

# AN EARLY DIAGNOSIS OF TRUMP'S IMPACT ON US–AFRICA RELATIONS AND ON SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN THE US AND AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

After eight months in office, US President Donald Trump had issued no policies specifically dealing with Africa, made no senior appointments for African affairs, and showed little interest in, knowledge of, or sympathy with Africa or the future of US–Africa relations. Trump did make statements and take actions during this period that were of interest and concern to the people of sub-Saharan Africa. This paper identifies and assesses the implications of these, which, taken together, have already had important and perhaps enduring effects on US–Africa relations. The paper unfolds in four parts. The first focuses on several normative aspects of Trump’s beliefs and attitudes about world affairs that are likely to clash with those of African countries. Part two summarises various programmes that have defined the US’ Africa policy for the past quarter-century, highlighting how each will likely fare during the Trump era. The third section notes 10 leadership traits of Trump likely to alarm Africa’s democrats while reassuring Africa’s autocrats. A fourth and longer section cites seven political ingredients that sustain democracies, whether in the US or Africa, and that affect prospects for enduring Africa–US partnerships. The paper concludes with references to the first Africa policy statements by senior officials, made nearly eight months after Trump became president, and notes early signs of resistance to Trump domestically. Such resistance, both popular and among the US political elite, could signal a period of democratic reconsolidation in the US and lead to the renewal of US democracy and diplomacy, with better prospects for resilient and mutually beneficial partnerships in African–US relations.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
ERMA	Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance
IFFs	illicit financial flows
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OAU	Organization of African Unity
Pepfar	President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief
Africom	US Command Africa

## INTRODUCTION

President Donald J Trump has thus far not shown much interest in sub-Saharan Africa, a position much like his disregard for the aspirations and wellbeing of his 46 million African-American compatriots, most of whom are the descendants of African victims of American slavery.

During the initial months of his presidency he offered only indirect and generally negative hints of how his handling of the presidency might alter the US' many long-running partnerships with the 55 member states of the AU, which represent diverse and rapidly growing populations now totalling more than 1.2 billion. In at least one area of vital concern to Africa – US mitigation of the damage it is doing to the global environment, along with a commitment to assist vulnerable low-income countries to adapt to climate change – Trump's policies portend dire consequences for Africa.

Trump's 2018 Budget Blueprint would sharply reduce foreign assistance to developing countries, most of them African, and eliminate programmes supporting good governance, human rights and democracy.<sup>1</sup> These have enjoyed unusual bi-partisan support within the US Congress and have been welcomed across Africa. At the time of writing the fate of most of these programmes is uncertain. The prospects for several of the most important ones are briefly summarised below, but all must await congressional budget action.

Trump's rhetoric and behaviour during his first months as president suggest that, as foreign policies emerge, they will aim to reduce any bilateral and multilateral agreements if these do not produce equal, or advantageous, short-term material benefits for the US. Trump also has a long record of publicly questioning the value to the US of its participation in alliances and regional and global organisations, including the UN. Policies to cut or eliminate US support would ignore the domestic needs and international priorities of virtually all sub-Saharan African countries.

One early sign of South African concern is prominent in the International Relations Discussion Paper for the 30 June – 5 July 2017 Fifth National Policy Conference of the ruling ANC, which urges priority attention to the questions: 'What does the election of Donald Trump as President of the US signify, and what lessons can the ANC draw from this?'<sup>2</sup> The sections that follow consider these questions, but from a broader, pan-African perspective.

This paper must grapple with analytical challenges because Trump has provided so little foreign policy leadership generally that conventional foreign policy analysis of inter-state relations driven by sovereign leaders does not apply, in my judgement, at least regarding

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- 1 Farrington D, 'Read President Trump's Budget Blueprint', *NPR*, 16 March 2017, <http://www.npr.org/2017/03/16/520379061/read-president-trumps-budget-blueprint>. (All Internet links were accessed between 1 May and 1 June 2017.).
  - 2 ANC, 'International Relations: Discussion Document', Fifth National Policy Conference, Midrand, 30 June – 5 July 2017, <http://www.anc.org.za/sites/default/files/National%20Policy%20Conference%202017%20International%20Relations.pdf>.

US–Africa policy. When he addressed the UN General Assembly on 19 September 2017 the attention he gave African nations – which comprise over one-quarter of UN members – consisted of a two-sentence paragraph toward the end.<sup>3</sup> One sentence praised UN-led peacekeeping missions for ‘invaluable contributions in stabilizing conflicts in Africa’, and the other praised the US, which ‘continues to lead the world in humanitarian assistance, including famine prevention and relief in South Sudan, Somalia and northern Nigeria and Yemen’.<sup>4</sup> The next day Trump hosted a luncheon for the leaders of nine African countries – Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and South Africa. Only his welcoming remarks, which are nearly devoid of policy content or guidance, have been published.<sup>5</sup> His opening gambit was reminiscent of a 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialist hoping to turn a profit, as he proclaimed: ‘Africa has tremendous business potential, I have so many friends going to your countries trying to get rich. I congratulate you, they’re spending a lot of money ... It’s really become a place they have to go, that they want to go.’ He called on African companies to invest in the US and then shifted to security cooperation, asking Africans to help defeat Islamist extremists and the threat from North Korea.

Trump proposed no new presidential initiatives for Africa, but at least he did not say those launched by his predecessors were a waste of money and would be ended. Nor did he mention opposition to foreign assistance generally, or his renunciation of the Paris climate accord and refusal to fund the Green Climate Fund, so crucial for Africa’s adaptation to global warming. A verbal flub, his calling Namibia ‘Nambia’, suggests he neither knows nor cares much about Africa.

## CLASHING NORMS AND THE PROSPECT OF ESTRANGEMENT

Trump’s core beliefs of racial and economic nationalism are well known in Africa. The first offence against African racial sensibilities took place during Trump’s rise to political prominence with the false claim that Barack Obama, the US’ first African-American president, was not born in the US and that his presidency was, therefore, illegitimate.<sup>6</sup> Obama was and remains enormously popular throughout Africa.<sup>7</sup> Many Africans, especially in post-apartheid South Africa, thus saw Trump’s ascendance as a racist backlash; a view that does not appear to have changed.

3 The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, ‘Remarks by President Trump to the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly’, 19 September 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/09/19/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly>.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

5 The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, ‘Remarks by President Trump at working lunch with African leaders’, 20 September 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/09/20/remarks-president-trump-working-lunch-african-leaders>.

6 Wikipedia, ‘Barack Obama citizenship conspiracy theories’, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack\\_Obama\\_citizenship\\_conspiracy\\_theories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama_citizenship_conspiracy_theories).

7 Stremlau JJ, ‘Barack Obama: An enduring legacy for advocates of democracy in Africa’, *The Conversation*, 16 February 2017, <https://theconversation.com/barack-obama-an-enduring-legacy-for-advocates-of-democracy-in-africa-73088>.

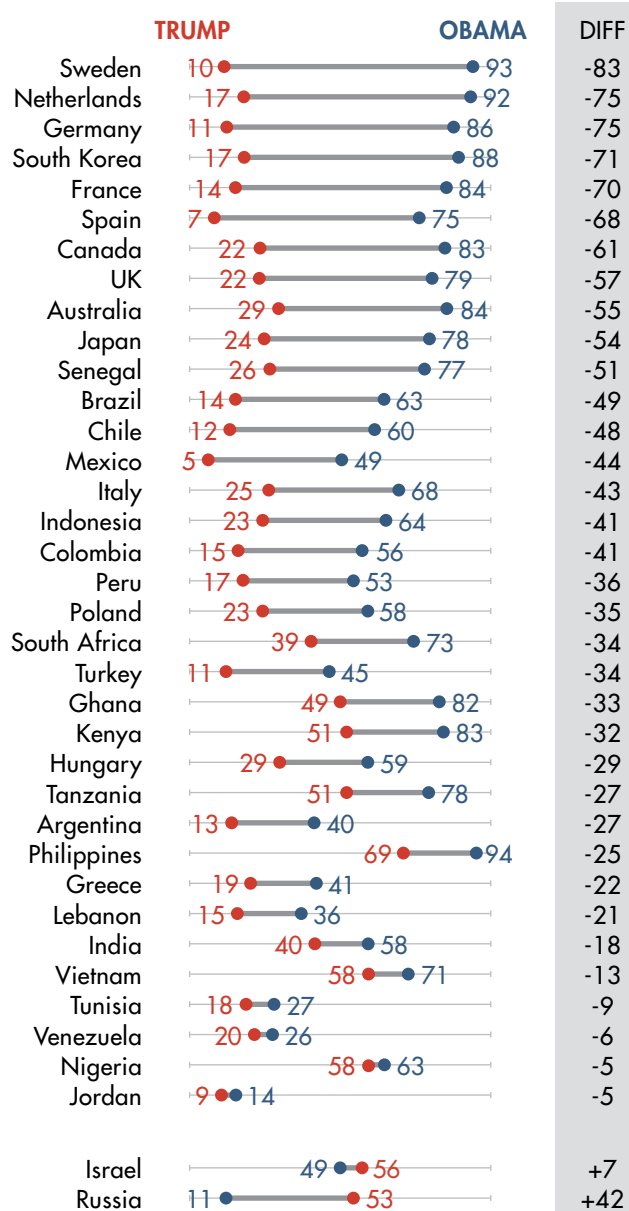
A Pew Research Center global survey of public perceptions of the US in July 2015 showed that 79% of Africans had a favourable view of the US, a higher percentage than in any other region.<sup>8</sup> Some of this enthusiasm might be attributed to the 'Obama factor', but Pew polling in the past decade shows the US' positive image in Africa was virtually the same during the two terms of Obama's predecessor, Republican George W Bush.

Since Trump's election there has been a sharp drop in the world's regard for the US. According to a Pew survey of 37 countries, released in June 2017, there had been a 15-point drop in positive views of the US (64% to 49%) from Obama's leaving office to Trump's taking office. Confidence in the US presidency under Trump has plummeted to 42%.<sup>9</sup> Only in Russia and Israel is Trump more popular than Obama. Six African countries were polled and reveal the following declines of confidence in the US presidency since Trump's inauguration: Senegal (-51%), South Africa (-34%), Ghana (-33%), Kenya (-33%), Tanzania (-27%) and Nigeria (-5%).

One of Trump's first executive actions – the controversial 90-day ban on all travel from seven Islamic countries, three of them African (Libya, Somalia and Sudan) – reeked of racism. The travel ban was quickly blocked by a US court ruling, but it provoked a sharp rebuke from outgoing AU Commission chair and South African presidential candidate Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. In remarks prepared for the 30 January 2017 AU assembly of African heads of state and government she declared: 'The very country to whom our people were taken as slaves during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade has now decided to ban refugees from some of our countries.'<sup>10</sup>

When the respected 2016 American National Election Study released its detailed quantitative analysis of voter attitudes in April 2017, the salience of racism among Trump's most ardent supporters was confirmed.<sup>11</sup> *New York Times* columnist David Leonhardt drew a similar conclusion when summarising the political forces shaping Trump's first 100 days in office, writing that 'Trump won the White House despite – and partly because of – his disdain for Mexicans, Muslims and African-Americans and his flirtation with anti-Semitic tropes'.<sup>12</sup>

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- 8 Wike R, '5 charts on America's (very positive) image in Africa', Pew Research Center, 23 July 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/23/5-charts-on-americas-very-positive-image-in-africa/>.
- 9 Wike R *et al.*, 'US image suffers as publics around the world question Trump's leadership', Pew Research Center, 26 June 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/06/26/u-s-image-suffers-as-publics-around-world-question-trumps-leadership/>.
- 10 EWN, 'Dlamini-Zuma: US travel ban heralds turbulent times for Africa', 30 January 2017, <http://ewn.co.za/2017/01/30/au-chief-us-travel-ban-heralds-turbulent-times-for-africa>.
- 11 ANES (American National Election Study), '2016 Time Series Study', [http://www.electionstudies.org/study/pages/anes\\_timeseries\\_2016/anes\\_timeseries\\_2016.htm](http://www.electionstudies.org/study/pages/anes_timeseries_2016/anes_timeseries_2016.htm).
- 12 Leonhardt D, 'Donald Trump's first 100 days: The worst on record', *The New York Times*, 26 April 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/26/opinion/donald-trumps-first-100-days-the-worst-on-record.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2F david-leonhardt&action=click&contentCollection=undefined&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=21&pgtype=collection](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/26/opinion/donald-trumps-first-100-days-the-worst-on-record.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2F david-leonhardt&action=click&contentCollection=undefined&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=21&pgtype=collection).

