



U.S. Africa Policy under Barack Obama: A New Direction?

1. Introduction

The election of the United States' first African American president has been accompanied by extraordinarily high expectations for U.S. policy towards Africa. Barack Obama's personal knowledge of and interest in Africa, as well as his commitment to multilateralism, have generated optimism that his approach might be more sympathetic and better-informed in conducting relations with African nations. His decision to undertake a diplomatic visit to Ghana early in his presidency, as well as his nominations of several seasoned diplomats to the Department of State's Africa bureau, provided initial indicators that his administration would pursue involvement in the major issues related to the continent.

U.S. policies toward Africa have in the past been governed by a discrete set of interests, however, and these interests are unlikely to prove any less influential under the Obama presidency. In evaluations of Obama's performance thus far, it is often noted that he has made important symbolic and rhetorical changes in the way that the United States approaches global engagement, but that the underpinnings of Bush's foreign policy are essentially intact. American public discourse around Africa has often been marked by deeply negative cultural and racial stereotypes, and the tone of political rhetoric is therefore not unimportant. Rhetoric alone, however, is likely insufficient to alter the foundations of Africa's marginalization in U.S. policy. This paper will examine Obama's policies towards Africa thus far and explore the question of whether his election has precipitated any kind of a qualitative shift in the way that the United States approaches African affairs.

2. U.S. Foreign Policy towards Africa—Historical Drivers and Recent Developments

That Africa remains grossly misunderstood by U.S. policymakers and the U.S. public at large is something of an axiom of American foreign policy. It is less accurate to conclude, as some Africa advocates do, that Africa is "ignored" by the United States. Instead, Chris Alden notes that U.S.-Africa relations have been "characterized in the main by indifference and neglect, punctuated by flurries of interest and action."¹

¹ Chris Alden, "From Neglect to 'Virtual Engagement': the United States and its New Paradigm for Africa," *African Affairs* 99(2000), 355.

Africa has in fact been the recipient of much destructive attention from the United States and its allies, most notoriously as a staging ground for U.S.-Soviet animosities during the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union did not necessarily eliminate the ideological basis for U.S. engagement with Africa, however. Africa was initially seen as uninteresting by the U.S. in the post-Cold War period, but attention was reinvigorated both by private actors pointing to enormous investment opportunities in newly-opened markets and politicians eager to project the 'triumphalist' vision of liberal capitalist states as the only alternative.² The 'new paradigm for Africa' articulated by the Clinton administration had as its foundations the economic integration of Africa into the global economy and the mitigation of threats to national security stemming from Africa.

President George W. Bush has often been credited for a robust Africa policy more centrally concerned with global health and development. While the ideals of democracy and the protection of individual rights have begun to consistently form the basis of the U.S.' rhetorical commitments to Africa, however, the manner in which these objectives are pursued generally remains shaped by U.S. strategic goals. Thus, while Bush's policy placed development in Africa firmly within the national interest, this link was constructed by merging development and security initiatives and integrating Africa policy into the broader framework of the War on Terror.

U.S. foreign policy towards South Africa provides a useful example of the interaction between stated support for democracy, pursuit of national interests, and pressure from international and domestic civil society. Until 1985, the U.S. had repeatedly vetoed United Nations resolutions to impose economic sanctions against apartheid South Africa or expel it from the U.N. The stated reasons for this were a belief in non-interference in domestic affairs and a strategy to build stronger relationships with the apartheid government in order to engage them more effectively. Strategic interests were also very much a part of this policy; however, the Nixon administration busied itself building up trade with South Africa and President Ronald Reagan viewed the apartheid government as an important bulwark against communism in the region. Of the contradiction between U.S. involvement in drafting of international norms and its refusal to enforce them domestically, Richard Goldstone says, "this is the crux of American ambivalence in foreign policy: a desire for international law, yet a resistance for any possible affect it may have domestically."³

Broad-based civil society engagement in the U.S. eventually helped to change President Reagan's policy of constructive engagement with the apartheid regime and win Congressional support for harsher anti-apartheid measures. This reflects what is a fairly strong tradition of human rights campaigning by students, faith-based, and other civil society groups in the U.S. Campaigning by African American and faith-based communities on such Africa-related issues as debt and HIV/AIDS has a long history in American politics, and the more recent growth of student movements focused on Darfur, Sudan, northern Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have been compared to the South Africa divestment movement.

