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**Africa-US relations in a world between
decomposition and reconstruction**

Interview with :

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1- How is the Africa/US partnership two years after the arrival of President Joe Biden in the White House?

The arrival of the 46th President of the United States of America, Joe Biden, in November 2020 at the White House, has brought about a rather positive evolution in the relationship between Africa and the United States. If I had to sum it up in a few words, I would say that US-Africa relations have experienced a new dynamic after an era marked by Trumpian anomalies. The relationship is calmer, certainly more assertive, and certainly more diverse, if not more convivial. President Joe Biden's team has been busy restoring the American image on several fronts, including foreign policy in Africa. There is thus a clear demarcation, a break with the previous administration. Nevertheless, one of the rare subjects where we can still see a kind of continuity from Donald Trump to Joe Biden is of course the clearly stated desire of these two Presidents to safeguard or better still, to extend the strategic influence of the United States in Africa. This is mainly to counter and anticipate the Chinese and Russian breakthrough on the continent, especially in a context where even the traditional allies on which the United States could rely, such as France and the United Kingdom, are losing more and more ground.

Despite President Biden's gestures of openness, the renewal of foreign relations focused on Africa that he is promoting, whether diplomatic, economic, commercial or security, still suffers somewhat from what Maya Kandel, head of the programme on the United States at the Institut de Recherches Stratégiques de l'École Militaire (IRSEM), has called "the dogmas of American strategy in Africa". According to her, these are the ideological, strategic and operational constraints that have plagued American policy in Africa since the 1990s, with varying degrees of constancy, until the early 2000s and beyond. Following her, other authors have argued that Africa was not considered a strategic priority for the United States. Therefore, they limited their ground presence there, through a discreet military and assistance presence, and advocated that "African solutions to African problems" be found.

The culmination of what could therefore be seen as a disembodied US policy in Africa was symbolised by the passage of the Republican Donald Trump to the White House. I do not think it is necessary to go back over the regrettable acts and remarks made by the latter, which unfortunately contributed to reinforcing doubts within the political class and the African populations on the real intentions of the United States in Africa.

Fortunately, Joe Biden's team is trying to change perceptions, while laying the groundwork for a new partnership with Africa. This explains, among other things, the fact that the second Africa-US Summit held in Washington is so well attended after the 2014 summit organised by Barack Obama, another Democrat.

I would like to remind you that this Summit, which is a privileged moment of exchange and contact between American and African actors working at very high levels of responsibility, both in the public and private sectors, is in reality the culmination of a policy of (re)conquest

and seduction of the African-American community and Africa, the outlines of which have already been visible since the 2020 presidential campaign led by the Biden camp.

Indeed, during this campaign, whose programme was "America is back", meaning that America is back, and intends to move the lines economically and politically, and especially to make its voice heard or rather prevail on the international scene, Joe Biden had expressed his desire to change the relationship between his country and Africa. Beyond the clichés and prejudices about Africa, which he did not adhere to because he had travelled there and thus had a better idea of the reality, he had built a real strategy to conquer the Afro-American community and the African diaspora. He had committed himself to eliminate anti-immigration restrictions against Muslim countries, including those in Africa (Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania), to revive and strengthen a programme for African youth, Yali (Young African Leaders Initiative), which had been set up by Barack Obama's team in 2010. And also, to mobilise the best skills to advise him on Africa. This is why in his team of advisers for the campaign, several members had already held high positions on and/or for the continent, both in diplomatic and security terms.

If we analyse his postures at the time, it becomes clear that Joe Biden's discourse was in line with that of his predecessors and *grosso modo* with the global objectives of the United States.

His foreign policy orientations, which followed in the footsteps of some of his predecessors, announced the colours of intense diplomatic activity to come. This was to take advantage of the foreign policy instruments that had proved their worth, to (re)position the United States at the forefront of the African scene.

If it is true that the creation in 2007 of the American Command for Africa, AFRICOM, had allowed the United States to play a leading role in military and security issues on the continent, it is more the flagship cooperation programmes put in place by his counterparts that Joe Biden intended to capitalise on. In this respect, we can mention the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) created in 1999 under President Bill Clinton; the Plan for Emergency Relief (PEPFAR) created in 2003 under the Bush administration and designed to promote access to health over several years with more than 15 billion dollars or the Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative established by President Barack Obama in 2009. With the support of Congress, Barack Obama was also able to launch the "Power Africa" initiative, a programme worth more than 7 billion dollars intended to develop the electrification of the continent and provide electricity to nearly 60 million homes.

In terms of alignment with overall US objectives in Africa, Joe Biden again seems to share, albeit, with a touch of originality, the key axes set out in 2012 by the Obama Administration, namely: strengthening local democratic institutions; supporting economic growth, trade and investment; advancing peace and security; and promoting "opportunity and development".

It is within the framework of these axes that the American Strategy for Africa has been articulated since Joe Biden took office. Before elaborating on the latter, I think it is interesting to say a word about the authoritative and symbolic gestures that Joe Biden has made, which

appear to be a form of recognition of both the importance and the potential of the African-American community and Africa.

