

News24.- 14.06.2023

Lenin Ndebele

US takes stock of relations in Africa ahead of leaders' peace mission to russia

США підбивають підсумки відносин в Африці напередодні миротворчої місії лідерів у росії

Президент США Джо Байден здійснить свою першу поїздку до Африки у другій половині 2023 р. Південна Африка і США не в злагоді через зв'язки Південної Африки з росією, і обидві країни ведуть жорсткі переговори з цього питання. Помічниця держсекретаря США у справах Африки М. Фі заявила, що Південна Африка має дотримуватись своєї політики неприєднання. Спеціальний представник президента США на саміті африканських лідерів Д. Карсон сказав, що США були найсильнішим партнером Африки в найважливіших галузях розвитку протягом останніх трьох чи чотирьох десятиліть. Одним із найбільших інтересів США в Африці є демократія. У другій половині 2023 року відбудуться вибори у Сьєрра-Леоні, Зімбабве, Габоні, Ліберії, Лівії, Мадагаскарі та Демократичній Республіці Конго. На саміті лідерів африканських країн США оголосили про надання 3,3 мільярдів рандів (165 млн дол.) на вибори.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/us-takes-stock-of-relations-in-africa-ahead-of-leaders-peace-mission-to-russia-20230614>

The US says it is having private conversations with South Africa over the latter's "potential security" partnership with Russia.

A top US diplomat says they should communicate better and more often with African citizens.

President Joe Biden is due in Africa later this year after some of his diplomats make second trips to Africa.

The geopolitical race between the US and allies China and Russia is as serious as ever, with the US taking stock of its engagement with Africa before Russia hosts African heads of state in St Petersburg in July.

South Africa and the US have been at loggerheads over the latter's ties with Russia, and the two countries are engaged in tough conversations around the matter.

"We share Congress' concerns about South Africa's potential security partnership with Russia.

"As you know, Russia is waging a brutal war against the people of Ukraine, and we're constantly working to cut off support and funding for [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's war machine and to undercut Russia's ability to carry out this conflict.

"As part of these efforts, we are strongly encouraging countries not to support Russia's war.

"I'm not going to get into the specifics of private conversations with the South Africans, but be sure that we are having these conversations," said the US National Security Council's senior director for African Affairs, Judd Devermont.

Pretoria is due to host the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) forum sometime this year, but US lawmakers are pushing for the summit to be moved because of Russo-South African ties.

Assistant US Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee said South Africa should stick to its non-alignment policy.

"We acknowledge and respect South Africa's long-standing policy of non-alignment, and it's our expectation that the South African government will adhere to that policy when dealing with this terrible conflict in Europe," she added.

Allegations South Africa loaded arms onto the Lady R, a sanctioned Russian ship that docked at Simon's Town Naval Base, present a major point of diplomatic fallout with the US.

The US is waiting for results from an investigation into the matter before making a decision that could affect engagements such as AGOA, which, according to Devermont, were guided by legal frameworks that could not be changed for anyone.

He said:

With respect to AGOA, we have a process every year where we revalidate AGOA membership. And the law is very clear on what we'll follow, and that won't change for South Africa. We'll go through the appropriate steps as we do every year as we look at AGOA eligibility.

Phee added the Lady R incident was a "legitimate concern" and because of it, they were having "an important dialogue with the government of South Africa" amid a multifaceted relationship, considering South Africa was one of the countries spearheading the dialogue initiative with Russia to stop the war in Ukraine.

The US Africa Leaders Summit's special presidential representative, Johnnie Carson, said for the US to have an edge ahead of its rivals in Africa, it had to communicate more and more openly with the continent.

"The US probably needs to communicate better and more often with the citizens of Africa about exactly what we're doing.

"The US has been Africa's strongest partner in the most important areas of development over the last three or four decades, and a lot of the very great and outstanding work that we do across the continent is not seen as visibly as some other things," he added.

China is the biggest source of foreign direct investment in Africa, with two-way trade with the continent in 2021 reaching about R5 trillion (US\$254 billion), which is almost twice the amount of American foreign direct investment in Africa.

With that reality, Carson said America's involvement in Africa was also important.

"Some of those things [American benefits to Africa] are not as flashy as a road or a railroad, but they're equally important, and probably more important in opening up opportunity and the ability of citizens and countries to move ahead economically into the future," he added.

Democracy

One of the biggest interests of the US in Africa is democracy.

This year alone, there have been elections in Benin for its National Assembly, the Senate in Cameroon, and presidential elections in Nigeria.

In the second half of the year, there are elections in Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Gabon, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At the US Africa Leaders Summit, the US unveiled about R3.3 billion (US\$165 million) for elections.

For Devermont, the Nigerian elections set the tone for what to expect ahead.

"The president [Joe Biden] sent a high-level delegation - in fact, the biggest delegation that he has sent in his administration to an election - to welcome President [Bola] Tinubu and to engage with the Nigerian people as they work to strengthen their democracy.

"So, throughout this year, we remain focused on not just elections but all of the parts of the process that strengthen democracies and show that this system delivers for people," he said.

US Africa Leaders Summit review

Biden will make his maiden trip to Africa in the second half of the year after some of his Cabinet or senior-level officials return to the continent.

In his appraisal of the US Africa Leaders Summit, Carson said in the first six months, they had surpassed expected targets.

"Over the past six months, I have been engaged in an effort to reach out to African leaders across the continent and to meet with all of the African diplomats in Washington, D.C. to determine how their leadership and how their countries viewed the summit.

"Without a doubt, the summit has been greatly appreciated by all of those who attended.

"The leaders are overwhelmingly pleased by what has happened. And we are pleased with the progress that has been made over the last six months in implementing the Biden administration's efforts," he added.

But unlike Russia and China, which have shown interest in holding their summits in Africa, the US wants to establish a pattern in Washington.

"It's important for us to be able to establish a regular pattern here at home, which I think we're trying very hard to do," Carson said.

The US' senior diplomats spoke to a select group of African journalists at an online press conference on Tuesday.