



THE STARE. US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen looks on as Minister of Finance Enoch Godongwana speaks to the press during her visit to the South African National Treasury in Pretoria yesterday. Picture: EPA-EFE

Why US won't punish SA

SURPRISE: AMERICAN BIGWIG CONCILIATORY OVER RUSSIA VISIT

» **Country strategic for superpower as trade ties are cemented with Yellen.**

Eric Naki

The optimism expressed by Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana towards the visit by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen cemented relations between SA and the US.

South Africa was expected to be punished by the US for defying its call for support of sanctions against Russia due to its invasion of Ukraine in February last year.

But the two countries are still talking to each other and continue to hold bilateral talks aimed at strengthening their trade partnership.

Experts associated the US conciliatory tone towards South Africa

with Washington's geopolitical interests and its attempts to outdo Russia and China in African and elsewhere.

Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Naledi Pandor's tough talk towards the United States in the recent past raised fears about possible punitive measures imposed on the country by the US, including economic sanctions.

But the Biden administration preferred, instead, to strengthen trade relationships with SA.

Political analyst Prof Siphamandla Zondi said the US was trying to leverage on its strong trade ties with South Africa which, in turn, had the European Union as its largest trading partner after European Union and Germany.

"Of course, the big trade the US has with Africa is an entry point, while warm political relations since Soviet times and its identification with the global south in the past three decades is what Russia will use in this current stage of

geopolitics," Zondi said.

However, China's growth in Africa was seen as a threat by America. The US was feeling the pinch of China, which had a huge economic influence in Africa and solidarity towards Russia had grown since its invasion of Ukraine, while it was isolated by the West.

These were matters that worry the US and the reason it wanted to counter China and Russia's influence on the continent.

Another analyst, Prof Jan Venter from North-West University, said the big powers were competing for geostrategic matters among others and South Africa was strategically placed on the tip of Africa for them to use to pursue their interests.

"South Africa has a strategic influence in Africa especially in southern Africa. It's a bit like a schoolyard fight where each of these powers would like to be bigger and better and have more allies on the other side," Venter said. —*erien@citizen.co.za*