At their inauguration ceremony in January 2020, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris chose the hit song "Destiny" by Nigerian singer Burna boy from the official playlist of 46 songs. Then, in February, one month after he arrived in the White House, Joe Biden chose to send a video message to African presidents on the eve of the 34th African Union (AU) Summit for his first address to an international body as President. He assured them that the United States is *“a partner in solidarity, support and mutual respect”* for Africa. On a purely bureaucratic level, Joe Biden has surrounded himself with people who know Africa and even the continent's children. For example, he appointed Linda Thomas Greenfield, a seasoned diplomat who has served in several African countries, as US Ambassador to the UN, with ministerial rank; Samantha Powers, Ambassador to the International Development Agency; and Dana Banks, a former diplomat in South Africa at the National Security Council. But perhaps the most notable appointments were those of Wally Adeyemo, 39 years, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, and Osaremen Okolo, 26 years, as advisor on President Biden's anti-Covid-19 team, both of Nigerian descent.

In addition to these managerial innovations, I can say that Joe Biden has consistently shown signs of a deep commitment to the continent. This also explains the diplomatic sweep of his staff in Africa. Whether it is Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee or Senior Director of the National Security Council for Africa Dana Banks. For example, Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. He also took part in high-level meetings, notably at the Algiers International Trade Fair in June 2022, during which the United States was in the spotlight, and in Morocco, during the 14^{ème} edition of the US-Africa Business Summit in July 2022, placed under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, and organised by the Moroccan Government, in partnership with the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA). This latest event, which had as its theme *“Building the Future Together”*, was attended by a large US government delegation, African ministers and decision-makers from leading US multinationals and the African business community. The event was attended by 1,500 officials, 80% of whom were from the private sector, six foreign ministers and more than twenty ministers representing different sectors and more than fifty African countries. More than 450 US companies attended and more than 5,000 business connections were made between public and private sector representatives.

In August 2022 in Pretoria, South Africa, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken outlined the main pillars of the US Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa during his speech at the University of Pretoria.

Unlike the December 2018 strategy implemented by the Trump administration, which was more selective and security-oriented, the new US strategy is based on the premise that *“sub-Saharan Africa is a major geopolitical force that has shaped our past, is shaping our present, and will shape our future”*. It highlights Africa's growing demographic importance,

its weight in the UN, and the diversity of its many natural resources and opportunities. For the next five years, the strategy will be based on four objectives, including: fostering open societies; delivering democratic and security dividends; working on post-pandemic recovery and economic opportunities, and supporting climate preservation and adaptation and a just energy transition. On observation, it appears that the calibration of this strategy has taken into account the continental priorities as set out in the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063. As a result, the implementation of US programmes dedicated to Africa, and particularly the US Africa Strategy, suggests that the new Africa-US partnership can have more concrete impacts that can accelerate the achievement of the continent's development goals. I note that over the past two years, much has changed. I note an increase in transformative projects.

To give just a few examples, the Prosper Africa initiative has resulted in 800 trade and investment agreements between the United States and African countries worth 50 billion dollars since 2019. The Millennium Challenge Corporation, the US development agency, has invested some €8.85 billion in 25 African countries since 2004. In the area of connectivity, thanks to US support and the collaboration of government and business, Mozambique has become the first African country to license SpaceX's Starlink technology. This technology uses satellites to provide Internet service, helping to increase access and reduce costs for people in rural areas of the country. Similarly, the US International Development Finance Corporation has invested nearly 300 million dollars in financing the development, construction and operation of data centres in Africa, including South Africa. A 600 million dollars contract was awarded for the construction of an undersea telecommunications cable that will stretch more than 17,000 kilometres - from Southeast Asia to the Middle East, through the Horn of Africa and Europe - to provide high-speed, reliable and secure connections for people on all continents.

In the area of food security, the United States has pledged through the Feed the Future initiative to invest 11 billion dollars over five years in 20 partner countries, including 16 in Africa. Another initiative launched with the collaboration of the United Arab Emirates should also help stimulate investment and innovation in climate-smart agriculture.

In health, PEPFAR, which has received more than 100 billion dollars in funding, has helped save the lives of an estimated 21 million people, facilitating the birth of five and a half million HIV-negative babies. To date, PEPFAR funds 70,000 clinics, 3,000 laboratories, 300,000 health workers and countless DREAMers, who help protect adolescent girls and young women from HIV.

In addition, during the coronal crisis, the United States had to provide more than 170 million doses of COVID vaccine to African countries free of charge. US funding was also committed to the construction of vaccine production facilities in Senegal. Also related to vaccines, the US National Institution of Allergy and Infectious Diseases has partnered with Afrigen, a South African organisation, to share technical expertise in the development of next-generation mRNA vaccines and treatments. To help African countries cope with climate change, the US is also providing support. In Ghana, for example, partnerships have led to the construction of the first hybrid solar-hydro power plant in West Africa. The plant will improve reliability,

reduce costs and eliminate more than 47,000 tonnes of emissions annually. Similarly, in Kenya, where 90 per cent of energy comes from renewable sources, US companies have invested 570 million dollars in off-grid energy markets and created 40,000 green jobs.

