

The China-Russia-BRICS factor in South African-US bilateral relations

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Abstract

The bilateral relations between South Africa and the United States are at a crossroads. Since the apartheid era, these countries have gone through different stages of cooperation and periods of tension. Today, although they consider each other strategic partners, the two countries are facing increased diplomatic disagreements. These disagreements arise from South Africa's growing diplomatic alignment with China, Russia and Iran, which oppose US international policies, and its active involvement in the BRICS association. This paper argues that South Africa's cooperation with China, Russia, and other BRICS countries strongly affects the US's perception of the country and determines its policy towards South Africa. The paper maintains that the South Africa's case against Israel before the International Court of Justice and the passage of the Expropriation Act have strained its relations with the United States. This led to concerns regarding the future of bilateral trade agreements, such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The paper is framed around constructivist theory and uses a qualitative methodology based on secondary sources. It concludes that the China-Russia-BRICS factor is central to the current diplomatic tensions between South Africa and the United States, its strategic partner.

Keywords

South Africa, United States, bilateral relations, adversary, diplomatic tensions.

Introduction

Since the establishment of the first US consulate in Cape Town in 1799, the United States and South Africa have normalized their bilateral relations and formed a strategic partnership, under which cooperation has been strengthened and disagreements managed diplomatically. The US Department of State¹ (2025) describes South Africa as a strategic partner of the United States in global political and economic affairs. The US formally established diplomatic relations with South Africa in 1929. This led to the upgrading of interactions between the two countries from consular level to ambassadorial level, and the establishment of diplomatic missions throughout South Africa. After that, there was a period of robust bilateral engagement between the two countries until the 1970s, when the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act was passed in the US (1972). The Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act was introduced in response to the establishment of the apartheid system by the South African government in 1948. Apartheid was a brutally racist system of government that formalised economic and political oppression of the majority of non-white people in the country. The apartheid regime in South Africa sought to implement a policy based on racial discrimination, which provoked wide-spread international condemnation, including significant scrutiny from the US Congress.

Although the US was generally opposed to the apartheid system in South Africa, there was a resistance within the US government to the enactment of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act. The initial Act, which sought to cease any engagements between South Africa and the US in critical areas such as trade and investment and to ban travel to South Africa, was denied by the Congress on the vague grounds that the Act itself was invasive. The second attempt to introduce the Act was made by Democrats in the Senate in 1985. Again, this attempt failed as the then-President Ronald Reagan raised concerns about the Act, citing ambiguous foreign policy and diplomatic issues. As the blog published by the Anti-Apartheid Movements in North Texas (2024) explains, "Another act was reintroduced in 1985 by Democrats in the Senate. This attempt was also unsuccessful due to the apprehension of President Reagan, who noted that passing this act would interfere with his authority to pursue foreign policy." Because he prevented the passage of the Act, some people argued that the President of the United States was in support of the apartheid regime and its oppressive system, which was later characterised by the international community as a crime against humanity.

The above background shows that South African-American relations have not always been harmonious. In the recent decades, South Africa and the US have had their disagreements, including different voting patterns at the United Nations (UN) on a variety of issues of global importance. South Africa appears to have adopted a foreign policy seeking to maintain close ties with both the US and its perceived adversaries,

¹ Despite the ongoing challenges between South Africa and the US, the US's Department of State still describes South Africa as a strategic partner of the United States, with strong collaboration in the areas of health, education, environment, and digital economy.

such as China, Russia and Iran. As the former ambassador of the United Kingdom, Charles A. Ray, emphasised, "The relationship between the United States and South Africa has long been complex, influenced by factors such as apartheid, economic interests, and geopolitical strategies" (Ray, 2025: 3). It is no secret that while the US supported the cause against apartheid, it also had reservations and extended support to the apartheid government of South Africa. Ray (2025) notes that even South Africa's world-renowned leader, Nelson Mandela, was characterised as a terrorist by the US government and remained on its terrorist surveillance list until 2008. Despite this, the two countries have been able to compartmentalize their relations in situations where it was necessary and normalize them. For example, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), introduced by George W. Bush administration in 2000, has remained an important part of the US foreign policy towards African countries, including South Africa. AGOA provides enhanced access to the US market for South Africa and other eligible African countries.

