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An Exploration of the African Dimensions of State-based Philanthropy in US Foreign Policy and Global Change

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Abstract

This article is situated at the intersection of foreign policy and philanthropy amid geopolitical shifts. It uses ongoing foreign policy shifts in the United States of America as they apply in African situations, tied to broader global dynamics. After tracing the historical context under which these shifts are happening, the article discusses the shifts in the global order, pointing out some of the factors reordering the global order, with a knock-on effect on US aid to Africa. This paves the way for an analysis of the specific executive orders issued by the United States, including those dealing with the United Nations. Next is an analysis of the Global North-Global South perspectives, including African perspectives. The article concludes with some of the potential research agendas in the unfolding policy-aid developments.

Keywords: United States, Africa, Foreign Policy, Foreign Aid

Introduction

The world is witnessing a fast-tracked pace of unprecedented change in global governance. This is not a mere cliché. The swiftness with which the United States has implemented foreign policy actions since the inauguration of President Donald Trump in January 2025 is living testimony. This paper explores the African dimensions of the state-based philanthropic dimensions of US-led geopolitical shifts. It does so by addressing the questions of a) what are the links between the sharp shifts in US foreign policy as it relates to foreign policy on the one hand, and the geopolitical shifts in an increasingly multipolar multilateral global order? b) How can geopolitical shifts ignited by the America First policy be leveraged to rethink and reengineer African-generated ideas on the link between foreign policy and philanthropy? c) What are some of the African values and knowledge systems that stand a chance of infusion into African diplomatic practices in the pursuit of African self-sufficiency, agency, and Afrocentricity in financing basic needs?

The intersection of U.S. foreign policy and U.S. foreign aid in Africa is discussed and interpreted with a global lens. Specific examples are derived from official U.S. sources, which serve as quasi-data analysis and interpretation. As an exploratory study, the chapter purposively selects data from the foreign policy space and transiently applies geopolitics, foreign policy, and philanthropic perspectives. It assembles literature from official, policy, academic, and journalistic sources as the

first step in making sense of the foreign policy-philanthropy intersection, with the understanding that incisive studies can follow in the future. The chapter concludes with potential areas of further research on this rapidly unfolding topic.

Much of the change in U.S. foreign policy has been through executive orders and other promulgations falling under ‘presidential action’. Executive orders are the “signed, written, and published directives from the President of the United States that manage operations of the federal government”ⁱ. Executive orders also “amend, rescind, or revoke a prior executive order issued by his [president] or an earlier Administration”ⁱⁱ. A website tracking executive orders by American presidents shows that the current President, Donald Trump, had signed the highest number of executive actions since Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945) by early December 2025ⁱⁱⁱ. Trump has signed the highest number of executive orders of any other US president when his first and second term directives and revocations are combined. The data show that foreign policy is by far the sector in which Trump has affected official policy changes through executive orders. Several of the geopolitically significant policy actions were signed moments after the inauguration ceremony, highlighting the prioritization of international affairs.

A big percentage of the foreign policy actions were aimed at ending the US’s provision of global public goods. On his first day in office, January 20, 2025, President Donald Trump shocked Americans and the world by signing twenty-six executive actions. This was the highest number of day-one executive actions by an American President ever^{iv}. Given that domestic US policy has foreign or external ramifications, all twenty-six day-one executive actions have consequences for philanthropy. However, to identify the executive actions that have a higher relevance to philanthropy, one must consider those that led to the ending of funding to African countries^v. For instance, the “America First Trade Policy” executive order has many potential philanthropy dimensions. However, the purpose of such an executive order is not to terminate funding, but to implement trade tariff actions. The “Ending Radical And Wasteful Government DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity) Programs And Preferencing” order is meant to remove affirmative action based on gender, race, disability, and other social inequalities in the US. Its domestic objectives have been projected abroad by stopping funding for DEI initiatives^{vi}. The same argument can be made regarding the designation of selected external actors as terrorists, those targeted at specific

countries (e.g., South Africa and Brazil) as adversaries, those on combating anti-Christianity and antisemitism, and those aimed at illicit drugs, among others.

Five of the funding cessation actions that have a higher consequence on philanthropy are the “America First Policy Directive to the Secretary of State”, “Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid”, “Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program”, “Withdrawing the United States from the World Health Organization”, “Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements”, and “Withdrawing the United States from and Ending Funding to Certain United Nations Organizations and Reviewing United States Support to all International Organizations”.