Adekeye Adebajo of the Cape Town-based Centre for Conflict Resolution notes, however, that Africa as a whole still lacks a strong, consistent domestic constituency in the United States of the sort that shapes U.S. policy towards Israel.⁴ Coalitions are often built around specific issues rather than sustained interest, and have most often been at odds with U.S. government policy and without strong support in

² Ibid., 357

³ Richard Goldstone, "Ambiguity and America: South Africa and US Foreign Policy," *Social Research* 72(2005), 812.

⁴ Adekeye Adebajo, "Obama's Africa Express," *the Mail & Guardian*, 10 July 2009.

the broader public. While there are sometimes opportunities to produce shifts on specific issues or towards individual countries, such as South Africa, the impact of these constituencies and of principled norms has remained limited in the broader arena of U.S. engagement with Africa.

Africa also lacks a widely shared symbolic importance in U.S. politics. The cultural and historical ties that link the U.S. to Britain and Western Europe constitute an important part of national identity; while these ties certainly exist with Africa, however, they pertain to a dark area of U.S. history and are consistently unacknowledged or undervalued. In the absence of such significance, Africa policy is sometimes interpreted as a function of the way that the U.S. defines its energy and security interests. The U.S. currently imports almost 20% of its crude oil from Africa, and this is likely to increase to 25% by 2015.⁵ American foreign assistance to the continent has undergone a steady militarization, with the proportion administered by the Department of Defense increasing from 3.4% at the beginning of Bush's first term to 22% by the end of his second in 2008.

That Barack Obama was elected on a platform of renewed multilateralism and, particularly, engagement with Africa, suggests that internationalism and human rights are becoming more salient with the American public. During the presidential campaign, Obama listed Africa within his top eight foreign policy priorities, a significant statement considering the location of this placement just below Israel. As in the past, however, the question will be how the enactment of these commitments is influenced by the pursuit of U.S. interests.

3. Changing Geo-politics? The United States, BRIC, and South Africa

Two broad shifts are often discussed with respect to U.S.-African affairs in the past decade. The first is the increased rhetorical attention to human rights issues on the continent and a growing domestic constituency interested in African issues. The second is the emergence of new international players competing with the U.S. and Europe for market share on the continent. While the growing presence of the 'BRICs' (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) in Africa has been widely remarked upon, U.S. interests remain extremely influential. The U.S. still consumes a larger percentage of Africa's oil exports than any other country, including China⁶, and foreign direct investment in Africa by U.S. companies continued to increase throughout the financial crisis.⁷

The Bush administration's attention to the BRICs in Africa was often narrowly focused on the material and diplomatic support given by Russia and China to the repressive regimes which it sought to isolate. The Obama administration has acknowledged the significance of the BRIC presence in Africa and has indicated more willingness to co-operate with these countries to address issues of shared concern. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asserted in a June 2009 foreign policy address that the United States would begin "to put special emphasis on encouraging major and emerging global powers. . .to be full partners in tackling the global agenda." Such statements have occasionally been met with skepticism,

⁵ "Africa Becoming Leading Foreign Investment for US Businesses," *Business Trends*, available at <http://businesstrends.wordpress.com/2009/08/18/africa-becoming-leading-foreign-investment-for-u-s-businesses>.

⁶ Stephanie Hanson, "China, Africa, and Oil," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 6 June 2008, available at http://www.cfr.org/publication/9557/china_africa_and_oil.html.

⁷ "Africa Becoming Leading Foreign Investment for US Businesses."

however, that this embrace of multi-polarity has been a short-term attempt to gain support for global financial recovery initiatives.⁸

Thus far, American hegemony in global political and financial institutions remains largely intact. Even if emerging economies were able to level a serious challenge to this hegemony, however, it is unclear whether this would significantly reduce the marginalization of Africa in the global economic and political order. Instead, many commentators note that while rising economic powers may alter the hierarchy of the international system, they are unlikely to transform its structural foundations. Michael Glosny notes, for example: "As China has become more powerful it has become more integrated with and more accepting of the international order. . .and come to recognize itself as a major beneficiary of that order."⁹ Thus, while African societies may gain some benefits from access to alternative sources of funding from BRIC, there remain broad similarities in the position of Africa in its formal economic relationships with both western and non-western powers. Such persistent patterns include disproportionate investment in extractive sectors, damage done to domestic industries by cheap or subsidized imports, and the exclusion of African labor and firms from infrastructure development projects.

