

UNITED STATES–AFRICA LEADERS SUMMIT 2022: ADVANCING AFRICA’S GLOBAL VOICE

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1. Did the Summit advance Africa’s global voice?

On assuming office in early 2021, the Joe Biden and Kamala Harris administration of the United States (US) identified Africa as a strategic region of focus. Within 18 months, the administration produced a strategy on Africa, the first Africa-focused policy since 2012. This was followed four months later with the US-Africa Leaders Summit, held from 13–15 December 2022. How can we deconstruct the information and communications aspects of the Summit from an African standpoint? Did the Summit advance Africa’s voice on the global stage?

Overall, the Summit rose to the levels of a mega global soft-power event, thus drawing global attention on Africa. Mega events are defined as ‘ambulatory occasions of a fixed duration that attract large number of visitors; have large, mediated reach; come with large costs; [and] have large impacts’.¹ For an analysis focused on Africa’s global voice, the impact factor can be understood as the influence of the event on policy and relational dimensions. The Summit fits these four features of a mega event in the following ways:

¹ M. Müller, 2015, ‘What makes an event a mega-event? Definitions and sizes’, *Leisure Studies*, 34(6), 627–642, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2014.99333>

- **Large number of visitors:** The Summit was larger than the 2014 Summit, with 49 African heads of state attending compared to 37 in 2014. Entourages of businesspeople, civil society activists, scholars and representatives of international organisations trooped to Washington DC in their thousands. There was also a larger number of side events compared to the 2014 event (see Table 1). The large number of African visitors could be seen in the traffic gridlock in Washington DC over the Summit's duration.
- **Large, mediated reach:** The Summit was a major media event. Global, regional and local news outlets ramped up reporting well before the event. A look at the pre-event reporting reveals strategic communication to publicise the event, particularly by US government officials. This piqued the interest of the media, with several news and commentary items, some factual, others speculative. Public debate ensured further propelling public debate on the conclave. Africa made it to the headlines of high circulation traditional and social media platforms. Additionally, the organisers – The White House and US State Department, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), among others – maintained daily press briefings, social media postings, email correspondences and bespoke broadcasting on specialised channels. Long after the event, news about it was still reverberating. It was one of *the* global in-person events as the world emerged from COVID-19 restrictions.
- **Large costs:** Statistics on the cost of the event are inaccessible publicly. It can however be surmised that travel to Washington DC by delegations representing governments, business executives, civil society activists, UN agencies and other international organisations, the AU, regional economic communities (RECs) and journalists must have cost substantial amounts of money. The private and public meetings, dinners and luncheons must have also been high budget expenditures. The financial commitment of USD 55 billion by the US government was the ultimate demonstration of financial heft.
- **Policy and relational impact:** The Summit convened as a form of US rapprochement towards Africa and at a time of repair in US–Africa relations under the Biden-Harris administration. US–Africa relations had reached their lowest ebb during the presidency of Donald Trump (2016–2020). It signalled US engagement via summitry after an eight-year hiatus during which opinion leaders advocated for a follow-up event. It was convened at a time when historical geopolitical tensions in which Africa had been sucked were reaching new highs. These had been triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, coupled by sanctions and countersanctions between China and the US in the political and economic spheres. The Summit thus sought to influence the geopolitical balance of power in the favour of the US. It was one of the major bilateral events (if Africa is considered one entity) and multilateral (when international organisations in attendance are factored in). Even more significantly, it was the first major stab at its implementation.

Table 1 shows the number of official events held during the summit. Space does not allow listing all the side events. However, internet searches show that there were more than 45 of these.

The Summit convened as a form of US rapprochement towards Africa and at a time of repair in US–Africa relations under the Biden-Harris administration.

Table 1: Official events during the 2022 US–Africa Leaders Summit (source: US State Department website)

Day	Event theme/topic
13 December	African and Diaspora Young Leaders Forum
	Civil Society Forum
	African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) Trade Ministerial
	US Africa Space Forum
	Peace, Security and Governance Forum
	Partnering for Sustainable Health Cooperation
	Conservation, Climate Adaptation and a Just Energy Transition
14 December	Charting the Course: The Future of US–Africa Trade & Investment Relations
	Building a Sustainable Future: Partnerships to Finance African Infrastructure and the Energy Transition
	Growing Agribusiness: Partnerships to Strengthen Food Security and Value Chain
	Advancing Digital Connectivity: Partnerships to Enable Inclusive Growth through Technology
	US–Africa Business Forum
15 December	Leaders Session – Partnering on Agenda 2063
	Discussion Session 1: ‘An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law’
	Discussion Session 2: ‘A peaceful and secure Africa’
	Discussion Session 3: ‘A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development’
	Leaders Working Lunch – Multilateral Partnerships with Africa to Meet Global Challenges
	Leaders Session – Promoting Food Security and Food Systems Resilience