**TABLE 1** CONFIDENCE IN THE US PRESIDENT TO 'DO THE RIGHT THING' REGARDING FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Note: Obama figures are based on the most recently available data for each country between 2014 and 2016

Source: Pew Research Center, 'US image suffers as publics around the world question Trump's leadership', 23 June 2017, [http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/06/26/u-s-image-suffers-as-publics-around-world-question-trumps-leadership/pg\\_2017-06-26-us\\_image-00-1/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/06/26/u-s-image-suffers-as-publics-around-world-question-trumps-leadership/pg_2017-06-26-us_image-00-1/), accessed 21 September 2017



A second area of clashing beliefs arises from Trump's economic nationalism and disregard for multilateralism, both of which are inimical to Africa's dependence on global trade and its aspirations for greater regional integration and a larger role in global institutions. Forecasts, based on extensive and credible scientific research, show that Africa, for the rest of this century, will be highly vulnerable to the vagaries of climate change, forced migrations and deadly epidemics that can only be managed through creative, resilient, carefully balanced and adequately funded multilateralism.

The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change is the most recent and hopeful indication that 195 sovereign states are capable of negotiating, and voluntarily accepting, a complex mix of varying obligations and costs, in a shared hope for the betterment of all. Trust and agreed means of verification are essential and can be bolstered by credible scientific evidence of needs, and the costs and prospects of redressing them. Africa is, in many ways, the most vulnerable continent, but it is also the most receptive to creative multilateralism, which makes climate change denialism by Trump and key senior advisers so dangerous. On 1 June 2017 Trump announced the US' withdrawal from the agreement and cancelled its pledge to fund the Green Climate Fund, which will assist African countries to adapt to climate change.<sup>13</sup>

Trump generally favours American disengagement and greater self-reliance, and disdains multilateral institutions and arrangements. In the view of former Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt, Trump's proclaimed policy of 'America First' is evolving into a more dangerous doctrine of 'America Alone'.<sup>14</sup>

The third area of clashing norms and likely estrangement has to do with Trump's apparent distrust of democratic institutions, processes and values. Perhaps reflecting his highly personal, ever suspicious, and entirely transactional – zero-sum – approach to business, Trump shows autocratic leadership traits that are uncharacteristic of, and may well prove to be incompatible with, the US' political traditions and politics. They may be perceived in Africa as almost the mirror image of some of the worst characteristics of the colonial, white minority and post-colonial autocratic governance that has blighted so many countries on the continent. These realities had prompted Obama, during his first visit to sub-Saharan Africa as US president, to declare that to succeed politically and economically Africa needs strong institutions, not strongmen.<sup>15</sup>

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13 Stremlau JJ, 'Africa is the perfect testing ground for adapting to the Anthropocene epoch', *The Conversation*, 11 September 2016, <https://theconversation.com/africa-is-the-perfect-testing-ground-for-adapting-to-the-anthropocene-epoch-65055>.

14 Brooks D, 'Donald Trump poisons the world', *The New York Times*, 2 June 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/02/opinion/donald-trump-poisons-the-world.html?mcubz=3>; Bildt C, 'The scariest part of Trump's Paris Accord speech wasn't about climate', *The Washington Post*, 2 June 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/06/02/the-scariest-part-of-trumps-speech-wasnt-about-the-paris-accord/?utm\\_term=.5bd60849b01f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/06/02/the-scariest-part-of-trumps-speech-wasnt-about-the-paris-accord/?utm_term=.5bd60849b01f).

15 AFP, "'Africa doesn't need strongmen, it needs strong institutions': Obama", *Sunday Times* (Sri Lanka), 12 July 2009, <http://www.sundaytimes.lk/090712/International/sundaytimes-international-03.html>.

The fact that Trump holds a contrary view was made evident in the early months of his presidency by his preference for dealing directly with authoritarian strongmen, notably Russia's Vladimir Putin, Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte and Saudi Arabia's King Salman. This should alarm Africans, who may be struggling under difficult conditions to build and sustain fledgling democracies. Trump's stance could reassure Africa's autocrats and oligarchs that their repressive and corrupt practices will be less scrutinised and less likely to be the subject of sanctions imposed by Washington.<sup>16</sup>

Trump disdains past US government support for international programmes to advance democracy, human rights, the rule of law, elections and other elements of good governance, which have been a major focus of US–Africa relations for decades. For their part, many African governments have tolerated US support for pro-democracy non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In Africa, there is no regional consensus on any specific form of democracy, or a sudden resolve to interfere in each other's internal affairs. But there has been an historic shift in regional diplomatic norms. African governments are no longer 'indifferent' to abuses of power, including denial of basic human rights, internal conflicts and violation of constitutionally sanctioned presidential term limits, especially unconstitutional changes of government. These are all seen as early warnings of conflict, and of the danger to regional stability that forced migration and untold numbers of refugees hold.

Since 2002 Africa's leaders have formally endorsed the spread and entrenchment of democracy as serving their collective aspirations for sustainable peace and economic development, and as a basis for gradually advancing regional integration. Democratic norms are embedded in the AU's Constitutive Act of 2002, which supplanted the less politically ambitious Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU, a 1963 post-colonial sovereign alliance that precluded involvement in the internal affairs of members). The AU commits all 55 member states to 'promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance' and 'show respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance'.<sup>17</sup>

To begin implementing the AU's vision of a more democratically inclusive, peaceful and integrated Africa, AU members also unanimously adopted in 2007 and later ratified the African Charter for Democracy, Elections and Governance. The charter commits all states to holding regular, peaceful and democratic elections, open to observation by AU election monitors drawn from other African states. In a report prepared for the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), to commemorate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016, I noted that EISA, a pan-African NGO based in Johannesburg, provides technical

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16 Rucker P, 'Trump keeps praising international strongmen, alarming human rights activists', *The Washington Post*, 2 May 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-keeps-praising-international-strongmen-alarming-human-rights-advocates/2017/05/01/6848d018-2e81-11e7-9dec-764dc781686f\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.5a775c4b7490](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-keeps-praising-international-strongmen-alarming-human-rights-advocates/2017/05/01/6848d018-2e81-11e7-9dec-764dc781686f_story.html?utm_term=.5a775c4b7490).

17 ACHPR (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights), 'Constitutive Act of the African Union', <http://www.achpr.org/instruments/au-constitutive-act/>.

assistance to all AU electoral observation missions in virtually all AU member states.<sup>18</sup> Quality and credibility vary, of course, but this is a positive development, along with the related constitutional provisions in most African states that set two-term limits for the head of state (although these limits have been overturned in 13 of the 38 states that have adopted them).<sup>19</sup>

Trump has demurred from promoting democracy internationally, including in Africa. During his campaign and initial months in office, he has shown a shocking disregard for the US' democratic institutions, the constitutional provisions for checks and balances, and the primacy of rule of law and due process, which are essential in sustaining any democratic experiment.<sup>20</sup> His election and behaviour in office should remind leaders and publics in Africa's young and still fragile democracies that no democracy, even the oldest one, is ever fully secure. As Margaret Dongo, a prominent Zimbabwean democrat and former parliamentarian, once quipped to me: 'America is still growing into its Constitution.' Trump threatens this growth as never before, raising new fears among Africa's democrats.

Africa, after all, is the world's most ethnically diverse region, where deadly conflicts most often occur within, not between or among states. Democracy, despite its challenges, is increasingly viewed as the best – perhaps the only – way to accommodate this pluralism.<sup>21</sup> Democracy, in theory, should provide ways and means to accommodate and reap the advantages of diversity, while preventing and resolving local conflicts. Trump's rise to political power through the demagoguery of emotional appeals to disaffected and angry white voters, promising them renewed privileges and greater access to national resources, also alarms liberal Africans.

## TRUMP'S ACTIONS AFFECTING AFRICA

Of more immediate concern to African governments than the political and social undercurrents likely to strain US–Africa relations during the Trump years is the fate of specific programmes and partnerships that have been the mainstay of generally good

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18 Strelau J, *Africa's Democracies: Promises, Progress and Prospects*, EISA (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa), 2016, <https://www.eisa.org.za/pdf/eisa2016Strelau.pdf>.

19 Cheeseman N, 'Democracy is taking root in Africa. But that doesn't mean it works all the time', *The Conversation*, 24 May 2017, <https://theconversation.com/democracy-is-taking-root-in-africa-but-that-doesnt-mean-it-works-all-the-time-78273>.

20 Traub J, 'A shining Comey on a hill: Can the former FBI director lead us back to our better selves?', *Foreign Policy*, 9 June 2017, [https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/09/a-shining-comey-on-a-hill-trump-russia--investigation/?utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm\\_term=%2AEditors%20Picks](https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/09/a-shining-comey-on-a-hill-trump-russia--investigation/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm_term=%2AEditors%20Picks).

21 Fisher M, 'A revealing map of the world's most and least diverse countries', *The Washington Post*, 16 May 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/05/16/a-revealing-map-of-the-worlds-most-and-least-ethnically-diverse-countries/?utm\\_term=.84720d35d1fc](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/05/16/a-revealing-map-of-the-worlds-most-and-least-ethnically-diverse-countries/?utm_term=.84720d35d1fc).

relations since the end of the Cold War. These include cooperative initiatives aimed at promoting trade and investment, and building capacity for more rapid economic development. The US has also championed efforts to advance and entrench good governance, democracy and human rights. Other priorities have been improving public health and education, increasing agricultural productivity and resilience, developing alternative sources of energy and, more recently, expanding efforts to help countries adapt to and mitigate the effects of global climate change. Small but extensive military assistance programmes have been more controversial, during and after the Cold War. They have recently been justified as helping vulnerable African governments combat violent extremism and acts of terrorism.

Complicating efforts by African and all other governments seeking serious policy discussions and engagement with the Trump administration are the many unfilled senior positions. Key people with the experience and authority to negotiate issues of international concern have yet to be appointed. Six months into the Trump presidency less than 10% of 564 senior federal positions had been confirmed by the US Senate.<sup>22</sup>

The situation at the US Department of State is especially dire, where most senior posts were still vacant as of this writing. In addition, ambassadorial and other positions not included in the priority list of senior federal positions but that require Senate confirmation remain unfilled. Although the deputy secretary of state was finally confirmed, none of the undersecretaries was confirmed or the key regional assistant-secretaries – including for Africa – even nominated. The main exceptions in terms of Africa policy are the Undersecretary for Political Affairs, Thomas Shannon, and the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs, Donald Yamamoto, both career foreign service officers.<sup>23</sup> US embassies in Africa still have ambassadors, but they too are career foreign service officers and are receiving very little policy guidance from Washington. South Africa, like many others, remains without an ambassadorial candidate even nominated. And except for the US Permanent Representative to the UN, Nikki Haley, all other US ambassadorial posts to multilateral organisations of interest to Africa are unoccupied.

In a damning editorial on 3 May 2017 *The New York Times* forecast that the State Department would be without most senior staff until well into 2018.<sup>24</sup> This lack of capacity to seriously conduct international relations – and, apparently, of any real interest in doing so – marks a sharp break with the US' evolving global role since the Second World War. For African countries, the pressures to adjust may not be as urgent as for the US' key allies in Europe, or in Beijing or Moscow. Securing the gains from and sustaining the US' extensive

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22 *The Washington Post*, 'Tackling how many key positions Trump has filled so far', <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-administration-appointee-tracker/database/>.

23 Shannon and Yamamoto issued the Trump administration's first broad Africa policy statements. These were made at a 13 September 2017 conference at the US Institute for Peace, broke no new ground, and are highlighted in the final section of this paper.

24 *The New York Times*, 'The State Department deserves better', 3 May 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/03/opinion/the-state-department-deserves-better.html>.

programmes and partnerships in Africa, however, pose important policy challenges for each country's bilateral ties to the US, and for regional and pan-African strategies.

Clues about how the Trump administration might develop its Africa policy surfaced in a *New York Times* report in January about a four-page list of Africa-related questions that was circulating at the State Department and Pentagon. The list suggested the curtailment of development and humanitarian commitments in favour of pushing business opportunities.<sup>25</sup>

Although the report ascribed authorship to unnamed members of the Trump transition team, US embassy officials in South Africa said the list had been generated elsewhere. Its substance has not been repudiated and is generally compatible with the tone and tenor of Trump's 'America First' rhetoric and the draft budget he sent to Congress in early March.