South Africa inhabits an unusual position in this geopolitical landscape. As a nation without significant oil resources, it nonetheless maintains special relationships with both traditional and emerging powers. It ranks among the top recipients of Chinese foreign direct investment¹⁰ and participates in a tripartite 'India, Brazil, South Africa Dialogue Forum' (IBSA) dedicated to increasing South-South co-operation. This year, it also signed on to an agreement establishing a new 'U.S.–South Africa Strategic Dialogue' which, according to the U.S. government, will facilitate high-level co-operation on issues such as trade, investment, energy, and non-proliferation. The Obama administration has generally acknowledged South Africa as an important economic power and opinion leader in regional affairs. Hillary Clinton mentions South Africa, Turkey, and Indonesia alongside BRIC countries in her statements on emerging economies; South African negotiators were included in closed-door climate change meetings at the Copenhagen conference; and Thabo Mbeki's leadership was solicited in addressing the crisis in Zimbabwe.

However, the election of Jacob Zuma was initially viewed with deep ambivalence in the U.S. Although Obama portrays the U.S. relationship with South Africa as having improved under Zuma, a March 2010 hearing on U.S. Africa policy emphasized that South Africa was under-going 'a drift in economic policy.'¹¹ This reflects a broader nervousness over Zuma's populist line and a concern that South Africa is in a position to undermine acceptance of the political and economic reforms that the U.S. routinely ties to its involvement in the region. During the latest round of the World Trade Organization negotiations, South Africa led other African nations in opposing U.S. proposals for greater market liberalization without cuts in U.S. agricultural subsidies.¹² Thus far, however, neither South Africa nor the BRIC countries have leveled a wider challenge to U.S. influence in the region, nor have they shown a keen interest in doing so. The United States' other choices within Africa for new bi-national

⁸ Michael Glosny, "China and the BRICs: A Real (but Limited) Partnership in a Unipolar World," *Polity* 42(2010), 124.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 102

¹⁰ Akwe Amosu, "China in Africa: It's (Still) the Governance, Stupid," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 9 March 2007.

¹¹ Princeton Lyman, "An Overview of U.S. Policy in Africa," testimony at the Hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, 24 March 2010, available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201003270003.html>.

¹² Princeton N. Lyman and Kathryn A. Robinette, "Obama and Africa: Matching Expectations with Reality," *Journal of International Affairs* 62(2009), 16.

commissions, Nigeria and Angola, reinforce the interpretation that energy needs remain a key factor in U.S. foreign policy.

4. U.S. Energy Policy and its Impact on Climate Change

U.S. policies on energy and climate change continue to have an inverse and deeply damaging impact within Africa. The U.S. imports more and more of its crude oil from Africa, and the economies of a few countries are becoming increasingly dependent on this export of crude oil. At the same time, the continent as a whole is already being impacted by the process of the climate change, which oil consumption in the U.S. continues to drive.

Obama's willingness to participate personally in climate change negotiations in some ways represents an important change from his predecessor. However, the agreement spearheaded by Obama at the 2009 Copenhagen United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) largely evades acknowledgement of the principle outlined in the 1992 UN Framework—that countries which produce higher levels of emissions have a greater responsibility to mitigate climate change. The eventual non-binding agreement signed at the Copenhagen summit expresses the intention to limit the rise in global temperatures to two degrees Celsius, but does not give targets in global emissions cuts or timelines to specify how this will be achieved. Negotiators and civil society groups from African nations had pushed for a deal that would limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, but the final agreement removed all references to these demands. With the majority leader in the U.S. Senate having announced in July 2010 that there was insufficient support to pass climate legislation, it is unlikely that the United States will pursue federal initiatives to reduce its emissions in the near future.