Did the above factors amplify Africa's voice on the global stage? The fact that many African leaders attended the Summit demonstrated aspects of Africa's voice. However, African countries scored on the communication front only minimally. While the US government deployed its communications machinery backed by US private media outlets, the AU and African countries did not generally leverage their communications infrastructure at the same level. One way of understanding how the African Union (AU) and most African governments lost out on the media and communications domain is to look at the documentation of the Summit's deliberations. Most of the key documents and materials are archived on The White House, US State Department and USAID websites. A survey of the AU and African government websites yields only smatterings of such documentation. With regards to costs, throughout the Summit, the US government was the sponsor, with Africans on the receiving end. Notably, all the financial commitments were made by the US government with very minimal contributions from the African end. This sustains the pessimistic narrative of Africa as a beggar rather than a contributor to its own needs. On the policy and relational impact front, several African leaders – even those with difficult relations with the US – were treated with respect and decorum rather than the proselytising approaches of the past. Even where pro-democracy advocates denounced the US for inviting illiberal politicians, US officials had robust rebuttals.

One area of unequivocal consensus is that the agenda was set by the US side with only perfunctory input from the AU. Some of the indications that uphold this conclusion are:

- During a press briefing, a Voice of America journalist said he had reached out to the AU Commission Chair Moussa Faki Mahamat to find out how invitations to the Summit had been made. Apparently, Mahamat's response was that the AU had not been contacted. Yet, US officials indicated that the AU had been consulted on this matter.² This stunning revelation essentially means that African delegates arrived in DC to listen to the plans that the Biden administration has for them.
- During a meeting between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and AU Chairman President Macky Sall, the later stated thus: 'I have already seen the draft declaration statement for this summit, which is very encouraging going forward, and we are fully supportive of it'.³ However, the language of the 'declaration' or key outcome documents textually show little input from the AU side.

- We saw and heard US officials expound on the Summit's agenda but not African officials. This suggests either that African leaders failed to articulate an agenda they knew about or that they were not fully aware or in charge of the agenda.

A key recommendation for the AU and African countries is that they should be better prepared for the next Summit. They should not only have a say in the setting and framing of the agenda, but their interests should be reflected in the discussions and outcomes. Two important organs of the AU that should lead on setting agendas for future summits are the Executive Council (ministers of foreign affairs) and the Permanent Representative Council (ambassadors seconded to the AU). These two organs can present views from their respective countries to the AU Assembly for debate and endorsement.

The recommendations for media and communications are necessary and fundamental. It is apparent that the AU's media and communications structures need a major overhaul. This would include converting the current AU communications and information unit into a fully fledged department within the African Union Commission. Given the preponderance of social media platforms in this digital era, it should be possible for the AU and African governments to communicate better with relatively low costs. Besides, the US should consider communicating about future summits jointly with AU leaders rather than the apparent unilateral communication. Moreover, future summits should include media and communications aspects, bringing in stakeholders such as freedom of expression advocates and media owners and organisations. For instance, during one of the press briefings, a journalist wondered why journalism and press freedom issues were off the agenda.

For civil society, the 40-plus side events are a treasure trove of possibilities for issue-based partnerships, joint resource mobilisation, networking and coalition-building, and forward-planning. Table 2 shows the issues and organisers that African civil society can leverage.