However, the current diplomatic disputes between Washington and Pretoria suggest that the bilateral relationship between South Africa and the United States is at a critical point, as these disputes do not portend well for the future of the relationship. Under the leadership of the 45th and 47th President of the United States, Donald Trump, who has been aggressively pursuing nationalist and protectionist policies, the bilateral relations are deteriorating and the two countries are drifting apart. This paper attempts to answer the following questions: first, what has led to the deterioration of South Africa-US bilateral relations? Second, what may be the future of these relations? The paper adopts a qualitative conceptual approach and relies mainly on secondary data sources. Joining the ongoing discussion on South African-US relations, this paper aims to explore the factors that have led to the recent ups and downs in the bilateral relationship between the two countries. It argues that South Africa's close diplomatic engagement with the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) is one of the factors contributing to the deterioration of bilateral relations between South Africa and the United States. The paper also shows that South Africa's domestic and foreign policy affairs have largely driven its relations with the US to the current juncture.

Theoretical consideration

This paper is framed around constructivist theory. The constructivist approach has gradually evolved into one of the significant analytical frameworks in international relations, particularly for examining how and why states engage in global politics (Shoba & Mlambo, 2024). There is limited research that has explored South Africa-China relations and South Africa-US relations from the constructivist ideological perspectives (Otele, 2020; Kansaye, 2021; Matambo, 2020). Most studies on South Africa's relations with countries such as China, Russia, and the United States have analyzed these engagements through theoretical lenses of liberalism and realism

(Matambo, 2020; Shoba & Mlambo, 2024). These studies have primarily focused on what China or the United States gains from their engagement with South Africa and other African countries (Moyo, 2016; Shoba, 2023). Scholars such as Bond (2013), Moyo (2016), and Kansaye (2021) have invoked the concept of the “scramble for Africa” in analyzing South Africa’s relationships with its strategic partners in the world politics. The realist perspective, in particular, emphasizes the notion that states are self-interested actors driven by economic and geostrategic interests in international relations (Edel & Chan, 2018). For example, Shoba and Mlambo (2024), in their study on bilateral relations between China and South Africa, argue that anarchy characterizes world politics, and the states’ interactions with others are primarily based on their self-interest.

The constructivist theory highlights the importance of historical context in the relationship between states. South Africa has a long history of relations with the US, China, and Russia, which have been shaped by historical context, prevailing identities, and interests. It is important to note that material interests are not the only drivers of relations between states; this contrasts with the idea that egoism and anarchy are the main driving forces in global politics. The constructivist theory does not dismiss the effects of material forces in international relations; however, it emphasises that “the development of identities and interests is endogenous to social relations among actors” (Checkel, 1998: 324).

South Africa’s domestic and foreign policy issues are among the major factors contributing to the current state of its bilateral relations with the United States. Matters of national interest include both domestic and foreign policy issues. The concept of national interest is based on a state’s perception of the world around it and its pursuit of its policy goals in that world. (Kotze, 2024). States’ foreign policy is often determined by their national interests. As Wara and Gul (2025: 181) point out, foreign policy aims to achieve specific goals in the international arena. It can also be influenced by countries’ historical values and national identities, which have a significant impact on how they conduct their foreign policy.