The overarching “America First Policy Directive to the Secretary of State” is notable for its foreign policy agenda-setting value. It states that the “foreign policy of the United States shall champion core American interests and always put America and American citizens first”, framing the overall environment under which philanthropic considerations would proceed. This action is not of much utility at the empirical analysis level. The explicitly philanthropy-focused executive order is “Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid”. It gives aid a bad name by labeling it a “foreign aid industry and bureaucracy ... in many cases antithetical to American values”. More importantly, it is the consequential action that paused US foreign development assistance and stopped the disbursement of funds. It is the order that sounded the death knell for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Four of the executive orders focus on the United Nations, thus linking with UN-based philanthropy. They deal with the US retrenchment or withdrawal on migration and refugees (therefore linked to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)); the World Health Organization (WHO); the Paris Climate Pact through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

With the U.S. the largest donor country in absolute terms, the field of philanthropy entered an uncertain phase. The resultant dramatic flux in global affairs is not only interesting but critical in understanding implications for the intersection of international relations, foreign policy, and

philanthropy. The cutbacks in US foreign aid and cessation of funding that followed the executive actions left large funding gaps in national budgets worldwide that are nearly impossible to fill, at least in the short term. This is particularly true for Africa, where national budgets are heavily reliant on foreign aid and development assistance^{vii}.

Before returning to the analysis of the foreign policy actions instituted by the Trump administration, it is worthwhile taking a step back to reflect on the historical and geopolitical environment in which the catalytic US action is unfolding. This helps to chart the path that broader developments have travelled, leading us to the unfolding geopolitical developments.

Historical Context

It is difficult not to agree that the world is in an intense period of flux, given the clashes, frictions, and tensions between nations, particularly global powers. The foreign policy of the Trump administration has intensified these dynamics. But to be certain, change is the only constant in world affairs. Thus, changes in global order are always and have always been at play, whether intense, moderate, or lackluster. This is borne out when we trace transformations in world affairs over time^{viii}. Doing so reveals that global shifts go farther back in time, such that the current shifts are a moment in time and space.

The long arc of perpetual resets in global affairs is traceable to the early and late modern periods, roughly between 1500 CE and 1945 CE. These range from the invention of the Gutenberg printing press in the 15th century, through the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and European exploration eras in the so-called Middle Ages^{ix}. They include the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, the First and Second World Wars, and the ideological battles in the first half of the 20th century. During these earlier epochs, Africa made significant advancements but also encountered setbacks. Between the 15th and 18th centuries, several African empires flourished across the continent^x. It can thus be surmised that many African societies were self-reliant in material and ideational terms well into the colonial era. This would have included acts of philanthropy in quintessentially African settings, as philanthropy scholar Zakeyo demonstrates^{xi}.

The major jolt came with the arrival of imperial European powers, marked by devastation in the form of colonization, with the slave trade as a major disruptor^{xii}. Colonialism was accompanied

by Christianity, which introduced philanthropy through missionaries^{xiii}. This laid the foundation for the institutionalization of Western philanthropy in sectors such as education, medicine, and, broadly, culture. At the same time, colonialism and European evangelism disrupted African forms of giving and communal support. The seeds for African reliance on the West for assistance were sown during this period. The resilience of African philanthropy, however, lives on in various forms, particularly under the Ubuntu philosophy^{xiv}. For Africa, colonialism was a new world order, upending traditional forms of societal organization, philanthropy included.

By the time the phrase “new world order” entered the global political lexicon in the early 20th century, after the end of World War I and the establishment of the League of Nations^{xv}, Africa was under colonial rule and subject to immense external influence. Yet another new world order emerged in the post-World War II era, at a time when Africa was still under colonial rule. It is therefore fair to say that the ‘new world order’ designations were more from external rather than internal African conceptions. In the post-World War II period from 1945, two developments that impacted African philanthropy can be delineated. First, the United States (and the West) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (and the East) were the bipolar powers around which alliances revolved. In this bipolar setting, philanthropy towards Africa was defined by the proclivity of the United States and Russia to counter each other as they promoted their capitalist-liberalist and socialist-communist ideologies^{xvi}. The impact of the Cold War still reverberates in 2025, including in the philanthropy domain. Western assistance to Africa in recent times has revolved around ‘countering Russian malign influence in Africa’^{xvii}, while Russia has stepped up military support for Africa, framed in assistance terms. Second, the formation of the United Nations as a world government in 1945 began to define multilateral assistance toward Africa and indeed the rest of the world. This is the subject of the analysis below.