2 US State Department, 2022, 'Special briefing', <https://www.state.gov/digital-press-briefing-with-u-s-department-of-states-bureau-of-african-affairs-assistant-secretary-molly-phee-and-national-security-council-senior-director-for-african-affairs-judd-devermont/>

3 US State Department, 2022, 'Secretary Blinken and Senegalese President and AU Chairperson Macky Sall before their meeting', <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinken-and-senegalese-president-and-au-chairperson-macky-sall-before-their-meeting/>

Table 2: Civil society and areas of interest per events hosted (source: US State Department website)

Event theme/ topic	Organiser(s)
Economics, trade and development	Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; Africans Rising for Unity, Justice, Peace & Dignity; American Friends Service Committee; Interconnected Justice; Jubilee USA Network; Advocacy Network for Africa; US–Africa Bridge Building Project; Africa Mbele; Afronimicslaw; Open Society Africa; DRC National Investments Promotion Agency; USAID; Pan-African Council; Afri Business; National Black Chamber of Commerce; Business Council for International Understanding; Together for Constructive Actions
Diaspora and migration	Humanity United; TAB Productions; Virginia African Diaspora Committee
Peace and security	Search for Common Ground; Social Science Research Council; US Institute of Peace
Democracy, governance and human rights	Amnesty International; Human Rights Watch; Humanity United; Project on Middle Democracy; American University's School of International Service; SIS Africa Research
Agriculture and food security	InterAction; African Development Bank Group; African Leaders for Nutrition Initiative; Nutrition CEO Council; Jollof Gist
Cities and urbanisation	Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS); Charter Cities Institute (CCI)
Climate and energy	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; International Conservation Caucus Foundation (ICCF); Telesto Strategy
Women and youth	Howard University Center for African Studies; Women United Foundation; Afro Creative Ecosystem Foundation; Global Education Monitoring Report at UNESCO; African Institute of Mathematical Sciences; Jubilee Campaign; Orphan Care Ethiopia
Digital technologies	Corporate Council on Africa, Covington & Burling; Milken Institute; Invest Africa US; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Atlantic Council; Semafor; Arizona State University
Politics and diplomacy	US Africa Institute; Center for American Progress; African American Institute; African Diaspora Network; The Africa Center; Africa Soft Power
Partnering for our shared future	Foreign Policy for America and Microsoft
Education	African Centre for the Study of the US University of the Witwatersrand; Annenberg Center for Communication Leadership and Policy, University of Southern California; Center for African Studies, Howard University; Institute for African Studies, George Washington University; Public Diplomacy Council of America

2. African voices beyond the US–Africa Summit

The Summit effectively boosted US–Africa foreign relations in a context of intensified courting of Africa by established and emerging powers, notably Russia, China, the European Union (EU) (particularly the post-Brexit UK, France and Germany), Turkey, Japan, the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Israel, United Arab Emirates, Iran), India and Brazil. This latest US reproachment towards Africa is a strategy to win the hearts and minds of Africans in a crowded geopolitical battlefield. But as global powers compete on the continent, African leaders score advantages and encounter disadvantages in various ways:

- The contest can be read as an opportunity to negotiate deals that advance Africa’s course with the respective countries. These international forums have given voice to African leaders and their countries, helping the continent secure funding from multiple sources. Increasingly, African scholars are seeing the geopolitical rivalry as an opportunity for Africa,⁴ in for instance, increasing alternatives for funding projects. However, African countries should pursue forward-looking negotiation strategies and positions to reap even more from the summits and their agendas.
- Received wisdom is that Africans should engage with all the powers without discrimination. On the reverse side, Africans might be overwhelmed by the magnitude of courting to the extent of losing focus on Afro-centric goals. The density of the summits is such that there is at least one happening every year complete with a high volume of publicity. This is not to mention the AU’s two annual heads of state and government summits and countless meetings of its organs, departments and units. The African Union Commission should consider setting up an entity with sufficient capacity to plan, evaluate and follow up on the resolutions of summits with external partners. This way, the AU can explain itself better to its partners, for instance in terms of African priorities.

- Some of the discussions at the various summits draw on multilateral agencies, particularly the United Nations (UN), which further promote some of Africa’s interests, particularly those relating to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On the flip side, Africans are on the periphery in some of the critical decision-making bodies of UN organisations. Indeed, some of the summits may be drawing the AU away from a more dedicated focus on AU–UN projects and programmes. The AU should draw on its already established linkage of Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 to figure out how relations with the US and indeed other global powers can be synergised.

In some respects, the US has ceded ground to other powers: to China in terms of trade and investments and increasingly politics and diplomacy; to the EU largely in terms of political and economic engagements; and to Japan with regards to predictability and fidelity to commitments. From a summit diplomacy perspective – a key platform for the projection of African voices – the US is essentially playing catch-up to the other powers. Table 3 shows tighter summit-level engagements between China, Japan and the EU compared to the US.