African youth are also at the heart of US programmes. The YALI network, which provides young African leaders with tools, resources, and virtual interaction, now has over 700,000 members, a number that is growing. Ultimately, this programme could help to substantially strengthen the critical thinking of the continent's youth.

2- What are the objectives and expectations of both parties regarding the upcoming Africa/US Summit?

The Africa-US Leaders' Summit, which opened on 13 December, is likely to mark a turning point in relations between the world's leading power and the continent. More than hope, it raises great expectations for both parties in the short and long term. I think that the fact that the United States is focusing its vision on “dialogue, respect for shared values or common values” is a position that is catching the attention of African leaders, even if it is still slow to materialise in practice. But already, I notice that the collaborative designs announced by the United States fit well with the priorities of the current African agenda influenced by internal challenges and external disturbances. Indeed, the US approach tends to strengthen ties with Africa by focusing on policies that can foster a new economic dynamic; strengthen US-Africa engagement on democracy and human rights; mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and future pandemics; strengthen regional and global health collaboration; promote food security; advance peace and security; respond to the climate crisis, and amplify ties with the diaspora.

The summit being held in Washington D.C., is therefore a multidisciplinary laboratory where governmental actors, civil society, diaspora communities and the private sector will have to devise the first formulas to be administered to perfect the renewal of the US-Africa relationship. In this regard, I note that the organisational format is indicative of the expectations and objectives pursued by the host country and the African partners. The thematic events organised during the three days allow us to see by whom and how the priorities should be addressed.

Let me therefore briefly go over what the programme provides. It will also make the objectives and expectations of both sides clearer. According to the programme agreed upon with the African parties, the Summit will last three days, during which a series of forums will be organised.

With this in mind, the first day included a forum for young African leaders and the diaspora; a civil society forum; a forum on peace, security and governance; a US-Africa civil space and trade forum; as well as sessions on climate, energy, education, health and the creative industry.

As one might expect, the choice of themes is not insignificant. The United States is well aware of the role that young people play in the transformation of Africa and the even greater role that they will play in the management of affairs, as well as the importance of the African diaspora present on American territory. Already considered the sixth region of the African Union, the African diaspora represents both a source of resources and wealth creation as well as a potential political counterweight. It is therefore understandable that one of the objectives of the United States is to capture the opportunities offered by the demographic and diasporic dividends from Africa. The interest of the US authorities in synergising African and American civil society actors is also in line with the pursuit of its objectives to increase its influence. Although it is described as the “voice of governance”, civil society is also a formidable resonant voice whose reach is growing in Africa, and above all, a privileged partner for implementing projects as close as possible to African communities. The proximity of civil society organisations to local actors has a great advantage. The issues they address, such as corruption, human rights violations, the empowerment of women and girls, etc., have often been appropriated by politicians. The impact of projects funded and/or implemented with US support should therefore not be underestimated. With regard to issues of peace, security and governance, the presence of certain American personalities on the first day, such as the Secretaries of State and Defence and the Administrator of the US Agency for International Development, also reflects a strong commitment to strengthening democratic institutions and governance, which for the United States have an impact on peace and long-term prosperity.

The second day of the Summit is scheduled to be devoted to the United States-Africa Business Forum (USABF). It will be hosted by the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Corporate Council on Africa, in partnership with the Prosper Africa initiative. As a follow-up to the Business Summit held at Marrakech in July 2022, the forum is intended to be a platform where African and American companies first and foremost, as well as state actors, financial organisations and job seekers, will be able to seize the best business and employment opportunities by signing contracts and networking.

Through this forum, the United States aims to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development across the continent, increase capital flows, and encourage the dynamic spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation that is prevalent throughout Africa. It is worth noting that the inclusion sought here is partly the result of a unanimous recommendation of the Marrakech Summit. They argued that accelerated economic development and prosperity can only be achieved through the combined efforts of governments, multilateral financial institutions, development finance institutions, sovereign wealth funds and private sector investors.

The third and final day will be reserved for the leaders. It is expected that President Biden will meet with the 50 or so Heads of State and Government who have made the trip, as well as with the Heads of Delegation and representatives of regional organisations who have been invited. During the official sequences, it can be assumed that President Biden will continue to advocate for the formation of a solid bloc between the United States and Africa to meet the most significant challenges of our time. It has already been announced that the US is

considering allocating an additional 50 billion dollars in funding to various sectors in Africa. Major policy decisions between the two partners are also expected. Much further away from the spotlight, it is to be expected that more sensitive issues will be discussed one-on-one or in a collegial manner. I am thinking here of Africa's quite legitimate demand to see the UN Security Council reformed. The latter initiative has the advantage of being supported by the United States, one of the most influential members of the Security Council. To this end, the African Union had to issue a declaration in 2005 where African nations collectively took a common position on Security Council reform. This was the Ezulwini Consensus, which outlined the form of equitable representation advocated by Africa in the Security Council: two permanent seats with veto power, as well as five non-permanent seats. The modalities for African Union membership of the G20 as suggested by the US could also be discussed. Similarly, African states could be encouraged to review their positions on the Russian-Ukrainian crisis given the stalemate in the conflict and the repercussions on the continent's economies, or even to (re)clarify the meaning of their close cooperation with China and Russia, two powers that the United States considers as adversaries, or even as a threat.