The origin of the current shifts can be pinned to the late 1980s and early 1990s. This is when the Cold War ended with the United States and the Western world victorious, and the USSR crumbled and shrank into a smaller, but still the world’s largest country, the Russian Federation. The notion of the ‘end of history’, a triumphant celebration of liberalism over socialism, greeted the world of the early 1990s as the US emerged as the sole superpower in the world. The US became the most significant philanthropic state^{xviii}, particularly when we stretch the definition of philanthropy as

foreign aid. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was established in 1961 during the J.F. Kennedy presidency and became an important instrument of US state-based philanthropy^{xxix}. Analysts now argue that the world is undergoing, or is already in, a new world order marked by the decline of the West generally and the US specifically^{xx}. Analysts argue that the ending of USAID and other Western foreign programmes is an important reflection of the waning US power.

It can be concluded that the current revolutions underpinning changes in global order rest on layers of previous developments. To borrow Thomas Kuhn's phrase^{xxi}, the various world orders are paradigm shifts in global affairs, in which Africa is drawn. In a nutshell, the current buzz around global shifts is founded, not on one wave of change, but on self-reinforcing layers of revolutionary change. Development assistance by global powers in Africa, a key component of the philanthropy and foreign policy junctures, is intricately entangled with historical dynamics. As we shall see, the power accumulated and retained by the Global North has ensured that for decades, North America and Western Europe have been the providers of foreign assistance to the supposedly less endowed rest of the world. For the most part, preeminence in global affairs across culture, politics, and economics has been at the behest of the Western or Global North world. The new world order we are witnessing is unfolding in predictable and unpredictable ways, one characteristic being the retreat of the US as a philanthropic superpower^{xxii}.

It is this historical context that the Donald Trump II presidency, which began in January 2025, after a four-year hiatus from the first Trump administration (2017-2020), should be read. It is an acceleration rather than an entirely new phenomenon. Certainly, the "America First" foreign policy has already had a seismic impact on the world, igniting unprecedented geopolitical shifts, many of which are unfolding before our eyes.

A Shifting World Order

The U.S. foreign policy actions of 2025 are occurring in a rapidly transforming world. Observers have labeled current international relations as being in the phase described variously as a shifting global order, a changing global order, a new world order, a new international order, and an emerging world order, as well as other proximate phrases^{xxiii}. These phrases describe the

observable phenomenon of new ways in which state and non-state actors perceive and actively engage in global governance. The phrases have featured across the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field of geopolitics in the social sciences, drawing on history, geography, arts and culture, economics, international relations, politics, foreign policy, and diplomacy, among others. Indeed, in daily lives as well as in intellectual circles and academic citadels, geopolitics and its disciplinary and practice intersections are a hot-button point of discussion.

There are no settled definitions of 'global order' or 'world order'. Instead, the 'order' part of the phrase comprises features and characteristics, be they economic, ideological, relational, regional, and many more. The 'new' part presupposes an 'old' order, as we shall see in the intervening sections of this chapter. While working on this paper, I realized that philanthropy and foreign policy are featured in literature from the perspective of non-state actors, particularly private foundations, rather than state actors. Yet there is room to conceive of state-based philanthropy and foreign policy as a means of ideationally expanding new knowledge generation in the field. It is germane for the current chapter to work with the idea of philanthropy and its related terms and practices, such as foreign aid, humanitarianism, donor funding, and development assistance. In these respects, philanthropy in the form of official foreign aid or assistance has not been untouched by the tectonic geopolitical shifts. We can thus discuss philanthropy in a new world order and its synonymous phrases, such as foreign aid in a new world order^{xxiv}, development assistance in a new world order, and donor funding in a new world order, among others.

