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## DONALD TRUMP'S RE-ELECTION: A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE UNITED STATES-AFRICA RELATIONSHIPS

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### Résumé

Cet article examine l'approche de la politique étrangère de Trump, caractérisée par une diplomatie transactionnelle et un engagement limité dans les institutions multilatérales. Il explore les répercussions potentielles de cette approche sur les relations entre les États-Unis et l'Afrique. Le président Trump est connu pour son positionnement "l'Amérique d'abord", qui privilégie les actions unilatérales au détriment de la coopération multilatérale. Sa réélection à la présidence des États-Unis pourrait profondément influencer la diplomatie africaine. Son approche pourrait réorienter la politique étrangère des États-Unis en Afrique, s'éloignant des efforts collaboratifs avec des partenaires internationaux et des organisations régionales pour aborder des problématiques telles que le terrorisme et l'instabilité politique. L'analyse se concentre sur l'Afrique en général, avec une attention particulière portée au Mali, confronté à des crises sécuritaires et à une instabilité politique persistantes. Elle examine également la réorientation de la politique étrangère malienne vers des puissances alternatives comme la Turquie, la Chine et la Russie. À cet égard, une approche qualitative est adoptée pour collecter, interpréter et analyser les données. Une attention particulière est accordée à l'analyse critique du discours, en s'appuyant sur la théorie du réalisme politique de Thucydide comme cadre méthodologique principal. Les résultats mettent en lumière l'importance d'une prospective stratégique dans la diplomatie malienne, ainsi que la nécessité pour les pays africains d'évaluer les risques potentiels liés à un second mandat de Donald Trump dans la redéfinition des trajectoires de leurs politiques étrangères.

**Mots clés : Amérique d'abord, changements géopolitiques, Donald Trump, relations américano-africaines, Mali.**

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### Abstract

This article examines Trump's foreign policy approach, characterized by the transactional diplomacy and limited engagement in multilateral institutions. It explores how Trump's approach may impact the United States-Africa relationships. President Trump is known for his "America First" stance, which prioritizes unilateral actions over multilateral cooperation. His re-election to the United States' presidency could profoundly impact African diplomacy. His approach could re-shift the United States' foreign policy in Africa away from collaborative efforts with international partners and the regional organizations in addressing regional issues like terrorism and political instability. The analysis focuses on Africa in general and specifically on Mali, grappling with the

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ongoing security crises and political instability. It considers the re-orientation of Mali's foreign policy toward alternative powers like Turkey, China, and Russia. In this regard, the qualitative approach is used to collect, interpret and analyze the data. Focus has also been on critical discourse analysis through the lens of Thucydides' Theory of Political Realism as a major methodological framework. As the results, the analysis highlights the importance of the strategic foresight in Mali's diplomacy, as well as the necessity for African countries to assess the potential risks of Donald Trump's second term in shaping their foreign policy trajectories.

**Key words : America First, Donald Trump, geopolitical shifts, Mali, US.-Africa relations.**

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## **Introduction**

In just a few weeks, the American presidential campaign has seen a series of twists worthy of the best TV dramas. President Trump was victim of assassination attempt, followed by the Republican Convention confirming the full "Trumpification" of the former Grand Old Party. James David Vance was nominated as running mate and heir to the former president. Joe Biden stepped aside in favor of Kamala Harris, the exciting launch of her campaign, and finally, the unexpected selection of Tim Walz, governor of Minnesota, as her running mate. With less than two months until the election, these developments and the polarization between both sides make it difficult to predict what the United States' foreign policy will look like in the coming years. The first uncertainty, of course, is the outcome of the presidential election itself in this new configuration, which may be decided, as in 2016, by just tens of thousands of votes in a handful of key swing states. The majority in the Senate, with a third of its seats up for election, and the House of Representatives is equally uncertain. As we know, Congress plays a significant role in shaping American foreign policy through its budgetary powers, approval of key appointments, and treaty ratifications. Donald Trump's victory would introduce a second layer of uncertainty regarding American foreign policy in the coming years, given his complete unpredictability, the inconsistency of his positions, and the contradictions within the new Republican doctrine on this matter. According to most commentators, a second term would likely be even more damaging than the first, as the president-elect would be better prepared and supported by a Republican Party wholly devoted to him. Nonetheless, it remains challenging to predict what the diplomacy of the world's foremost power might look like in the coming years under these circumstances.