African states do not intend to be passive or to be dictated to. Especially on international issues, such as the situation in Ukraine, where the scale of aid and the billions of dollars of funding that are being rapidly mobilised may have offended some African leaders in the face of humanitarian and security challenges and disasters in Africa, but which do not receive as much political and media attention.

Despite the peaceful atmosphere with the United States and the existence of issues of common interest, such as the reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC) with the admission of African states as permanent members, the recognition of the weight of the African group in the UN, the promotion of full equality within the international system, or a better insertion in foreign capital markets, African states have particular objectives and expectations.

I believe it is important to recall that African states are well aware of their assets and the comparative advantages that these can constitute in their quest for development or relations with foreign partners. Africa has immense natural resources, a dynamic diaspora, extremely rapid economic and demographic growth in some places, the largest free trade area thanks to the FTAA, very varied and diversified ecosystems, and above all, it constitutes one of the largest regional electoral blocs of the United Nations. In this configuration, African objectives and expectations intersect in classic economic, political and security priority areas, and also in new ones, such as climate change.

On the economic front, Africa intends to propose strategies for directing US investment into sectors deemed to be priorities following the goals of Agenda 2063. It also expects the United States to be a trusted partner, more respectful of the win-win logic in business. So that there can be an evolution, even a revolution in US-African trade relations which remain very unbalanced to the detriment of Africa, despite the existence of successive programmes aimed at encouraging trade, such as AGOA and investment, such as the Trade Africa Initiative or Power Africa, and recently, the Trump Administration's Prosper Africa programme. African

private sector partners are also waiting for better support to penetrate the vast US market with fully African-made products.

In the political sphere, as I have already pointed out, the African states want to be able to secure the support of the United States to consolidate their place in the international system, in particular the UN system, obviously on reasonable terms. They will certainly be called upon to play the card of appeasement and to extol the virtues of dialogue in an attempt to curb the rivalry between the United States, China and Russia in Africa. African states, which have always advocated diversification of partnerships in strict compliance with their sovereignty and international norms, do not wish to find themselves on the front line, nor continue to suffer the harmful consequences of the fierce battle for influence between the great powers on the continent.

Given the current climate of instability and security volatility in Africa, it is likely that more discussions will be held on these issues. The United States has already acknowledged that it has a 'comprehensive', cross-departmental approach to security in Africa, integrating military, economic and political dimensions, and has adopted a strategy of building the capacity of African partners both through the funding of numerous assistance programmes to strengthen local security instruments and through the development of cooperation on the ground between US militaries and their continental counterparts. However, further engagement with African partners may be needed to sustain the progress made in the fight against maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, for example, and in the fight against radicalisation, violent extremism, and radical Islamism, which continues to gain ground from West to East Africa. With so many challenges, reforming AFRICOM's modes of intervention and increasing its financial, logistical and human resources becomes an urgent necessity. The desire to demobilise part of AFRICOM's troops, which was announced at one point, is thus becoming counter-indicated.

3- How do the China/US rivalry and the war in Ukraine affect relations between African countries and the US?

At the risk of repeating myself, I would like to reiterate that Africa is a 'stake zone', a strategic continental perimeter for the United States because of its potential, US economic and commercial interests, and above all, its desire to retain the lead as a major military and diplomatic power whose actions influence the international scene. From the point of view of powers such as China and Russia, Africa opens up a window of opportunity and possibility that is inconceivable to ignore. Since several countries on the continent were kept under the yoke of colonisation, close ties had been forged with Chinese and Russian agencies to facilitate Africa's emancipation. As time went on and new issues emerged, the relationship between the continent and these two countries deepened and diversified. Even today, the presence of China and Russia alongside Africa is still noticeable, whether in the development of natural resources, the construction of infrastructure, the granting of financing, training, assistance in matters of security, cultural exchanges or the defence of reciprocal interests in the international arena, etc. It is easy to see that this proximity is not appreciated by other

powers, which, like the United States, are unlikely to remain on the side-lines while the "game of the century" is being played in Africa. While it is true that reservations can be raised about the methods, penetration strategies and impacts of Chinese and Russian activities in Africa, just as they can for other powers such as the United States, the fact remains that the power clash taking place on the continent becomes more understandable when one uses the theoretical framework of realism in international relations, as developed by Hans Morgenthau and Raymond Aron. In foreign relations, realist theory recalls that states that are the main actors in international relations are driven by the desire to preserve their national interests, extend their influence and increase their power. Aron's realism also states that war and conflict are a natural extension of relations between states, which are competitive. The intense rivalry between the United States, China and Russia in the world, particularly in Africa, is therefore completely in line with this view.