Summits between China–Africa and Japan–Africa have been consistent on a triennial basis, followed by EU–Africa summits with US–Africa summits being inconsistent. Moreover, Chinese and Japanese summits have follow-up mechanisms and set timelines. This ensures the kind of consistency that has resulted in the institutionalisation of these summit-based international organisations. No date was set for the next US–Africa summit. It would be a loss of soft-power projection and influence for Africa if the next summit is not held at a predictable date. Furthermore, the rotational hosting of the summits between these global powers and Africa is a symbolic coup for China, Japan and the EU. The US should consider borrowing from the predictability of these summits, even if it may diminish Washington’s prestige as a leader in the ideas.

4 F. Soule, 2022, ‘Africa can use great power rivalry to its benefit: Here is how’, *The Conversation*, 6 January, <https://theconversation.com/africa-can-use-great-power-rivalry-to-its-benefit-here-is-how-172662>

Table 3: Summits between Africa and global powers (compiled from various sources)

Summit name	No. of summits	Year/location of first summit	Year/location of latest summit	Year/location of next summit	Monetary commitment (latest summit)
Forum on Africa China Cooperation (FOCAC)	8	2000, Beijing, China	2021, Dakar, Senegal	2024, Beijing, China	USD 40 billion
Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD)	8	1993, Tokyo, Japan	2022, Tunis, Tunisia	2025, no location, Japan	USD 30 billion ⁵
EU–Africa Summit (now AU–EU Summit)	6	2000, Cairo, Egypt	2022, Brussels, Belgium	No date, no location	about USD 164 billion (February 2023 exchange rate)
US–Africa Leaders Summit	2	2014, Washington DC	2022, Washington DC	No date, no location	USD 55 billion

While the EU and China have been more visible in their engagements with Africa, this perspective must however be qualified in view of the long-running, established US strengths in Africa. The US is head and shoulders above most of the global powers in terms of humanitarian assistance to Africa. Moreover, the US-EU-Japan rivalry in Africa can be characterised as ‘friendly competition’ due to shared values and global alignments even as they pursue their individual interests. For instance, on the infrastructure front, the US seems to be rebounding in Africa through the Partnership for Global Infrastructure Investment (PGII), a joint initiative of the G7 aiming ‘to collectively mobilise USD 600 billion⁶ in five years for roads, railways and ports. In the digital economy arena, the commitment to invest USD 350 million for the Digital Transformation with Africa (DTA) – to, among other projects, facilitate the AU’s Digital Transformation Strategy – can be seen as a US response to China’s heavy investment in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector. Silicon Valley in the US is globally recognised as the pioneer and leader in innovation. Investment in Africa’s digital technologies is particularly important as it creates the connectivity to enable the articulation of African issues on the global stage against Africa’s low levels of linkages with the rest of the world.

For the AU, the geopolitics of summits present dicey choices. Snubbing them would draw the ire of the big powers. Attending and agreeing to the proposals of the big powers potentially leads to the AU and African

countries abandoning their own well thought out Agenda 2063 and national plans. The solution again lies in reaching out to the big powers to ensure the setting of agendas that incorporates Africa’s core interests. For the US, the temptation to structure summits specifically and relations more broadly as a zero-sum game with other powers should be avoided. The US Congress and Senate should consider legislation to secure a periodic schedule of summits with Africa and indeed other regions. This would help with predictability, consistency and, ultimately, institutionalisation of US–Africa summit diplomacy. The AU and African leaders should also lobby for the next summit to be held on African soil, borrowing from the summits with Europe, China and Japan. Communicating the need for reciprocal summetry between the two sides would put the AU on a high moral ground and constrain the US side to accede. With regards to the use of infrastructure projects as an instrument by the global powers to woo Africa, the AU should be guided by its own infrastructure plans such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). The danger with shifting gears to accommodate infrastructure projects developed by external partners is that it redirects efforts away from priority initiatives. A case in point is the Chinese soft-power projects where large office blocks and presidential palaces have been built in various countries. Yet, the priority in many of these countries is road infrastructure to far-flung hinterlands.

