

An Overview of U.S. Policy in Africa

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Testimony of

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United States Policy in Africa

Summary

United States policy in Africa under the current administration has been proactive. The administration has spoken out clearly and effectively on maintaining constitutional government in Nigeria, taken specific action – withholding visas -- to emphasize the problem of corruption in Kenya, and has initiated new bodies – bi-national commissions – in Nigeria, Angola, and South Africa to build stronger relations in those key countries. It appointed a presidential envoy on Sudan, and a State Department special envoy for the Great Lakes region. It has announced two new development initiatives, on food security and global health. Nevertheless, the administration faces a difficult situation in Somalia with no clear outcome, a threatened collapse of the peace process in Sudan, and a series of setbacks in democratization, notably in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Senegal, as well as in smaller countries like Niger, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau. South Africa is witnessing a drift in economic policy and there is concern over the respect for law and the independence of the judiciary. Growing drug trafficking in both east and west Africa poses a threat of creating narco-states and providing financing to terrorist groups.

The President set the tone, in his visit to Ghana and in Secretary Clinton's visit across the continent, that this administration would emphasize good governance and democracy in its relations in Africa. But the nature of U.S. aid to Africa, i.e. heavily concentrated on HIV/AIDS and emergency food, leaves the U.S. little leverage on these issues when governments in those recipient countries are determined on amassing and keeping power through limited or rigged elections and repressive acts. The slow process of staffing the senior levels of USAID has also prevented the administration from moving very far forward on its two new development initiatives. Finally, the low level of staffing throughout the Africa Bureau makes it hard to follow up on even the most important initiatives cited above, let alone address longer term issues like climate change, trade policy, and multilateral issues. Trade policy in particular seems to fall between the cracks of State, USTR, and USAID with no clear direction.

General Democratic Trends

Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner, in their new book, *Democratization in Africa: Progress and Retreat*, demonstrate clearly that Africa is at a turning point in the democratization process. After two decades of democratic gains, with most African governments becoming elected, and since 2001 the Africa Union (AU) refusing to sit any government that comes to power by unconstitutional means, the process seems stalled and in some cases regressing. Key states like Kenya, Senegal, and Nigeria appear to be slipping backwards. Kenya has not addressed any of the fundamental problems that sparked violence after the last elections, notably land ownership, decentralization of power, and other constitutional issues. Nigeria, after three successively worse elections is struggling with issues of succession and has yet to pass electoral reform or address deep seated sources of unrest and violence in both the delta region and the middle belt. Meanwhile the country is de-industrializing, with growing unemployment and poverty, as the government fails to invest in essential infrastructure and other forward looking economic policies. Senegal is regressing back to centralized state control, with efforts to establish a dynasty rather than a progressively open political system. In South Africa, President Jacob Zuma is flouting ethics laws and leaving the country uncertain about economic direction. As a nearly one-party state, the readiness of the ANC to establish and enforce rules of democracy and good government is critical but this is now being questioned.

Human Rights and Freedom of the Press

Not surprisingly, as democratization stalls, freedoms suffer. The press has been harassed in all those states where rulers are determined to stay, e.g., in Ethiopia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and in war torn states like Somalia and Congo. Human rights suffered most in the repression of opposition parties and their supporters. Advances in women's rights were notable, especially in Rwanda and Liberia, but women have been horrifically victimized in the wars in Congo. In Nigeria, police brutality has been reported on an alarming scale. On the positive side, civil society has been growing throughout Africa, giving voice to human rights and media groups, but many are heavily dependent on foreign financing. Attempts to deprive them of that financing have been advanced by the governments in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, threatening their survival. The Africa Union is only now establishing its human rights institutions, such as a Human Rights court. It is still uncertain if it will exert any real influence in this area.

Extremism and Terrorism

The most dangerous terrorist threat is in Somalia and linked to the situation in Yemen across the strait. The rise of Al Shabaab, with its proclamation of links to Al Qaeda, in the wake of the Ethiopian invasion of 2007 and the subsequent civil war, has raised the importance of Somalia in combating worldwide terror. Al-Shabaab and allied clans control most of southern Somalia, including the port of Kismayo. Of particular concern is the recruitment of some twenty or more Americans of Somali origin to fight and be trained by Al-Shabaab. The administration in charge is caught in supporting a weak, but internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government, helping it to hold on to the capital and provide a basis for eventual national government. The TFG is defended by an African Peacekeeping Mission (AMISOM) but which can do no more than protect the port and airfield of Mogadishu and a few blocks of the capital itself. Kenya's absorption with internal matters, Ethiopia's special but not always helpful concerns, and Eritrea's spoiler role all make regional players less than useful. The administration needs to think of additional or alternative strategies, e.g., appeals to clans loosely allied to Al-Shabaab, with offers of support for autonomy and with economic help, even without their allying with the TFG. Improving relations with the autonomous region of Puntland, and the self-declared independent Somaliland, will also provide the U.S. with more options in limiting Al-Shabaab's advances. But this is likely to be a situation that drags on with great humanitarian cost and limited political progress.

Al-Qaeda cells are believed to operate down the east coast of Africa and perhaps elsewhere. The administration is hamstrung by limitations on staff and security concerns which keep us from a presence in the important Kenyan city of Mombasa and in being able to interact on a broader basis throughout the region.

In West Africa, the threat from the Algerian group, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) can be exaggerated. One wing of this group is definitely ideologically driven, but for both wings the focus is on Algeria, not much beyond. AQIM does operate in the Sahelian regions of Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and Chad, kidnapping foreigners for ransom, smuggling, and recruiting. The danger here may be mostly from the growing link between terrorist organizations, traditional smuggling groups, and drug traffickers. One estimate is that terrorist groups now get half their financing from drug trafficking. In West Africa, Latin American drug trafficking groups are expanding to move drugs through West Africa to Europe. As in all drug trafficking strategies, these syndicates promote addiction – they pay their African smuggling

partners in-kind – and corruption. Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, even Senegal and Ghana are in danger of being caught up in this process.