During the first Donald Trump's presidency, the U.S.-Africa relations were significantly impacted by a series of key events and policies, particularly the reduction of foreign aid and a notable disengagement in diplomatic engagements. One major shift was the substantial decrease in foreign aid to the African nations. In 2018, Trump's administration proposed a budget that would slash the U.S. foreign aid by nearly thirty percent. This proposed reduction was part of a broader strategy to cut back on international spending and prioritize domestic issues. The decrease in aid impacted various programs, including those related to health, education, and development initiatives across the continent. According to Hudson (2018): "This reduction severely undermined critical humanitarian and developmental assistance, which had previously been a cornerstone of U.S.-Africa relations" (p. 45). This shift away from foreign aid was perceived by many African leaders as a sign of diminishing American commitment to the continent's development. Furthermore, Trump's presidency caused a decline in diplomatic commitment with the African countries. His administration's approach was characterized by a

significant reduction of high-level visits and multilateral engagements in contrast to the previous administrations. Its focus on bilateral trade deals and “America First” rhetoric often overshadowed longstanding diplomatic relationships. As Radelet (2019) notes: “Trump’s foreign policy was marked by a notable disengagement from traditional diplomatic platforms, including those involving African nations, resulting in a decrease in collaborative efforts on global issues” (p. 102). This diplomatic disengagement, coupled with the aid reductions, contributed to the perception of the United States retreating from its historically engaged role in African affairs. That stance altered the dynamics of the U.S.-Africa relations during this period.

The return of Donald Trump to the presidency is significant for African diplomacy in general, and Mali in particular because it could signal a shift back to a more transactional and less engaged approach to U.S.-Africa relations. During Trump’s first term, his administration’s approach to Africa was marked by a lack of clear strategy and priority. His policies towards Africa were largely characterized by neglect and a transactional outlook that emphasized competition with China and Russia over genuine engagement with some African states. This outlook was evident in actions such as the reduction of the U.S. foreign aid and a marked absence of diplomatic visits to the continent. Trump’s new term could reignite these trends, potentially undermining years of diplomatic efforts aimed at fostering mutually beneficial partnerships between the U.S.A and the African nations. This shift might result in diminished U.S. influence on the continent, leaving space for other global powers to strengthen their foothold. Additionally, his new term could also affect the perception of the U.S.A in Africa, particularly in the context of human rights and democratic governance. During his tenure, President Trump was criticized for his remarks and policies that were perceived as dismissive or even derogatory towards the African nations. For example, his rhetoric and policies often undermined the moral authority of the U.S. to advocate for the democratic values and human rights in Africa. Trump’s leadership style could weaken the diplomatic relations that prioritize these values, making it more challenging for the African nations to align with U.S. policies that appear inconsistent or self-serving.

The research problem of the present article revolves around how Trump’s re-election could reshape the geopolitical dynamics in Africa in general, and in Mali in particular, influencing political, economic, diplomatic, and security relationships between the United States and African nations. The objective is to uncover the potential challenges, opportunities, and consequences for Africa under a continuation of Trump’s policies. The research question formulated is the following: How would Donald Trump’s re-election impact the United States-Africa relationships in terms of political, economic, and diplomatic engagements? The hypothesis formulated is that Donald Trump’s re-election will exacerbate the decline in the U.S.-Africa relationships, leading to reduced developmental aid, increased economic unilateralism, and major changes in Africa’s geopolitical alliances towards other global powers such as China and Russia. The approach used is qualitative as methodology with a critical discourse analysis through the lens of Thucydides’ Theory of Political Realism. This theory provides a lens to explore the United States’ strategic interests in Africa, emphasizing power and national interest as the driving forces of Trump’s foreign policy. The article is structured into five parts. The first part makes an overview of President Trump’s foreign policy doctrine

also called “Trumpism”. The second part is devoted to the analysis of the diplomatic reactions and strategic adjustments by African Nations to Trump’s diplomatic approach towards Africa. The third part examines the strategic importance of Mali in Africa and U.S. Foreign Policy. The fourth part focuses on the stakes of Donald Trump’s new term. The fifth and last part investigates the strategic options for Mali and African diplomacy.