Among the reported questions were:

- How does US business compete with other nations in Africa? Are we losing out to the Chinese?
- With so much corruption in Africa, how much of our funding is stolen? Why should we spend these funds on Africa when we are suffering here in the US?
- We've been fighting al-Shabaab [a terrorist group operating in Somalia], why haven't we won? We've been hunting Kony [Ugandan terrorist leader] for years, is it worth the effort? The LRA [Kony's Lord's Resistance Army] never attacked US interests, why do we care?

The memo did not address Africa's special trading relationship with the US under the highly favourable terms of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA),<sup>26</sup> a major concern of African exporters of agricultural products and manufactured goods (excluding oil and other natural resources). Trump has not spoken publicly about AGOA despite his frequent complaints about most other US trade agreements and policies, which he flatly disparages – without proof or context – as taking 'unfair' advantage of a too pliable US. He promises these will all be renegotiated in the spirit of 'America First'.

There was much speculation in the South African media about Trump's reneging on AGOA or his trying to renegotiate terms more favourable to the US. South Africa, as Africa's biggest exporter of manufactured goods, would be especially hard hit. Fortunately, AGOA was renewed for 10 years in 2015 and enjoys bi-partisan congressional support. Thus far Trump has indicated no interest in challenging it. US proponents of AGOA also point to the 120 000 US jobs that have resulted from expanded trade with Africa, a selling point with Trump. Similar support and presidential silence apply so far to the continuation of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, a George W Bush initiative that has led to billions

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25 Cooper H, 'Trump team's queries about Africa point to scepticism about aid', *The New York Times*, 13 January 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/13/world/africa/africa-donald-trump.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/13/world/africa/africa-donald-trump.html?_r=0).

26 US, Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, 'African Growth and Opportunity Act', <http://trade.gov/agoa/>.

of dollars in investments in partnership compacts with African governments linked to obligations to greater government transparency and democratic accountability.

On 3 March 2017 the White House sent Congress its proposed budget priorities for 2018.<sup>27</sup> So far, this provides the most comprehensive picture of Trump's national priorities. Congress has yet to debate, much less approve, Trump's budget outline, which should offer clues on the extent to which it is prepared to accept his national priorities. Trump's total budget request is for \$4 trillion, but his particular budget priorities only apply to one-third of the total that is discretionary spending, which includes money for defence. Congress would have to amend the legislation that mandates how the larger portion of the budget is spent, for items such as Medicare and servicing the country's \$20 trillion debt.

Trump also wants major tax cuts for wealthy Americans and corporations. Yet under current revenue projections the proportion of the budget over which he has no control will need an additional \$487 billion. How he will reconcile these competing priorities is unknown, but this fiscal situation does not bode well for carrying forward the US' current development and humanitarian assistance programmes in Africa. The US' total expenditure on foreign assistance currently accounts for less than 2% of the overall federal budget, with Africa receiving a narrow slice of the total, according to an April 2017 study, 'How Does the US Spend its Foreign Aid'.<sup>28</sup>

A total of \$8 billion of the \$49 billion spent on US foreign assistance in 2015 was allocated to 49 sub-Saharan countries, considerably less than the \$11.8 billion given to just four others: Afghanistan, Israel, Iraq and Egypt. Yet this aid is prized by the millions of Africans who benefit from it. Whether and how much Trump's first budget will cut development, humanitarian, military and other mutually beneficial partnerships with African nations will only become clear when budget bills are finally signed and the administration's Africa policies are articulated and adequately staffed. Were Trump to have his way, the 28% in 'savings' from cutting foreign assistance would likely not come from such 'strategic' priorities as Afghanistan or Israel, but from Africa.

More than half of US assistance to Africa in recent years has gone to bilateral health programmes, including HIV/AIDS treatment, maternal and family health and support for government healthcare systems. And Trump does propose to maintain current funding of the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (Pepfar), initiated by George W Bush. Pepfar is vitally important to South Africa, saving millions of lives there, as it does in many other African countries.

US support for the World Bank and the UN Development Programme, whose biggest operations are in Africa, is targeted for large reductions. Two of Obama's biggest Africa

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27 Executive Office of the President of the United States, *America First: A Blueprint to Make America Great Again*, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/budget/fy2018/2018\\_blueprint.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/budget/fy2018/2018_blueprint.pdf).

28 McBride J, 'How does the US spend its aid?', Council on Foreign Relations, 11 April 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/how-does-us-spend-its-foreign-aid>.

initiatives – to improve African agriculture (Feed the Future) and develop alternative sources of energy (PowerAfrica) – are not referred to in Trump's budget outline.<sup>29</sup>

As for aid for healthcare for African women and families, the budget reflects Trump's earlier executive order defunding organisations that provide family planning assistance. In April the Department of State thus said it would end support for the UN Population Fund, to which the US has been the third-biggest contributor, providing nearly \$80 million in 2015.<sup>30</sup> The reason given was that this violates the administration's policies, announced during Trump's first week in office, including ending all aid to any organisation providing abortion services, information, counselling or referrals. The impact is likely to be felt especially by African women, whose mortality during childbirth has steadily declined since 1990. It could also result in an increase in unsafe abortions.<sup>31</sup> Major reductions in US contributions to the UN Children's Emergency Fund and World Health Organization would, if enacted, hit Africa especially hard.

International humanitarian assistance, much of it channelled through UN agencies for work in Africa, only accounts for 16% of current US aid. The Trump budget proposes to defund the State Department's Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account, used to avert and mitigate disasters such as this year's famine in South Sudan and to help resettle and sustain some 65 million refugees, many of them Africans. A UN spokesperson notes that the US contribution to such relief represents, at 29%, the world's biggest, although at \$6.4 billion it is just a tiny slice of last year's \$4 trillion US budget.<sup>32</sup> Much of this aid is in the form of agricultural goods purchased from US farmers, which, for domestic reasons, may be the last to be cut. However, Trump's budget targets the UN and its agencies for major reductions of US support, which could include financial support to, among others, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Military and security assistance accounts for 35% of the aid budget. Much of this is also spent domestically on purchasing US military equipment, training foreign military personnel and supporting UN peacekeeping operations. The last category has been targeted for cuts of \$1 billion, which will likely be opposed by many in Congress, but it sends a strong signal to African governments that they can no longer look to the US as

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29 USAID (US Agency for International Development), 'President Obama's commitment to global development', <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/jul-20-2016-president-obamas-commitment-global-development>.

30 *Al Jazeera*, 'US ends funding for United Nations Population Fund', 4 April 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/united-nations-population-fund-170404004048308.html>.

31 McKenzie D & B Swails, 'US foreign aids cuts could be "death sentence" to women in Malawi', *CNN*, 27 July 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/27/health/malawi-us-foreign-aid-cuts/index.html>.

32 *CNN*, 'Alarm bells ring for charties as Trump pledges to slash foreign aid budget', 1 March 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/28/politics/trump-budget-foreign-aid/index.html>. See also Shendruck A, 'Funding the United Nations: What Impact Do US Contributions Have on UN Agencies and Programs?', Council on Foreign Relations, 21 September 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/article/funding-united-nations-what-impact-do-us-contributions-have-un-agencies-and-programs>.

a major contributor to UN operations, most of which are currently in troubled states in Africa.

The same cannot be said of US bilateral military assistance linked to Trump's counter-terrorism priority. That, we may assume, will be at the heart of any Africa policy. Much of this assistance is buried in the huge Pentagon budget. Trump may have been unaware of the approximately 1 700 Special Forces members and other US military personnel undertaking 96 missions in 21 African countries, but it is doubtful he disapproves.<sup>33</sup> The number of countries immediately threatened by violent extremists is much smaller – Nigeria, Kenya, and several others in the Horn region and the Sahelian Central Africa. An illustration of the US military's escalating presence in the Sahel was a public statement, made within days of the 4 October killing of three US soldiers in Niger, that the 186 'security cooperation events' in 2017 (fiscal year) would [increase to 271 in 2018](#).<sup>34</sup>

As for funding the diplomacy necessary to help prevent and mitigate the need for peacekeeping operations and much of the military aid spent, the State Department, along with the US Agency for International Development, is targeted for a 29% cut in funding. Among all federal departments this proportion is only surpassed by the 31% cut proposed for the Environmental Protection Agency. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson accepted this cut without protest and maintains that he has filled few senior policy posts, including that of the assistant secretary for Africa, because it gives him time to restructure his department and, presumably, accommodate a big budget reduction.

The effects of understaffing on US–Africa relations are impossible to measure. Reports that African governments are being needlessly irritated, however, illustrate the problem. One example was the visit of Rwandan President Paul Kagame to Washington in March, during which no one in the administration was available to meet him. Another occurred in late April when Tillerson unexpectedly and inexplicably cancelled a scheduled meeting at the State Department with AU Commission Chair Moussa Faki Mahamat. This not only reportedly infuriated Mahamat but must also have dismayed senior officials in all AU member states.

A final substantive area of critical concern for African countries is the dangers posed by global warming. A key element of the Paris Agreement<sup>35</sup> was the creation of the Green Climate Fund, aimed at assisting the poorest and most vulnerable countries, mostly in

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33 Okeowo A, 'The enduring American mission in Africa', *The New Yorker*, 3 May 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-enduring-american-military-mission-in-africa>.

34 Myers M, 'US Army Africa turns focus to Lake Chad Basin, increases exercises to deter emerging extremist groups', *Army Times*, 10 October 2017, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2017/10/09/us-army-africa-turns-its-focus-to-lake-chad-basin-increases-exercises-to-deter-emerging-extremist-groups/>.

35 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 'The Paris Agreement', [http://unfccc.int/paris\\_agreement/items/9485.php](http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php).



Africa.<sup>36</sup> An initial fund of \$10 billion was pledged, with the expectation that it would grow to \$100 billion annually in order to fund projects and programmes to help these countries adapt to global warming. The Obama administration pledged \$3 billion, paying out \$1 billion just prior to Obama's leaving office.

Trump criticised the Paris process throughout his campaign and during his first 100 days in office, appointing climate denialists to key senior posts and cancelling a host of earlier executive orders and policies issued by Obama aimed at reducing US greenhouse gas emissions. On 1 June he formally announced that the US would withdraw from the Paris Accord. He also stated that the US would not honour Obama's pledge to fund and in other vital ways support the Green Climate Fund.<sup>37</sup>

Africa is the region least responsible for, most vulnerable to, and least able to afford the cost of adapting to global climate change. Southern Africa is already suffering the effects of a severe drought and other extreme weather events as the subregion is warming at twice the global mean rate.<sup>38</sup> Prompt and pervasive international criticism of Trump's actions, including a leaked EU–China joint climate statement that suggests they are prepared to replace the US as climate leaders, do give Africa hope.<sup>39</sup> There are also some early indications that Africans themselves may be prodded by Trump's affront to seek greater national, regional and international self-reliance and integration, without regard to the US, in meeting their Paris Accord pledges.<sup>40</sup>

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## TRUMP'S LEADERSHIP TRAITS RESONATE NEGATIVELY IN AFRICA

In deciding the US would no longer support the Paris climate accord, Trump acted alone and decisively, without consulting allies or other parties to the agreement, in disregard for the international understandings reached by his predecessor, and with no evident familiarity with the details of the agreement or acknowledgement of the scientific evidence and years of negotiations that led to this global agreement. During his campaign he had

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36 Green Climate Fund, 'African countries propose ambitious GCF pipeline at Cape Town dialogue', 28 October 2016, <http://www.greenclimate.fund/-/african-countries-propose-ambitious-gcf-pipeline-at-cape-town-dialogue>.

37 Kotchen MJ, 'Trump will stop paying into the Green Climate Fund. He has no idea what it is', *The Washington Post*, 2 June 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/06/02/trump-will-stop-paying-into-the-green-climate-fund-he-has-no-idea-what-it-is/?utm\\_term=.91cee8237ce5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/06/02/trump-will-stop-paying-into-the-green-climate-fund-he-has-no-idea-what-it-is/?utm_term=.91cee8237ce5).

38 Scholes M, Lucas M & R Scholes, *Climate Change: Briefings from Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2015.

