

## **Trump's African Gambit: Five Presidents, One Agenda and It Isn't Africa's**

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As President Trump hosts the leaders of **Gabon, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal** and **Mauritania** this week in Washington, make no mistake: there is no free lunch in this administration's 'America First' playbook. Behind the veneer of reciprocal prosperity lies a strategic gambit: a transactional show of soft power, leveraging both Africa's resource wealth and its complex migration-security flashpoints to position U.S. interests ahead of an intensifying US-China standoff.

President Donald Trump has not suddenly discovered a passion for African development. This is not a pivot to the continent, nor a recognition of Africa's emerging global voice. It is a calculated play: a low-risk, high-leverage move to secure political and economic wins on America's terms while keeping Africa divided and dependent.

These five countries though important, are not the continent's economic powerhouses, well apart from Senegal, *But what they do possess either in the ground or through geography is strategic capital. Gabon and Mauritania are mineral-rich, with vast deposits of manganese and iron. Liberia is endowed with gold, timber, and potential offshore oil. Senegal sits on newly discovered gas reserves and offers a rare example of political stability in West Africa. Guinea-Bissau, often overlooked, provides deepwater port access, a location increasingly relevant in maritime trade, and proximity to Brazil's expanding Atlantic interests. These are not coincidental details. They are the precise reasons these five were handpicked.*

Trump's return to the White House has brought back a foreign policy defined by deal-making, transactionalism, and a clear binary: you're either with America or with its adversaries. The invitation to these leaders is not an offer of friendship; rather, it's a demand for alignment. Washington wants to shore up influence in Africa without engaging the continent's more assertive voices. The message is clear: support U.S. priorities on critical minerals, China containment, migration control or risk being shut out of trade deals, investment flows, and diplomatic visibility.

The absence of Africa's heavyweights is glaring. Nigeria, Egypt, South Africa, Morocco, and Kenya all absent. These are nations either linked to the BRICS bloc or pursuing a foreign policy that favors non-alignment. Trump's team has little interest in being lectured by governments advocating multipolarism or defending African agency in the global financial system. Yet Africa now sits at a multilateral crossroads with the African Union newly inducted as a permanent member of the G20. That makes Trump's selective diplomacy even more troubling. By engaging selectively with only these states, he undercuts Africa's collective agency and the AU's authority. This piecemeal approach fosters division, not partnership, also speaks to a deeper issue: *the continued use of Africa as a geopolitical chessboard.*

These five presidents must not become pawns in that game. They risk legitimising a dynamic that sidelines Africa's regional institutions and weakens the collective bargaining power of the continent.

There is no “free lunch” with this administration. Every handshake in Washington comes with conditions implicit or otherwise.

But the burden to fix this imbalance doesn't rest solely on the U.S. These five leaders however they came to be selected now carry the responsibility to speak not only for their citizens but for the continent's interests. Their duty is not to flatter Trump. It is to engage him diplomatically but firmly on policies that imperil Africa's development trajectory.

One urgent example: Trump's proposal to introduce a federal tax on diaspora remittances. If implemented, this measure would threaten a critical financial lifeline. Africa receives over \$100 billion in remittances annually, surpassing total foreign direct investment and dwarfing development aid. These flows fund school fees, healthcare, housing, and entrepreneurship. With USAID budgets slashed under Trump's leadership, remittances are not merely complementary they are essential. Taxing them would amount to punishing African families for Washington's fiscal priorities.

The presidents must also resist any efforts to position them as geopolitical pawns in a new Cold War. Trump's team will likely seek verbal or symbolic support for U.S. positions against China and Russia. Africa must remain firm in its right to engage all global partners on its own terms. Economic non-alignment is not a betrayal it is a strategy for survival in an increasingly fragmented world.

Yet even in this tightly controlled forum, these leaders can reclaim the narrative. They should collectively and diplomatically push for five clear commitments from President Trump measures that would move the relationship from transactional to transformational:

- A public confirmation of Trump's participation in the upcoming G20 Summit in South Africa, where the African Union will for the first time engage as a permanent member. This would signal respect for the continent's multilateral voice and avoid reinforcing America's retreat from global cooperation.
- A reversal of any planned tax on diaspora remittances, recognizing their role in sustaining African economies amid growing external shocks and dwindling aid budgets.
- Binding agreements on critical mineral beneficiation, including joint ventures for value addition, local content rules, and technology transfers—ensuring Africa doesn't remain a source of raw materials in a green transition it won't benefit from.
- A reset of U.S.-Africa trade terms under a reformed AGOA, with expanded market access, streamlined rules of origin, and investment incentives for small and mid-sized African exporters—not just multinationals.

- Establishment of a standing U.S.-African Union Presidential Dialogue Platform, hosted annually by the AU, to centralize Africa's diplomatic engagement and prevent future circumventions of continental institutions.

This week's meeting is not a win for Africa unless it is used strategically. These presidents must see beyond the pageantry. They must channel the voices of African citizens, business communities, and youth who demand dignity, opportunity, and fairness in global affairs. If they succeed, they can transform what looks like a power play into a platform for reform. If they fail, they risk confirming the worst fears of a divided, directionless continent willing to barter long-term sovereignty for short-term visibility.

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