The new philanthropic landscape ignited by the policy shift in 2025 rests on factors reshaping the global order. At a recent public lecture at the University of the Witwatersrand^{xxv}, global public intellectual Jeffrey Sachs pinpointed the five disruptions shaping a new multipolar world. First is geopolitical realignment, in which several nodes of influence have emerged, away from the West as the core of global power. Wallerstein's^{xxvi} concept of centre, periphery, and semi-periphery requires revision as formerly core countries increasingly seem like semi-periphery and vice versa. Second is the economic shift in which prowess in global trade and value chains is shifting away from the North Atlantic to Asia, with China and India in the lead. Third is the technological revolution and digital leapfrogging, in which digital tools are lifting much of the world out of poverty, again, with China as the model. Fourth is the ecological crisis and green transition, in

which the old Western industrial and extractive economic models are being challenged with the emergence of cheaper and environmentally friendly options. Fifth is the demographic transformation of the world, in which the “world’s population has surged from 800 million two centuries ago to 8 billion today”^{xxvii}. The bulk of the world’s population is in the Global South, including Africa. It is justifiable to interpret these five disruptions through a philanthropic lens and from an African perspective.

In some respects, philanthropy, in the form of foreign aid and development assistance, is at the heart of the shifting global landscape^{xxviii}. These are the subjects of the emerging global order, not because they are on the rise, but because they are declining, if not changing^{xxix}. The year 2025 has been particularly instructive as the foreign policies of global powers collide in a manner that leaves philanthropy in a state of soul-searching, if not crisis. Apprehension has risen, reaching a new peak in the global public sphere due to the domestic and foreign policy actions initiated and ratcheted by various global powers. The deep shift in the foreign policy of the United States of America is particularly catalytic, hence this chapter. These developments raise questions about the implications of the unprecedented and revolutionary geopolitical changes on Africa’s philanthropic relations with the U.S. and the world.

The cross-cutting field of philanthropy in which Africa is implicated has been a direct casualty of the drastic reset in U.S. foreign policy. To understand the foreign policy-foreign aid, and their link to geopolitics, we have to zero in on the matter before moving on to make geopolitical interpretations.

Foreign Policy and Philanthropy

At its basic level, foreign policy is a nation’s plan to control the behavior of another country or region and promote or protect its strategic interests. On the other hand, foreign aid (in this case synonymous with state-centric philanthropy or development assistance) is fundamentally “the financial, technical, or material assistance given to help the recipient country in its development efforts”^{xxx}. Over the years, several U.S. interests have driven philanthropic engagement with the continent. Development assistance aimed at streamlining governance systems has been geared

toward helping American businesses to do business on the continent. Humanitarian assistance during emergencies such as floods and droughts has often been framed in moralistic terms. Support for human rights promotion is motivated by the norms and values that serve as the core of the US as a leading liberal democracy. Assistance in the peace security sector is linked to US national security interests, including protecting terrestrial and maritime commercial and military interests. Counterterrorism has been particularly important as a national security objective of US foreign aid to Africa^{xxx}.

The proclivity for liberal norms and values as the cornerstone of US philanthropy came to a halt with the “America First Policy Directive to the Secretary of State” and the “Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid” executive orders in January 2020. The latter executive order paused aid for a 90-day period, which was fully implemented with the termination of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in July 2025. In an article published by the State Department, Secretary of State Marco Rubio^{xxxii} stated that USAID had created an “NGO industrial complex at taxpayer expense”, that problems such as instability had worsened, that instead of boosting US influence, an anti-American sentiment had risen, and that developing nations had become dependent on the aid. He pointed out that African countries had voted more with US adversaries than with the US in the UN despite receiving \$165 billion in aid since the early 1990s. Forthwith, explained Rubio, aid would be in “furtherance of an America First Foreign policy”, focused not on the “global community”, but on “US taxpayers”, operated as “an instrument” of US foreign policy rather than “charity”, and focus on trade rather than aid, and so forth. This is what has come to be labeled transactional US policy in Africa under the second Trump administration, evident in the US National Security Strategy released in December 2025^{xxxiii}.

The new US foreign aid doctrine is an iteration of long-running debates around the tensions between its political instrument and moral commitment dimensions^{xxxiv}. In the broader context of the US foreign policy action to end conventional aid, an analytical prism that can be used is that of the three ideological objectives of foreign aid^{xxxv}. The realism perspective holds that foreign aid is meant to influence the political judgment of recipient countries. The framing of the

executive orders and data from other US Government sources suggests that this has failed because recipient countries have not perfectly aligned with US interests.