39 Mathiesen K, 'Leaked EU–China statement – in full', *Climate Change News*, 1 June 2017, <http://www.climatechangenews.com/2017/06/01/leaked-eu-china-climate-statement-full/>

40 Fioramonti L, 'As Trump smacks the climate, world must do better to save planet', *The Conversation*, 4 June 2017, <https://theconversation.com/as-trump-smacks-the-climate-world-must-do-better-to-save-planet-78567>.

faulted the agreement for hurting the US economy. His decision thus made good on a campaign promise, but it was the promise of a demagogue appealing to fear and anger, rather than reason justifying an evidence-based concern. The decision no doubt pleased supporters and perhaps his financial backers with special interests in preserving revenue and jobs in the US' traditional energy sector, but it ignored decades of credible scientific evidence and diligent multilateral diplomacy by prior Republican and Democratic administrations to reduce the US' production of greenhouse gases responsible for global warming. The decision also ignored the advice of those government agencies charged with developing US climate change policies, as well as the US Congress and a host of civil society groups devoted to environmental protection and improvement. It was, in short, the act of a leader with autocratic 'strongman' tendencies.

The specific decision will almost certainly hurt Africa and damage relations with the US. The leadership traits Trump showed here are also evident in the other ways that he operates as president, which may have important if subtle implications for US–Africa relations during the Trump era. Ironically, the man who now speaks for the world's oldest democracy conducts himself in office in a manner that often appears more characteristic of Africa's most notorious autocrats. The most famous comments on these similarities were made during the 2016 US presidential campaign by South African comedian Trevor Noah, host of *The Daily Show*.<sup>41</sup> Among the demagogic traits that Noah noted were: offering people simple and absolute answers to complex issues and appealing to their fear, anger and prejudices in emotionally compelling ways. Juxtaposing quotes from Trump with virtually identical language by Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, and Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe made for some sensational television clips. At that stage, however, the prospect of a Trump victory seemed low.

Just after Trump's election Noah reprised his African strongman comparison in a much more politically relevant fashion, comparing Trump to South Africa's current president, Jacob Zuma, who is now mired in controversy related to allegations of corruption and abuse of power.<sup>42</sup> Among the traits shared by Zuma and Trump that Noah alludes to as damaging their countries' international standing and domestic democratic consolidation, are unclear lines between their children running the family businesses and those kids' access to the government, as well as their threatening to prosecute political enemies using government resources, referred to in South Africa as 'state capture', and vowing to censor the press. Noah's phrase, 'When you look at Zuma and Trump it seems like they're

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41 Wright T, 'Trevor Noah says Donald Trump reminds him of an African dictator and stand-up comedian', *Vulture*, 15 October 2016, <http://www.vulture.com/2016/10/trevor-noah-compares-trump-to-african-dictators.html>.

42 Nededog J, 'Trevor Noah compares Trump to South Africa's scandalous president', *Business Insider*, 16 November 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/trevor-noah-donald-trump-south-african-president-jacob-zuma-2016-11>.

brothers from another mother', immediately caught the attention of South Africa's media and went viral.<sup>43</sup>

The success of satire, of course, is the kernel of truth it contains. In the context of this paper some further comments on the autocratic attributes of Trump's leadership style and personality may shed light on why his presidency may discourage Africa's democrats and encourage the region's autocrats.<sup>44</sup>

- **Favouring strongmen over strong institutions:** Trump showed little interest in sub-Saharan Africa during his first three months in office. He made brief phone calls to the presidents of South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya, which reportedly focused on countering terror and promoting US economic interests. The only African invited to Washington for a state visit during this period was Egypt's el-Sisi. This defiance of Obama's policy of avoiding encounters with dictators will likely result in future visits by other African autocrats to the Trump White House. What was not mentioned but is much discussed in South African foreign affairs circles and, presumably, in other African cities, is Trump's criticism of the previous US emphasis on good governance and strengthening democratic institutions, including limitations on executive powers. In South Africa, Prof. William Gumede of the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Governance warns of 'demagogue peers', including Trump, Zuma, Erdogan, Putin and Duterte.<sup>45</sup>
- **Crony capitalism:** Trump's blurring of lines between government duties and his personal financial dealings and interests, which also benefit family members and a small number of business and political associates, reminds Africanists of the oligarchic behaviour, or neopatrimonialism, that still stymies democratic consolidation in too many African states, notably those rich in minerals and oil. The US' political institutions are comparatively strong, but Trump's conflicts of interests and disregard for institutional safeguards against such practices is bad nationally and a bad example for countries where such practices already predominate. Trump allegedly laundered vast sums of illicit financial flows (IFFs) from Russia's oligarchs prior to becoming president.<sup>46</sup> His rise to power may reassure those in Africa who are involved in such corruption that Trump will do nothing to stop Africa's loss of revenue owing to IFFs.

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43 Channel 24, 'Trevor Noah: Donald Trump and Jacob Zuma are brothers from another mother', 16 November 2016, <http://www.channel24.co.za/The-Juice/News/trevor-noah-donald-trump-and-jacob-zuma-are-brothers-from-another-mother-20161116>; *iol entertainment*, 'Noah: Zuma, Trump "like brothers from another mother"', 21 November 2016, <https://www.iol.co.za/entertainment/celebrity-news/international/noah-zuma-trump-like-brothers-from-another-mother-2091897>.

44 Stremlau JJ, 'Trump's leadership traits are bad news for democrats in Africa', *The Conversation*, 4 December 2016, <https://theconversation.com/trumps-leadership-traits-are-bad-...its%20are%20bad%news%20for%20democrats%20in%20Africa>.

45 Gumede W, 'African leaders are masters at "post-truth" politics', *Democracy Works*, 20 April 2017, <http://democracyworks.org.za/african-leaders-are-masters-at-post-truth-politics/>.

46 Unger C, 'Trump's Russian laundromat', *New Republic*, 13 July 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/143586/trumps-russian-laundromat-trump-tower-luxury-high-rises-dirty-money-international-crime-syndicate>.

A high-level panel sponsored by the AU and the UN and chaired by Thabo Mbeki estimates these to be over \$50 billion annually.<sup>47</sup>

- **Non-transparency:** For decades, US presidents have been pressing African governments to become more transparent for the benefit of their citizens and as a cornerstone of good governance. Trump's persistent refusal to disclose his own financial dealings and taxes and the new restrictions on access to information at the White House and among his cabinet officials set another bad example for Africa.
- **Attack on freedom of expression:** An all-too-familiar affliction of African autocrats now has many disturbing parallels in the Trump administration's restrictions on press access to the White House, curtailment of press briefings and strict new limitations on members of the media allowed to accompany senior US officials, including the secretary of state, on foreign trips.
- **The political art of lying:** Trump's frequent lies are well documented. *The Washington Post's* non-partisan fact-checkers documented 623 false and misleading claims made by Trump during his first 137 days in office.<sup>48</sup> His lying, which he often does when claiming others are lying about him, may even be strategic, what *The Washington Post* columnist Dana Milbank calls 'verbal jujitsu',<sup>49</sup> using his opponents' strengths against them. Lying may also reflect East African editor and journalist Charles Onyango-Obbo's warning that '[t]he genius of Trump is that he understands what adept guerrilla leaders figured out ages ago – do that which the opponent thinks is impossible or so unthinkable, that they have not planned how to defend it'.<sup>50</sup> Lying in emotionally appealing ways to delude citizens and to discredit opponents and keep them off balance is a familiar strategy of demagogues and African autocrats.
- **Opinion over fact:** Trump's denigration of responsible reporting and his dismissal of scientific evidence, most notably regarding climate change, have seriously undermined his administration's credibility both at home and abroad, much like the 'fact-free' tendencies of African strongmen. William Gumede references Trump when criticising Zuma. He cites the lack of any factual basis for Zuma's anti-African immigrant rants,

47 AU/ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 'Track It! Stop It! Get It!: Illicit Financial Flows', Report of the High Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa, 2015, [https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/iff\\_main\\_report\\_26feb\\_en.pdf](https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/iff_main_report_26feb_en.pdf).

48 *The Washington Post*, 'In 232 days, Trump has made 1 145 false and misleading claims', Fact Checker, 8 September 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/?tid=a\\_inl&utm\\_term=.c1081f9b2c96](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.c1081f9b2c96).

49 Milbank D, 'Of course Trump called Comey a liar: That has always been his strategy', *The Washington Post*, 12 June 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/of-course-trump-called-comey-a-liar-thats-his-strategy/2017/06/12/6ff4b4-4a8-4fa6-11e7-91eb-9611861a988f\\_story.html?utm\\_term+.026ffla843bf](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/of-course-trump-called-comey-a-liar-thats-his-strategy/2017/06/12/6ff4b4-4a8-4fa6-11e7-91eb-9611861a988f_story.html?utm_term+.026ffla843bf).

50 Ssenoga G, 'Idi Amin and Donald Trump: Strong men with unlikely parallels', *The Conversation*, 1 June 2017, [https://theconversation.com/idi-amin-and-donald-trump-strong-men-with-unlikely-parallels-78004?utm\\_medium+emali&utm\\_campaign%20f...](https://theconversation.com/idi-amin-and-donald-trump-strong-men-with-unlikely-parallels-78004?utm_medium+emali&utm_campaign%20f...)

imagining South Africa's president calling 'in Donald Trump style – for a wall to be built alongside the Limpopo River to keep out those northerly neighbours'.<sup>51</sup> Gumede compares Zuma's 'layered lies' in stirring up popular support for 'radical economic transformation' to those that Trump uses to promote his demagogic slogan, 'Make America Great Again!'. Zuma and Trump both benefit from uncritical dissemination of their unfounded claims and promises by favoured broadcasters financed by their enablers: ANN7 (and the *New Age* newspaper) in South Africa and Fox News, among others, in the US.

- **Infallibility:** This is another self-righteous trait Trump shares with African autocrats such as Mugabe. It means never accepting responsibility and always blaming others. While Trump cannot ascribe his failures to imperialism, as Mugabe does, his citing of various unproven conspiracies to thwart or unseat him may reassure like-minded peers in African capitals.
- **Repression:** Trump does not accept criticism, whether from the media, the opposition, human rights groups or other civil society organisations. Repression of these groups has a long and troubling history in Africa and recent clampdowns on Internet access in 11 countries<sup>52</sup> point to a possible resurgence. Domestic legal institutions have thus far restrained Trump, as they have Zuma in South Africa, but these leaders' willingness to test and even suppress efforts to hold them accountable rightly alarms democrats domestically and elsewhere.
- **Male dominance:** Trump's disregard for women's rights – both in his personal behaviour and in his early executive actions to restrict their right to access family planning support, safe abortions and anti-discrimination protections – rivals the most orthodox behaviour of traditional African leaders. His glamorising of male dominance with a modern gloss, including in nearly all of his cabinet and other senior appointments, is likely to continue to resonate perniciously in a still overwhelmingly patriarchal Africa.
- **Tribalism:** The campaign to 'Make America Great Again' raises the question, 'for whom?'. As noted in the next section, one of Trump's few core beliefs appears to be the need to reassert the primacy of white, Christian men. Ethnic nationalism has a long and conflict-ridden history in Africa. In recent years, ethnic nationalism has been moderated by constitutional provisions requiring political parties and electoral victories to satisfy various minimal standards of diversity. As referenced in the first section, norms supporting civic nationalism are now embedded in the AU and subregional organisations. These norms are also linked to the AU's aspirations for greater national and regional peace and security, and for regional integration.

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Domestic legal institutions have thus far restrained Trump, as they have Zuma in South Africa, but these leaders' willingness to test and even suppress efforts to hold them accountable rightly alarms democrats domestically and elsewhere

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51 Gumede W, 'Post-truth politics: Down the rabbit hole with Jacob Zuma', *Africa Report*, 90, May 2017, pp. 36–37.

52 Algeria, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

## DEMOCRACY UNDER STRESS

Preceding sections of this paper focused on the likely short-term impact of the Trump presidency on US policies toward Africa and on Africa–US relations. Initial impressions, garnered during Trump’s first eight months in office, included references to his character, temperament and prior experiences that helped shape his early behaviour in office and that seemed woefully inadequate for a position of such political complexity, pressures and power.<sup>53</sup> Contrasts with his predecessor, Obama, could not be starker, especially on attributes of character, judgement and personal demeanour.<sup>54</sup> Whereas the leader Obama is believed to admire the most is democrat Nelson Mandela, Trump seems most enamoured by Russian autocrat Putin.

During his first eight months as president, Trump was not tested by a major international crisis. However, his public threats to use nuclear weapons rather than the diplomatic and economic tools of his predecessors in response to North Korea’s advances in nuclear weapons and delivery programmes have rattled the US’ Asian allies and prompted the US Congress to assert its constitutional war powers authority. Meanwhile, the Trump administration has become mired in a domestic political crisis that could test the US Constitution in ways not experienced since the Civil War of the 1860s. Whether and how the country deals with this crisis might hold lessons for and have effects on other nations struggling to consolidate or prevent the deconsolidation of democratic government, including across sub-Saharan Africa.