## **1-Overview of Trump's Foreign Policy Doctrine**

The slogan “Make America Great Again” could manifest as a “primacist” version inspired from Ronald Reagan aimed at maintaining U.S. military and technological supremacy globally. It could also manifest as a neo-isolationist version advocating for a withdrawal from distant operations in favor of domestic priorities. The “America First” policy, prominently advocated by the former American President, Donald Trump, has had significant implications for global diplomacy, reshaping America’s role on the international stage and altering its relationships with key allies and adversaries. This policy emphasizes the priority of American economic and political interests above global commitments, often at the expense of multilateral cooperation and traditional diplomatic practices. According to Drezner (2019): “‘America First’ reflects a transactional approach to foreign policy that dismisses long-standing alliances and emphasizes immediate, tangible benefits to the United States” (p. 3). By shifting focus away from cooperative international agreements, such as the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran Nuclear Deal, and toward bilateral negotiations that favor the U.S. interests, the policy has generated a sense of unpredictability and unilateralism in the American foreign relations. This shift has led to strained relationships with the NATO allies and created a vacuum of leadership in global governance, which adversarial powers, particularly China and Russia, have sought to exploit.

Moreover, the “America First” doctrine has profound implications for the global diplomatic landscape. It has particularly impacted the international institutions and global norms. The policy’s emphasis on sovereignty and national interests has fueled a rise in nationalist sentiments worldwide, encouraging other countries to adopt similarly inward-looking stances. As Mearsheimer (2018) notes: “The resurgence of nationalism and great-power rivalry is partly a response to the retreat of American leadership and the decline of its commitment to a liberal international order” (p. 32). This retreat has weakened the influence of multilateral institutions like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, undermining efforts to address transnational challenges such as climate change, global health crises, and the international security threats. The erosion of the cooperative frameworks under the “America First” policy underscores the complexities and potential dangers of an increasingly fragmented and competitive global order. In this context, diplomatic efforts are more likely to be characterized by conflict and division than by collaboration and consensus.

During Donald Trump's administration, there was a notable shift from multilateral agreements to a preference for bilateral transactions in the United States foreign policy. This approach was guided by his “America First” doctrine, which prioritized direct negotiations with individual countries over broader, multilateral agreements involving multiple nations. Trump’s administration viewed bilateral deals as more advantageous, believing they allowed the United States of America to leverage its economic and political power more effectively. According to

Trump's former National Security Advisor, Bolton (2020): “Trump often expressed skepticism about multilateral agreements, viewing them as restrictive and less beneficial for the United States” (p. 213). This approach marked a significant departure from the post-World War II era, where multilateralism was seen as a means to foster international cooperation and stability. The emphasis on bilateralism was evident in several key policy decisions. For example, his administration withdrew from multilateral agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Paris Climate Accord, favoring instead direct negotiations with countries on trade and environmental policies. Trump's strategy was to dismantle existing multilateral frameworks that he perceived as disadvantageous to U.S. interests and replace them with bilateral agreements. This shift was rooted in a belief that multilateral deals often involved compromises that diluted the United States influence whereas bilateral agreements provided clearer advantages and stronger negotiating positions. This approach could undermine global governance and lead to increased geopolitical tensions, as it often sidelined international institutions and long-standing alliances in favor of more transactional and unpredictable foreign relations.

## **2-Diplomatic Reactions and Strategic Adjustments by African Nations**

During Trump’s first term as the President of the United States of America, there were significant shifts in alliances, partnerships, and strategies both domestically and internationally. On the domestic front, Trump’s strategy involved forging alliances with non-traditional political groups and leveraging social media to bypass conventional media outlets. His administration focused on reshaping the Republican Party’s grassroots, appealing to disaffected white working-class voters, and adopting a populist rhetoric that resonated with those who felt they were left behind by the globalization and technological change. The shift in strategy was evident in the administration’s immigration policies, which emphasized border security and reduced legal immigration—a stark contrast to the previous bipartisan support for comprehensive immigration reform. Trump’s ability to galvanize a coalition of cultural conservatives and economic populists represented a profound realignment of the American politics, challenging the established norms and reshaping the political landscape. Additionally, his use of social media as a direct communication tool enabled him to mobilize his base effectively while circumventing traditional media channels, further reinforcing his unconventional approach to governance.

Internationally, one of the most notable changes was Trump’s approach to longstanding alliances, particularly with the NATO and the European Union. He openly criticized the NATO members for not meeting their defense spending obligations, suggesting that the United States of America might not honor the alliance’s mutual defense clause if these conditions were not met. This approach marked a departure from the post-World War II consensus on collective security, where the United States played a leading role in ensuring the European stability through the NATO. It also suggested a reorientation of the United States foreign policy towards a more isolationist stance, prioritizing national sovereignty over international cooperation and traditional alliances.