⁵ C. van Staden, 2022, ‘Japan makes \$30bn Africa aid pledge during TICAD in Tunis’, *The Africa Report*, 30 August, <https://www.theafricareport.com/236500/japan-makes-30bn-africa-aid-pledge-during-ticad-in-tunis/>

⁶ The White House, 2022, ‘Remarks by President Biden at the US–Africa Business Forum’, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/12/14/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-u-s-africa-business-forum/>

3. Rhetoric and symbolism

During the Summit, certain factors that motivated the US to pursue a rapprochement mission toward Africa were repeatedly amplified. In the main action plan, it was stated that ‘African leadership and contributions are essential to addressing today’s pressing challenges and achieving shared priorities’.⁷ In one of the sessions, President Biden intoned: ‘Today, I’m looking forward to hearing more from all of you about the issues and priorities that matter most to Africa and how we can deepen our cooperation. And I emphasise cooperation’. Similar language emphasising ‘partnership’, ‘shared’ destiny and ‘listening’ to African leaders served up the rhetorical and symbolic stance accentuating the inevitability of Africa to fully be included in the pressing global issues. Throughout the Summit, various US and African leaders took stock of Africa’s demographic bulge, its youthful dividends, extensive landmass with vast natural resources and being home to the largest free trade area. The issue is that Africa’s voice on global agendas is not commensurate with the magnitude of these and other resources.

One approach towards raising the stature of Africa is the proposed high-level visits which the Biden administration has followed through, with visits by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visiting Zambia, Senegal and South Africa, and US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas Greenfield visiting Ghana, Mozambique and Kenya in January 2023. These visits, as well as the anticipated trips by President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, will equally boost Africa’s standing globally, probably inspiring other global leaders to follow suit. While US leaders had already started prioritising Africa with visits – for instance Secretary Antony Blinken’s visits since late 2021 – the new approach seems to borrow a leaf from the

Chinese playbook, which has seen Beijing sending high numbers of top-level officials over the years. Indeed, some of the language from the Summit’s outcomes mimic the official’s language of FOCAC and Chinese statements. Consider this from Secretary Blinken: ‘together, as the world’s largest economy and one of the world’s fastest-growing economic regions, respectively, the United States and African nations have the potential to build one of the 21st century’s most successful economic partnerships’.⁸ It reads like China’s often stated rhetoric that China is the largest developing nation and Africa a region with the largest number of developing nations. More importantly, it will be interesting to note the specific African countries that US officials visit as this will be indicative of those that are favoured while at the same time likely raising issues around a collective African voice vis-a-vis bilateral relations.

For the AU, US rhetoric of partnership presents an opportunity to infuse the notion of African solutions for African problems. This Afro-centric agency did not come out as strongly as it should. It should be a script from which African leaders should read going forward. On the matter of Africa’s natural and human resources wealth, it would be good for the AU to come up with specific opportunities that Africa offers to the world. These could be packaged in professional marketing and publicity materials and platforms with the aim of ‘selling’ the African brand to the world. Some of the leading private African media can partner with the AU and governments to promote investments in specific regions. To this end, the AU should consider regional or national training sessions for media stakeholders.

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⁷ The White House, 2022, ‘US–Africa Leaders Summit: Strengthening partnerships to meet shared priorities’, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/15/u-s-africa-leaders-summit-strengthening-partnerships-to-meet-shared-priorities/>

⁸ US State Department, 2022, ‘Secretary Antony J. Blinken at the US–Africa Business Forum lunch’, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-anthony-j-blinken-at-the-u-s-africa-business-forum-lunch/>

4. African diaspora

The ‘people-to-people ties pillar’ was given prominence and priority throughout the Summit. The key highlight was President Biden’s issuing of an executive order for the establishment of the President’s Advisory Council on African Diaspora Engagement in the United States (PAC-ADE).⁹ Membership is to be comprised of the descendants of enslaved African and the more recent or contemporary immigrants. The historical and contemporary African diaspora in the US is the largest of anywhere in the world (estimated at 46,350,000 in 2023).¹⁰ This has been strategised as a great direct and indirect diplomatic resource for US interests in Africa. Notably, the diaspora plans were also coupled with youth-related plans as seen in the Summit’s side event, ‘the African and Diaspora Young Leaders Forum’. This follows the large number of African Americans and African diaspora members who were appointed to the Biden administration in 2021. The elevation of the African diaspora portends great potentialities for Africa in at least four ways:

- It reinvigorates the role of African diaspora as an avenue for cultural, social, political and economic connections with and in the US.
- It institutionalises the African diaspora into US foreign policy and advances the AU’s designation of the diaspora as the sixth region of Africa.
- The strategy is likely to be emulated by other countries and regions with large African diasporas such as Latin America, the Caribbean and parts of Europe, particularly the UK and France.
- It offers the AU and African countries an opportunity to intensify their co-option of the so-called Global Africa as a key developmental avenue, particularly through economic avenues such as diaspora remittances (estimated at USD 80 billion by the World Bank in 2020¹¹).