The US’ current political crisis has been developing for several years, with complex underlying causes beyond the scope of this paper. Trump took advantage of these conditions. His divisive campaign and performance thus far in office have made matters worse. Although it is too early to know the lasting impact this crisis may have on sustainable democracy in the US, or on US–Africa relations, seven fundamental variables should be considered.

## ‘THE POST-AMERICAN WORLD’

Nearly a decade ago Fareed Zakaria published an international non-fiction bestseller titled *The Post-American World*.<sup>55</sup> His argument then was not that the US was in decline but rather that there had been an unprecedented ‘rise of the rest’, notably China, India and other big emerging markets. The US had, by its international push for market capitalism and globalisation, contributed to this diffusion of power and growing interdependence

53 Wright R, ‘Why is Donald Trump still so horribly witless about the world?’, *The New Yorker*, 4 August 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/why-is-donald-trump-still-so-horribly-witless-about-the-world?mbid=nl>.

54 Stremlau JJ, ‘Barack Obama: An enduring legacy for advocates of democracy in Africa?’, *The Conversation*, 16 February 2017, <https://theconversation.com/barack-obama-an-enduring-legacy-for-advocates-of-democracy-in-africa-73088>.

55 Zakaria F, *The Post-American World*. New York: WW Norton & Company, 2008; Zakaria F, *The Post-American World*, Release 2.0. New York: WW Norton & Company, 2011.

of nations in a post-imperial age of historic peace and prosperity. Today Zakaria strikes a different note. In a 2017 opinion piece in *The Washington Post*, he argues that in the first six months of the Trump administration 'the post-America world' is being driven negatively, by the sharp decline in US interest and engagement, and loss of international respect or admiration.<sup>56</sup>

Zakaria is not alone in his views on the US' loss of dominance in world affairs, from the end of the Second World War to the 1990s, following the end of the Cold War. In 2013 Moises Naim, Venezuela's former minister of industry and trade and later editor of the influential Washington journal *Foreign Policy*, published *The End of Power*, arguing the world had entered a new era where power was decaying on all levels as politics became more complex and dominant.<sup>57</sup> Both small and large states should adjust to a new global reality, according to Naim: 'Power is easier to get, harder to use, and easier to lose'<sup>58</sup> Putting these new realities into a more authoritative context, the US National Intelligence Council's 2017 edition of *Global Trends*, published in the aftermath of Trump's surprise election, cites the country's future role as the first and biggest uncertainty that should concern all other countries.<sup>59</sup>

For African countries long accustomed to receiving help from the US, sometimes to the point of dependency, there is a now another big incentive to achieve greater self-reliance, individually and collectively, as well as new and more balanced partnerships with non-African actors. This may eventually turn out to be at least one 'silver lining' to the damaging Trump era. Were Trump to resign or be removed from office before the end of his four-year term, there is no indication that Vice-President Mike Pence would pay Africa any more attention, although Congress might well press ahead with existing programmes that command bi-partisan support.

Should he be succeeded by a Democrat in 2020, there would likely be an attempt to define a new 'grand strategy' for the US in foreign affairs. An early proposal in this regard has been published by the 2016 vice-presidential candidate Senator Tim Kaine, and is discussed briefly in the conclusion.<sup>60</sup> Although Kaine does not offer an blueprint for US–Africa policy, his general tone and emphasis suggest it would not differ much from that of the Obama administration, and would likely support efforts at achieving greater collective self-reliance and regional integration in Africa.

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56 Zakaria F, 'Say hello to a post-America world', *The Washington Post*, 27 July 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/say-hello-to-a-post-america-world/2017/07/27/aad19d68-7308-11e7-8f39-eeb7d3a2d304\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.9af104eb0887](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/say-hello-to-a-post-america-world/2017/07/27/aad19d68-7308-11e7-8f39-eeb7d3a2d304_story.html?utm_term=.9af104eb0887).

57 Naim, M, *The End of Power: From Boardrooms, to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being in Charge Isn't What it Used to Be*. New York: Basic Books, 2013.

58 YouTube, 'Moises Naim on power: Easier to get, harder to use, easier to lose', Stanford Graduate School of Business, 3 May 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GHWa-qqoBM>.

59 US, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, [www.dni.gov](http://www.dni.gov).

60 Kaine, T, 'A new Truman Doctrine', *Foreign Affairs*, 96, 4, 2017.

## EMPOWERMENT OF AN AMERICAN DEMAGOGUE

Trump's political methods and leadership traits meet the definitional criteria of a demagogue.<sup>61</sup> Because power in all democracies, by definition, ultimately rests with the people, decisive majorities exercising their constitutional rights can legitimately elect a demagogue. Such was the US' electoral result in 2016, which should serve as a reminder to democrats everywhere that no democracy is ever fully secure. After 241 years the US may be the world's oldest democracy, but it is not exempt from such upsets. How well it deals with the result will have global implications.

Demagogues throughout history, and in several post-colonial African countries, have shown themselves to be clever enough to denigrate, disarm and/or co-opt their critics and opponents, while garnering sufficient votes to gain high office. Trump won the presidency with a popular minority by securing key support in less populous states, which under the federal constitutional bargain of 1789 were granted disproportionate voting weight in the Electoral College affirming the winner. Ironically, this provision was ostensibly approved to protect the young democracy from state capture by just such a demagogue as Trump. However, unlike many other democracies, including in Africa, reforming the US' founding document to eliminate this glaring democratic deficit has thus far been widely viewed as politically impossible.

The irony of Trump's demagogic election is made worse by the sordidness of his appeal. The democratic deficit enshrined in the US' constitution also favoured less-populated slave-holding states in the once cotton-rich south. Sediments of slavery still infect American politics, despite the 1860–65 Civil War that ostensibly freed African-Americans, and the civil rights struggles of the 1960s to secure full and equal voting rights. Trump's appeal to white supremacists in states with disproportionate weight in the Electoral College helped ensure his constitutional election.

Such tribalistic campaigns are a familiar tactic of victorious demagogues in post-colonial Africa. A crucial difference, thus far, between enduring African demagogues and Trump is that Trump appears increasingly unable to consolidate the power he has won. While he might still exploit an international crisis or terrorist attack to do so, the prospect of a dictatorship seems less likely than many initially feared. Whether he could rally the American people to grant him emergency powers is increasingly doubtful. His incompetent, incoherent and erratic handling of foreign affairs has undermined the confidence of the US' allies and the respect of its adversaries.

## DEMOCRATIC 'DECONSOLIDATION'

Disillusionment with democratic governance often accompanies economic grievances and the fear and anger that create conditions conducive to the rise of demagogues. The deconsolidation of democratic institutions, often resulting in a return to authoritarian rule, is most often associated with new and fragile democracies where the institutions

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61 Wikipedia, 'Demagogue', <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demagogue>.



and values of democracy are not entrenched. Of course, the US, like any other democracy, is best defined as a political experiment whose main purpose is to keep the experiment going. Trump's election and conduct in office increasingly challenge the viability of that experiment. The underlying political and economic conditions enabling Trump's political success, however, had been developing well before he became a presidential candidate. In a widely discussed *Journal of Democracy* article, Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk draw on a decade of World Values surveys (1995–2014) to show rising disillusionment with democracy in countries in Europe and North America where such regimes are deeply entrenched.<sup>62</sup> The 'deconsolidation of democracy' in established democratic regimes, including the US, they argue, is not merely the result of electorates' unhappiness with the leader or party in power. Rather, the anger and alienation seem to be more fundamental, directed at democratic institutions, elites and the overall regime, which are viewed as failing to listen – much less respond – to popular needs. In the US, Congress was viewed favourably by only 13% in a March 2016 survey. Foa and Mounk also report that more Americans than ever favour 'strong leaders' over elected ones. In 1995 barely 10% of all US respondents thought it would be good if the military ruled, rather than politicians. A decade later the number had jumped to nearly 17%. More research is clearly needed, as democracy is now widely viewed as legitimate, despite its losing the trust of many citizens who no longer believe that democracy can deliver on their most pressing needs and preferences.

This decline of trust in democracy is a topic of concern across Africa, and is usefully summarised by Jakkie Cilliers in *The Future of Democracy in Africa*.<sup>63</sup> Deconsolidation may now be taking hold of the US' democratic institutions. If so, and should this continue – with the Trump administration suddenly an acid test – an end to the US' democratic experiment would be a political catastrophe, with unpredictable but possibly dire secondary effects for democrats in Africa and around the world.

Democracies adapt to the popular will. All democracies, whether in North America or sub-Saharan Africa, by definition ultimately derive their legitimacy and authority from the voluntary allegiance and support of their people. Deconsolidation, as just noted, is abetted by popular frustration and disillusionment. On both sides of the Atlantic, this appears to be growing. African and American opinion surveys point to two core concerns. One is a cluster of familiar economic issues – jobs and job security, rising inequality, poverty, and related means of access to the necessities of food, education and healthcare. The second is about the integrity and fairness of governance – whether or not corruption, special interests, and other forms of favouritism by the powerful undermine public confidence in the current government, or worse, in democracy as regime. Americans possess far greater resources and institutional capacity to redress these public concerns, but Trump is failing to do so. This also makes prospects for renewing US–Africa cooperation more difficult.

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An end to the US' democratic experiment would be a political catastrophe, with unpredictable but possibly dire secondary effects for democrats in Africa and around the world

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62 Foa RS & Y Mounk, 'The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democracy Disconnect', *Journal of Democracy* 27, 13, July 2016, pp. 5–17.

63 Cilliers J, 'The Future of Democracy in Africa', ISS (Institute for Security Studies) African Futures Paper, 19, October 2016, <https://issafrica.org/research/papers/the-future-of-democracy-in-africa>.

Before summarising how these issues are framed in US politics, and their importance for democratic consolidation there, it is useful to note that popular concerns across Africa on whether and how these issues are addressed on both continents may be relevant for long-term cooperation. In March 2017 Afrobarometer published the results of polling done across 36 African countries on what citizens regarded as their most pressing needs and whether their governments were addressing them.<sup>64</sup> Three broad demands predominated:

- paid employment, social services, infrastructure and food security;
- poverty reduction, associated with access to reliable development infrastructure; and
- less corrupt government institutions committed to good governance and greater political accountability.

Levels of public trust in government performance were lowest for unemployment (26%), poverty (28%) and corruption (30%). Governments fared best in delivering education (51%) and healthcare (51%).

American polling is much more extensive and typically includes issues of terrorism and foreign policy, which are not on the Afrobarometer surveys. The independent compiler of all the leading polls regularly done in the US, PollingReport.com, shows the economy topped the list in 2017 and virtually all others dating back to 2005.<sup>65</sup> Economic issues are sometimes specified, eg, unemployment and jobs, but the patterns recall a phrase popularised during Bill Clinton's surprising triumph over incumbent president George HW Bush in 1992: 'It's the economy, stupid!' The second issue – corrupt practices and lack of confidence in the current health of the US' political institutions – was summarised during a review of the 2016 election issues:<sup>66</sup>

Eighty-four percent of all voters of all demographics in the US believe there's an elite group of incumbent politicians in both parties, lobbyists, big banks, big business, big unions, big special interests, big media in Washington that rig the system for their own power and prestige ... Seventy-eight percent of the people believe that both parties are too beholden to special interests to be able to do anything for the country.

'Money is the mother's milk of politics' has been an American political cliché for generations, but in the 2016 elections this reached obscene levels. An estimated \$4.4 billion was spent on television ads alone.<sup>67</sup> Elected officials increasingly rely on money from special interests that can legally pour into political action committees that are not transparent enough. This fuels public suspicions that politicians are in the pockets of special interests and not accountable to voters. Corruption may take different forms in

64 AfroBarometer, 'Highlights of Round 6 Survey Findings From 36 African Countries', 20 March 2017, [http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/summary\\_results/ab\\_r6\\_afrobarometer\\_global\\_release\\_highlights8.pdf](http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/summary_results/ab_r6_afrobarometer_global_release_highlights8.pdf).

65 PollingReport.com, 'Problems and priorities', <http://www.pollingreport.com/prioriti.htm>.

66 Council on Foreign Relations, 'Public opinion and the 2016 election', 1 April 2016, <https://www.cfr.org/event/public-opinion-and-2016-election>.

67 *Time*, 'Do we really need campaign finance reform?', 19 January 2016, <http://time.com/4182502/campaign-finance-reform/>.

