Truman's vice president of policy and programs John Temin [Music]

John:
hello again folks we are now at the final two sessions of the day and we have a great one two set of programming to end the day it starts with a live recording of one of vox's most popular podcasts the weeds hosted by John Glenn Hill and her guest today is someone known very well to Truman and to many of you United States ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas Greenfield please welcome them to the stage

thank you

Jonquilyn Hill:
hello everyone Make some noise for yourselves for coming out here today

welcome to truecon 2023 and to our live taping of the weeds vox's policy and politics podcast I'm Jonathan Hill and like a lot of you in the audience today I'm a policy nerd and I can't lie the part of me that did model you in back in high school is real excited right now I'm thrilled to be joined today by a woman who doesn't need an introduction but I will attempt to give one anyway before Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield began serving as the U.S ambassador to the United Nations she had already retired from a nearly four decade career as a diplomat during that time she served as the assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and had postings in several countries including Liberia Kenya and Nigeria this only touches on a few of her many
credentials but for this conversation I wanted to zoom in on the African continent and its role in geopolitics right now Ambassador Thomas Greenfield thanks so much for joining me

LTG: thank you I'm delighted to be here

Jonquilyn Hill: So before we jump into the real meat and potatoes of the conversation I want to address an elephant in the room and that's that we are two black people talking about foreign policy and sadly you don't see that all that often how hopeful are you about diversity in the Foreign Service and what steps need to be taken to get people from different backgrounds involved

LTG: Well thank you and you know that that has been a real priority for me throughout my career I served one of the positions I served in was director of personnel the director general of the Foreign Service in the state department and really what we should do is what you did it's model un it is getting out to communities talking uh talking to young people so that they know that this is a career option for them I didn't know it was a career option for me I gave a speech at a high school uh recently for a graduation and I told them I never had a me come and speak to my high school class so I didn't know diplomacy was was an option now they have that knowledge as they go off to college and so again I just think it's reaching out to young people at a young age encouraging them and for those of us who have already reached positions like I'm in to Mentor those who are coming behind and I spend an inordinate amount of time mentoring young people who are interested in foreign affairs careers

Jonquilyn Hill: I want to Pivot to Africa now what's the big picture Vision the Biden Administration has for the continent and in particular I'm interested in what came out of the summit the president hosted and what comes next

LTG: you know Africa and I again I spent most of my career in Africa as you saw from my bio and Africa is the New Frontier it is the Last Frontier uh it is the the continent that has the only continent left that has all of the resources needed to make a difference in the future they have a really strong youth population the medium age is 19. that young population will be populating jobs around the world in in the future Africa still has natural resources that have not been tapped and those natural resources will be important as we look at what is needed in the future so again we felt when we hosted the leaders Summit in December that we needed to re reaffirm our our commitment our relationship our partnership with the African continent and I think we accomplished that and we continue to work on that

Jonquilyn Hill: I want to zero in on one of the top stories right now in that Sudan prior to the current conflict it really seemed like that country was on track to become a full-fledged democracy going against a trend we're seeing across the globe towards autocracy what do you
say to critics who point the finger at the U.S in this particularly for working with the military and the rapid support forces

LTG: Look these two generals are responsible for this situation the civilians Civil Society really stood up for democracy and we supported them the United States backed their effort uh and we backed the transitional government and then two military guys who were fighting for

power fighting for their own Ambitions have now taken this country 10 steps backward and we need to get back to a situation where civilians are leading the process there's a transition that have civilians in leadership roles and supporting this country's move toward democracy it's easy to blame the U.N to blame the United States to blame the world the blame is on the uh on the two on the shoulders of these two individuals who started this kind conflict and they can end it and and they should.

Jonquilyn Hill: what role do you see the U.S playing and ending that conflict do you see the U.S playing a role in ending that conflict.

