingly vital for the continent. The necessity for robust digital infrastructure in Africa – coupled with the US drive to enhance its footprint on the continent – presents a unique opportunity for a collaboration that would benefit both the US and African nations. To increase Africa's internet connectivity, there is a need to expand telecommunication infrastructure. This includes expanding fibre networks and building new

28 Harry Clynych, “DeepSeek's Cheaper AI Claims Raise African Hopes”, *African Business*, 30 January 2025,

<https://african.business/2025/01/technology-information/deepseeks-cheaper-ai-claims-raise-african-hopes>

29 “Fact Sheet: United States and Eight Companies Launch the Partnership for Global Inclusivity on AI”, United States Department of State, 23 September 2024, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/united-states-and-eight-companies-launch-the-partnership-for-global-inclusivity-on-ai/>

30 Paul Smith-Goodson and Matt Kimball, “The Stargate Project: Trump Touts USD500 Billion Bid for AI Dominance”, *Forbes*, 30 January 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/moorinsights/2025/01/30/the-stargate-project-trump-touts-500-billion-bid-for-ai-dominance/>

31 “Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2024”, The International Telecommunications Union, 27 November 2024, <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2024/11/10/ff24-internet-use/>

telecommunication towers. The required investments are estimated to be USD 100 billion.³² This requires that companies secure financial backing, creating an opportunity for US companies to partner with government-backed financing. US instruments such as DTA and PGII offer avenues for digital infrastructure partnerships under Trump 2.0. These engagements would provide opportunities for US tech companies and their African counterparts to deploy secure digital infrastructure.

Africa-US Digital Partnership: The Opportunity for Europe

There is an African proverb that states: *“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you wish to go far, go together.”* The enhancement of digital partnerships will stem from the capacity of the Africa-US partnership to provide sufficient financing options, which is a benefit that can be achieved through collaboration with multiple partners. It would be prudent for the Trump 2.0 administration to align its digital strategy for Africa with other key players, including the EU, which has also made substantial investments in the continent’s digital landscape. EU digital partnerships can provide complementary tools that the US can leverage. The EU Global Gateway strategy introduced the Africa–Europe Investment Package to assist Africa in achieving a robust, inclusive, green, and digital recovery and transformation. The investments include the establishment of the EurAfrica Gateway submarine fibre cable, which links the two continents, and develops fibre cable networks throughout Africa.³³ Fibre connectivity creates a chance for collaboration, particularly in ongoing initiatives such as the Lobito Corridor, where the US government has financed the deployment of terrestrial fibre and access infrastructure that links inland areas in Central and Southern Africa with subsea cables.³⁴

Conclusion

This brief has proposed that a Trump 2.0 foreign policy towards Africa should centre on technology, given its increasing role in shaping international relations and its potential benefits for both political power and economic growth. Technology is playing a growing role in shaping the global order, presenting opportunities for the Trump 2.0 administration to leverage it in its foreign policy strategies. With the Trump administration gearing up to redefine its foreign policy regarding Africa, there is strategic value for it to focus on technology as a key anchor. I have outlined how the US ambition of maintaining AI global leadership offers an opportunity for Africa, which is seeking to develop its AI and digital infrastructure. African nations are currently forming digital partnerships with various stakeholders, which undermines US objectives. I advocate for the US to strategically reposition itself through a unified approach involving government, the private sector and financing solutions in order to be the partner of choice for AI and digital infrastructure across Africa. To deliver on its

32 “Achieving Broadband Access for All in Africa Comes with a USD100 Billion Price Tag”, World Bank Group, 17 October 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/10/17/achieving-broadband-access-for-all-in-africa-comes-with-a-100-billion-price-tag>

33 “Factsheet: EU-Africa: Global Gateway Investment Package – Digital Transition”, European Commission, 28 November 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_22_1117

34 “Fact Sheet: Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment in the Lobito Trans-Africa Corridor”, United States Embassy in Tanzania, 5 December 2024, <https://tz.usembassy.gov/fact-sheet-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment-in-the-lobito-trans-africa-corridor/>

technology ambitions, the US must redefine its approach with a bold and precise technology-inclusive foreign policy towards the continent and enlist allies such as the EU to enhance its strategy. The proposals in this policy brief provide strategic avenues of engagement for President Trump's second term. In the coming months, Washington will continue to unveil its executive actions, prompting realignments and repositionings – both nationally and internationally. Washington is already abuzz with the various changes stemming from the recent executive orders, foretelling the approaching shift in US foreign policy, including that towards Africa. Nonetheless, the US must adopt a clear and concise approach, ensuring that it provides mutual benefits for both the US and African countries.

Megatrends Afrika

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SWP

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik | German Institute for International and Security Affairs

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www.megatrends-afrika.de

megatrends-afrika@swp-berlin.org

swp-berlin.org

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Jane Munga is a fellow in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Africa programme, where her research focuses on the continent's digital economy, its enabling policy environment, digital inclusion and digital partnerships. Her research seeks to provide new knowledge and perspectives that can help catapult Africa's digital transformation.



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