



US President Donald Trump in Washington, DC on January 6. Picture| File

## Trump taps AU to protect business interests in Africa

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The US government and the African Union Commission have formed a new team of experts to promote private-sector investment in Africa.

Details revealed on Wednesday confirm President Donald Trump's focus on trade and investment in Africa rather than aid. The team will focus on building trade and infrastructure with Africa.

The team, known as the US-African Union Strategic Infrastructure and Investment Working Group (SIWG), was created during a meeting between US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau and AUC Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa.

Landau is on a four-country tour of Africa, during which he will meet with officials from the governments of Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti.

A State Department dispatch said SIWG is intended to "promote and advance US-Africa economic partnerships that create jobs, prosperity, and economic security both in America and across Africa".

Composed of senior officials and technical experts from the US government and the AU Commission, it will identify and advance opportunities for US private sector investment. The dispatch added that it will also guide investments in AU-backed infrastructure projects and related initiatives.

This suggests US support for transboundary projects, such as railways and power pools, as well as border crossing facilities, such as one-stop border posts. Washington claims its investors will participate in projects that will promote US-Africa relations and benefit American investors, while also advancing the priorities of the African Union and its member states, as well as regional economic communities such as the East African Community and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

The new team is part of President Trump's ambition to increase trade with Africa and reduce aid, while also challenging China's commercial influence on the continent. In December, the Trump administration published the US National Security Strategy, identifying critical minerals, energy and trade opportunities as potential areas of interest in Africa, abandoning the usual aid approach.

While the strategy portrays Africa as a region of strategic importance, it also states that the US will establish fair trade based on reciprocal policies that safeguard American investors. "The United States should transition from an aid-focused relationship with Africa to a trade- and investment-focused relationship, favouring partnerships with capable and reliable states that are committed to opening their markets to US goods and services," the strategy published last December says.