

# White House Summit with African Leaders Result in More Promises

A \$55 billion package from the United States cannot regain ground lost to China and Russia on the continent

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*During the December 13-15 White House-Africa summit, the Biden administration sought to persuade leaders and officials from 49 states that the United States wants an equal partnership with the continent.*

This was the first of such meetings since 2014 when the administration of former President Barack Obama was in office.

The tenure of Obama's successor, former President Donald Trump, was marked by open hostility towards Africa where he never visited while in office. Nonetheless, the Biden administration has made no substantial shifts in its policy towards the continent. In actual fact, **President Joe Biden** has sought to further utilize the 55 member-states African Union (AU) as an appendage in the renewed 21st century cold war between NATO and the Russian Federation.

During the first day of the summit, the position of African governments were that they favored a diplomatic resolution to the Russian special military operation in Ukraine. The continuing conflict over the last 10 months has resulted in the further aggravation of supply chain problems plaguing the global economy since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Obviously, the administration in Washington wants to remain in dialogue with African heads-of-state despite the rapidly developing trade, political and military relations between the AU member-states with the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. However, as it relates to infrastructural and security questions, Beijing and Moscow now are far more advanced in regard to building long term relationships.

Biden promised to facilitate investment of \$55 billion into African economies while pledging to visit several countries on the continent in 2023. Some of the funds are designed to purportedly support the capacity of African governments to conduct democratic elections.

Biden reportedly reflected on the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. The attacks were aimed at preventing the results of the November 2020 elections from being certified by the House of Representatives and the Senate.

## Differences over Key Issues in U.S.-Africa Relations

The divergence of opinion between the African leaders and the White House over Ukraine policy was not the only point of disagreement at the summit. Some of the participants questioned the U.S.'s commitment to the security of the continent.

On the second day of the summit, the Department of Defense under **Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III**, hosted a session entitled the "Peace, Security and Governance Forum." Much of the discussion on the part of Pentagon, State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) attending the gathering represented a repackaging of the language already present in the briefing documents of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). See [this](#).



Although the Pentagon has established a separate command for Africa since 2008, insecurity in key geo-political regions is worsening. A series of military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Conakry and Chad with an attempted seizure of power also taking place in Sao Tome in early December, illustrate the failure of AFRICOM to carry out its stated mission. Criticisms among the people and those in government are growing over the role of AFRICOM along with French military forces.

Almost all of the coup makers over the last decade in West Africa are graduates of Pentagon military training programs conducted both inside the U.S. and on the continent. Joint military operations between the Pentagon and various African military structures have become routine. These annual maneuvers and war games operations represent the degree to which imperialism has penetrated military forces on the continent.

Even though there are clear connections between the military usurpation of power from civilian-led governments and the Pentagon, those who have taken power in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea-Conakry were not invited to the White House. The State of Eritrea was not present as well since the government in the Horn of Africa state is often on the receiving end of punitive measures by Washington. The presidents of key countries such as the Republic of South Africa and the Republic of Zimbabwe sent their foreign ministers as representatives to the summit. (See [this](#))

Senegalese **President Macky Sall**, who is the current Chair of the AU, said of the differences over U.S. legislative policy and sanctions against the Republic of Zimbabwe that:

“Sall criticized pending U.S. legislation that he said unfairly ‘targeted’ Africa, an apparent reference to a measure titled ‘Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa.’ Lawmakers sponsoring the bill say the legislation is intended to prevent Moscow from using Africa to bypass U.S. sanctions imposed after the invasion of Ukraine. Sall also raised concerns about years-long U.S. sanctions against Zimbabwe for corruption and human rights violations, saying that it was time to lift the penalties so the nation could ‘fight against poverty and underdevelopment.’ Earlier this week, the U.S. Treasury Department announced it was hitting four Zimbabwean people, including the adult son of President Emmerson Mnangagwa, and two companies with new sanctions, accusing them of roles in undermining democracy and facilitating high-level graft.” (See [this](#))

## Washington Views Moscow and Beijing as Strategic Competitors

Undoubtedly, this summit at the White House was planned as a public relations campaign directed against China, Russia and other international powers which have held multilateral meetings with the AU member-states. However, in real terms, the U.S. has decreased its level of direct investment in Africa since the Obama administration.