South Africa has a history of colonialism and apartheid. It has already been mentioned that the United States had a hazy foreign policy stance towards apartheid, even though it ultimately supported the cause against it. At a global level, South Africa, influenced by its history and national identity, has adopted a stance against Israel. It has taken Israel to the International Court of Justice, accusing it of committing genocide in Gaza, which angered the United States, as Israel is a strategic ally of the US in world politics. The US government officials characterised the case brought by South Africa against Israel as “meritless, counterproductive and completely without any basis in fact whatsoever” (JNS, 2024). There were also calls from senior Congress members, such as Michael McCaul, for the US government to take a stronger policy position against the South Africa’s lawsuit against Israel. At a domestic level, the policy issue in South Africa that led to further deterioration of the relations between the two countries

was the passage of the Expropriation Bill by the South African government. The bill was intended to address some of the legacy of apartheid in South Africa connected with land-related issues. In the wake of the passage of this bill, Donald Trump signed an extraordinary executive order, titled "Addressing Egregious Actions of the Republic of South Africa". The order focused on two main points: first, the implementation of the Expropriation Act of 2024, and second, the lawsuit that South Africa had filed against Israel. According to the executive order,

...shocking disregard of its citizens' rights [when it] recently enacted the Expropriation Act 13 of 2024 to enable the government of South Africa to seize ethnic minority Afrikaners' agricultural property without compensation. This Act follows countless government policies designed to dismantle equal opportunity in employment, education, and business, and hateful rhetoric and government actions fuelling disproportionate violence against racially disfavoured landowners. In addition, South Africa has taken aggressive positions towards the United States and its allies, including accusing Israel, not Hamas, of genocide in the International Court of Justice, and reinvigorating its relations with Iran to develop commercial, military, and nuclear arrangements (Erasmus & Hartzenberg, 2025).

The above excerpt from the executive order confirms that the Expropriation Bill and the lawsuit against Israel are important matters for Washington, which have led to the current state of affairs in bilateral relations between South Africa and the United States. The country's links with Iran also played a role. The US government has repeatedly accused South Africa of re-establishing ties with Iran, which is one of its perceived adversaries in global politics. The order has serious implications for both South Africa and the US. Today, the US is South Africa's second-largest trading partner, after China. Since 2001, trade between the two countries has been growing mainly through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which was initially formed as a US foreign policy towards Africa aimed at leveraging African support for US interests.

The countries that have policies aligned with US national interests are eligible to participate in AGOA, but South Africa's domestic and foreign policy actions may imply that it has taken a position against the United States. Although South Africa has long pursued this strategy, maintaining relations with the United States and having strong ties with countries seen as adversaries to Washington, it appears that only now is the Donald Trump administration opposing this approach. South Africa may be excluded from the AGOA agreement, which the country has benefited from since 2001. The bilateral trade between South Africa and the US in goods totalled \$20.5 billion in 2024 (US Trade Representative, 2025). If South Africa were to be excluded from the AGOA program, \$20.5 billion worth of bilateral trade could be at risk. As a smaller economy compared to the United States, South Africa would be significantly affected by this decision. The US government has already announced its intention to impose tariffs on goods and services from South Africa entering the US market but the South African

government is trying to use diplomatic means to resolve the difficulties. It remains to be seen how the situation will unfold in the coming weeks and months. South Africa seems to be attempting to strike a balance between its ties with countries that are not aligned with the United States and its trade relations with the US.

The China Factor and South Africa-US relations

The United States was, at some stage, South Africa's largest trade and strategic partner. However, things changed in 2008/2009 when China overtook the US and its European allies to become South Africa's largest trading partner, and South Africa itself became China's biggest trading partner and most significant ally in Africa. The bilateral relations between South Africa and China have grown in all areas of their cooperation, driven by shared history, common values and national identities (Shoba & Mlambo, 2024). They have also been influenced by complementary economic, social, and political needs and interests, as well as policies under the Framework for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and other strategic partnerships. South Africa remains committed to its foreign policy of hedging, which has led to closer developmental ties with both China and the United States. South Africa has consistently maintained its position that its foreign policy and actions in global affairs are guided by the fundamental principles of non-alignment and a commitment to upholding the values of multilateralism. However, South Africa has also continued to strengthen its economic, social and political ties with China. Figure 1 compares the trade between the US and Africa from 2002 to 2018 with the trade between China and Africa during the same period. Additionally, Figure 2 presents the corresponding data on US-Africa imports and exports from 2002 to 2018, and Figure 3 shows the same data for the same timeframe.