The response of some African countries, such as Mali, to Trump’s policies was shaped largely by the administration’s controversial rhetoric and actions, which often diverged from

the traditional diplomatic norms. Under President Trump's administration, the United States of America adopted a more transactional approach to foreign policy, which included tightened immigration policies. President Trump's stance was perceived as a lack of engagement with the African continent. Mali, alongside other African nations, was concerned by his moves, because they also impacted security and economic aid. For instance, President Trump's went far by calling African nations "shithole countries". His derogatory remark about Africans sparked outrage and were widely condemned across the continent. Therefore, the Malian government, like many other countries such as Ghana, South Africa, Botswana, Nigeria, Senegal, and the African Union, responded by reaffirming their sovereignty and commitment to partnerships that respect mutual interests and dignity. Such diplomatic reactions were indicative of a broader continental sentiment that sought to assert Africa's place in the global order as a partner rather than a subordinate continent.

Furthermore, many African countries, including Mali, Namibia, and Senegal actively sought to diversify their international partnerships in response to the perceived unpredictability of the Trump's administration. These diplomatic reactions and diversification of strategic partners were partly a strategic maneuver to reduce dependency on the Western nations and in particular the United States' aid and to strengthen the economic and political ties with other global powers such as China, Russia, and the European Union. In Mali, where the security situation has been precarious due to the ongoing conflicts with terrorist groups, President Trump's policies, which included a proposed reduction in the United States' support for the United Nations peacekeeping missions, were met with apprehension. The Malian response highlighted the importance of international cooperation in maintaining the regional stability. Our government, through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasized that multilateral efforts remain crucial for peace and development in the region, signaling a preference for inclusive global engagement over isolationist tendencies. These reactions underscore how President Trump's policies prompted a recalibration of the diplomatic and strategic approaches among the African nations, seeking to safeguard their interests amidst shifting global dynamics.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has become a significant source of infrastructure investment and development assistance for many African countries. Unlike the Western aid, which often comes with stringent conditions related to governance reforms, human rights, and economic policy adjustments, Chinese investments through the BRI are typically presented as "no strings attached." This approach is particularly attractive to the African nations seeking to build infrastructures like roads, railways, and ports without having to navigate the complex and often politically charged requirements associated with the Western funding. According to Brautigam (2020): "[China's policy of non-interference has] allowed for a pragmatic relationship focused on mutual economic benefits" (p. 152). The BRI offers African governments an alternative model of development partnership, one that respects their sovereignty and aligns with their immediate economic needs. This model has resonated especially well in countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, and Nigeria, which have become key participants in the initiative.

Moreover, the BRI's appeal is amplified by the flexibility and speed with which China can mobilize financial resources and expertise, often outpacing the Western countries and

institutions in responding to the infrastructure needs of the African countries. As Alden and Large (2019) note: “The speed of decision-making and the scale of funding available from China contrasts sharply with the slow, bureaucratic processes of Western donors’ (p. 178). This swift mobilization is particularly crucial in contexts where infrastructure deficits are seen as major impediments to the economic growth and regional integration. Furthermore, the focus of Chinese investment on large-scale, visible infrastructure projects aligns with the political and developmental priorities of many African leaders who view these projects as vital for stimulating the economic activity, creating jobs, and improving connectivity. Consequently, the BRI has not only provided African countries with much-needed infrastructure but also positioned China as a key partner in Africa’s development trajectory, challenging the traditional Western dominance in the region.

Russia has significantly expanded its influence in Africa, particularly through military cooperation and arms deals. This influence is evident in countries within the Sahel region, such as Mali, where Russia is pursuing strategic partnerships to increase its geopolitical presence. According to Stronski (2022): “Russia has aggressively pursued arms sales and security cooperation agreements with African states, viewing them as a means to expand its influence on the continent” (p. 14). These agreements often include not only the sale of military equipment but also the deployment of Russian private military contractors, such as the Wagner Group, which has been active in Mali since 2021. The presence of these contractors has been a critical component of Russia’s strategy to offer security assistance to African governments facing insurgencies and internal conflicts, positioning itself as a reliable partner in contrast to the Western countries.