Indeed, as researcher Aline Lebœuf pointed out, strategic competition against China and Russia is the only horizon for American defence in Africa, even if the latter remains committed to the fight against jihadists. Already at the time in December 2018, during the presentation of the White House's Africa strategy, Donald Trump's Security Adviser, John Bolton stated that the two priority objectives were: "countering the threat of radical Islamic terrorism and violent conflict" and "controlling or containing the Chinese and Russian presences" in Africa. As soon as he took office, Joe Biden followed suit and adopted as his diplomatic priority in Africa: "countering the growing influence of Russia and especially China". This posture was later reaffirmed in the US Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa in August 2022. In this strategy document, the United States denounces in a rather harsh tone the actions of its strategic adversaries on the continent, in the words of Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield, indicating that "China is acting as if in an arena to challenge the rules-based international order, advance its narrow commercial and geopolitical interests (...) and weaken the United States' relationship with African peoples and governments". While Russia is said to view the region as "a permissive environment for parastatal and private military companies, often creating instability for strategic and financial advantage", referring to the Wagner Group. Some observers believe that these accusations are somewhat exaggerated and that they are primarily strategies to undermine China's and Russia's reputation in Africa, and thus penalise their deployment. Still, the rivalries between these powers are not about to fade away.

As it turns out, the increase in Chinese and Russian influence on the continent is still ongoing, hence the US concerns. After a slowdown in the conduct of major projects such as the New Silk Roads project, China's mass financing is gradually starting to flow back into Africa. During the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which was held in Dakar on 28, 29 and 30 November, the Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs Wang Yi, on behalf of President Xi Jinping, announced new promises in this direction.

China has an edge over the US in several respects. According to a report entitled "The Three Issues That Will Make or Break the Prosper Africa Initiative" by Zainab Usman and Katie Auth, respective director and non-resident researcher in the Africa programme at the Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace, US trade with Africa has declined since 2009, when Beijing became the continent's largest trading partner at the expense of Washington, from a peak of 142 billion dollars in 2008 to just 64 billion dollars in 2021. US FDI in Africa in 2020 amounted to 47.5 billion dollars, or 5.2 per cent of global US investment. The same report also states that “the presence of US companies on the continent is not only lower than that of their Chinese counterparts but also, in some places, that of countries such as Turkey and India”.

However, I think if you look at it, it is more the concentration of Chinese funding in sectors deemed strategic, such as extractive resources (strategic metals and rare earth), infrastructure, ports, telecoms etc. that keeps the US and others Western powers on their toes.

The distrust of these powers is partly shared by Africans themselves. Insofar as certain practices are regularly decried, such as the lack of respect for human rights, little regard for the environment and repeated violations of national legislation. In the port sector, for example, a 2019 study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) argues that Chinese investment in this sector poses a threat both to “US influence” and to the “sovereignty” of African states. Several ports around the Gulf of Guinea in which China may have been an investor, builder or operator of facilities are in the firing line. Many fear that in addition to the commercial and geo-economic interest that these ports can provide, their control will one day provide a foothold for the Chinese navy. Although Beijing currently has only one military base on the continent, in Djibouti, according to The Intercept magazine, the United States, through AFRICOM, has at least 34 sites on African soil where more than 6,000 soldiers are deployed. Most of them are located in West Africa, the Horn of Africa and Libya.

As for Russia, the same grievances are reproached to it, with the only difference being that the Kremlin is more concerned with restoring security cooperation relations, which have lost momentum in some places. The Russians are advancing more in the security sector, with the provision of military equipment and technical assistance. Several African countries have signed cooperation agreements with them. These include, but are not limited to, Cameroon in April 2015 (an agreement that has since been updated), Ghana in June 2016, Gambia in September 2016, Guinea in April 2018, Sierra Leone in August 2018, DR Congo in May 2019, etc.

The updating of these cooperation agreements is seen by Russia's opponents as a way for Putin to put his country back in the running in Africa and retain its allies, while at the same time luring new supporters into Russia's diplomatic and strategic battles. It is this logic that may have justified the holding of the first Russia-Africa Summit in October 2019 and, more recently, the African tours of Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister. Russia's rapprochement with Africa has come under increased scrutiny since the involvement of Russian private military companies in military operations in Africa and in securing people and property, such as the Wagner Group active in Mali and the Central African Republic. Numerous observers and reports have accused the Wagner Group of abuses and systematic human rights violations, but the leaders of the countries in question have not accepted its involvement. Notwithstanding this, the issue that currently meets with the most resistance

from the US-led camp in African states is surely the latter's unwillingness or reluctance to condemn and retaliate against the hostilities between Russia and Ukraine. For my part, this refusal to take sanctions and openly take a stand for one side or the other must be understood as a desire on the part of the African states to bring the warring parties back to dialogue, to favour compromise and to engage in a peace process, rather than encouraging an escalation of violence and over-mediatization for the benefit of one side in the conflict, which could ultimately lead to an even more serious crisis. Africa is in a better position to convey the message of appeasement. It is the continent that is bearing the brunt of the consequences of the war in Ukraine through the disruption of supply chains and the soaring prices of raw materials and commodities.

