



RE-ENERGIZING AMERICAN DIPLOMACY WITH AFRICA & COUNTERING THE LEFT'S CLIMATE COLONIALISM

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The Biden Administration has adopted a policy of supporting “green” energy alternatives in developing countries while actively discouraging almost all activities associated with the oil, gas, and coal industries.
2. Various African leaders have described the Biden Administration’s approach of denying access to reliable and affordable traditional energy as an effort to “crush” or “force poverty onto” Africa.
3. While the Biden Administration abdicates American energy leadership on the world stage, the Chinese communist regime is extending its influence in Africa through its web of state-owned or -affiliated companies. The Biden Administration’s use of taxpayer funds to bankroll the energy transition further assists the proliferation of Chinese-made solar panels around the world.
4. The Biden Administration’s refusal to engage with African governments on traditional energy projects limits the range of mutually beneficial opportunities to collaborate with African peers. This constitutes a “climate tax” on America’s commercial diplomacy and erodes the effect of hardworking taxpayer dollars.
5. The United States should return to a policy of supporting an all-of-the-above energy development strategy, whereby African countries are empowered to choose the type of energy that best suits their context and needs. This would facilitate further diplomatic cooperation on topics in the American national interest, as well as the rightsizing of humanitarian and development financial assistance.

INTRODUCTION

The United States is home to the most dynamic energy industry in the world. American natural gas and oil extraction are cleaner and more efficient than its international peers (Dunleavy, 2022), American nuclear technology is at the global forefront (Cho, 2019), and American researchers are pioneering a plethora of alternative energy sources (Givens, 2022). Despite this enormous potential, the Biden Administration has inflicted an energy crisis upon American businesses, families, and workers through its efforts to extinguish domestic energy production and decimate the traditional energy industry.

This war on reliable and affordable energy has not stopped at our shores. Historically, Congress and several presidential administrations—of differing parties—have recognized that rampant energy poverty in sub-Saharan Africa merits an “all-of-the-above” energy development strategy. Considering the desperate need for greater energy in Africa, the United States previously promoted the rapid adoption of almost all types of modern energy there. However, by rebuking this strategy, and despite a chorus of opposition from African leaders, the Biden Administration is pursuing a concerted campaign that would deny hundreds of millions of people across the African continent ready access to traditional, reliable, and affordable sources of energy.

By injecting parochial and niche political objectives into U.S. foreign policy, the Biden Administration is imposing a tax upon our country’s diplomacy and embracing a policy equivalent to climate colonialism (Ramachandran, 2021). The refusal to help African countries meet their energy priorities means that American humanitarian and developmental aid generates a lower impact because it cannot be used for projects that African leaders deem to be their most pressing priorities. Moreover, by near-exclusively providing support to “green” energy projects, the Biden Administration utilizes American taxpayer dollars to fund projects in Africa that rely upon Chinese-made components. Without closer humanitarian or business engagement, the United States’ ability to marshal the diplomatic support of partners on other international issues of importance to American national interests—such as ending the war in Ukraine or supporting the State of Israel—is diminished.

This report outlines the dire energy needs of sub-Saharan Africa and the Biden Administration’s decision to prioritize parochial politics over development. It subsequently tallies the cost of this misguided policy before proposing ways to correct the United States’ engagement with African counterparts on energy issues.

RECOGNIZING THE NEEDS OF AMERICAN PARTNERS

Approximately 10 percent of the global population lives without reliable electricity, including around half of the population of the African continent (Puliti, 2022). Due to the rising cost of electricity, the number of Africans living without electricity has increased in recent years (IRENA, 2021). In South Sudan—a country with a population roughly equivalent in size to the state of Ohio—only 7 percent of the population has access to electricity (IRENA, 2021). This need is reflected in the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals, which include the ambition of achieving “universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services” by 2030 (UN, n.d.). At the current rate, less than 60% of Sub-Saharan Africa will have access to electricity by 2030 (Valickova & Elms, 2021).

Access to electricity is crucial for African businesses and communities because its absence inhibits economic growth and development. A lack of reliable electricity hinders business productivity (Arnold et al., 2006), while a reliance upon backup generators can triple the cost of powering a business (Oseni, 2019). These costs are significant, particularly in the aggregate. The economic cost of rolling blackouts in South Africa, for example, is estimated to be between \$1.7 billion and \$6.8 billion per month (Public Servants Association, 2015).