The liberal perspective argues that foreign aid is altruistic and meant to help recipient countries achieve development and even prosperity. This morality-based perspective may explain the emotional outpourings captured in the media as the US stepped back from values-based financial transfers to Africa and elsewhere. It is based on the understanding that U.S. aid is an instrument of soft power through which the U.S. achieves its foreign policy goals^{xxxvi}. The Trump administration views this as another case of failure due not only to the dependence that it encouraged, but also the fact that countries have not achieved the desired development. The scholars who align with this view include Brautigam and Knack^{xxxvii} on institutional governance failures of aid. Moyo argued that decades of aid had harmed rather than helped Africa on its desired path to self-reliance, proposing instead that investments and the role of the private sector, among other pathways, were better^{xxxviii}. The world system viewpoint is that aid is meant to curtail the economic development of recipient countries. This too has failed in part because other donor powers, such as China, have emerged and provided alternatives to recipient countries. Fentahun is wedded to this view, arguing from a democratization viewpoint that aid was aimed at Western domination of Africa^{xxxix}. Indeed, in scholarship, foreign aid from the US or elsewhere is unpopular. This is contrary to the consternation that was expressed after the termination of USAID and other US aid mechanisms.

As the reality of a new US foreign policy bereft of aid set in, several African voices talked of resilience, innovative local solutions, alternative sources of funding, and the like. All these speak to the emergence of a tacit African policy position toward the U.S., a topic that has been on the table since the first Trump administration and the transition to the Biden administration^{xl}. This is another moment of geopolitical inflection in the sense that parts of Africa were beginning to accept the fate that had befallen them and to take responsibility. This does not, however, mean that some form of antipathy towards the US had fizzled out, as seen in calls for an “Africa First” policy^{xli}. Rather, it was partially an escape loop for leaders who wanted to play to domestic galleries, a promise to the citizens that the storm would be weathered. It was also a subtle appeal

to the global competitors of the US to step in, almost seeking sympathy from European and Asian powers to help out.

But, what about the US's retrenchment from global leadership generally and the supposed prioritization of domestic interests predicated on the America First policy?

Multilateralism and Philanthropy

An overarching lens through which we can analyze the state-based philanthropic dimensions of the geopolitical shifts ignited by the US foreign policy shift is the debate over multilateralism versus unilateralism and multilateralism versus bilateralism. In global governance, multilateralism is when countries work collaboratively on transnational issues, pooling resources for collective solutions and sharing costs through global institutions and operating by shared norms. The United Nations is the ultimate multilateral organization. Unilateralism is when a country exercises freedom to act independently and on its own rules in pursuit of national foreign policy goals, allowing for expedient decision-making and the securing of interests. Bilateralism is when two countries prefer and agree to cooperate on one or more issues^{xlii}. Concomitantly, we can talk of multilateral foreign aid (for instance, through the United Nations), and bilateral foreign aid^{xliii}. Unilateral foreign aid is improbable as it presupposes the donor forcing a donation to a recipient.

Overall, the U.S. has delivered foreign aid through both multilateral and bilateral channels^{xliv}. The unilateral turn in U.S. foreign policy under the America First rubric has seen the U.S.'s multilateralism grinding to a halt. In some instances, unilateralism has meant no aid at all, while in others, unilateralism has paved the way for bilateralism, for example, the December 2025 health aid packages between the US with Kenya and Rwanda. From a multilateral perspective, many observers have expressed consternation at the US's withdrawal from United Nations institutions. One has, however, to consider the factors provided by the withdrawals and cessations. An incontestable factor is that domestic politics can be deduced in the revocation of the Democratic Party's UN-based multilateral commitments between 2020 and 2024. The conclusion that can be made is that African countries must be realistic about the implications of the periodic change between the Democratic and Republican administrations, as well as different presidents in the US.

The “Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program” executive order and related migration actions provide the factors that informed the US’s walk away from multilateralism. These factors are that the US is inundated with immigrants beyond its financial coping capacity, that Americans deserve the resources directed to refugees, that refugees have become a national security threat, and that some refugees fail to assimilate into American communities. In addition to this, the refugees’ action revoked a Biden-era initiative to resettle refugees. This is a more explicit example of the US declining to shoulder the burden of Africa’s and the world’s populations displaced through conflict and other factors, such as environmentally inspired economic hardships. The implication is that Africa has to devise means and ways of taking care of its people seeking sanctuary in the US and elsewhere in the world.