Figure 1. US-Africa trade vs China-Africa trade (US billion). *Source:* China-Africa Research Initiative (2020); Shoba & Mlambo (2024).

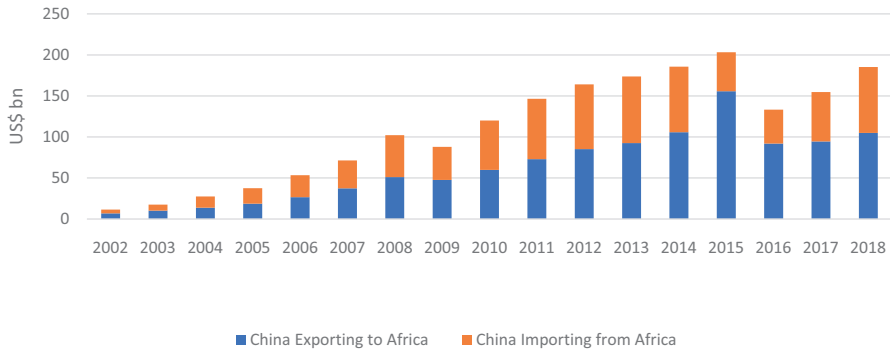


Figure 2. Composition of China-Africa export and import (2002–2018). *Source:* China-Africa Research Initiative (2020); Shoba & Mlambo (2024)

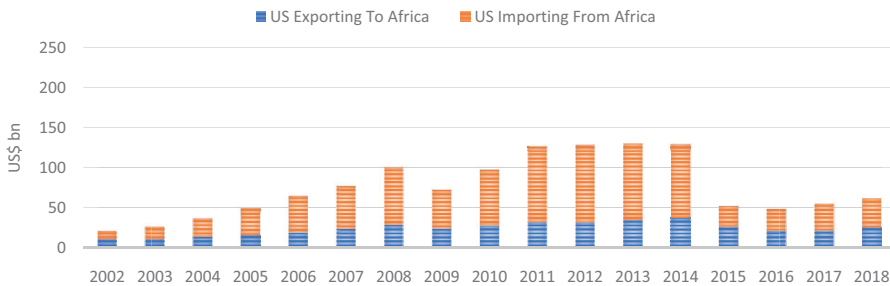


Figure 3. Composition of US–Africa export and import (2002–2018). *Source:* China-Africa Research Initiative (2020); Shoba & Mlambo (2024).

The data presented in Figures 1, 2, and 3 are the most comprehensive available on the composition of China-Africa and US-Africa relations. These figures cover more than a decade of bilateral engagements between Africa and two of the most powerful countries in the global economy. The data show clearly that the structure of Africa-China trade and Africa-US trade composition changed drastically in the past few years. China has become Africa’s largest exporter, while the trade between Africa and the US in terms of exports and imports remained relatively stable.

In 2015, South Africa became the first African country to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), further solidifying its cooperation with China. It has been described as a gateway to Africa (Uzodike, 2016), a position the country fully embraced as part of its foreign policy (Ofusori, 2025). As a result, in some circles South Africa is labelled as the “conduit” through which China exploits African resources. Indeed, the China’s officials have consistently called South Africa an important cog in its African wheel (Xiaodong, 2023). Against this backdrop, the US administration, both under Joe Biden and now Donald Trump, has designated China as a competitor and serious adversary in the world economy and global politics. The Trump administration has clashed with China in many ways; it has effectively declared a trade war on China, which could seriously