LTG: Absolutely, uh we are engaged in trying to find a solution bringing the two parties to the negotiating table pushing the uh the efforts and supporting the efforts of the region uh to take leadership on this situation uh and we're expected to play that role so it is something where those parties who are engaged want to have the U.S involved

Jonquilyn Hill: and and in what way do you see the U.S playing that role though like what are the actions that we could or should be taking

LTG: well you you may know that just uh yesterday we announced sanctions on the uh the two uh leaders uh we have put uh some travel restrictions out visa restrictions on individuals who are involved in in this violence and I think that is the first step toward accountability because people do want accountability when you have a situation like what we see happening uh in Sudan and they look to the U.S to lead on the the accountability front but we've also worked hard to help to find a solution that will lead to ceasefire so that humanitarian assistance can get in and again we’re the largest uh contributor to humanitarian programs in Sudan but all over the world and this is something that is very much appreciated by the people of Sudan but I also think others around the world world who watch us as we engage on these issues

Jonquilyn Hill: I want to get into another top story some African nations have decided to remain neutral when it comes to the war between Russia and Ukraine African countries made up about half of the abstentions during a U.N vote to condemn Russia and leaders from six African nations are set to meet separately with presidents Putin and Zielinsky what do you see as these nations possible role in that conflict
LTG: you know the the first the Six Nations who have offered to be involved in in trying to find a peaceful solution this is something we support all of us want peace but peace will start with Russia Russia started this the unprovoked aggression against Ukraine Russia's Russian troops are inside of Ukraine and this war will end tomorrow if Russia pulled their troops out and stopped the the fighting so for us and we've been clear on that you cannot be neutral when there is an attack on the very values that we all hold dear that are are founded in the U.N Charter that we all signed on to Russia has broken all of those rules and until they stop this fighting and until they engage on finding a solution we won't have one and our position has also been clear that there cannot be negotiations that cannot be peace without Ukraine we can't do this without Ukraine Ukraine has to be part of the discussions and we have encouraged all of these countries who have expressed interest in finding a peaceful solution to also engage with Ukraine

Jonquilyn Hill: I want to dig into South Africa in particular Putin was recently invited to the country and there are credible allegations that South Africa supplied arms to Russia did this come as a surprise to you? 
LTG: we have a strong partnership with South Africa it's a partnership that we have worked over many many years to reaffirm but we're also clear that any support to Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine is unacceptable we're not telling South Africa what their foreign policy should be so their decision on President Putin is their decision but Putin is a war criminal Putin has has been convicted or he's being prosecuted by the ICC and the accountability for him being the leader of what has been a consistent and high level of human rights violations against the Ukrainian people I think has to be taken into account by any country who makes the decision uh that will make the decision to engage with him

Jonquilyn Hill: why are we seeing these countries sort of straddle the fence when it comes to Ukraine and Russia is it that the West hasn't give given them a compelling argument is it something else what's going on

LTG: you know I can't speak for these countries we we don't uh tell countries what their foreign policy uh should be as a as I said earlier what we can say is if you believe in sovereignty if you believe in the Integrity of borders if you believe in the U.N Charter then you can't support Russia the decisions that countries have made and actually it's only been about uh six countries total that have voted with Russia uh the vast majority of countries 140 Plus have voted against Russia in the two resolutions that we've put forward and some countries have made the decision to abstain and they have to explain that themselves

Jonquilyn Hill: Speaking of South Africa that nation has been very vocal about U.N security Council reform namely adding permanent members from the continent President Biden has
come out in support of this I'm curious what you think of the possible additions and also why we're seeing the shift now

LTG: well you're seeing the shift now because we made the shift I gave a speech in September in San Francisco that outlined our vision for U.N security Council reform and how we will intend to move forward President Biden gave a very well-watched speech during high level week later in September in which he announced that the U.S would support additional permanent and non-permanent members of the security Council the elected members and that the U.S would support additional permanent members from Africa from Latin America and the Caribbean as well as other parts of the world that actually ramped up the conversation on