Just before the deal in Copenhagen was signed, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton arrived and pledged that the United States would contribute to a \$100 billion climate finance fund for developing countries if the framework proposed by the U.S. was signed. Canadian journalist Naomi Klein referred to Clinton's offer as 'climate structural adjustment'¹³ because it appeared to present an ultimatum to developing countries in terms of which they would not receive funding for adaptation to climate change unless they agreed to the United States' conditions for a weakened deal. The deal reached did include the commitment of \$100 billion by 2020, but how this funding will be secured remains unclear. The Africa Progress Panel has called on rich countries to immediately begin providing the promised start-up funding of \$10 billion per year and to specify what portion of the \$100 billion they will contribute.¹⁴

5. Human Rights and Conflict Resolution

Much of the attention paid to Africa by the U.S. public is directed towards the issues of human rights and conflict resolution. The specific cases of Sudan, and to a lesser extent the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), have particularly influential domestic constituencies, and Obama campaigned on promises to end what he referred to as 'genocide' in Darfur and conflict in the DRC. After appointing a new special envoy to Sudan, the Obama administration undertook months of internal policy review that

¹³ Naomi Klein, "Climate Structural Adjustment: We'll Save Your Life on our Terms," Personal blog, 17 December 2009, available at <http://www.naomiklein.org/articles/2009/12/climate-structural-adjustment-we-ll-save-your-life-our-terms>.

¹⁴ Africa Progress Panel, "Finance for climate-resilient development in Africa – An agenda for action following the Copenhagen conference," 30 June 2010, available at <http://www.africaprogresspanel.com/>.

resulted in the announcement of a new Sudan strategy in October 2009. The revised approach emphasized implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the use of both incentives and sanctions in ongoing diplomatic efforts to bring peace to the Darfur region. Sudanese and human rights advocacy groups have criticized the administration, however, for failing to implement this strategy, for endorsing the flawed April 2010 elections which returned President Omar al-Bashir to power¹⁵, and for generally under-investing diplomatic resources in peace talks.

In an August 2009 visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Clinton announced a \$17 million plan targeted to address pervasive sexual violence in the nation's eastern region.¹⁶ She also made a statement that combating sexual violence would require addressing impunity for its perpetration within the Congolese army. Despite this acknowledgement and several more visits of U.S. officials to the region, however, the United States' continued support for the Congolese army has tarnished its efforts at involvement in the region.¹⁷

Some Africa specialists have interpreted this as indicating a tenuous line between Obama's commitment to 'mutual interest and mutual respect' in foreign policy and tacit approval of the ongoing repression and abuses committed by some of the U.S.' strategic allies. According to this criticism, promotion of democracy and human rights has taken a back seat to the principle of constructive engagement with foreign heads of state. Thus, while the Obama administration may denounce abuses in states with relatively little strategic importance, such as Guinea, the U.S. remains a major and largely uncritical supporter of the governments of Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Somalia.¹⁸

6. AFRICOM and Military Expansion

This criticism is corroborated to a large degree by Obama's decision to expand the unpopular U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). At his speech in Ghana in 2009, Obama insisted, "Our Africa Command is focused not on establishing a foothold in the continent, but on confronting these common challenges to advance the security of America, Africa and the world." Much of the funding for AFRICOM, however, remains concentrated in counter-terrorism programs and in security assistance for countries with strategic U.S. interest, such as Nigeria.

In the Department of Defense budget, Obama requested \$278 million for the fiscal year (FY) 2010 and \$296.2 million in FY 2011 for AFRICOM operations.¹⁹ In his first budget request, President Obama also proposed to increase State Department spending on military programs in Africa by more than 300 percent,²⁰ a distressing trend for those who had hoped his presidency would bring expanded resources for diplomacy unattached to security initiatives. This includes financing for arms purchases, capacity-building, and military training in individual African nations, as well as regional initiatives such as the

¹⁵ John Norris, "Obama's Sudan Fumble," *Foreign Policy*, 14 April 2010, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/14/obamas_sudan_fumble?page=0,1.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Gettleman, "Clinton Presents Plan to Fight Sexual Violence in Congo," *the New York Times*, 11 August 2009, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/12/world/africa/12diplo.html?_r=1&ref=world.