You will therefore agree with me that all these tensions negatively affect the development of Africa and the daily lives of its people. Unfortunately, these tensions are also reflected in bilateral diplomatic and economic relations. I still remember the clash between the American and Chinese Ambassadors in Kinshasa (DRC), following the revelations about what was called the Chinese-Congolese contract of the century, about the conclusion of a mega-contract in 2008 concerning Congolese copper and cobalt, minerals that are highly prized by the major Chinese and American high-tech industries.

US-African relations are also affected by the competition that arises between these powers when it comes to endorsing the claims of one of them in international forums. The Ukrainian case illustrates this phenomenon.

In sum, the relationship between the United States and Africa, however privileged it may be at the moment, suffers from the instrumentalization of international disturbances by competing powers, and also from the counter-performances caused by rivalries that now embrace all sectors of activity. It is unlikely that the United States will let up in Africa, especially at such a pivotal time. However, the effectiveness of its external action remains conditioned by its domestic policy, the interventionism of the Senate and the House of Representatives, which have a say in the US President's budget.

4- What are the main axes and actors around which the partnership between Africa and the United States could be fundamentally renewed?

The advent of new forms of cooperation between the United States and Africa, more concerned with common priorities through what has been dubbed the 21st century partnership, requires a profound and cross-cutting redefinition of all that has been done to date. There are some innovative policies and projects that need to be retained, but they need to be updated and made more inclusive. I think it is not too much to point out here that Africa is the fastest-growing continent in the world. By 2030, the continent will be home to almost 1.7 billion people, one-fifth of the world's population. The high proportion of young people living there increases the opportunities, but also the challenges. The latter, which are superimposed

on global issues, concern simplified access to financing, maintaining a climate of peace that would sustain prosperity, taking better account of human rights and governance, developing infrastructure and the technological ecosystem, improving health and education conditions, strengthening standard-setting mechanisms and promoting more participatory multilateralism. In my view, if we want to have a chance to properly address the said challenges, we will have to involve public actors, multilateral organisations, the private sector, civil society, women and youth, as well as diaspora communities. Once this is agreed upon, it will become clearer to find practical ways to achieve common goals in economic, trade and investment relations, peace and security, democracy, food security, health and humanitarian issues, climate change, and even cross-cutting cooperation with the AU for example. If you don't mind, I would like to say a few words on each of these axes.

Imbalances in the US-Africa economic, trade and investment relationship remain despite the immense potential recognised by both partners. With the establishment of the 54-country African Continental Free Trade Area, Africa is poised to become the fifth-largest economic bloc in the world. This necessarily provides opportunities in terms of jobs, consumption, innovation and power to make a difference in a globalised economy. However, to date, several African regions individually are unable to compete or partner with some of the American behemoths. Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, accounts for only 2 per cent of world production and 3 per cent of world trade, even though it has 17 per cent of the world's population. This leads me to say that Africa's trade partnership with the US needs to be rethought, and reformed from top to bottom. I am among those who believe that this must begin with the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the most important preferential agreement linking African states to the United States.

The latter was once seen as a tool for economic transformation through exports but has so far had a mixed record with most African parties.

Indeed, in 2018, much of Africa's exports to the US were concentrated in extractive resources, with oil, gas and petroleum products accounting for 73 per cent of US imports from the region under the programme. While imports with the same tariffs on US resources were unthinkable. In addition, the eligibility of countries for AGOA is determined annually by the US government in a decision that cannot be appealed, which contributes to the unpredictability of the US market for African exporters. It must be said that US discretion in this area has often been detrimental to African parties, particularly when used for political purposes as a retaliatory measure against states at odds with Washington. This has been the case with Rwanda, Madagascar, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Cameroon etc.

With the end of the waiver granted by the WTO on 30th November 2015 to AGOA expiring on 30th September 2025, when the regime itself expires, and with the United States has indicated its willingness to see AGOA give way to multiple bilateral free trade agreements, I believe it is important for the African parties to “stand together and speak with one voice” to negotiate a single free trade agreement between the United States and Africa taken as a single entity. This is more in line with the commitments made by African states within the African Union.

That said, the partnership between Africa and the United States should be deepened in other high-value-added areas. For example, in the digital technology sector, including through e-commerce in the broadest sense, with a focus on technology transfer, and ensuring the protection of sensitive data. It should also take into account mutual needs and comparative advantages. Thus, business relations should be multiplied in the private sector, between members of the diaspora and the continent, the promoters of small and medium-sized enterprises, between operators of financial services, actors in the pharmaceutical industry, extractive companies, energy companies, construction companies for the construction of quality infrastructure.

It seems to me that the strengths of economic and commercial diplomacy are not sufficiently exploited by both partners. It would therefore be appropriate to strengthen the presence of foreign trade services on both sides. The latter could facilitate the multiplication of trade hubs specialising in American and African products.