The critical electricity needs that Africa faces undermine the case for insisting on an exclusive reliance on renewable sources of energy, rendering such an approach narrow-sighted. As the second largest and most populous continent, Africa and its energy needs are too diverse and nuanced for a simple one-size-fits-all approach. While renewable energy advocates have

eagerly claimed that renewable generation is now cheaper than fossil fuels, recent research has underscored how average costs of renewable generation can be manipulated by selectively excluding infrastructure costs (Timilsina, 2021) or the provision of artificially cheap financing (McPherson-Smith, 2021). Additionally, these headline costs rarely include the cost of energy storage technology across the grid that a reliance upon renewables demands for round-the-clock reliable electricity. The most advanced forms of renewable energy, such as wind and photovoltaic solar (PV), only produce electricity when the sun shines or the wind blows. Without a backup source to pick up the slack, a reliance on renewables would exchange one form of rolling blackouts for another.

Considering these costs and potential drawbacks, in recent years, various African leaders have voiced concerns about how an exclusive reliance on renewable energy would impede the continent's economic development. In August 2021, Nigeria's Vice President Yemi Osinbajo argued that affordable and reliable natural gas is crucial for poverty alleviation and that an international ban on financing fossil fuel projects would "crush Africa" (Osinbajo, 2021). Later, in August of that year, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni called on African countries to embrace an energy mix that puts their development goals first, warning that a reliance on solar and wind would "force poverty onto Africa" (Museveni, 2021). In May 2022, ten African governments issued a joint communiqué to endorse the use of natural gas as a transition fuel that can be replaced by renewables and green hydrogen—hydrogen produced solely through renewable-based electrolysis—but only if and when it is technically and financially feasible (Kigali Communiqué, 2022). Most recently, a prominent African philanthropic organization, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, described the comparative absence of energy access as "energy apartheid" and identified natural gas as "a key transition fuel to achieve the continent's development agendas" (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2022).

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S CLIMATE OBSESSION

Despite the clear demand for greater and more reliable electricity in developing countries, the Biden Administration has prioritized symbolism over constructive economic diplomacy. A week after taking office, President Joe Biden signed EO 14008, "Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad," which vowed to place climate change at the center of American foreign policy and national security. More specifically, EO 14008 calls on the Secretaries of State, Energy, and the Treasury to work together to end the "international financing of carbon-intensive fossil fuel-based energy while simultaneously advancing sustainable development and a green recovery" (White House, 2021). The administration's International Climate Finance Plan, released in April 2021, further clarified that President Biden would seek to use bilateral and multilateral fora to discourage other countries from financing fossil fuel projects.

The Biden Administration's shift towards an exclusive focus on renewable energy overturns a well-established, bipartisan recognition that the energy needs of sub-Saharan Africa are immediate and above the remit of virtue signaling. Indeed, per section 3 of the Electrify Africa Act of 2015, Congress explicitly resolved to "promote an all-of-the-above energy development strategy for sub-Saharan Africa that includes the use of oil, natural gas, coal, hydroelectric, wind, solar, and geothermal power" (Electrify Africa Act, 2015). These objectives are not a relic of a bygone era. Rather, President Barack Obama signed the bill into law in February 2016—while Joe Biden was Vice President and after the signing of the December 2015 Paris Climate Accord.

Rather than seeking to alleviate the needs of developing countries in Africa, the Biden administration has prioritized the approval and consensus of other developed countries. When phrased as a loose objective, the goal of eliminating public sector support for traditional energy sources has been endorsed by other wealthy countries—most notably in Europe. For example, a G7 joint communiqué in June 2021 vowed to end direct government support for unabated coal power projects, as well as for “carbon-intensive” fossil fuel energy projects around the world (White House, 2021). Without compelling international partners to follow suit, in August 2021, the Department of the Treasury announced that the United States would use multilateral development banks (MDBs) to categorically oppose all new oil and gas exploration and extraction (Treasury, 2021). Moreover, the new policy only supports natural gas transportation and refining projects in the world’s poorest countries when they can demonstrate the absence of technically or economically feasible so-called “clean” energy alternatives.

However, the Biden Administration has subsequently found fewer international partners willing to sign onto a firm deadline to end support for traditional energy projects. At the Glasgow COP 26 conference in November 2021, the Biden Administration spearheaded a joint statement that set the end of 2022 as a deadline for phasing out “new direct public support for the international unabated fossil fuel energy sector” (UNCCC, 2021). Japan, which had signed onto the G7 communiqué, refused to sign the Glasgow joint statement. Even the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which ceased to support upstream oil and gas investments in 2019, refused to be a party to the statement (World Bank, 2021).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, coupled with the Biden Administration’s campaign to stifle the American energy industry, has further distanced the Biden Administration’s international policies from the United States’ strategic interests. In an effort to reduce Germany’s reliance on Russian natural gas, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has recently sought to support the development of liquified natural gas projects in Senegal as a potential source for German energy needs (Rinke & Marsh, 2022). Similarly, the energy ministers of the G7—the majority of whom are net importers of traditional energy—have called on major oil producers to increase their production due to the war (Waket & Abnett, 2022). In late June, G7 leaders pivoted away from their climate focus to reiterate their call for greater fossil fuel production and to welcome public sector investment in natural gas infrastructure due to the “exceptional circumstances” of the war in Ukraine (G7, 2022). Despite this international U-turn, the Biden Administration remains committed to the suppression of domestic fossil fuel production and defiant in supporting policies that would deny the opportunity for economic development for African countries that do not already have mature energy industries.