Africa, but its corrosive effects on democratic consolidation are bad on both sides of the Atlantic. If there were substantial reform of campaign finance in the US, the effects on Africa and on the prospects for more productive Africa–US relations would likely be positive.

Trump exploited the anti-Washington sentiment among the US electorate, promising to ‘drain the swamp’ of money-driven politics in Washington. Much has been written on how Trump exploited the fears of historically privileged and recently disadvantaged predominantly white Christians in the economically troubled communities of the former industrial regions of the country. Rising economic inequality and social exclusion have become an increasing threat to sustainable democracy and economic development globally, and across Africa. It is unclear whether American democracy can manage this problem. China and other authoritarian capitalist systems present Africa with alternative approaches.

Two developments during Trump's first eight months suggest a major domestic struggle is taking shape over economics, which will eventually have an impact on the US' global role and the fate of cooperative programmes with Africa. One has been Trump's accumulating failures to deliver on the economic promises made to his supporters, notably healthcare reform. Overall economic trends evident during Obama's second term have continued, but Trump's prioritising of tax relief to the wealthy and corporations have eroded some of his support. This erosion appears to be accelerating.

In July 2017 the Democratic leader in Congress, Senator Chuck Schumer, offered a carefully negotiated and crafted economic platform to appeal to the country's middle class, with promises of better wages, higher taxes on the rich, more generous educational and family leave benefits, and greater public spending to generate employment.<sup>68</sup> Absent from this populist appeal are references to factional social issues, foreign policy concerns or criticisms of Trump, which were mainstays of Hillary Clinton's campaign. If appeals to the Democratic Party's traditional economic agenda resonate positively with most voters worried about rising inequality and lack of opportunities, this could also resonate positively in Africa and affect longer-term prospects for more productive partnerships with the US.

## ELECTORAL INTEGRITY

In all democracies, elections are a necessary but insufficient element for establishing and sustaining legitimate sovereign authority. Public trust in the integrity of elections is essential but too often lacking. After 241 years of electoral experience, the US' electoral processes still have many flaws. Fixing these is complicated because, unlike most other democratic systems – including in Africa – elections are not conducted under a standard set of constitutionally mandated electoral management bodies applying national standards

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68 Schumer C, ‘A better deal for American workers’, *The New York Times*, 24 July 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/24/opinion/chuck-schumer-employment-democrats.html>.

and procedures. Voting rights for all citizens were not guaranteed under federal law until the 1960s and there are continuing challenges.

During and since the 2016 election, Trump has challenged the very integrity of the US' electoral system as no other previous major candidate has ever done.<sup>69</sup> Even after winning he continued to question the validity of vote totals, claiming Hillary Clinton's popular margin was the result of millions being allowed to vote illegally. Electoral experts and voting officials have disputed these claims,<sup>70</sup> yet Trump has persisted by setting up his own commission to investigate electoral fraud nationally.<sup>71</sup>

African observers may be bemused by this, as allegations of electoral fraud are usually made by losing parties. And the risks to conducting credible elections in many African countries are enormous. I have been privileged to have access to many African elections, as a Carter Center election observer.<sup>72</sup> Some of these observation missions have been in partnership with EISA, which now also provides technical assistance to the AU's Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit.<sup>73</sup> Under the AU's Constitutive Act and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, all member states are obligated to hold periodic elections, accessible to AU observers. Efforts to improve the integrity and credibility of elections in Africa will continue, although US assistance to these endeavours will likely cease under the Trump administration's avowed disinterest in supporting programmes to help entrench democracy.

While Trump and his secretary of state want to end US foreign assistance programmes dealing with democracy and human rights, the US president has also sent troubling signals globally by publicly challenging the integrity of the US electoral system, including judicial oversight, during his campaign and presidency. Beyond rhetoric, the Justice Department has launched an independent investigation into allegations of clandestine Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. It also seeks to discover whether the Trump campaign colluded with and benefitted substantially from such interference, and whether such actions render senior campaign officials and perhaps Trump himself vulnerable to Russian blackmail.

These allegations cast a darkening shadow over his presidency and could result in findings that usher in the termination of his presidency. No government should tolerate foreign intervention in its sovereign electoral processes, or ignore such actions wherever they

69 Qiu L, 'Donald Trump's baseless claims about the elections being "rigged"', Politifact, 15 August 2016, <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/aug/15/donald-trump/donald-trumps-baseless-claims-about-election-being/>.

70 Sanger DE, 'US officials defend integrity of vote, despite hacking fears', *The New York Times*, 25 November 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/25/us/politics/hacking-russia-election-fears-barack-obama-donald-trump.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/25/us/politics/hacking-russia-election-fears-barack-obama-donald-trump.html?_r=0).

71 Lopez G, 'Trump's "election integrity" commission, explained', *Vox*, 19 July 2017, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/6/30/15900478/trump-election-integrity-commission>.

72 See Carter Center, [www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org).

73 EISA, 'Support to the African Union', <https://eisa.org.za/epp-au.php>.

occur. What is finally determined regarding Russia's interference in the US election, including any collusion with the Trump campaign, could impact perceptions of the US' democracy in Africa, and have longer-term effects on Africa–US relations, including cooperation programmes to strengthen democracy and respect for human rights.

By mid-2017 there was strong bi-partisan agreement in Washington that the Russians had seriously interfered in the 2016 presidential election. This was based on the unanimous conclusions of US intelligence agencies; findings Trump questioned to an extent that appears to have undermined his own standing and relations with these institutions. This, in turn, raised the issue of possible obstruction of justice by Trump and prompted the Justice Department to appoint a former FBI director, Robert Mueller, as Special Counsel to determine if there was any wrong-doing.

During his campaign and since his election Trump has repeatedly stated a desire to improve relations with Putin's Russia, including the lifting of sanctions that Obama imposed. Congress not only opposed lifting these sanctions but also – in a direct challenge to Trump's authority – passed additional sanctions legislation in late June. Trump reluctantly signed these into law on 3 August. By then he had little alternative, as it was clear there was sufficient support in Congress to override his veto. For Africans, or anyone else trying to determine whether Trump is a sufficiently strong leader to overpower the other key governing institutions of the US' troubled democracy, this was an important sign of the limits to presidential power. It also is an indication of a deep national commitment to resist foreign interference in electoral processes, which is no less in post-colonial African nations.

## SEPARATION OF POWERS

At a time when many African nations are struggling to entrench democracy, checks on potential abuses of power by a strong executive are a major challenge. This is not a new problem. Roukaya Kasenally's critical assessment of one of Africa's leading democracies, Mauritius, reminds us of the importance of a developed and powerful legislature, noting that there can be no democratic consolidation without one.<sup>74</sup> When Trump became the first US president without any prior governing or military history, he seemed oblivious to the limitations on the power of his office. How well he understands the lessons of his first eight months in office is uncertain. The realities of his limited powers, however, are becoming ever more obvious, weakening his presidency in ways that are fully sanctioned by the US Constitution. These steps might both inspire African democrats and, depending on how they play out, restore prospects for more productive and enduring Africa–US partnerships.

In addition to forcing Trump to impose sanctions against Russia, his attempts to assert his executive powers have been repeatedly and successfully thwarted in the judicial branch and Congress. The process began just days after his inauguration, with the interdiction of

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74 Kasenally R, 'Mauritius: The not so perfect democracy', *Journal of African Elections*, 2011, pp. 33–47.

his executive orders to restrict immigration and prevent refugees from entering the US. His failure to deliver on legislative promises, most notably his inability to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, Obama's greatest achievement, leaves him looking weak and unable to bring along the other branches of government. He has also been checked by the career professionals in his own executive branch, including the US intelligence agencies, Justice Department and even the military, who have become alarmed by his erratic actions and evident lack of understanding of issues before pronouncing on them. His example may hold few answers for others but is, ironically, prompting more bi-partisan cooperation and renewed civic interest and action.

There may also be important reminders of the nature of US democratic presidential leadership that are relevant for democratic consolidation elsewhere, as the US judicial and legislative branches are increasingly reining in Trump's autocratic inclinations and arbitrary actions. As noted by US presidential scholar Julia Azari, Trump does not seem to grasp what successful presidents have known for decades: presidential power depends primarily on the power of persuasion.<sup>75</sup> To succeed in office all US presidents must rely on the support of Washington elites to pass legislation and deliver on election promises. In a democracy with a separation of powers, that requires negotiation and consensus building, similar to the conduct of international relations. Trump thus far has not grasped that fact in either domestic or foreign affairs. If Africa wants a serious US partner in trade, development, climate or regional security matters, it cannot be indifferent to the current domestic drama unfolding in the US.

## REFEREES

Any aspiring democracy must rely on an independent judiciary, free press, universities and non-partisan research institutions and other expertise to provide the best obtainable version of the truth. Citizens lacking the time, talent or inclination to undertake their own investigations need to be able to trust that those they have empowered to lead them will act in the nation's best interests and that, when partisan conflicts arise, informed due processes will prevail to resolve differences peacefully and fairly. Trump has challenged these ideas with the demagogue's promise that his version of reality is the only true one.

Eight months into his presidency, getting to the truth behind Trump's version of his political and financial contacts and relations with Russians – prior to and during his presidential campaign, and since his assuming office – will likely require him to testify under oath before a grand jury. The result will determine the fate of his presidency, which surely will be a seminal moment in the US' long-running democratic experiment.

If the US reaffirms that political disputes and policies are better grounded in facts – the best obtainable version of the truth, including scientific evidence – that might well become a more resilient and viable basis for forging enduring Africa–US partnerships. It was, of

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75 Azari J, 'Trump came in as a weak president, and he's made himself weaker', *FiveThirtyEight*, 1 August 2017, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/trump-weak-president/>.

course, already being tested within the complex negotiations and agreements that led to the Paris Climate Change Accord of 2015 and the Green Climate Fund.

This paper has highlighted some of the immediate dangers to US–Africa relations posed by Trump's bigotry, mendacity and denigration of expertise. He has repeatedly dismissed the knowledge and wisdom of experts, including professionals in the Environmental Protection Agency, Justice Department, intelligence agencies and other federal departments. His recruitment of non-experts as ill informed on the issues as he is himself, and the side-lining or removal of senior experts, whether in climate, agriculture, justice or foreign affairs, have characterised his first eight months in office.

Fortunately, there has been pushback from these agencies, Congress and the professions, including the US' centres of advanced research. Trump's dismissal of press accounts he disagrees with as 'fake news' has been popular among his voter base, where hostility to 'elite media' has festered for years. But it has also boosted readership and revenues for the US' most reputable media, and subsequent credible investigative reporting has spurred judicial inquiries and further research. This virtuous democratic circle favouring greater transparency and accountability may be one beneficial result of Trump's provocations. If so, this too will help support more responsible and informed decisions about policies and partnerships with Africa.

To be more effective partners, investments in African scientific research facilities, think tanks and training centres, including for journalists and other 'fact-finders', can inform partnership decisions that are fair and beneficial for Africa. Funding is always a constraint, but transparent private and public international support, a traditional area of development assistance, will remain vital for adapting to the realities of an increasingly interdependent globalised and technology-driven era. One small but important example of how Africans can improve their capabilities to make informed partnership decisions in relations with the US is the new African Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of the Witwatersrand, which will be owned and operated by Africans and seek a more Africa-relevant understanding of the many topics raised in this paper.

## **POLITICAL EQUALITY**

The US has become a culturally diverse nation; what the late Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui once described to me as the 'world's first global nation'. Current demographic trends indicate the US will be a non-white majority by 2050. Reaction to this reality – and a commitment to challenge, contain and, if possible, reverse this trend – has been a hallmark of Trump's presidential campaign and his first eight months in office. Such ethnic nationalism, as noted previously, still bedevils efforts to achieve national and regional integration in Africa, despite growing consensus that sustainable democratic governance at all levels offers the most promising approach to achieving the greater inclusivity and peaceful compromise necessary to achieve long-term political, economic and social development. The fundamental historical differences among African and US approaches to developing democratic regimes deserve greater research and informed debate than this paper will allow, but may hold the key to enduring mutual understanding and cooperation.

The US' founders believed in the primacy of individual rights, but not for women or people of colour. They also agreed to create a republic that granted greater power and equality to federated states, contravening democracy's defining principle of inherent equality and, far worse, guaranteeing the entrenchment of slavery. Post-colonial African democratic experiments have been generally more enlightened, but they also struggle with balancing competing demands for individual and group rights, protections and opportunities.