In the case of Mali, Russia’s engagement has been marked by a series of high-profile arms deals and military training programs. These deals have often been accompanied by political support for the local regimes that are increasingly disillusioned with Western partners, particularly France, due to its controversial counter-terrorism operations in the region. Russia's increasing military footprint in Mali through arms deals and military cooperation has not only helped to consolidate its influence but also to undermine the influence of Western powers in the Sahel. The Malian government's turn towards Russia, underscored by the acquisition of advanced weaponry and training from Russian forces, highlights a growing trend of African countries seeking diversified security partnerships that offer them greater leverage and independence in international affairs. This strategic shift demonstrates how Russia's influence in Africa is intricately linked to broader geopolitical dynamics and its ambition to challenge the Western dominance on the continent.

The diversification of partnerships in Africa has significantly reshaped the geopolitical landscape, diminishing the United States' relative influence while creating a more dynamic and competitive environment for the international engagement. This fact is primarily driven by the growing presence of emerging powers such as China, Russia, and India. These nations have increased their investments, trade, and diplomatic ties with African countries, seeking to leverage the continent's abundant natural resources, strategic locations, and expanding markets. As a result, African states have gained more leverage in their international relations, allowing them to negotiate more favorable terms and attract diversified sources of economic and political

support. This multipolar approach has enabled African nations to balance the interests of various global powers, fostering a more competitive atmosphere where no single entity, including the United States, holds a dominant influence. Consequently, this diversification has not only altered traditional power dynamics but has also encouraged African countries to pursue more autonomous and strategic foreign policies that reflect their interests and aspirations.

### **3- Strategic Importance of Mali in Africa and U.S. Foreign Policy**

Mali plays a pivotal role in West African security due to its strategic location in the Sahel region, a vast and often volatile area that stretches across the breadth of North Africa. The country's geographical positioning makes it a critical buffer zone between the more stable coastal countries of West Africa and the conflict-ridden regions further north and east. This location exposes Mali to a confluence of security challenges, including terrorism, illicit trafficking, and armed insurgencies, which have proliferated in the wake of the 2012 rebellion and subsequent instability. Mali's stability is vital not only for its national security, but also for the broader regional security architecture. Efforts to stabilize Mali, therefore, have significant implications for the security of the Sahel and West Africa at large, making the country a focal point for international counterterrorism efforts and regional cooperation initiatives aimed at curbing the spread of violent extremism and enhancing border security across the Sahel.

Mali has emerged as a critical focal point in global counter-terrorism efforts, particularly in relation to the activities of Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda. The country's vast, ungoverned spaces and porous borders make it a strategic location for these terrorist groups to operate, recruit, and launch attacks across West Africa. According to Thurston (2020): "Mali has become a battlefield in the global fight against terrorism, where the local struggles for power and resources intersect with the broader geopolitical agendas of international jihadist networks" (p. 212). The presence of both ISIS-affiliated groups, such as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Al-Qaeda's local branch, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), has transformed Mali into a key arena for counter-terrorism strategies. Efforts in Mali are not only aimed at disrupting the terrorist networks but also focus on stabilizing the country through military interventions and development initiatives that address the root causes of extremism, such as poverty and marginalization.

According to the American Department of State (2020):

In response to the terrorist threats, the United States of America has invested heavily in military assistance to support regional forces. Between 2013 and 2020, the U.S.A provided an estimated \$600 million in security assistance to the G5 Sahel Joint Force, which included Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania, aiming to enhance their capabilities in counterterrorism operations.

Moreover, the American Special Forces have provided extensive training to the Malian troops to strengthen their ability to combat terrorism, with joint military exercises like Flintlock, which have taken place annually in the region. These initiatives underscore Mali's importance in the broader efforts to stabilize the Sahel and curb the spread of violent extremism across West Africa.