COUNTING THE COSTS

Reflecting the compassion of the American people, the United States has long been a generous donor of international aid. Even when efforts have been made to right-size the federal aid budget in pursuit of efficiency, such as under the Trump Administration, the federal government has apportioned tens of billions of dollars each year for foreign engagement and assistance (OMB, 2020). The Biden Administration’s budget proposal for fiscal year 2023 sought to dramatically increase this spending, including more than \$11 billion for international climate finance alone (OMB, 2022). However, when international partners explicitly state that their preference is to replicate the reliable and cost-effective traditional energy sources that the United States relies upon, these billions upon billions of American taxpayer dollars are wasted upon second, third, and fourth tier priorities. American

humanitarian and development assistance is most effective when it meets the most pressing needs and objectives of its recipients. Selectively supporting the lower-tier priorities of African partners while overlooking their immediate requests for help undercuts the goodwill and compassion of that assistance. Put otherwise, the diplomatic rate of return on these funds is artificially diminished and constitutes a tax upon American diplomacy and international economic development. Considering this disconnect, it is little surprise that regional organizations are actively lobbying the Biden Administration for yet more funding (Pecquet, 2022).

By centering American diplomacy and engagement around niche interests and lower-tier priorities, the Biden Administration is creating a void on higher priority matters that paves a path for greater Chinese influence on the African continent. Despite a promise to end its support for international coal-powered projects in September 2021, Beijing remains intimately involved in a variety of traditional energy projects across Africa. For example, Chinese lenders have committed more than \$1 billion toward a domestic natural gas pipeline network in Nigeria that is currently under construction (Nyabiage, 2020). Similarly, the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation is expected to complete a \$7 billion oil pipeline across Niger and Benin in 2024 (Mutethya, 2020). Most recently, Chinese state-owned oil company Sinopec signed an oil and gas exploration deal with Algeria's Sonatrach for almost half a billion dollars in May 2022 (Xinhua, 2022).

The expansion of Chinese activities across the continent is not solely attributable to the Biden Administration's lack of engagement. Rather, the Chinese communist regime and its associated commercial entities work together to expand their influence in lucrative markets; state-owned or -affiliated companies tout immediate access to Beijing's finances, while Chinese lenders often mandate that Chinese companies, workers, and resources get priority in project contracts (Wong, 2019). Beyond their nominal price tag, the activities of the Chinese communist regime and its commercial entities impose a litany of ancillary costs upon African communities—including the importation of corruption, prolific environmental degradation, and Dickensian labor abuses (Tiffert & McPherson-Smith, 2022).

The Biden Administration's myopic focus on promoting renewable energy sources risks further enabling Beijing's influence to extend over the region's energy industry. The overwhelming majority of solar panel components are currently manufactured by Chinese firms (Wu, 2021). By encouraging African nations to rely upon renewable energy and its current supply chains, the Biden Administration uses American taxpayer funds to underwrite the expansion and reliance upon Chinese goods and services in Africa.

The Golomoti Solar Project in Malawi illustrates the pitfalls of this strategy. In 2013, the United States entered into a \$350 million development assistance program with Malawi. Part of that money was used to help to design energy procurement and tendering rules (MCC, 2020). In November 2018, an additional \$700,000 was awarded by the U.S. Trade and Development Agency to conduct a feasibility study for a large solar power project in the Golomoti region of the country. In 2021, it was revealed that a Chinese company would supply the key components for the project (Bellini, 2021). The project is expected to last for 20 years, providing Chinese manufacturers with a long-term market in the country. American taxpayer dollars primed and prepared an African market for Chinese manufacturers—that is the definition of America Last.

As was evident under the Trump Administration in 2017, when the U.S. government committed to advocating for American businesses in traditional energy industries, American

companies have successfully defied Beijing's efforts to dominate African markets corrosively (Wong, 2019). Conversely, by withholding American aid and multilateral resources from energy projects, as well as the powerful support of the U.S. government, the Biden Administration is facilitating the corruption-laden and abusive expansion of Chinese state-owned corporations in the developing world.