The US’s withdrawal from the WHO was unsurprising, given the global power’s withdrawal from the organization in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. As in the earlier retrenchment, the factors adduced included the WHO’s alleged mishandling of the pandemic, inability to avoid influence from some member states (China), and opposition to disproportionate contributions from the US compared to other countries (China singled out). This is another case of the US moving away from underwriting funding for multilateral institutions. The subtext, however, is that of geopolitical competition with China. In September 2025, the US released the “America First Global Health Strategy,” which provided further justification for policy change. America’s health diplomacy and assistance were assessed as suffering “significant inefficiency and waste” as seen in “... data (that) shows that only about 40% of PEPFAR’s budget goes directly to finance on-the-ground service delivery, specifically health commodities and health workers”^{xlv}. Another justification was that a “culture of dependency” had developed, as seen in the failure of transitioning programmes from aid to self-reliance by recipient countries. These justifications formed the foundational thinking leading to a shift to a bilateral foreign aid approach with pacts signed with Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Liberia, and Lesotho in December 2025^{xlvi}. The transactional nature of the deals can be seen in the Kenya-US example, where the pact was tied to Kenya’s involvement in US counterterrorism campaigns and Kenya’s role in the stabilization of Haiti^{xlvii}.

Like the WHO withdrawal, the “Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements” executive order further confirms that the key motivation for the withdrawal is the concern about

the US being hamstrung by multilateralism. It is equally a reversal of the Biden Administration's multilateral foreign aid commitments and a return to the first Trump administration's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Pact and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). A key distinction between the US's WHO and the Paris Agreement is that the unilateral actions have not translated into any bilateral foreign aid or other diplomatic engagement. We therefore see instances of partial unilateralism that lead to bilateralism in the case of the WHO, and complete unilateralism with little or no transition to bilateralism in the case of the UNFCCC. The complete unilateralism is also evident in the withdrawal from the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the Human Rights Council.

The United Nations system is intricately linked to philanthropy^{xlviii}, particularly in the form of humanitarian assistance. Concerns about the US's withdrawal from UN-led multilateralism and its development assistance work shouldn't be the case, given the indications emanating from the first Trump administration between 2017 and 2020^{xlix}. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the United Nations system came under immense renewed pressure in the second Trump administration^l. Across these agencies, the US was a key funder of programmes in Africa and elsewhere in the world, a demonstration of US foreign aid through multilateralism.

Views expressing disappointment with the US's withdrawal from the UN agencies have pointed out that the US was the architect-in-chief in the establishment of this global governing body in the post-World War II period^{li}. The dismay for those who want the US to remain the fulcrum of the UN as the global governing body is that the values and norms it stands for are also the values on which the US is founded^{lii}. These perspectives clash with the America First policy as seen in the executive orders that set the stage for US withdrawal from the UN. These include determinations that the UN system is wasteful, that it is anti-American, that the US makes far more contributions to the UN, and that collective multilateral agreements by the UN limit the pursuit of American interests, among other criticisms^{liii}.

From the viewpoint of Africans, the US's position that several UN agencies do not serve American interests should be respected, or at the very least, left for Americans to deal with. If the US

withdrawal from multilateral global governance architectures and mechanisms has caused a crisis, it should also be seized as an opportunity. The UN remains a vital philanthropic mechanism, often collaborating closely with African governments and charitable organizations to address global issues. Africans should be more focused on the calls for reforms of the UN for this global governance to be more efficient and effective overall terms and as concerns delivery of global public goods. For instance, African leaders have been pushing for reforms in institutions such as the United Nations^{liv} could argue that the issues raised by the US are all the more reason the reforms are needed.

A pathway is for Africans to work with other partners to implement aspects of the Pact for the Future, which was passed by the UN General Assembly in September 2024 with an eye on UN reforms^{lv}. The second opportunity, linked to the first, is for Africa to seize the opportunity presented by the UN@80 Initiatives^{lvi}, which was launched in March 2025, apparently, as a response to the US's cuts, defunding, and withdrawal from UN agencies^{lvii}.