¹⁷ Anthony Gambino, discussion at panel, "Improving U.S. Policy for Africa's Two Biggest Wars," Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C., 20 July 2010, transcript available at http://www.brookings.edu/events/2010/0720_africa_wars.aspx.

¹⁸ George Packer, "Rights and Wrongs," *the New Yorker*, 17 May 2010, available at http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2010/05/17/100517taco_talk_packer

¹⁹ Lauren Ploch, "Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa," Congressional Research Report, 3 April 2010, available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL34003.pdf>.

²⁰ Daniel Volman, "Obama and U.S. Military Engagement in Africa," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 5 May 2010.

African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program, which provides Peace Support Operations training to African troops.

7. Development and Foreign Assistance

At the June 2010 Muskoka G8 summit, President Obama released a statement announcing ‘A New Approach to Advancing Development.’ Both new legislation and a new presidential policy directive are anticipated and expected to clarify some of the procedural and structural problems which make U.S. aid delivery fragmented and inefficient. The possibility of signifying a greater commitment to development through creation of a new, cabinet-level development agency has also been discussed. A larger question, however, concerns whether U.S. development policy will be designed with greater attention not only to growth and absolute poverty reduction but to sustainability, self-determination, and the reduction of inequality.

Both President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton have expressed their intention to elevate development as a policy tool and to integrate it to a greater extent with diplomacy and defense in a strategy that Clinton has referred to as the ‘three Ds’ of national security. The basic framework for U.S. foreign aid policy has not been updated since 1961, when the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was created and mandated to oversee aid in areas designated by the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA). Written in the midst of the Cold War, this legislation is widely considered to be focused primarily on ideological objectives rather than poverty reduction.

This focus has a clear legacy in the contemporary structure of U.S. aid, which underutilizes coordinating institutions such as the UN in favor of directing unilateral aid to a small number of strategically important countries.²¹ The standard practice of “tying” aid to certain conditions, particularly those requiring purchase of American goods and services, and the increasing role of the Department of Defense in administering aid, indicate that the United States’ development enterprise has in many ways continued to serve its national interest. Obama signaled an intention to work with global partners and multilateral development agencies in his June announcement, but it remains to be seen what effect further integrating development with diplomacy and defense may have.

Obama has also launched several new development programs. ‘Feed the Future’, a new global food security program which commits \$3.5 billion for agricultural development and food security over the next three years,²² has been praised for expanding the focus beyond food aid and employing country-specific approaches. It has also been noted, however, that the focus on ‘inclusive agriculture sector growth’—through such measures as the opening of regional trade and investment corridors, agribusiness investments, and the introduction of new agricultural technologies—has the potential to create dependencies on expensive farming practices and foreign food imports, and to damage local environments and small-holder farms. Twelve of the program’s twenty ‘focus countries’ are in Africa.²³

The president’s Global Health Initiative, which subsumed the Bush-initiated President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) in 2009, has also come under criticism as renegeing on the commitments

²¹ American Jewish World Service, “A Justice-Based Vision for Foreign Aid Reform.”

²² Whitehouse.gov, “The Global Commitment to Food Security,” *Feed the Future*, available at <http://www.feedthefuture.gov/commitment.html>.

²³ Sarah Kozyn, “Interfaith Community Response to Feed the Future,” *Africa Faith and Justice Network*, 9 July 2010, <http://afjn.org/component/content/article/109-commentary/848-interfaith-community-response-to-feed-the-future.html>.

that the United States has already made to HIV/AIDS relief. PEPFAR has provided the funding for life-sustaining anti-retroviral therapy (ART) for almost three million HIV/AIDS positive patients since 2003. This policy has created what Mead Over of the Centre for Global Development has called an 'entitlement' to continued US financing of treatment, as any decrease in funding for PEPFAR would likely result in the deaths of a portion of those who have become dependent on this source of ART.²⁴ Obama has emphasized that the Global Health Initiative will "integrate our health programs in order to reduce inefficiencies and expand impact,"²⁵ which has in effect resulted in a decreased portion of funding for HIV/AIDS treatment in the overall expenditures on global health.