affect the global economy. Both China and the US are leading economic powers – with the US having the largest economy and China the second largest economy in the world. China represents the developing countries and emerging economies in the global South, while the US is a world superpower in the global North. The trade war between the US and China has reached unprecedented levels after the Trump administration imposed tariffs of up to 145% on Chinese goods. China retaliated with its own tariffs of up to 125% on US goods and services entering its market. The Trump administration has also imposed tariffs on South Africa of up to 30%, which is the highest level of tariffs imposed on an African country. This indicates that bilateral relations between South Africa and the United States, and between China and the United States have been seriously deteriorating. Given the ongoing trade conflict between the United States and the rest of the world, the future of bilateral relations between South Africa and China is more promising than ever before. The two countries are set to strengthen their social, economic, and political relations in the face of tensions between them and the United States.

The Russia Factor and South Africa-US relations

The diplomatic relationship between South Africa and Russia has long been a source of concern and frustration for the United States. However, South Africa has always managed to hedge its foreign policy position toward both Moscow and Washington. Despite the challenges, the United States has seen South Africa as a strategic partner in balancing the rising influence of China and Russia in the country since the 2000s (the US Department of State's 2025 report). The US pledged to support South Africa's efforts to maintain its regional leadership in Africa through trade and development assistance (Stone, 2025). In 2001, the United States adopted the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which provided significant benefits for South Africa. In 2003, the United States launched the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a global assistance program that has been beneficial to South Africa since its inception. In 2008, the United States and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), which includes South Africa, formed a trade agreement known as the Trade, Investment, and Development Cooperative Agreement. (TIDCA). Furthermore, in 2012, South Africa and the United States signed another agreement, called the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA).

The above-mentioned trade and development initiatives have been facilitated primarily through the AOGA, PEPFAR, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In 2024, the United States provided \$453 million in direct development assistance to South Africa through the PEPFAR programme. Additionally, USAID provided \$60 million that year to support various development initiatives in South Africa. However, all this courtship of South Africa on the part of the US has not stopped Pretoria from establishing and strengthening diplomatic relations with Moscow. Russia is a major economic, political, and security rival of the United States.

The US views Russia as a major threat to global peace, security, human rights ideals, democratic values and its belief systems. During the Obama era, the United States disagreed with Russia over many issues, including security concerns. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 led to Russia's exclusion from the G8. Although President Trump seemed to be "flirting" with Russia, its cooperation with the USA remained limited. The election of Joe Biden after Trump's defeat led to an increase in tensions between Russia and the United States and its allies in Europe. Russia's decision to invade Ukraine in February 2022 made the situation between the two countries worse. The Biden administration had continually imposed sanctions on Russia (Contini, 2025) and financially supported Ukraine in its fight against Russia since the beginning of the invasion (Northam, 2024). The Biden administration's ambassador to South Africa criticized Pretoria and the ruling party for focusing on relations with Russia instead of showing appreciation for the United States' efforts in the country. This was part of a growing sentiment against Russia by the Biden administration, as they were frustrated by Moscow's actions in international affairs.

However, Trump has expressed opposition to the Biden administration's foreign policy approach towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Throughout his re-election campaign, Trump claimed that the Biden administration should have handled the matter differently. He repeatedly stated that his administration would manage to broker a deal with Russia in order to end the protracted war in Ukraine. Indeed, immediately after his re-election as the 47th US President, Trump started talks with Moscow aiming to broker a ceasefire deal between Russia and Ukraine. The Trump administration had also blamed its predecessor for financially supporting Ukraine in this war. Recently, the Trump administration's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, visited Moscow in an attempt to pave the way for a ceasefire agreement that the president is desperately seeking in this situation. (Banco et al., 2025). Reports indicate that there was a telephone meeting between Trump and Putin after Witkoff had visited Moscow. This signals a growing possibility of the Trump administration reaching a deal with Russia to end a war that Trump believes should not have happened if he had been President of the United States.