The Pact for the Future was initiated partly because of the dysfunction of the UN system, as evidenced by the failure to meet the goals and targets of the Agenda 2030 plan, better known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In turn, the seventeen SDGs are intricately linked with philanthropic practices, including those of the private sector stakeholders^{lviii}. Specifically, Action 2 of the Pact deals with the provision of “sustainable, affordable, accessible and predictable development finance and effective means of implementation” of the SDGs (UN 2024). With the US commitments now untenable, it would be strategic for alternative sources to be considered. From a UN@80 perspective, several possibilities exist for African actors. One of them is the call for the relocation of some UN functions and agencies from expensive Global North headquarters to more cost-effective Global South locations. An early example is the relocation of UNICEF, UNFPA, and UN Women from New York to Nairobi, announced in 2025^{lix}. This suggests that the philanthropic mechanics and operations of these agencies could be rethought in the African country context.

Global North – Global South Shifts

The shock and awe of the Trump II administration’s foreign policy, and the multilateral shifts that followed, can be interpreted through balance-of-power lenses. As we saw in the introduction, the paradigm shifts in global affairs saw the rise of the West for centuries, but this began to unravel in the twenty-first century. Jeffrey Sachs’s global disruptions thesis discussed above signifies the factors of friction in the power contest between North America, Western Europe, and the rest of the world, particularly Asia and Latin America. These accelerating fissures have been conceptualized as Global South versus Global North formations. A caveat is that the Global South-Global North distinctions are contested^{lx}. It is easier to understand the ‘Global North’ because it denotes North America and Europe. It is more difficult to comprehend the Global South because it is often conflated with other references, such as emerging powers, emerging economies, middle powers, and the global majority, among others. It is sufficient for the current chapter to say that the Global South refers to the developing countries and regions geographically located in the southern hemisphere. Despite the imprecision of the term ‘Global South’, the current chapter finds its broad strokes useful for analyzing the link between philanthropy and geopolitics.

To a great extent, the “Make America Great Again” clarion call that undergirds the America First Policy is the United States’ response to the rise of new global powers located in the supposed Global South countries and regions^{lxi}. Within the Global South, some countries are more powerful than others, speaking to the contradictory asymmetries. Broadly, the Global South powers, led by Brazil, India, and, significantly, China, compete with the Global North, led by the US, on about every global governance issue. Notably, the aforementioned countries, along with Russia and South Africa, are members of the BRICS, a major cog in the Global South wheel. Their ascendancy is indeed a key vector in the rise of Donald Trump as President of the US, determined to arrest the relative decline of the US and halt the rise of Global South powers^{lxii}. African nations have invited themselves into or been co-opted into the Global South formations in a manner that triggers retribution from the US. The case of the frosty relations between the US and South Africa is an example of the tightrope that African countries walk when they align with Global South powers, particularly China. At the time of this writing, there was a retributive legislative bill in the

US Congress issued in April 2025^{lxiii} aiming to punish South Africa for allying itself with Global South or countries perceived as America's foes.

In philanthropic terms, the rise of Global South powers has ignited a seismic shift that has shuffled donor-recipient relations. Philanthropy has equally been thrown into a spin, symbolized by the US' withdrawal from UN agencies and the ending of the world's largest foreign aid agency, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)^{lxiv}. Development assistance flows from the Global North to Africa, for instance, have reduced in relative terms, while those from Global South powers have been on a relative rise^{lxv}. Indeed, South-South cooperation frameworks have emerged in recent times, with development assistance circulating in the Global South as a key practice^{lxvi}. Given these developments, the US's retrenchment from development assistance has been seen as opening the door for further Global South cooperation in foreign aid.

From a political economy perspective^{lxvii}, Global North foreign aid was seen more as beneficial to the developed nations than to the developing nations of Africa, raising charges of the donor industry complex as a source of Africa's dependence on the North^{lxviii}. It has been argued that Africa's aid dependency is the bane of Africa's development as it threatens sustainable development, promotes mental lethargy, reproduces poverty and underdevelopment, undermines good governance, and facilitates resource exploitation^{lxix}. Quite interestingly, China has also been accused of exacerbating Africa's dependency on external funding, falling in the same criticism that has been leveled at the West^{lxx}.

Specifically, pundits have reasoned that China, the chief competitor to the US, would move in to fill the development gaps left by the US withdrawal^{lxxi}. The incongruous ramification is that some African countries have had to look to economic powers within the Global South as the new saviours to plug budget deficits^{lxxii}. Yet, as it became evident early in the aid cuts, China or any other Global South power wasn't going to fill the void due to the sheer heft of US foreign aid to Africa^{lxxiii}. At any rate, the impact of US foreign policy, particularly trade tariffs, is so widespread that even the Global South powers themselves are having to focus on domestic strategies. Moreover, the US may be in decline, but it remains a global power with several levers of influence and reprisal at its disposal. The threat of massive retribution from the US should the BRICS

countries proceed with plans for the de-dollarization of their trade transactions is a sobering example of the capacity of the US to flex its muscles.