In the US, individual rights were gradually extended to include previously excluded groups, a trend that Trump and his predominantly white Christian and male-dominant base appear determined to reverse. Such struggles are also known as competing demands for 'horizontal' vs. 'vertical' rights.<sup>76</sup> Although this is generally confined to domestic politics, with the problems most acute when constitutional bargaining takes place and the results are subject to legal challenges, this can also be an issue for diplomats seeking to create and develop regional cooperation.

The AU and its eight affiliated regional economic communities all have to implement their commitments to democratic principles and processes while satisfying demands, especially by smaller states, for continued sovereign protections. The analogies to the founding of the US democratic republic could easily be overdrawn, but at least warn of unforeseen consequences when conceding too much power to constituent political entities at the expense of equal protections for their people.

In contemporary US politics, horizontal inequalities are a source of injustice whenever inter-group discrimination occurs, whether on the basis of identity differences of gender, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. American politics appeared to be shifting, at least within the Democratic Party, toward more horizontal equality among the diversity of ethnic, religious, racial and other groups that comprised Obama's winning coalition in 2008 and 2012. During Trump's first eight months in office these groups, to different degrees, have protested what they regard as his readiness to reassert horizontal discrimination, initially notable in his temporary ban on immigrants and refugees from certain Muslim countries.

Whether or not Trump survives the current investigations into his relations with the Russians, resistance to his white ethnic nationalism appears on the rise. At the same time the Democratic Party has signalled its recognition that it must do more to appeal to Trump supporters without compromising its commitment to ensuring greater horizontal equality among all identity groups.

Democrats are beginning to craft a party platform that will appeal to a diverse majority – including the white nationalists in Trump's base – by trying to address common economic concerns. It is too soon to know what might work to their advantage in the 2018 or

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76 For a brief explanation of the difference between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' human rights, see FEPS (Foundation for European Progressive Studies), 'What horizontal inequalities are and why they matter', <http://www.queries-feps.eu/what-horizontal-inequalities-are-and-why-they-matter/>.



2020 elections. However, if they succeed, this could lead to a more forthcoming attitude to African concerns, in part because African-Americans, an essential component of the multi-ethnic Democratic coalition, have strong ties to the African continent. And, as noted earlier, there is a long history of bi-partisan support for US assistance to Africa.

On the other hand, should Trump and the Republicans consolidate power and Trump remain in office until 2024,<sup>77</sup> this would almost certainly entrench ethnic nationalism. The likely result would be a continued decline in the US' role and influence internationally, contributing to conditions conducive to violent ethnic extremist actions and communal violence. In any event, closer attention to balancing and re-balancing individual and group rights will remain an important topic of research for anyone interested in sustainable democracy in the US as well as across Africa.

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## DIPLOMACY AND DEMOCRACY IN US–AFRICA RELATIONS

In launching this early diagnosis of Trump's impact on US–Africa relations I cited his 19 September address to the UN General Assembly and his welcoming remarks at a luncheon for African leaders as the most recent and glaring evidence of his lack of interest in or knowledge about African affairs. Despite this reality, there are still officials at the State Department charged with carrying out Africa policies. Two of them offered the first official views on the new administration's Africa policy only a week before Trump's UN meetings in New York. Although I have no evidence that Trump or his White House chief of staff approved these remarks, they do provide a backdrop to some concluding comments on whether the Trump presidency, still in its first year, will have any lasting impact on US–Africa relations.

At a 'US–Africa Partnerships' conference at the US Institute for Peace in Washington on 13 September, Shannon gave the keynote address.<sup>78</sup> Shannon, appointed by Obama in 2016, is a highly accomplished career Foreign Service officer. He emphasised continuity in US–Africa relations, while implicitly affirming Trump and Tillerson's apparent desire to have no more new initiatives and for reductions in foreign assistance.

Shannon and Yamamoto at a later session<sup>79</sup> reiterated that the four main goals that have framed Africa policy for many years – peace and security; counter-terrorism; economic trade, investment and development; and democracy and good governance – would remain.

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77 Sosnik D, 'Trump is on track to win reelection', *The Washington Post*, 6 October 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-is-on-track-to-win-reelection/2017/10/06/91cd2af0-aa15-11e7-850e-2bdd1236be5d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.7c8c18cdba6a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-is-on-track-to-win-reelection/2017/10/06/91cd2af0-aa15-11e7-850e-2bdd1236be5d_story.html?utm_term=.7c8c18cdba6a).

78 US Department of State, 'Thomas A Shannon Jr, Under Secretary for Political Affairs: "US–Africa Partnerships: Advancing Common Interests"', 13 September 2017, <https://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2017/274073.htm>.

79 allAfrica, 'Remarks by Donald Y Yamamoto, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of African Affairs, US Institute of Peace', 18 September 2017, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201709180753.html>.

The ordering points to a greater emphasis on security and counter-terrorism than in the past. When recounting their own career experiences, however, both accorded primacy to the long-term goals of sustainable democracy and human rights as the most resilient and mutually beneficial basis for US–Africa partnerships. They also endorsed previous presidential initiatives, with specific references to Obama’s Feed the Future, PowerAfrica and Young African Leaders programmes. These initiatives’ continuation and level of engagement will depend on budget decisions, as well as continued bi-partisan support in Congress.

Normally, broad statements of foreign policy such as these would be released as a presidential directive, and occasionally showcased in an address by the president. There is no indication of such White House engagement in providing guidance and priorities for setting Africa policy, or any other US foreign policies. As one leading scholar of the US’ foreign relations recently wrote: ‘If “policy” implies a predictable pattern of behavior, US foreign policy ceased to exist when Trump took office.’<sup>80</sup>

Trump has shown personal interest in only one ad hoc international development initiative: the World Bank’s global Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative, championed by his daughter Ivanka. The Trump administration has donated \$50 million toward its global start-up budget of \$315 million.<sup>81</sup> This is something from which Africa could benefit, as Yamamoto noted.

Trump is less likely to challenge the US military’s commitments in Africa. The 13 September address by General Thomas Waldhauser, Commander of US Africa Command (Africom), sounded more authoritative and diplomatic, at least on the security aspects of US–Africa relations, and perhaps for US foreign policy more broadly.<sup>82</sup> His address began with Africom’s current engagements in Libya and Somalia, where he said the mission was to support locally engineered political solutions. Critics of the US’ many previous failed interventions in these two countries and elsewhere will rightly remain sceptical.

The second part of Waldhauser’s address dealt more broadly with Africom’s capacity-building assistance, nationally and regionally. He said Africom only operates where ‘US and partner nation strategic objectives are compatible and aligned and, second, the operations are conducted primarily by partner nation forces with the US in a supporting role’. Africom, he said, conducts ‘some 3 500 exercises, programs and engagements’ annually, with ‘5 to 6 000 US service members working on the continent every day’. Africom’s operations deserve close monitoring and critical analysis by African international relations scholars and regional security experts.

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80 Bacevich J, ‘Saving “America First”’, *Foreign Affairs*, 96, 5, 2017, p. 61.

81 Worstall T, ‘Ivanka Trump and \$50 million for women entrepreneurs – nice idea but trivially unimportant’, *Forbes*, 8 July 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2017/07/08/ivanka-trump-and-40-million-for-women-entrepreneurs-nice-idea-but-trivially-unimportant/#518b48351af2>.

82 *allAfrica*, ‘Africa: Remarks by Africom commander at the USIP program on US–Africa relations’, 13 September 2017, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201709140684.html>.

Waldhauser ended with a surprisingly specific and positive view of China's role in Africa. First, he praised China's construction of much-needed infrastructure throughout Africa and the rapid growth of China–Africa trade, which in 2016 exceeded \$300 billion. On security issues he commended President Xi Jinping's announcement of \$100 million to the AU and its contribution of 8 000 police officers to UN peacekeeping missions. He then referred to the construction of China's first overseas military base, which is located near the US base in Djibouti, as creating 'opportunities found nowhere else in the world'. He added:

China assigned the first soldiers to this base and expressed interest in conducting amphibious training between Chinese and US Marines. Across the continent, we have shared interests in African stability. We see many areas where we can cooperate with the Chinese military. For example, we both support UN peacekeeping missions and training with African defence forces. The fact that we have mutual interests in Africa means that we can and should cooperate.

To emphasise the importance of this comment, he said:

Earlier this year, Secretary [of Defense James] Mattis pointed out, 'Our two countries can and do cooperate for mutual benefit. And we will pledge to work closely with China where we share common cause.'

Successful China–US security cooperation in Africa cannot succeed without the inclusion of African governments as equal partners in this 'common cause'. Such 'win-win-win' experiments in mutual confidence building would not only benefit Africans but could also serve as positive examples for other regions, and improve US–China relations globally. In the absence of a coherent and compelling US–Africa policy, this at least is one positive development that merits attention.

Trump regrettably shows little patience with or support for the hard work of diplomacy. While one can hope that the US military's diplomatic efforts to achieve trilateral security cooperation in Africa succeed, US embassies in Africa will be hard-pressed to help. They remain understaffed, are likely to be under-resourced, and can count on little back-up from either Washington or international organisations where the US has hitherto been a leading player. In late September Trump publicly criticised Tillerson, his own secretary of state, for trying to find a diplomatic solution to the North Korean nuclear threat.

While Tillerson was in Beijing preparing for Trump's visit to China and exploring possible direct diplomatic contacts with the North Koreans, Trump let fly a humiliating tweet advising Tillerson that 'he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man. Save your energy Rex, we'll do what has to be done!'<sup>83</sup> How in future can any government negotiate with US representatives in good faith and confidence?

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83 The tweets prompted many calls for Tillerson to resign, including from experienced non-partisan diplomats. See, for example, Miller AD & R Sokolsky, 'Should Rex Tillerson resign?', *Politico*, 1 October 2017, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/10/01/should-rex-tillerson-resign-215664>; Cohen EA, 'Rex Tillerson must go', *The Atlantic*, 2 October 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/trump-tillerson-self-respect-north-korea-puerto-rico-diplomacy/541695/>.

Shortly after this incident, Trump became embroiled in a highly charged and public exchange of insulting tweets with Senator Bob Corker, the Republican chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Corker then gave an on-the-record interview to *The New York Times*, asserting that Trump's handling of North Korea risked putting the US 'on the path of World War III'.<sup>84</sup> In the same report, Corker was quoted as suggesting Trump was treating his office and the conduct of US foreign relations as a television 'reality show'. The senator also said that Tillerson and generals Mattis and John F Kelly, the White House chief of staff, were doing their best to 'separate our country from chaos'. If true, this would imply that at some point they might refuse to follow or countermand the president's orders, in what would seem to be close to a coup d'état. No other Republican leader has denounced Coker, and it is widely reported that many privately agree with him.

African governments, along with the rest of the international community, are in a quandary. They may choose to take seriously the words of a US president, however impulsive, ill informed, incoherent and irresponsible these may sound. Or they can ignore his words and wait for action. Or they could attempt to do what little practical business they can in areas where Trump is disinterested or unlikely to sabotage hard-won progress. These are not mutually exclusive options, of course, and there will no doubt be efforts to seek greater clarity and test authority in any government's dealings with the Trump administration. At the same time, African governments and opinion leaders should watch the US' domestic political trends closely. Republican leaders' decision to join Democrats in condemning Trump's slow and qualified criticism of racist and Nazi demonstrators in Charlottesville, Virginia in August is an example of the growing willingness to confront Trump on value issues at the heart of American democracy and its international reputation. This reaction, especially from leading Republicans, may be viewed sceptically in Africa. Not only is Trump a white supremacist, but the Republican elite and voters – many of whom swear they are not white supremacists – also did not regard his racism as a disqualification for becoming president. Racial attitudes and policies will remain key indicators of the health of American democracy, with the treatment of Trump a bellwether – one certain to influence African perceptions of the US.

At the same time, negative reactions to Trump among a large majority of Americans appear to be redounding to ever more favourable views of how Obama behaved and what he accomplished while in office. Judging presidential performance is best left to historians, but it is hard to imagine a sharper contrast between two presidents. Were the nation to revert to the carefully considered cosmopolitan leadership exemplified by Obama, rather than supporting the erratic and often erroneous efforts to advance Trump's version of American ethnic nationalism, this could also contribute to the country's democratic revival at home and its acting as a more responsible international partner to Africans, and globally.

