

Transition 2020 | Biden and Trade: Africa Policy Shifts Back to Traditional US Engagement

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President-Elect Joe Biden's campaign platform pledged the US would renew a "mutually respectful engagement toward Africa with a bold strategy." His immediate focus, however, will be to tackle domestic matters like COVID-19 and the economy. Initial engagement with Africa may therefore be conducted through combatting the pandemic, bilaterally and multilaterally, and via the Global Health Security Agenda, as the new administration further refines its Africa strategy. The incoming administration will likely seek initially to "restore and reinvigorate" diplomatic relations with African governments and the African Union with respect to combatting the pandemic.

While the Trump Administration focused more on reciprocal trade relationships, the incoming Biden Administration is expected to return US diplomatic efforts to promoting democracy, ensuring human rights, and addressing climate change. It remains to be seen if the "deal teams" established under the Trump Administration to spotlight investment opportunities for American companies will remain integrated within US Embassies or if some of these resources will shift to more traditional State Department foci.

Biden officials will focus more on multilateral trade relationships, and less on bilateral trade talks. It is therefore not clear whether a Biden Administration will continue ongoing bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations with Kenya begun earlier this year by Trump officials. A Biden Administration could instead seek to broaden these talks to an African regional agreement, or even target negotiations with the newly established African Continental Free Trade Area. Should President-Elect Biden move forward with the Kenya trade talks, expect an increased focus on labor and environmental concerns that could culminate in a "model FTA" for developing countries. Notably, Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), authority under which the current trade talks with Kenya are being negotiated, is set to expire on July 1, 2021. It remains to be seen if Congress will renew TPA.

President-Elect Biden may also invite African nations to his planned "Summit for Democracy," a new forum to "renew the spirit and shared purpose" of world democracies. The event – which is expected to be held in 2021 – will reportedly culminate with three broad commitments: (1) combatting corruption, (2) defending against authoritarianism, and (3) advancing human rights. Participants will likely call on the private sector – including tech and social media companies – to secure commitments that recognize the need to preserve open, democratic societies and protect free speech. The incoming administration will also decide whether to revitalize the African Growth and Opportunity Act

(AGOA) Forum, or the US-Africa Leaders Summit initiated by President Obama.

Meanwhile, addressing China's inroads into Africa will remain a focus for the next administration and US Congress. Notably, the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) – a relatively nascent agency that enjoys strong bipartisan support in Congress – will continue to serve as one tool by which the US can provide [alternative financing for projects in developing countries](#). It, together with the Export-Import Bank of the United States, will be a valuable resource for American investment on the continent.

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