

Transactionalism in State's Health Strategy. Devex, 23 Dec 2025

Scratch my back, I'll scratch yours

Is it a case of America first, health second? Some fear so based on [recent U.S. talks with Zambia and Nigeria](#) as part of the Trump administration's [broader global health strategy](#).

That strategy doesn't put health outcomes front and center. Rather, it **comes with geostrategic strings attached**, such as gaining a competitive edge over China, securing critical minerals, strengthening military alliances, or accessing data, my colleague Sara Jerving writes.

In Zambia's case, mining sector reforms are at the heart of negotiations — which are still ongoing — whereas in Nigeria, the signed health deal focuses on protecting Christians from violence.

Desta Lakew of [Amref Health Africa](#) says **the Nigeria deal raises questions about sovereignty and alignment** with Africa's own priorities: "Health partnerships should strengthen universal access — not privilege one group over another — because equity is the foundation of public health."

Meanwhile, U.S. Rep. **Gregory Meeks**, a Democrat from New York, called the Trump administration's conditioning of health assistance on access to Zambia's critical minerals a "very troubling trend" that **"evokes a colonial mindset."**

"President Trump is pursuing an approach that mirrors the worst practices of China and Russia, treating African countries as sources of commodities rather than as partners," he wrote in a letter.

But others say transactionalism has always existed in diplomacy, even if it's been subtler in the past.

And for the Trump administration, the deals are a win-win. As U.S. Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** recently put it, they are "proof positive that President Trump's leadership is making America safer, stronger, and more prosperous — saving millions of lives and helping recipients stand on their own."