By inhibiting more profound and productive relations between the United States and African countries on energy issues, the Biden Administration also limits opportunities for joint diplomatic cooperation on other issues of American national consequence. Evidenced by their inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals and the recent, repeated comments by various African leaders, the topics of energy access and economic development are of primary importance to American partners on the continent. It thus defies reality to view these topics as unconnected or sequestered from the United States' broader diplomatic relations. Rather, productive cooperation on these issues can serve as an initial step towards greater cooperation on further issues.

More productive collaboration on energy issues could serve as a starting point to seek further consensus on a wider range of issues between the United States and African countries within international forums, such as the United Nations. The international response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine has proven an illustrative example. Twenty-six African countries refused to condemn the invasion at the UN General Assembly (Al Jazeera, 2022). More than 40 refused to vote in favor of suspending Russia from the UN Human Rights Council (UN, 2022). At least 20 refused to demand aid access to Ukraine (UN, 2022). In light of the United States' approximately \$54 billion in aid to Ukraine, these votes stand in direct conflict with the bipartisan objective of ending the war and its associated humanitarian suffering in Ukraine.

A lack of cooperation over the situation in Ukraine is just the latest example of disharmony between the diplomatic objectives of the United States and its African partners. For example, a significant number of African countries participate in the United Nations' diplomatic harassment of the State of Israel, which is America's closest ally in the Middle East (UN Watch, 2021). These votes within the UN General Assembly are at odds with the United States' pursuit of peace and security in the region and the Trump Administration's demonstrated pathway towards diplomatic normalization among Israel and its Arab counterparts. In a particularly illustrative example, a majority of African countries voted to criticize the Trump Administration's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel (Al Jazeera, 2017). On the day of the vote in the UN General Assembly, Palestinian officials warned that a religious war without boundaries might follow (UN, 2017). Rather, the Trump Administration subsequently facilitated an unprecedented parade of peace agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. While greater cooperation on energy issues in support of African economic development is no guarantee of diplomatic harmonization, it nonetheless remains a supremely consequential opportunity for mutually beneficial cooperation.

CORRECTING THE COURSE

The Biden Administration's efforts to center American foreign policy around a parochial domestic political issue constitutes a tax upon U.S. diplomacy by making it more burdensome for the U.S. to achieve its goals with foreign partners. By willfully ignoring the preferences and development objectives of African counterparts, the Biden Administration

is inhibiting the development of more productive relations while precluding opportunities for American businesses.

To revitalize energy diplomacy, the Biden Administration should adopt an “all-of-the-above energy development strategy,” as outlined in the bipartisan Electrify Africa Act of 2015. This strategy empowers African counterparts to decide which forms of energy generation best meet the needs of their circumstances. Moreover, it places economic development through the liberty of choice—a time-tested bedrock of American domestic and foreign policy—at the forefront of engagement with Africa while rejecting a policy equivalent to climate colonialism.

Recognizing the diversity of African nations and the diversity of their needs enables the United States to act as the partner of choice more efficiently in their pathway to development. A focus on meeting the needs of African counterparts reintroduces a results-based approach to alleviating energy poverty. American financial support should be right-sized and deployed with the objective of achieving the greatest impact in the most efficient manner. Prioritizing projects and initiatives that would generate the greatest impact and goodwill with partner nations allows the United States government to right-size its foreign assistance budget. Moreover, supporting and endorsing traditional energy projects would provide African counterparts with alternatives to energy generation that relies upon Chinese manufactured renewable energy components.

Among the world’s most technologically advanced, economically efficient, and closely scrutinized, American businesses can play a pivotal role in assisting African countries in reaching their energy objectives. Consequently, the Trump Administration sought to facilitate the international success of American enterprises in traditional energy industries in Africa. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, for example, was a prominent and visible advocate for American energy companies across the continent (US Dept. of Commerce, 2018). According to Secretary Ross, the signing of a multi-billion dollar oil refinery deal in Uganda in 2018, with the vocal support of the Commerce Department, “embodies what we can achieve when government acts as a facilitator, not just a regulator” (Sok, 2018). By contrast, as part of the Biden Administration’s efforts to extinguish American energy production, American companies have been labeled as price gougers by their own government (Woellert, 2021; Datoc, 2022). This approach limits the commercial opportunities for American businesses abroad while also ceding them to Chinese rivals. The success of law-abiding American businesses, workers, or entrepreneurs abroad, whether in traditional, renewable, or future energy activities, should always be the policy of the United States government.

A more productive and collaborative engagement between the United States and its African counterparts on energy issues can precipitate closer collaboration on broader, diplomatic issues. By recognizing the legitimate interests of African countries to pursue economic development and energy poverty alleviation, the United States can seek greater African support for initiatives in multilateral fora that advance the American national interest.

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