U.S. preoccupation with military interventions has dominated its foreign policy imperatives since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe. These destabilization campaigns, aerial bombings, proxy wars and direct occupations have objectively weakened the political legitimacy of Washington in various geo-political regions internationally.

Beijing over the last two decades through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and other structures has become the largest trading partner with the AU member-states. [The U.S. Peace Information Center says](#) of the contemporary situation:

“China is Africa’s largest two-way trading partner, hitting \$254 billion in 2021, exceeding by a factor of four U.S.-Africa trade. China is the largest provider of foreign direct investment, supporting hundreds of thousands of African jobs. This is roughly double the level of U.S. foreign direct investment. While Chinese lending to African countries has dipped of late, China remains by far the largest lender to African countries. It is to be expected that China’s commercial activity in Africa would increase with the dramatic rise of its economy to become the second largest in the world, especially given China’s need for raw materials to support its very large manufacturing base. But this growth also represents a determined Chinese government-driven effort to make significant inroads in Africa.”

As it relates to Moscow, the historic relations between the Soviet Union and African independence movements and post-colonial governments marked a sharp departure from the neo-colonial approach of the U.S. Both the Soviet Union and People’s Republic of China advanced a foreign policy which was supportive of liberation struggles, sovereignty as well as non-capitalist development.

In recent years, the Russian Federation under **President Vladimir Putin** has established the Russia-Africa Summit which was held in 2019 in Sochi. Another summit announced earlier in 2022 has not yet convened.

Russian trade with Africa is far less than China’s. However overall, the volume of trade between the African continent and Russia has grown substantially in recent years.

Agricultural products such as grain are heavily imported into Africa. Also, agricultural inputs like fertilizers are essential in local farming efforts.

[Statista.com website says:](#)

“The annual volume of trade between Russia and countries located on the African continent reached 14.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2020, marking a decrease from the previous year. The revenue from Russian exports from and imports into the region more than doubled between 2013 and 2018. Russia’s leading trade partner on the continent was Egypt. The value of goods and services exchanged with Egypt accounted for roughly one third of the total trade volume between Russia and African countries.”

Russia-Africa trade relations are not the major concern of Washington in regard to the role of Moscow. More worrisome for the White House, the State Department and Pentagon are the volumes of arms sales from Russia to the African continent. In addition, the presence of the Wagner Group, a military services company based in Russia, which has been contracted by Mali and the Central African Republic to assist with national security, has been a cause for concern. France has claimed to have withdrawn its armed forces from Mali due to criticism from the military government led by **Col. Assimi Goita** along with the presence of Wagner. Secretary of Defense Austin during the White House summit referred to Wagner as “mercenaries” yet did not acknowledge the destructive character of AFRICOM in Libya, Somalia and other states where they are engaged in military surveillance and offensive operations.

One source on Russian weapons transfers to Africa [notes:](#)

“Russia’s arms sales to Africa have increased by a quarter over the last four years. In fact, Russia accounts for nearly half of major arms exports to Africa, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, with Algeria, Egypt, Sudan and Angola as the biggest customers (all of which, except Egypt, abstained in the UN vote to condemn Russia). And all across Africa, Russia has military trainers on the ground who are supporting the sales of the popular Mi-17 and Mi-35 helicopters and other equipment, according to U.S. intelligence reports.

Moreover, the support for Russia on a grassroots level among the workers and youth has been revealed in mass demonstrations in Burkina Faso and Mali. These factors are often considered by African heads-of-state in their public comments and actions at the United Nations and other international forums.

U.S. imperialism provides no other viable alternatives to Africa other than the pursuit of its non-aligned policy. Africa cannot be genuinely liberated and sovereign until the people defeat U.S. influence on the continent and around the world.

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