Of course, all this will only be possible if the United States and African states commit themselves in good faith to removing certain obstacles, including bilateral and multilateral debt, whether public or private.

In terms of peace and security, it would probably be appropriate to evolve the indirect approach favoured by the United States and which continues to be experimented with through the light footprint concept. The latter, however effective it may be in quickly resolving complex situations on the ground, does not, however, adequately address the immediate and distant causes of the conflicts that arise. Radicalisation, whether of Islamic or non-Islamic origin and violent extremism, which give rise to conflicts, are the result of a deep-seated malaise that is combined with systemic structural deficiencies. These problems must therefore be addressed by focusing on prevention and meeting needs. It is interesting to know that the United States is investing in this area. As Bakary Sambe, Director of the Timbuktu Institute-African Center for Peace Studies (Dakar, Niamey), pointed out, the United States has the most advanced prevention programme in the Sahel. This is the “Partnership for Peace Project P4P” - developed by USAID - which accompanies the G5 Sahel and helps countries such as Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic and Niger to put in place policies to prevent violent extremism. In recent years, the programme has contributed to the development of strategies to prevent violent extremism. The United States has also funded the development of a regional guide for the prevention of violent extremism within the G5 Sahel. As a member of the Sahel Alliance, the United States also plans to build new partnerships with donors, the private sector, and the host government to strengthen development and reform initiatives in the Sahel, as well as to address growing insecurity in West Africa.

On the purely military aspects, I think the US should broaden its understanding of the notion of “key states”, for example, by expanding the list of countries (English, French and Portuguese-speaking) already involved in conflict resolution or not, and able to benefit from their experience and expertise during major events. I am referring to the largest joint military exercise (the international military exercise “African Lion”) which is usually co-organised by

Morocco, the host country since 2004. As General Townsend of AFRICOM explained, the primary objective of this exercise is to “improve the level of readiness and skills of the participating armies and to strengthen partnerships”. It consists of land, airborne, air and sea manoeuvres, CBRN (nuclear, radiological, biological and chemical) decontamination and medical and humanitarian assistance.

Finally, I must say that based on the recommendations of the Washington Democracy Summit in December 2021 and the feedback from the Peace, Security and Governance Forum on the first day of the Leaders' Summit There should be continued changes led by the United States and African states in the areas of strengthening democratic institutions and values, civilian management of military institutions, accountability and respect for human rights, and the involvement of women, youth and civil society in peacebuilding.

These last aspects are timely in a context where the assaults on peace in African countries, as well as in Ukraine, have serious consequences on the populations. Indeed, in addition to the fragility linked to the existence of several internal conflicts, the Russian-Ukrainian crisis has accentuated the food insecurity that reigns in certain African territories. Given the disasters that this entails, it is only right that the new modalities of cooperation between the United States and Africa should take a closer look at these problems. The US has initiated the Feed the Future programme, which has been dedicated to long-term improvements in food security for 15 years, particularly with partners across Africa. It has also announced an additional 215 million dollars for emergency food aid in Algeria, Cameroon, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Mauritania, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya, among other countries. In April 2022, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) agreed to provide more than 311 million dollars in additional humanitarian assistance to support vulnerable people in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin regions. The additional funding announced today will allow USAID partners to provide emergency food and nutrition assistance to more than 3.8 million people. But these amounts and one country's unilateral action will not build agricultural resilience over the long term. It is therefore desirable that African states and the United States mobilise other partners and multilateral institutions, such as the African Development Bank (AfDB), which has put in place a 1-billion-dollar plan to help 40 million African farmers use climate-resilient technologies and increase crop yields.

In the face of the pressure of climate change, it is no longer acceptable to skimp on the means and options available. COP27, which took place a few weeks ago in Egypt, reminded us to listen to our survival instincts and to work together to make, as President Joe Biden so aptly put it, “vital progress by the end of this decade” and have a chance to escape a fate together. However, I would like to remind you that even in this quest for survival each side must contribute. The United States accounts for about 4 per cent of the world's population and contributes about 11 per cent of global emissions, making it the second largest emitter after China. Meanwhile, sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for 17 per cent of the world's population, produces only 3 per cent of emissions. Even if the United States bears a greater responsibility, its African partners must be able to find ways to work together to lead the fight

for adaptation and to strengthen their resilience by using so-called clean energy as much as possible.

The last axis of consolidation of the US-Africa partnership that I feel it is important to mention is the strengthening of ties between the United States, the African Union and the sub-regional political and economic groupings. With the African Union in particular, I can only welcome the more cross-cutting cooperation announced following the eighth annual high-level dialogue between the United States and the African Union Commission, held in March 2022 in Washington. With AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat taking part in the leaders' summit, it is hoped that he will secure greater US support for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and a more meaningful commitment to the implementation of Agenda 2063 programmes and projects to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic development, and build regional value chains while boosting competitiveness and investment opportunities for mutual benefit.

5- At the bilateral level, isn't this Summit an opportunity to strengthen the ties between Cameroon and the United States?