U.N reform I have continued over the course of the past few months with what I've called a listening tour among all of the countries and regions in in the U.N to get their their ideas of their Solutions their recommendations and we will be looking at those over the course of the next months to see what our next steps ought to be on on you in reform but again countries are watching the U.S and I think South Africa is is also watching what we're doing and what we're saying as they look at what they would like to see in terms of U.N reform

Jonquilyn Hill: so the U.S and China share an interest in Africa and like you said before it's rich in resources it has a large and young population and it has soft power too you know there are so many music artists and movies coming out of Africa if you grab my phone right now I'm probably listening to burn a boy like they're everywhere but meanwhile China has made real inroads on the continent in regards to infrastructure there's the Belt Road initiative China set up Telecom infrastructure in over 30 countries there are exchange students for programs there are excuse me there are exchange programs for students are you worried at all about China's influence on the continent

LTG: our Africa policy is our Africa policy it is not about China it is about our partnership with Africa and our partnership is long term we've been on this continent since the beginning uh and I always refer to the fact that we have a diaspora here in the United States China does not have an African diaspora living in China there are people who are American citizens who have backgrounds and and touch every single country on the continent of Africa our relationship on that continent is strong and we're working to build that relationship and make it even stronger and we we think we're we're making progress we're not telling African countries they shouldn't have a relationship with China they shouldn't trade with China we trade with China but we want to ensure that the partnership that we build with the continent with the people of Africa is a long long-term partnership a long-term relationship that African people will benefit from uh as a result of that that relationship

Jonquilyn Hill: how is the U.S navigating the overlapping interests when countries want to work with both the U.S and with China
**LTG:** It's fine we're not telling uh African countries they shouldn't work with China they should work with countries and and they can choose to work with countries that meet their their interests uh and if they're able to work with China and and meet the goals that they have we're not telling them not to do that our policy is about what we do with Africa and if you look at programs like uh pepfar the malaria initiative what we have done uh in the area of HIV and AIDS on the continent of Africa agoa those relationships are are very very strong and I think if you ask and I've seen some surveys that have been done if you ask ordinary Africans what their preferences are they will clearly State those preferences are to be aligned with the United States

**Jonquilyn Hill:** So a critique that not just the U.S but the West in general gets is that they don't really pay attention to Africa until something happens and it's arguable that that's partially why China and to an extent Russia have been able to form relationships the way they have I'm curious how what are some ways the U.S has misstepped in Africa in the past and what's the plan for course correction and building a closer relationship with the continent

**LTG:** I would turn that question around again our relationship with the continent is is long-term I went to Africa first in 1976. I'm an africanist I spent my whole career in Africa it annoys me when I hear people say we ignore Africa and then I want to know what I've been doing for 40 years and I'm not the only one we pay attention to this continent we engage with the continent we engage with the people of Africa and it didn't just start when the Chinese came on board the Chinese came late they are new to this continent we've been there since day one we recognized we were the first country to recognize Ghana in 1957 when they got their independence and if you look across the board we have been engaging in the continent now yes we are there when there's trouble because your friends need you even more when there's trouble uh there is a famine budding in in the Horn of Africa because of U.S funding we were able to avert that famine last year we gave almost 2.5 billion dollars to the Horn of Africa to avert the famine and this is something that the Chinese can't it's it's soft power but it saves lives and Africa knows when they are in trouble we will be there and it is not we're not fair weather friends we are friends who are there in bad times and in Good Times

**Jonquilyn Hill:** I want to look at another country as well here in the U.S you know it's June 2nd it's pride month we're going to see so many parades so many celebrations but in Uganda there's been news Uganda has been in the news for its anti-algia lgbtq laws what are your thoughts on the rising anti-gay sentiment on the continent