In a July 2010 editorial, Archbishop Desmond Tutu criticized Obama for adding only \$366 million to the PEPFAR budget in the FY 2011 budget. He contended that while the number of new African patients receiving ART increased by about 400 000 every year during the Bush administration, Obama's budget would reduce this number to 320 000, leading to 1.2 million preventable deaths over the next five years.²⁶ Ezekiel Emmanuel, Obama's Special Advisor for Health Policy, responded that the president's approach shifts the focus from dollars spent to development outcomes by strengthening prevention efforts, responses to other deadly diseases, and child and maternal health.²⁷ Anand Reddi, however, maintains that Obama's funding levels have represented overall decreases and that "by not providing "new" money towards maternal and child health, President Obama has *de facto* pitted HIV/AIDS funding against other global health priorities."²⁸

8. Trade and Development

The Obama administration has acknowledged in a draft of the upcoming policy directive that development encompasses more areas than aid. The relationship between aid and trade in African development has been a heavily contested issue. Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo has argued prominently that most forms of aid to Africa should end within five years. Njongonkulu Ndungane, president of the aid watchdog African Monitor and former Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, agrees that a transition away from aid dependency is needed, but contends that aid can usefully be channeled towards infrastructure development.²⁹ This refers to the paradigm of 'aid for trade' that was introduced through an initiative at the 2005 WTO Ministerial meeting and has been promoted as part of the Doha round of World Trade Organization negotiations. One concern that developing countries have expressed with respect to aid for trade is that it risks diverting funds and attention away from aid for essential social services. A more fundamental criticism concerns the location of aid for trade within the broader agenda of market liberalization and global trade integration, processes which continue to be fraught with losses for developing countries.

²⁴ Mead Over, "PEPFAR, Entitlements, and Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy," Global Health Policy Blog, July 7, 2010.

²⁵ Casey Dunning, "President Obama Issues Announcement on Global Development," *Rethinking Foreign Assistance*, 25 June 2010, available at <http://blogs.cgdev.org/mca-monitor/2010/06/president-obama-issues-announcement-on-global-development.php>.

²⁶ Desmond Tutu, "Obama's Overdue AIDS Bill," *The New York Times*, 20 July 2010, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/21/opinion/21tutu.html?_r=5&ref=opinion.

²⁷ Ezekiel J. Emanuel, "The HIV/AIDS Fight Needs Cooperation, Not Division," *The Huffington Post*, July 21, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/zeke-emanuel/aids-activism_b_654710.html.

²⁸ Anand Reddi, "Truth and Reconciliation: President Obama's Global Health Initiative and HIV/AIDS—Raising the Bar," *The Huffington Post*, 27 July 2010, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anand-reddi/truth-and-reconciliation_b_660586.html.

²⁹ Cindy Shiner, "Aid Plus Trade Can End Extreme Poverty," *AllAfrica.com*, 5 August 2009, available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/200908050536.html>.

U.S. policies with respect to aid and trade are often informed less by debates within development communities than by the ability of these activities to advance specific U.S. political and economic objectives, however. An ideological approach to both trade and aid has meant that different interest groups tend to promote aid or trade from the basis of different frameworks,³⁰ and the relationship between these activities in promoting development has thus been only thinly conceptualized. U.S. Africa policy has often been differentiated by periods in which one activity has been emphasized over the other according to the current political situation. Thus, aid to Africa fell sharply after the end of the Cold War, a fact which corroborated the interpretation that foreign assistance had been used primarily as a geopolitical tool.³¹ Clinton's subsequent 'trade not aid'³² approach intersected neatly with Congressional clamoring for decreased U.S. development assistance and the administration's new doctrine of 'democratic enlargement,' which attempted to cast open market reform as a humanitarian project by linking it to the spread of democracy.³³

The US position as a strong promoter of trade liberalization has since been belied by the assertion that trade promotes development and poverty reduction. This argument continued to be advanced by the Bush administration, and the U.S. contributed \$9.7 billion in trade capacity-building assistance between 2000 and 2008.³⁴ However, Bush also framed targeted initiatives for development as being within the U.S. national interest and nearly tripled aid for sub-Saharan Africa. The post-9/11 development landscape has thus been one in which the geo-political role of aid has been revived by the War on Terror³⁵ but the concept of 'aid for trade' has also constituted a consistent feature of development discourse.