The South African government has been cautious, trying to maintain a balance in its foreign policy by sustaining relations with all essential partners. A South African delegation, led by the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, was in Moscow on 14-15 April 2025 for a working visit. The situation in global affairs was a prominent topic during the high-level discussions between the officials from both countries. The South African Minister presided over the eighth meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation, which committed to enhancing bilateral mechanisms and coordinating economic and trade relations between the two countries amid global uncertainty. At the same time, South Africa's special envoy in Washington was being appointed, and the Ramaphosa government announced that it had chosen former Finance Minister Mr Mcebisi Jonas to lead a delegation to the United States to improve relations. This shows South Africa's efforts to avoid being perceived as taking sides in global politics.

The BRICS factor and South Africa-US relations

South Africa joined BRIC in 2010 following significant diplomatic activism by the Jacob Zuma administration after his election as president in 2009 (Shoba, 2017). The Zuma administration shifted South Africa's foreign policy focus away from the Global North and towards the Global South. It sought to establish stronger diplomatic relations with developing countries and emerging economies that shared its values. At the same time, the Zuma administration made concerted efforts to maintain and strengthen diplomatic ties with developed countries, such as the United States and its European allies as it continued to consider them important strategic partners in the global economy and international politics.

South Africa has been working closely with its BRICS partners to challenge the current world order, which it sees as unequal and discriminatory against developing countries, by excluding them from important global discussions and decision-making processes. The BRICS countries hold annual summits and meetings between ministers to coordinate their cooperation and collaboration on a range of important global issues. The BRICS countries have consistently expressed their dissatisfaction with the current global governance system, particularly in relation to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

The current world architecture is dominated by the United States and its Western allies, who do not support the efforts of the BRICS countries to assert themselves in the global arena. China and Russia were the main actors of BRICS, shaping the US perception of this bloc. Washington saw them as a threat to its national security and global dominance. South Africa aims to be geopolitically aligned and strategically close to all these countries. Indeed, South African officials, both under the Zuma administration and currently under the Ramaphosa administration, have consistently stated that South Africa adheres to the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Consequently, its foreign policy aims to maintain friendly relations with all members of the international community. However, the United States has been carefully observing South Africa's activity both domestically and internationally and the Joe Biden (44th) and Donald Trump (45th) administrations have commented on South Africa's close association with the United States' competitors both inside and outside of the BRICS association. Neither the US nor the European Union have a special BRICS-related policy, but they do have bilateral relations with each of these countries individually. Table 1 below provides a snapshot of the relevance of BRICS and the BRI in Africa.

In 2014, the BRICS countries launched two new initiatives: the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA). These initiatives demonstrate their commitment to institutionalizing BRICS as a group (Li, 2023). In 2016, China established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), following the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013. These development mechanisms complement each other and form part of the broader strategy of the BRICS countries to counter the influence of the "advanced" world. During the

formation of the New Development and Contingency Reserve Agreement in 2024, these countries announced that they would use local currencies for financing instead of US dollars. According to Hooymaaijer (2012), this is a bold move on the part of the BRICS nations, given that traditionally, multilateral institutions have used US dollars or euros to conduct business. This raised eyebrows in the US and the larger Western world, although the BRICS countries have cautiously stated that their development bank and other initiatives, such as the CRA and AIIB, do not intend to replace the existing multilateral institutional framework, which includes the IMF and World Bank. Instead, the BRICS bank aims to complement these existing institutions. However, the BRICS group continues to grow in strength and is rapidly becoming an alternative high-level political forum for the US-led Western countries. Washington sees this as a strategic move by its rivals, China and Russia, to shift the global power balance in their favour and ultimately decouple the world economy from the US dollar, which is one of the cornerstones of the US's global dominance.