Mali's geographic location, nestled at the crossroads of the major trans-Saharan trade routes, and its rich mineral resources have made it a focal point of international economic and strategic interest. The country's mineral wealth, particularly in gold, has been a cornerstone of its economy, contributing approximately 70% of its export revenues in recent years. According to the World Gold Council (2023): "In 2022 alone, Mali produced about 63.4 metric tons of gold, making it Africa's fourth-largest gold producer, ranking just behind larger producers like South Africa, Ghana, and Sudan"(p. 13). Additionally, its reserves of other resources such as oil, especially in the northern regions, hold significant untapped potential, attracting interest from global powers seeking to diversify their energy resources. This mineral wealth, combined with its proximity to both African and global trade corridors, has led to increased foreign investments, particularly from countries such as China, Russia and Australia, which have strategic interests in the region. As a result, Mali's economic and geopolitical significance has grown, despite the country facing political instability, underscoring its role as a valuable partner in both economic ventures and broader geopolitical initiatives. The U.S.A has recognized Mali's potential not only for its natural wealth but also for its geographical positioning as a crossroads between the North and the Sub-Saharan Africa, which makes it pivotal in maintaining regional stability and securing trade routes. Consequently, the economic potential of the country, driven by its natural resources, is not only significant for its national development but also for broader geopolitical strategies, including those of the United States of America.

The internal political dynamics of the country have been shaped by a complex interplay of ethnic tensions, military interventions, and insurgencies, which have contributed to its recent history of instability. Since gaining independence from France in 1960, Mali has experienced multiple coups d'état, the most notable occurring in 2012 and 2020, which have disrupted democratic governance and intensified internal conflicts. The 2012 coup, spurred by frustrations over the government's handling of a Tuareg rebellion in the North and the rapid advance of Islamist insurgents, exemplifies how internal political grievances can intersect with broader security challenges. The instability was further compounded by the proliferation of armed groups and the inability of successive governments to effectively govern the vast, remote regions, creating a fertile ground for insurgent activities and violent extremism. According to Thurston (2020): "Mali's problems are deeply rooted in a history of state fragility, characterized by weak governance and a fragmented political landscape that has often prioritized elite interests over national unity" (p. 47). This situation has been exacerbated by international interventions and peacekeeping efforts that, while aiming to stabilize the country, have sometimes led to unintended consequences, including bolstering certain factions or exacerbating local grievances. These dynamics illustrate the deep-seated challenges facing Mali, where the political instability, insurgency, and weak state capacity continue to undermine efforts toward peace and development.

#### **4- Stakes of Donald Trump's new Term**

The possible return to an "America First" approach, as seen during the first Trump administration, could significantly impact the U.S. foreign aid and military support to other

countries, prioritizing domestic interests over international commitments. This approach often emphasizes reducing the foreign aid and focusing military resources on direct threats to the U.S. security rather than on broader global stability or humanitarian efforts. To quote Nau (2021): “The ‘America First’ policy under Trump represented ‘a shift from the liberal internationalism of previous administrations to a more unilateral and transactional approach’” (p. 103). The shift could lead to decreased U.S. involvement in the international coalitions, reduced financial and logistical support for peacekeeping missions, and a scaling back of aid programs designed to address global poverty and health crises. Such a retraction from the international engagement could weaken the U.S. influence abroad and potentially create a power vacuum that rivals like China or Russia might fill. Furthermore, the implications of an “America First” stance could undermine the alliances and partnerships that have been central to the U.S. foreign policy since World War II, potentially destabilizing regions reliant on American support. Thus, while proponents of this policy argue for its focus on protecting the American jobs and reducing expenditures, the broader consequences for global security and the U.S. geopolitical strategy could be profound.

The recent changes in the U.S. support for counterterrorism efforts in Mali and the broader Sahel region reflect a shift in strategic priorities and a response to evolving security dynamics. The U.S.A has traditionally provided military assistance, training, and intelligence support to Sahelian countries, including Mali, to combat extremist groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). However, the recent political instability in the region, such as military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, has led to a reevaluation of the U.S. engagement. In response, the U.S. has scaled back certain forms of direct military support while emphasizing the importance of the regional cooperation, governance, and human rights. This recalibration includes reducing the footprint of the U.S. Special Forces and shifting towards diplomatic and development-focused strategies that aim to address the root causes of extremism, such as poverty, lack of education, and poor governance. Additionally, the U.S.A is increasingly coordinating with European allies, especially France, which has historically played a significant role in the Sahelian security, to ensure a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to counterterrorism in the region. This shift reflects a broader recognition that a solely military approach is insufficient to address the complex socio-political and economic factors that fuel instability and terrorism in the Sahel.

Mali and other African nations might realign diplomatically in response to the U.S. policy changes by diversifying their international partnerships and strengthening ties with other global powers, such as China, Russia, and regional alliances within Africa. As the U.S.A shifts its policy focus—potentially emphasizing human rights, democratic governance, or counterterrorism—Mali and similar countries may seek to balance their relationships with major powers to safeguard their national interests and avoid overreliance on any single country. This could involve increased cooperation with nations that offer alternative forms of economic and military aid without the stringent conditions often attached to the U.S. assistance. Such realignment would be a strategic maneuver to navigate the complexities of international politics and maintain sovereignty in decision-making amidst evolving global dynamics.