Indeed, the participation of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Paul Biya, in the Leaders' Summit which has been held for the past two days in Washington, at the invitation of his American counterpart, shows a kind of alignment of views on essential issues that interest Cameroon and the United States. The symbolism of this trip is quite strong after a limitation of the movements of very high ranking officials abroad because of Covid-19. As I mentioned, President Joe Biden has a good knowledge of Africa and its emblematic leaders, including President Biya, who as you know both in Africa and in the rest of the world is highly regarded, and is appreciated for his experience and his balance. As soon as he took office in January 2021, President Biden showed signs of a particular interest in Cameroon, the leader of CEMAC, and in the evolution of its economic and socio-security situation. The appointment by the President of H.E. Christopher John Lamora as Ambassador of the United States of America to Cameroon on 19 April 2021 was a sign of his willingness to renew contact after almost three years (2017) when the post was held by an interim Chargé d'Affaires. By granting his confidence to His Excellency Lamora, the American authorities undoubtedly wanted to provide Yaounde with a trusted interlocutor, capable of understanding the context without being influenced by prejudices or by a certain propaganda, and especially able to exchange on the spot with trustworthy people. H.E. Christopher John Lamora, who is assuming this role, presented the Figurative Copy of his Letters of Credence to the Cameroonian Minister of External Relations, H.E. Lejeune Mbella Mbella, on 21 March 2022. He also happens to know Cameroon well having been posted there at the Consulate General in Douala between 1992 and 1993. Although not much time has passed, I can say that during the Biden era, the relationship between Cameroon and the United States is evolving positively. The two countries are valued partners. They have had diplomatic relations since 1957. It is therefore a very old privileged relationship that has been magnified several times by presidential visits and high-level personalities in both countries. To date, cooperation

between the two countries remains very dynamic. The United States is one of the countries where the Cameroonian diaspora is best represented.

On the occasion of an Africa-US Leaders' Summit, it was therefore logical that the President of the Republic was invited among other top African leaders. Since his arrival, President Paul Biya has been the object of great attention from the top American political and economic leaders. Already on the eve of the Summit's start on 12 December, he was invited to speak at a private roundtable discussion on the theme: *“How Finance Can Help Meet Africa's Pressing Challenges and Opportunities and Contribute to Solving Seemingly Unresolved Global Problems”*. The rather evocative theme of this meeting allowed him to give his reading and to propose sustainable solutions to the problems posed. After denouncing the evils that undermine the optimal use of finances, including the existence of a very restrictive legal and regulatory framework, the pledging of natural resources and an outdated orientation of official development assistance, President Paul Biya suggested that all stakeholders should agree to mobilise greater volumes of capital over the long term, that natural resources should be transformed where they are extracted, and that a local capital market should be set up to provide suitable tools for financing development in Africa.

On the first day of the Summit, on 13th December, President Paul Biya expressed what he felt was the way forward in space. This was during the Forum on Civil and Commercial Cooperation between the United States and Africa in the Space Sector. He noted that given the challenges posed by the mastery of technology to facilitate life in common, and also to ensure the future of humanity, a democratised use of space technology through satellite and digital tools constituted an opportunity from which the greatest number of people could benefit.

Since the third day of the Summit, which is being held today, is to be punctuated by more formal discussions between leaders on global and regional issues, there is no doubt that the President will give his opinion. But already, it can be expected that he will remain faithful to the positions and values shared by Cameroon, relating to the promotion of dialogue and the use of peaceful means to resolve disputes or the expression of active solidarity.

It is clear that apart from the global themes, President Paul Biya will dwell on the situation in Cameroon. In particular, in terms of security and the economy. In the first case, i.e. socio-security, I observe a considerable reduction in violence, even if armed groups remain active and dangerous, and humanitarian challenges remain urgent, whether in the North-West and South-West or the Far-North. No doubt the President will also appreciate the results obtained by the soft power of Cameroonian diplomacy, which only a few weeks ago made it possible to bring before the American justice system several individuals of Cameroonian origin accused of having illegally financed, acquired and transported arms to armed groups operating in Cameroon. A further step could be to advocate for the extradition of the individuals listed and for a more active search on US soil for others involved in these criminal acts. In addition, since the American authorities now have information that is more in line with the realities on the ground in Cameroon, discussions will probably be initiated to lead to the lifting of the sanctions imposed on the defence and security forces, particularly concerning the suspension

of training programmes for certain elite corps, the validation of contracts for military equipment, and the re-evaluation of military aid granted by the American administration to Cameroon.

In the economic domain, however, the advocacy should first of all focus on the reintegration of Cameroon into the AGOA preferential system from which it was suspended in 2019. Then, the Cameroonian delegation should, under the leadership of President Paul Biya, pursue negotiations on the effective opening of an American Trade and Investment Hub for Central Africa in Douala; the project to set up a showroom for agri-food products in Philadelphia in the USA, for which negotiations on financing are well underway; and finally, the project to reopen the Honorary Consulate of Cameroon in Houston.

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