



Domino and Go in Africa

January 20, 2025 will be marked with a white or rather black stone for humanitarian aid and international solidarity. During his investiture, new US president, Donald Trump, signed a flurry of «executive order» that are as many declarations of war to the rest of the planet. There are no more allies or partners, only opponents who must submit or surrender. We can hardly compete with the American strike force. The operations of the US federal agency US Aid were suspended for three months in January. Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirmed the cancellation of 83% of contracts on 10 March 2025 without any serious evaluation. The 5,200 cancelled contracts would have been an unjustified and too costly expense for the United States; the 1,000 confirmed contracts must comply with the Make America Great Again (MAGA) ideology. American development aid is the first in the world with 72 billion dollars (in 2023) but it represents only 0.25% of their GDP (1).

The expected benefits for US public finances are therefore negligible and marginal. On the other hand, their consequences will be disastrous for the countries of the South, in particular the thousands of NGOs that benefited from this indispensable aid and which can hardly be replaced by private American foundations. The Bill Gates Foundation allocates \$2 billion to Health, \$6 billion to US Aid for large-scale public health programs, fighting AIDS and other epidemics. European countries do not have the means to take over, many have reduced their development aid. It should rise from 0.5% to 0.3% of GDP in the UK. After a significant increase (2017-2022), the French law of public finance has reduced it to 0.7% of GDP for 2025. The same trend can be observed throughout Europe, which is preparing to rearm in the face of other threats, particularly from Russia (2).

In the countries of the South, the end of US aid will result in considerable loss of life and a widening development gap. In Africa, the effects will be devastating for women's health and family planning, which has saved so many African women (who often died of complications during pregnancy). The most serious consequences will be geopolitical. USAid has been a formidable soft power weapon. Created in 1961 by the democratic president JF Kennedy, during the Cold War, it helped to counter the Soviet influence in southern countries in the midst of the independence wars that were regaining a national sovereignty lost during the European colonization (British, Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese...). American development assistance has always enjoyed bipartisan consensus. It has never been purely philanthropic. Republican US President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) summed up the strategy by saying "Trade, not aid". Democratic President Bill Clinton (1993-2001) took over the reins in 2000 with the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The objective was to reduce poverty and boost growth on the African continent.

A new chaotic and offensive phase seems to be emerging with the Trump administration "no trade, no aid". Following the dismantling of USAid, AGOA trade preferences could end in September 2025. They allowed some 30 African countries to export thousands of goods tax-free to the US market. With the obsession of President Trump to tackle the imbalances in the American trade balance with all its partners by threatening them with increasingly higher taxes

(25% with Mexico or Canada, 200% for some French products...), the threat is serious for African economies. Some of them had benefited from the AGOA agreement: the automobile industry in South Africa or the textile industry in Kenya.

The trade balance is in favor of Africans because they are too poor to buy manufactured goods from the Americans (4). On the other hand, US companies are very demanding of natural resources that Africa is richly endowed with. It has always been the focus of attention in many nations. In the 21st century, it has been the target of new forms of foreign interference. The Wagner paramilitary/mercenary organization that became Africa Corps in 2023 is directly managed by the Russian state services. Russia offers African governments a "regime survival program" in exchange for access to strategically important natural resources (5). The Russian regime is trying to change mining laws in West Africa to displace Western companies from a region of strategic importance. The Trump administration's rapprochement with President Putin in January 2025 could change the game. In a transactional approach to diplomacy developed by the new US team, a very personal conception of influence has evolved. It is no longer soft power nor smart power (6) but "threat and blackmail" power.

China, the region's main trading partner, has been engaged in a Sino-African relationship for 15 years now, in favor of Beijing, which is not for the good of African countries (7). The economic factor is one of the essential vectors of China's strategic deployment. The Chinese regime has developed an asymmetric and dependent relationship. It is also present in Africa for security reasons. Since the era of Mao Zedong, political ties have been woven to leverage against the West and promote their own normative model that involves the promotion of Chinese-dominated norms and standards and an economic and military presence.

"The abolition of USaid sends a shock wave to rethink development assistance" (1). It should push African countries to define "a much more effective national resource mobilization strategy". Several African heads of state (Kenya, Senegal, Rwanda or Ghana) have declared that the virtual elimination of US Aid is a short-term evil and a long-term good. Célestin Monga, a professor at Harvard University and former World Bank manager, stressed the low level of financial flows provided by USaid compared to the total flows generated in Africa.

If Africans do not take the initiative, foreign interests may prevail. They must be the strongest in an already advanced Go game where they did not have "the cards in hand" (8). They should stand ready- all games, and punches, are allowed.

Dr Bénédicte Halba runs a research institute (iriv), specializing in migration since 2003, publisher of a blog dedicated to migration since 2024 - <https://actions-migration.blogspot.com/>.

(1) Jean-Michel Bezat « Le développement : la vie après USaid », Le Monde, 18 mars 2025

(2) éditorial « La défense indispensable de l'aide internationale », le Monde, 28 février 2025

(3) Marie de Vergès « Les menaces de Trump sur l'Afrique », Le Monde, 21 mars 2025

(4) Cullen Hendrix economist at Peterson Institute, quoted by Marie de Vergès

(5) Joe Inwood & Jake Tacchi, " **Comment la Russie tente de redorer le blason de Wagner en Afrique** », 22 février 2024- <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/c161ykgvgy4o>

(6) Nye, Joseph S (2005) "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" publiée en 2004 dans la revue Public Affairs, New York puis « Soft Power - The Means To Success In World Politics- référence dans son article

(7) Emmanuel Véron, specializing in China, Foundation for Mediterranean Studies – mai 2024- <https://fmes-france.org/chine-afrique-une-relation-asymetrique-et-strategique-pour-pekini/>

(8) President Trump used this formula in his showdown with President Zelenski on February 28, 2025 at the White House