## 5. Strategic Options for Mali and African Diplomacy

To mitigate potential fallout from over-reliance on the United States of America, African countries, particularly Mali, can strategically strengthen their relations with non-U.S. partners. Engaging with alternative global powers, such as China and Russia, provides Mali with diverse economic, military, and diplomatic supports, thereby reducing its vulnerability to shifts in the U.S. foreign policy. As noted by Lumumba-Kasongo (2011): "African states must diversify their external relations to maximize benefits and minimize risks associated with over-dependence on any single foreign partner" (p. 56). By fostering stronger ties with these non-U.S. partners, Mali can access various forms of foreign direct investment, development aid, and technological transfers that support its national development goals. This approach aligns with the broader trend among the African nations to seek partnerships that do not come with the stringent political conditions often attached to the Western aid and cooperation agreements, allowing for more autonomous domestic policy-making.

Furthermore, strengthening relations with non-U.S. partners enables Mali to balance its geopolitical alignments and leverage international partnerships to its advantage. According to Alden and Large (2011), the engagement with a range of international actors "provides African states with greater leverage in international negotiations and enhances their strategic autonomy" (p. 22). For Mali, this means diversifying its diplomatic engagements to include countries with varying interests in the region, which can provide a buffer against potential economic or political coercion from more dominant partners like the U.S.A. By aligning itself with countries like China and Russia, Mali also gains access to alternative security assistance and infrastructure investment, crucial for maintaining the internal stability and fostering the economic growth. This diversified approach to international relations allows Mali to assert its sovereignty more effectively while navigating a complex global landscape characterized by competing interests and shifting alliances.

Leveraging Mali's strategic importance to attract foreign investments and security assistance has become a critical component of the country's foreign policy. Situated at the heart of the Sahel, the country holds a geostrategic position that is pivotal for the regional stability and counterterrorism efforts. As scholar Thurston (2020) argues: "Mali's geographic position makes it a valuable partner in the global fight against jihadism" (p. 118). This position has allowed Mali to attract significant international security assistance, particularly from powerful countries like Russia and Turkey, which view the Sahel as a key front in the battle against extremism. By capitalizing on its location, Mali has positioned itself as an indispensable partner for international actors seeking to curb the spread of terrorism across Africa. This strategic importance is not only relevant for security purposes but also opens doors for economic investments, particularly in sectors like mining, agriculture, and infrastructure, which are crucial for the country's development.

Furthermore, the current Malian military authorities are adeptly utilizing the country's strategic position to negotiate favorable terms for foreign investments. This approach has involved balancing the interests of various foreign powers, including China and Russia, which have shown growing interest in the region's natural resources and geopolitical landscape. By

fostering a competitive environment for investment, Mali aims to secure better deals that promote sustainable development while also enhancing its security infrastructure. This dual strategy of attracting both security assistance and economic investment ensures that the country remains a significant player in the geopolitics of West Africa, providing it with the necessary resources to tackle its internal challenges while also asserting its influence in regional affairs.

## **Conclusion**

The impact of Donald Trump's second election as president of the U.S. on global geopolitics could be significant, reflecting shifts that were apparent during his first term. In terms of U.S.-Africa diplomatic relations, this return could lead to a continuation of the transactional approach that characterized his first administration. Under his previous administration, there was a noticeable shift toward a more transactional approach to international relations, which often deprioritized African engagements in favor of direct, interest-based negotiations. His dismissive remarks about African countries caused tensions, which may further complicate diplomatic engagements. A renewed Trump presidency might see less focus on developmental aid, a key aspect of U.S.-Africa relations, and a reduced diplomatic engagement, potentially altering the dynamics of international partnerships. Such a shift could push Mali and other African nations to strengthen their alliances with non-Western powers like China and Russia, further complicating the geopolitical landscape in West Africa. The African nations, including Mali, can adopt several proactive measures to navigate potential diplomatic challenges effectively. These measures may include strengthening regional alliances through organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the AES, and expanding intra-African trade through frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). In addition to these measures, they may also foster stronger alliances among the African Union (A.U.) member states, and leverage regional strengths.

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