The Obama administration has pledged support for the aid for trade initiative and for expanding access to trade in subsequent WTO negotiations.³⁶ His administration has increased funding for the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a U.S. program established in 2004 that awards 'development compacts' for specific infrastructure projects on a competitive basis and distributes a large portion of U.S. trade capacity-building assistance.³⁷ Obama has also expressed continued commitment to the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which was signed by Bill Clinton in 2000 and remains the key piece of policy governing U.S.-Africa trade relations. At the 2010 annual AGOA Forum, Hillary Clinton asserted, "We need both trade and aid, and particularly aid that supports trade." Despite a call from Clinton to "re-launch and re-imagine" AGOA, however, the Obama administration has not shown a willingness to review or expand the terms of AGOA.

³⁰ Helen Milner and Dustin H. Tingley, "Who Supports Global Economic Engagement? The Sources of Preferences in American Foreign Economic Policy, *International Organization*, forthcoming.

³¹ Robert K. Fleck and Christopher Kilby, "Changing Aid Regimes? U.S. Foreign Aid from the Cold War to the War on Terror," *Journal of Development Economics* 91(2010):185 – 197.

³² Chris Alden, "From Neglect to 'Virtual Engagement': the United States and its New Paradigm for Africa," 352.

³³ *Ibid.*, 357.

³⁴ Office of the United States Trade Representative, "2009 Trade Policy Agenda and 2008 Annual Report of the President of the United States on the Trade Agreements Program," February 2009, 231.

³⁵ "Changing Aid Regimes? U.S. Foreign Aid from the Cold War to the War on Terror."

³⁶ Office of the United States Trade Representative, "Aid for Trade," 29 November 2009, <http://www.ustr.gov/about-us/press-office/blog/2009/november/aid-trade>.

³⁷ "Changing Aid Regimes?" 232.

This has been interpreted as a sign of the ‘demotion’ of AGOA in U.S. policy³⁸ and potentially reflects a change related to Obama’s agenda of ‘elevating’ development in foreign policy. In a March 2010 Congressional hearing on U.S. Africa policy, Princeton Lyman of the Council on Foreign Relations noted that U.S. policy on trade with Africa was still tending to “fall between the cracks” of the Department of State, the U.S. Trade Representative, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. He criticized Obama, particularly, for failing to oppose the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that the E.U. is in the process of negotiating with African, Caribbean, and Pacific nations.³⁹ Many African trade experts and civil society groups have denounced EPAs as free trade agreements that Europe is negotiating through ‘divide-and-rule’ in order to gain concessions from individual nations that could not be secured from regional blocs.⁴⁰ Concern over the EPAs in testimonies to the U.S. Congress has focused, on the other hand, on the possibilities that the EPAs will include conditions that discriminate against U.S. exports and inhibit the integration of regional trade blocs within Africa.⁴¹

A slight de-emphasis of trade in relation to aid under the Obama administration would be in keeping with the trend of liberal groups in the U.S. tending to favor aid over trade and conservative groups the reverse.⁴² In evaluating the impact of Obama’s policies on the poor and marginalized in Africa, however, the relative degree to which aid and trade are emphasized remains less significant than the broader arc of U.S. economic policy. In general, the changes precipitated by a stated commitment to development are dwarfed by the larger continuities in this area. Data from the U.S. International Trade Commission indicates that under AGOA, exports of energy-related products and natural resources have increased, but that exports of manufactured goods have actually dropped.⁴³ Clinton acknowledged in her most recent address that “AGOA has achieved only modest results and has not lived up to the highest hopes of a decade ago,” citing the continued dominance of petroleum products, which make up about 90% of exports from Africa to the U.S.

This reflects the broad, continued concern that Africa’s integration into the global economy has entrenched its position as an exporter of oil and mineral resources and an importer of manufactured goods. U.S. exports to Africa have more than doubled under AGOA⁴⁴, and the U.S. continues to sell large quantities of electronics, transportation and other machinery, and agricultural products to sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁵ Textile exports to the U.S., which were initially regarded as one of the most promising areas for growth under AGOA, have increased overall since 2000 but have been falling sharply in recent years. Ron Kirk, Obama’s trade representative, acknowledged this year that he was unsure whether

³⁸ Rosa Whitaker, “Don’t Mis-characterize AGOA, it’s Working,” US-Africa Relations Blog, 30 August 2010, available at <http://us-africarelationsupdates.blogspot.com/>.