**LTG:** you know it is it is worrisome you saw the president's statement on Uganda uh what Uganda has done criminalizing homosexuality uh uh really uh going against all the rights of the LGBT community is unacceptable uh and it's happening all over the world it's not just in Africa we've seen it in other places in the world as well and the U.S has made a strong stand against uh these these laws against criminalizing uh LGBT against imposing death sentences on people because of who they love so we've been clear across the board Uganda is the latest but it is not
the first and we have to continue to engage on this issue wherever we see it everywhere in the world

**Jonquilyn Hill:** I want to turn the uh proverbial mic over to the audience now we have some audience questions that we collected prior to this off Arthur asks should the United States be preparing for a multi-polar world or securing our dominant position on the international stage

**LTG:** we are in a multi-polar world and we have worked to ensure that we are continuing to take a leadership role in that world this is something that the world asked for uh for the few years that we stepped away from multilateralism when we stepped out of the Human Rights Council we were missed and the day we came back people applauded they want U.S leadership so our leadership is welcomed but we also want to work with uh with other partners in a world that has changed this is not what this is not the world of uh uh immediately after World War II uh this is not the world 70 years ago when the U.N was created this is why we support you in reform and this is why we think that the U.N should be and the security Council should be more representative

**Jonquilyn Hill:** I want to get to a question from Corey who asks with the rise of authoritarianism around the world threatening democracy how are you cancer how are you countering foreign propaganda and disinformation that oftentimes can change elections around the world and impact our national security by creating false narratives around pandemics human rights climate security and fragile Democratic institutions

**LTG:** you know that's the question we should ask all of uh we should all ask ourselves uh because it is a problem that we're seeing around the world but we still see the fact that in most places around the world people want democracies they want their governments to deliver and they see that when there's a strong democracy that democracy can deliver for their people but I do think we have to ramp up our own narratives we have to ramp up what we are doing around the world so that people know and and they don't buy into the false narratives that are are being perpetuated

**Jonquilyn Hill:** Marielle asks how is the U.N security Council and the broader U.N system adapting and incorporating emerging Technologies like AI for instance to address issues of Human Rights peace and security and sustainable development what are the opportunities and risks of this for the human's work and its Workforce

**LTG:** you know we had something called an aria formula meeting it's an informal meeting of the security Council where we talked about cyber security and how technology can be used to for for good and and try to understand how it is being used for for bad so this is something that we're all working on the Secretary General has just appointed a news cyber uh Envoy and we're
working very closely with him as he tries to address some of these issues. We talk about women's peace and security, and in the context of what women's peace and security we have also looked at how Technologies can be used for good and try to understand how it's being used for bad as well. So this is something that is definitely a high priority for us and and we will continue to improve our our abilities in this in this area.

**Jonquilyn Hill:** Barbie asks with respect to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), the Summit this September, where does the U.S. stand to rescue the SDGs by 2020, by 2030, and how is the administration working with Congress to make the U.S. a leader in fulfilling this multilateral commitment?

**LTG:** You must have read some talking points I had recently where I've said we are ramping up our efforts to support the implementation of the SDGs. It includes working with Congress to ensure that we have the support from Congress to do the necessary work that we see and need will need to be done over the course of the next few months and years. I think the SDG summit that is taking place in September will be a key uh watermark for us on where we are and what we what else we need to do to make sure that we get there by 2030.

**Jonquilyn Hill:** How hopeful are you about getting Congress on board? We are in such a polarized time right now.

**LTG:** You know it's hard work, but it's work that has to be done. I think we have had members of Congress who've been very supportive of these efforts on both sides, but again, it is something that we have to con continue to work on.

**Jonquilyn Hill:** All right. Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield, thank you so much for joining me.

**LTG:** Thank you.

**Jonquilyn Hill:** And thank all of you for joining this live taping of the weeds give it up for yourselves.

you can find new episodes every Wednesday wherever you get your podcasts.

thank you thank you [Music] [Laughter]

thank you [Music]