Table 1. BRICS and BRI Influence in Africa

Initiative	Description	Importance or relevance to Africa
BRICS	A forum for developing countries and emerging economies	Promotes South-South cooperation and dialogue, and funding for infrastructure
BRI	China's global infrastructure and development strategy	Makes investments in rail, mining, ports, roads, and research and development (R&D) in Africa.
New Development Bank	BRICS's multilateral development bank	Funds electricity generation, renewable energy, roads, transport, and telecommunication, etc., in Africa.
Recent development	Admission of new members, including Ethiopia and Egypt.	Signals a growing global South coordination driven by China and Russia.

Source: Author's own compilation.

On August 22, 2023, the BRICS countries held their much-anticipated 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa. There were three major items that attracted global attention: firstly, talks regarding the expansion of the group; secondly, rumours that those countries would create a new currency to compete with the US dollar; and thirdly, close monitoring by the US and its allies to see if the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin would attend the summit. The issue of President Putin's arrest was a major foreign policy challenge that South Africa faced as a result of being a signatory of the International Criminal Court. President Putin had been issued an arrest warrant by the ICC and South Africa was expected to take action on the warrant if President Putin attended a summit. However, by mutual agreement between South Africa and Russia, President Putin decided not to attend the summit personally; he still joined the event via a video conference, and the Russian delegation led by Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sergei Lavrov attended the summit in South Africa in person. It was at this summit that BRICS admitted new members, expanding the group to the BRICS+ format. The addition of more countries, including Iran - one of the United States' adversaries - put South Africa at odds with the United States. As a matter of interest, the group did not officially announce the creation of a much-anticipated currency for BRICS, but rather said that discussions were still going on about ways to further strengthen cooperation between countries involved. The expansion to the new BRICS Plus format clearly signaled the bloc's ambition to increase its geopolitical influence and promote greater global cooperation (Naidu & de Carvalho, 2025). The US government under Trump openly declared its opposition to BRICS, arguing that if the group created its own currency it would be a declaration of war against the Western world order led by the US.

Concluding remarks

Historical engagements, identities, and social interests have greatly contributed to the evolution of South Africa's relations with its strategic partners such as China, Russia and the US in world politics. The BRICS alliance and links between China and Russia have a significant influence on the United States' perspective and strategy regarding South Africa. The US government under Donald Trump remains opposed to BRICS and sees the grouping as a threat to the US interests. The Trump administration also disapproves of South Africa's domestic affairs, especially the passage of the Expropriation Act. The lawsuit that South Africa has brought to the International Court of Justice against Israel, a US ally, is also part of the major dispute between the United States and South Africa. Regrettably, strained relations between South Africa and the United States due to the close diplomatic ties between China, Russia, and the wider BRICS put the AGOA agreement at great risk. Some have already argued that the removal of South Africa from AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act) could lead to the US reconsidering or even cancelling the entire trade deal, as South Africa is one of the most significant participants in this agreement and its removal threatens the existence of the AGOA agreement as a whole.

South Africa and the US have been strategic partners for many years. South Africa benefits from bilateral trade with the United States; it needs American investments, development aid and funding. The US, in turn, needs South Africa for its broader strategy on the African continent. Several US companies and enterprises are currently operating in South Africa. So, if the bilateral relations between South Africa and the US finally collapse, it will hurt both sides because, first, they will lose benefits from the mutual trade and, second, the breakdown in the bilateral relations will be problematic for the US government because it might open more doors to deepening cooperation between Africa and BRICS, especially for China and Russia. Perhaps the Biden administration had factored this in when deciding not to punish South Africa despite Washington's strong view that Pretoria was conducting itself in a manner that was not

in the interest of the United States. Today, the US government appears to believe that South Africa's geopolitical alignment and closer strategic ties with Russia, China and Iran are a threat to the United States' national security and its global dominance. The US, both under the Biden and Trump administrations, perceived South Africa to be more aligned with the US's rivals and sympathetic to its enemies, such as Hamas. The US has based this assertion on the fact that South Africa launched a lawsuit against Israel and accused Israel of committing genocide, rather than blaming Hamas.

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