Nonetheless, philanthropy from the Global South is attractive to African countries for various reasons. African leaders have, over the last two-plus decades, been cultivated to forge ties with some of the Global South powers for alternative, supplementary, and/or additional development funding^{lxxiv}. It provides room to maneuver diversification of development assistance sources at a time when such assistance from the Global North is unavailable. Notably, the US's reconfiguration of cooperative frameworks has not affected Africa alone. The US has pushed European countries to increase their contributions to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Relations with traditional US allies such as India and Japan have soured as a result of US trade tariffs. All these and more have had a knock-on effect on development assistance to Africa^{lxxv}. These countries have correspondingly reduced or suspended development assistance to Africa to focus on domestic and regional issues. For the European Union and the United Kingdom, the major focus is on military aid to Ukraine in its war with Russia^{lxxvi}. These developments not only drastically shifted the philanthropy-geopolitics landscape but have also become a major factor in the shifting global order.

The abbreviated conclusion from the foregoing discussion is manifold. While philanthropy from the Global South may nominally help African countries, it is clear that they are equally vulnerable to the effects of the America First policy. The fact that project funding from the Global South powers is not assured indicates that, at the very least, African countries should walk a tightrope, not ditching the Global North entirely. It is therefore more prudent for African countries to adopt an approach in which the core of their developmental strategies is homegrown solutions. This would include repositioning and revamping the African Union's humanitarian mechanisms, such as the African Risk Capacity, the Africa Centres for Disease Control (Africa CDC), the Humanitarian Policy Framework, the Special Emergency Assistance Fund for humanitarian relief, and the African Humanitarian Agency (AfHA)^{lxxvii}.

Conclusion: A Research Agenda

The sharp turn in US foreign policy on foreign aid has spun state-driven philanthropy on its head in an unprecedented way. This was evident in the introduction of this paper. The executive orders and actions discussed in the paper are, however, too many to be comprehended in one fell swoop. It would be more germane to drill down to the impact of each of the executive actions and their implications in Africa. Such an intellectual enterprise could pave the way for an understanding that moves from width (analysis of most or all assistance programs) to depth (focus on programs in the migration, health, humanitarian, and other programs). Such an approach could ultimately furnish more detailed comparative studies, thus providing nuanced multi-perspective viewpoints.

This exploratory essay has touched on various discussion points at the intersection of U.S. foreign policy and foreign aid as a form of state-based philanthropy. What are the further research issues that can be pursued? The US foreign policy-making is linked to foreign policy from the perspective of executive orders. This raises the question of the role of other arms of the U.S. Government, such as the judiciary, Congress, and non-state actors, in foreign policy-making that impacts U.S. aid in Africa. This is an important research issue because it cannot be assumed that the President wields all the foreign policy and foreign aid power.

This chapter has not done justice to the history of U.S. foreign policy and aid in Africa due to its exploratory thrust. It is feasible for a historical account to be undertaken. One pathway is to look at foreign policy and aid during all the U.S. presidencies. It has been pointed out that change and continuity are the hallmarks of U.S. foreign policy. Running a thread through the various presidencies can help identify the development assistance approaches and objectives, at least from the 1960s when USAID was launched, to 2025 when it was terminated. A related question would be what the African responses have been over the years up to the present foreign policy of disengagement, transaction at the bilateral level, and unilateralism? Related to this would be a comparative analysis of the U.S. and other global powers in terms of their foreign policies and consequences for state-based philanthropy.

The various layers of global shifts for the past nearly two centuries, from the colonial period to the present, have greatly influenced the norms of philanthropy in and toward Africa. Thought

leaders have suggested that the US foreign policy shift and its global ramifications present Africa with an opportunity to rethink philanthropy at both state and non-state levels. How to go about this is not straightforward. Delving into this can be potentially productive at the intellectual and strategic or pragmatic levels. The sea change in foreign policy and foreign aid provides an opportunity to reflect on the philosophical base of African philanthropy.

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