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84 Martin J & M Lander, 'Bob Corker says Trump's recklessness threatens "World War III"', *The New York Times*, 8 October 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/08/us/politics/trump-corker.html>; *The New York Times*, 'Read excerpts from Senator Bob Corker's interview with The Times', <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/09/us/politics/bob-corker-trump-interview-transcript.html>.

After his appearances at the June G-7 summit in Italy and the July G-20 summit in Germany, it was clear to all that, under Trump, the US was isolated and virtually without influence to either set the agenda or negotiate effectively.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, African governments eager to participate in the 'Compact with Africa' proposed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the G-20 summit can no longer count on the US for help.<sup>86</sup> Priority concerns in Africa – eg, help to alleviate the effects of the terrible famine in Eastern Africa and parts of Western Africa, or the disruptive effects of climate change; or assistance in locating the lost tax revenues resulting from complicity in IFFs – must be undertaken with no prospect of US support so long as Trump is president.

So far, the main beneficiaries of Trump's international actions appear to be China and Russia. The former was no doubt relieved when one of Trump's first executive actions after being inaugurated was to cancel US participation in what had been a US-led Transpacific Trade Partnership Agreement. Russia, while likely exasperated by Trump's failure to lift the sanctions imposed by Obama, nevertheless can take satisfaction from his progress in isolating the US, weakening the Western Alliance, ending US support for Syrian rebels, and restricting the State Department's programmes in human rights, democracy and many other areas, including cyber policy.

Concurrently, Russia's role in the 2016 election and the allegations of collusion by the Trump campaign have been sources of bi-partisan congressional concern. Trump's dismissal of credible intelligence reports of Russia's meddling in the 2016 election alarmed leaders of both parties, who supported what many felt had been Obama's belated and too-limited sanctioning of Russia. Criticism of Trump's promises to lift even these modest sanctions erupted in bi-partisan outrage when Trump fired FBI director James Comey, who was leading the initial investigation, and offered contradictory reasons for doing so. On 8 June, testifying before Congress under oath, Comey related how his fear that Trump might lie publicly about the nature of their confidential conversations prompted him to file detailed notes of what was said, for FBI records.<sup>87</sup> This dramatic public evidence of mistrust at the highest levels of the administration shocked elites in both parties. The sense of a common threat thus produced the bi-partisan Russian legislation and other measures to prevent Trump from firing the Special Counsel, or those in the Justice Department responsible for

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85 Erlanger S & J Hirschfeld Davis, 'Once dominant, the US finds itself isolated at G-20', *The New York Times*, 7 July 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/07/world/europe/trump-g-20-trade-climate.html?mcubz=3>.

86 Stremlau J, 'Merkel will not be sidetracked by US in the drive for Compact with Africa', *BusinessDay*, 7 July 2017, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/201707-07-merkel-will-not-be-sidetracked-by-us-in-the-drive-for-compact-with-africa/>; Stremlau JJ, 'Africa is high on the G20 summit agenda. But will Trump thwart progress?', *The Conversation*, 27 June 2017, [https://theconversation.com/africa-is-high-on-the-g20-summit-agenda-but-will-trump-thwart-progress-80029?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=...](https://theconversation.com/africa-is-high-on-the-g20-summit-agenda-but-will-trump-thwart-progress-80029?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=...)

87 US Senate, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 'Statement for the record: James B Comey', 8 June 2017, <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/os-jcomey-060817.pdf>; *The New York Times*, 'Full transcript and video: James Comey's testimony on Capitol Hill', 8 June 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/us/politics/senate-hearing-transcript.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/us/politics/senate-hearing-transcript.html?_r=0).

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In today's world of unprecedented pluralism, inter-connectedness and the decline of US dominance – processes that preceded Trump and will continue after he has gone – Kaine and others raise fundamental strategic questions about the future of US foreign policy

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overseeing his investigation. Evidence of lying and allegations of possible obstruction of justice in the Russia affair, as noted earlier, are contributing to bi-partisan efforts to defend core constitutional principles and processes.

Although the Democratic congressional minority has consistently and unanimously opposed Trump's plans, Democratic leaders are cautiously becoming more open to bi-partisan compromise and coalitions with Republican moderates. In this spirit, Kaine (Hillary Clinton's running mate in 2016 and a probable 2020 presidential candidate) proposed a new foreign policy doctrine that could only succeed with bi-partisan support. His proposal, mentioned earlier, merits international scrutiny. He published his 'grand strategy' just as Trump was completing his first six months in office,<sup>88</sup> noting that the Trump presidency had prompted a major reassessment of the US' global role – 'the most fundamental rethinking since the immediate aftermath of World War II'. In today's world of unprecedented pluralism, inter-connectedness and the decline of US dominance – processes that preceded Trump and will continue after he has gone – Kaine and others raise fundamental strategic questions about the future of US foreign policy. Africans too should contribute to what must become much more than a domestic American debate.

During the period of the US' last grand strategy, at the time of the Cold War, it did not really have a post-colonial Africa policy but rather an anti-Soviet policy, resulting in regime-change interventions that proved counter-productive, as in the former Congo. Kaine argues that there was also an over-reaction to the 2001 terror attacks on New York and Washington, which resulted in the failed Iraq intervention. Instead he advocates a broader strategy, one rooted in the US' striving above all to lead by example rather than by claims of indispensability or military dominance. Ironically, since Trump has become president it is now the US that is shirking such responsibilities and obligations.

Kaine frames his proposal for a new US global doctrine around three diverse and dispersed power centres:

- democratic states;
- authoritarian states; and
- non-state actors.

Kaine points out that democracies now come in many different shapes and styles and exist all over the planet. His complaint, however, that the US focuses too much on trouble spots and does not engage those countries striving to become politically capable democratic partners regionally and internationally, is reasonable and compelling. Applying this criterion in Africa, in light of the AU's democratic norms and aspirations, might well become a priority. Strengthening such ties in ways welcomed by African partners might also advance collective action in containing and reversing autocratic tendencies and the actions of violent non-state actors, such as Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. It would, however, make counter-terrorism a lower priority in Africa, where such problems affect only a few states and appear not to be of any major or immediate threat to the US.

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88 Kaine T, *op. cit.*

Supporting African-led efforts to strengthen the role of the AU and its eight affiliated regional economic communities would in principle support sustainable democracies on the continent.

For this to occur, it would help to have one or more key African leaders willing to push for greater regional cooperation, as South Africa did in promoting reform of the OAU and establishing the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Having the support of the US on terms acceptable to African lead states would also help significantly. Before this can happen, however, both South Africa and the US must revitalise their internal democratic regimes to inspire greater confidence among other aspiring democracies in their willingness to act as reliable and resilient partners in negotiating enhanced regional integration and cooperation.

Escalating popular opposition to Trump across the US, as noted earlier, should also hearten democrats everywhere. If this resistance continues it might finally succeed in mobilising support for democratic reforms at home and fostering closer cooperation with African and other democracies abroad. A more immediate test will be the 2018 legislative elections and whether the electorate will decide to alter the political composition of the US Congress sufficiently to further restrain Trump's actions, or even impeach, convict and remove him from office.

Civic reaction to Trump's behaviour as president began as soon as he took office. In an assessment of Trump's first 100 days, author and activist Eric Liu refers ironically to 'one of the greatest surges of American citizen action in half a century as Trump's most striking accomplishment so far'.<sup>89</sup> The epic Women's March on Washington following Trump's inauguration was an immediate reaction, prompting demonstrations of solidarity across the US and around the world, including in South Africa. Popular reactions and judicial action to halt Trump's Muslim ban were another benchmark of resistance, applauded in Africa's mainstream and social media. If the resistance to the Trump presidency respects constitutional rights and obligations and is fully transparent, this might give hope to those working for sustainable democracy in Africa. Students of the US' complex politics note that Trump entered office with a narrower win in the Electoral College than most previous first-term presidents, and the biggest popular vote deficit of an elected president in US history. He also enjoyed much less support among the leaders of his own party than most newly elected presidents receive. This weak mandate was exacerbated during his first eight months in office. His popularity has slipped into the 30s and remains there with steady support from his base. In early July the respected National Public Radio/Marist poll revealed that 70% of Americans believed that civility had declined in the country since Trump's election.<sup>90</sup>

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89 *The Washington Post*, 'Trump's most striking accomplishment so far', 24 April 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trumps-most-striking-accomplishment-so-far/2017/04/24/904f71e2-23b5-11e7-bb9d-8cd6118e1409\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.656495893071](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trumps-most-striking-accomplishment-so-far/2017/04/24/904f71e2-23b5-11e7-bb9d-8cd6118e1409_story.html?utm_term=.656495893071).

90 Santhaham L, 'New poll: 70% of Americans think civility has gotten worse since Trump took office', *PBS*, 3 July 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/runtdown/new-poll-70-americans-think-civility-gotten-worse-since-trump-took-office/>.

Prominent conservative political analysts are adding their voices to concerns about Trump's impact on democracy and civility. Stephen Walt published an update of his post-election '10 warning signs' of Trump's authoritarian tendencies and concluded that, for the most part, Trump had failed to consolidate power, adding, 'the situation would be far more dangerous if Trump were a smarter, more disciplined, and more effective politician'.<sup>91</sup> Max Boot, also conservative, told liberal Robin Wright, as she reported in *The New Yorker*, that two folders he keeps current on his computer are labelled 'Trump Stupidity File' and 'Trump Lies' file. He added, 'Not sure which is larger at this point. It's neck-and-neck.'<sup>92</sup>

Reports of large spikes in the membership of and funding for US NGOs opposed to Trump's various actions are also hopeful indications of democratic revitalisation. So, too, are the sharp increases in the circulation and advertising revenue of and hiring at the US' leading news media, both print and electronic. Many of these have already played vital roles in exposing conflicts of interest and possible obstructions of justice by Trump and several key members of his administration. Trump's mendacity and disregard for factual reporting, scientific evidence and the sanctity of the US' legal institutions and due process could ultimately lead to congressional actions resulting in his leaving office before completing his first term.

By late September a bi-partisan trio of Washington's most experienced and influential political commentators – EJ Dionne, Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein – ventured to suggest that 'the election of Donald Trump could be one of the best things that ever happened to American democracy'.<sup>93</sup> While they decried Trump as 'the least-qualified and least-appropriate president in the nation's history', they foresaw a rising resistance that could revitalise, or even reconsolidate, democracy.

Their essay prompts a concluding hope that this dynamic in the US could create precedents of interest to Africa's democrats and facilitate long-term US–Africa partnerships. In particular, two reactions to Trump's behaviour during his first eight months have been harbingers of hope. One has been the increased bi-partisan cooperation among the US' political and government elites to rein in Trump and restore public confidence in government. This was evident in the bi-partisan passage of new sanctions against Russia, contrary to Trump's wishes. Less obvious have been the small but promising signs of bi-partisan deliberations on healthcare and tax reform.

Secondly, there are the stark contrasts between the competency and character of Obama and Trump, which have become a matter of growing US public awareness and concern. Obama set high standards of honesty, integrity, temperament and grace. There were no

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91 Walt SM, 'Top ten signs of creeping authoritarianism, revisited', *Foreign Policy*, 27 July 2017, [http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/27/top-10-signs-of-creeping-authoritarianism-revisited/?utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign...](http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/27/top-10-signs-of-creeping-authoritarianism-revisited/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign...)

92 Wright R, *op. cit.*

93 Dionne EJ, Mann TE & NJ Ornstein, 'How Trump is helping to save our democracy', *The Washington Post*, 22 September 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-trump-is-helping-to-save-our-democracy/2017/09/22/539b795e-9a1f-11e7-82e4-f1076f6d6152\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f3a937fb217e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-trump-is-helping-to-save-our-democracy/2017/09/22/539b795e-9a1f-11e7-82e4-f1076f6d6152_story.html?utm_term=.f3a937fb217e).



major scandals or White House upheavals during Obama's 96 months comparable to the many afflictions and embarrassments in only eight months of the Trump presidency. That Obama also happened to be the US' first black president may eventually contribute in subtle but vital ways to the US' ongoing struggle for national integration.

Obama also symbolises our shared humanity. He held himself to personal standards that should be commonplace in high office. These leadership traits and capabilities may not be sufficient but are surely necessary to assure the transparency and accountability that are the lifeblood of sustainable democracy. More immediately and urgently, the democratic recruitment, election and public accountability of such leaders can be a vital line of civil defence against the demagoguery and abuses of power by the likes of Trump. For it is the misguided aspirants to high office who threaten our national security and democratic development, whether in the US or in Africa, as well as the partnerships among democratic nations that can become the foundation for a more peaceful and just global order.

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