The elevation of the African diaspora is likely to be emulated by other countries and regions with large African diasporas such as Latin America, the Caribbean and parts of Europe.

9 The White House, 2022, ‘US–Africa Leaders Summit: Strengthening partnerships to meet shared priorities’, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/15/u-s-africa-leaders-summit-strengthening-partnerships-to-meet-shared-priorities/>

10 World Population Review, 2023, ‘How many black people are in the world 2023’, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/economics/how-many-black-people-are-in-the-world>

11 A. Negash, 2023, ‘Africa’s development needs to go beyond foreign aid and remittances’, *The Africa Report*, 18 January, <https://www.theafricareport.com/275921/africas-development-needs-to-go-beyond-foreign-aid-remittances/>

5. Multilateralism

Most African leaders – as would be expected – opted for silence on matters to do with China and Russia. It is apparent that the US navigated this slippery geopolitical terrain with lots of caution. It is with the proposals of Africans in the membership of the G20 and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that significant projection of African voices by the US was visible and feasible. African nations are known to value multilateralism as a means of making up for myriads of weaknesses. Inclusion in the G20 would afford an agenda-setting opportunity. Membership in the UNSC is even more important as this is the most consequential entity of the UN. Several challenges however stand in the way of the realisation of this ‘long overdue’ goal. Many nations from all the five continents have equally been clamouring for the veto-power status. Allowing Africa in would open a pandora’s box. Global powers vying for prowess in the international system may lead to lots of mischief, thus scuttling the plans. This is because the proposals are of a global-order changing nature.

For instance, the same problems that may hamstring Africa’s invitation to the G20 and the UNSC could also hamper Africa’s voice on global environmental matters. The Biden administration has pledged to support Africa

with over USD 150 million in climate adaptation and resilience programming. But this is to be done through the President’s Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE), which may be seen as a unilateral climate change initiative. Advocates of multilateralism maintain that environmental plans should be channelled through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP) rounds of negotiations. Moreover no mention was made of more equitable representation of Africa in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These are crucial global institutions because they deal with critical financial matters. During the Summit, the US government and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat signed a Memorandum of Understanding. This could provide a template for similar agreements with other powers that have not entered a modicum of formality with the AU around the AfCFTA. A key failure in promoting the African voice is that even though there was a session addressed by President Biden specifically on the AU’s Agenda 2063, the principles of this long-term African priority were thin, far-between and generic in the signature pledges and commitments.

African nations are known to value multilateralism as a means of making up for myriads of weaknesses. Inclusion in the G20 would afford an agenda-setting opportunity.

6. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing analysis, the Summit was an extension of the US Strategy Toward Africa. On the other hand, Africa does not have a policy framework towards the US. The AU should start a process that results in the creation of a framework of engagement with the US. In so doing, the AU can tap into the knowledge, experience and skills of African international studies scholars and former diplomats to the US who are familiar with summity diplomacy as an avenue for soft-power projection. Serving AU and African diplomats accredited in the US should consider setting up an initial meeting through the aegis of the AU diplomatic mission in Washington DC. The AU Executive Council and Permanent Representative Council can play a key facilitative role in creating the framework. During the development of the framework, consultations can be undertaken with US diplomatic missions in Africa, particularly the US permanent representative to the AU.

While Africa's voice was advanced during the Summit, more could have been done to take full advantage of the event. Revamping the AU communications architecture to make it fit for purpose, borrowing a leaf from the US global communications architecture, should be undertaken. Indeed, the US can offer advice on how information, outreach and advocacy entities work. These include the Office of Global Partnerships, the Office of Strategic Communications and Outreach, the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, the Bureau of International Programs and the Bureau of Public Affairs. This would assist the AU in establishing its own international communications entities including revamping failing or failed entities such as the African Union of Broadcasting and the Pan African News Agency. Indeed, US-Africa media partnerships should be considered along the lines of partnerships in the business and corporate sectors.

As we saw in the analysis, agenda-setting was done more on the US side than on the African side. Indeed, the US has gone ahead and appointed a special representative for the US-Africa Leaders Summit implementation. This helps further advance the US agenda. The AU should consider urgently appointing a counterpart to the US appointee, former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Ambassador Johnnie Carson.

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