³⁹ Princeton Lyman, “An Overview of U.S. Policy in Africa.

⁴⁰ UN Millennium Campaign Africa, “Africa Trade Network Denounces Economic Partnership Agreements,” 17 March 2008, available at <http://www.endpoverty2015.org/africa/news/africa-trade-network-denounces-economic-partnership-agreements/17/mar/08>.

⁴¹ Witney Schneidman, “U.S. Policy Towards Africa - An Initial Assessment,” testimony at the Hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, 24 March 2010, available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/201003270003.html>.

⁴² “Who Supports Global Economic Engagement?”

⁴³ International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, “Africa Pushes for Trade Reform at AGOA Forum,” *Bridges Weekly Digest* 29(13), 5 August 2009, available at <http://ictsd.org/i/news/bridgesweekly/52522/>.

⁴⁴ Office of the United States Trade Representative, “AGOA Opens Doors for American Businesses,” 5 August 2010, available at <http://www.ustr.gov/about-us/press-office/blog/2010/august/agoa-profile-edlen-international-inc>.

⁴⁵ United States International Trade Commission, “Sub-Saharan Africa: U.S. exports, imports, GSP imports, and AGOA imports, by major commodity sectors, annual and year to date Jan - Jun,” available at http://reportweb.usitc.gov/africa/by_country_agoa.jsp.

textiles could still promote long-term growth in Africa and acknowledged that “rather than rushing into the crowded world of textiles, Africa has to be open to opportunities in other industries and agriculture.” Rosa Whittaker, former Assistant Trade Representative for Africa, argues that the percentage of petroleum exports should not be a measure of success or failure this early on in the AGOA program, and gives examples within the \$28 billion in non-oil exports since 2000—including “automobiles from South Africa, apparel from Lesotho, cut flowers from Kenya, jams and jellies from Swaziland”—as reason to continue AGOA.⁴⁶

A number of criticisms of AGOA have also been emanating from African politicians and civil society groups. At the August 2009 AGOA forum in Nairobi, many participants signaled their desire to restructure the program to allow a greater diversity of African exports to reach American markets and to sign onto AGOA as a permanent trade agreement. In response, U.S. Trade Representative Kirk asserted that the U.S. did not have intentions to expand the list of products eligible for duty-free import but urged “increasing the utilisation of AGOA.”⁴⁷ Criticism of the program also continues on the grounds that eligibility for AGOA’s benefits requires adopting free-market reforms and that AGOA has done nothing to change the U.S. subsidies to corn and cotton that are particularly harmful to African agricultural and manufacturing industries. In response to a question on U.S. reform of AGOA at a June 2010 press conference, Secretary of State Clinton cited capacity and corruption problems as the major barriers to increased African exports and asserted that “most of the work that needs to be done needs to be done in Africa.”⁴⁸

9. Conclusion

Although Obama has shown a willingness to engage in a wide range of African issues, it must be noted that the degree of U.S. involvement has often proved a poor indicator of the effect that U.S. policies have on the well-being of African societies and their citizens. Obama’s policies remain situated within the broader approaches to energy and security which have governed U.S. foreign policy for some time and which the new administration has not significantly altered. For this reason, the president’s heritage and familiarity with issues relevant to the continent are likely to be less determinate of his policies than the structural relationships that exist between the U.S. and Africa. A key question related to the Obama administration, then, will be whether a rhetorical commitment to principled norms can produce any shift in the way that U.S. interests with respect to Africa are defined and pursued. Although South Africa is increasingly included in arenas of global decision-making, it thus far appears to represent an exception to the rules of foreign powers’ engagement in Africa, rather than an indicator of impending change.

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⁴⁶ Don’t Mis-characterize AGOA, it’s Working.”

⁴⁷ International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, “Africa Pushes for Trade Reform at AGOA Forum.”

⁴⁸ Clinton’s Remarks on Sub-Saharan Africa, June 2010, available at

http://www.cfr.org/publication/22438/clintons_remarks_on_subsaharan_africa_june_2010.html?breadcrumb=%2Fregion%2F143%2Fafrika