The U.S. is trying to combat this threat through the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Program (TSCTP). But TSCTP is working with poor and weak governments in the Sahel. And some of its efforts, like strengthening national military presence in the relatively “ungoverned spaces” of the Sahel, only aggravate the relations between these governments and the marginalized ethnic groups in the area who survive very much by smuggling. Economic development in this area will be slow and long and it is doubtful that the various aid programs for the region will have much impact in the near future. More needs to be done to stop the introduction of drug trafficking from Latin America, and to strengthen the overall capacity of the governments in this region, especially in their reaching political and economic accommodation with the Tauregs and other groups of the Sahel.

Priority Countries

South Africa. The administration has made progress in improving what had been a strained relation with South Africa under former president Thabo Mbeki. President Zuma has reversed Mbeki’s resistant policies on combating HIV/AIDS eliminating one major source of friction. The establishment of a bi-national commission should help both countries address other key issues, including Zimbabwe, corruption, economic policy, development, and multilateral issues such as trade and climate change in which South Africa is a leader in forming the positions of the Africa voting bloc. But there are worrisome trends in South Africa that must concern all friends of that country.

President Zuma installed a widely diverse, if balanced team of economic officials in his administration. But he has not followed up with giving any enough authority to set direction, nor has he done so. This there are calls for nationalizing the mines or other key industries from some cabinet and African National Congress (ANC) officials, which Zuma has only weakly rebuffed, leaving uncertainty among industrialists and investors. The same uncertainty lingers over privatization, where one Cabinet member was forced to retract a commitment to that policy under pressure from the ANC. Zuma has appointed a National Prosecutor beholden to him raising questions about the sanctity and independence of that authority. Zuma himself has resisted reporting his financial holdings, as required by law, and has not backed a call for more stringent financial reporting by all government officials. Zuma’s standing has been recently been reduced because of a personal scandal, fathering a child out of wedlock. All of these issues simmer as South Africa prepares to host the World Cup, the largest sport event in the world. If this event does not go well, though most assessments are that it will, Zuma’s position could be further weakened, giving rise to more uncertainty and drift in South African policy.

Finally, South Africa, under Zuma, has not played the same strong role in African affairs, and especially in the AU, as it did under Mbeki. With a weak government in Nigeria, the AU is deprived of its strongest backers and financiers as it tackles regional issues like Somalia, Sudan, Congo, and individual challenges to democracy and human rights in Guinea, Niger, and elsewhere. Zuma’s own record also raises questions about South Africa’s continuing to champion the principles of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) which emphasized good governance, economic management, and human rights. As of now, NEPAD seems to be fading into oblivion, with it slipping from South Africa to AU control, and with little support there.

Zimbabwe

From the outset, the U.S. has to recognize that we have little influence over the outcome there. The U.S. has neither the degree of national interest, nor the resources nor commitment, to intervene in any effective way. Sad as the decline of that country into autocracy, oppression, and economic ruin is, the U.S. can only urge those with more influence to affect change. South Africa, and its southern African neighbors, did force the ZANU government to accept a unity government with MDC head Morgan Tsvangirai as Prime Minister. But despite stopping the long economic decline by eliminating the Zimbabwe currency and taking some other steps, little has changed. It is likely that the situation will come to head when the MDC and civil society proposals for constitutional reform are put on the table, and arrangements are made for the next election. The U.S. itself can do very little, indeed by publicly denouncing the trend, only give more evidence of our frustration and impotence. Recently, President Zuma of South Africa led a three day, intensive negotiation in Harare that helped resolve some of the most immediate issues. These include the resignation of the Central Bank Governor, dropping of all charges against MDC member Roy Bennett, and the sharing of provincial governors among the parties. This is encouraging because South Africa has to take the lead on Zimbabwe. The bi-national commission with South Africa will enable the U.S. and South Africa to coordinate and reinforce their respective policies on Zimbabwe.

Nigeria

Nigeria is wrestling with its greatest crisis since the return to civilian rule in 1999. The president is ill, the Acting president is being challenged by the president's supporters, there is much behind the scenes political scrambling to assure continued northern control in the next presidential election, and meanwhile violence continues in the oil-rich delta region and ethnic and religious violence is breaking out in the middle belt and elsewhere. Underlying these points of crisis is the failure of successive Nigerian administrations to improve the electoral system which got worse in each of the last three elections, but even more fundamentally to make the political system more responsive to people's needs instead of upward to the powers of the ruling party and the dispensation of oil wealth. There has not been even enough vision to invest in the needed infrastructure – power, roads, and rail – to maintain Nigeria as a serious economic player. Thus plants dependent for power on basement generators are closing down in face of competition from Chinese and Indian goods, employment is declining, and the population outside of Lagos and Abuja, is poorer than years earlier.

The danger of Nigeria is that it would become irrelevant, except as a serious source of failure with widespread regional consequences. It is Africa's most populous country, but if that population is not involved in production and growth, it is only a harbinger of more violence and despair. Nigeria is the fifth largest supplier of oil to the United States, but oil is being discovered all along the western coast of Africa, and in east Africa as well, and Brazil is poised to become a major oil supplier in the next decade. All this while Nigeria fails to reorganize its oil and gas industry sufficiently to guarantee the investment and development to reach its admitted potential of doubling its current output. Nigeria continues to fail to address the complex problems of unrest in the oil-producing delta region, now plagued by violence, oil stealing on a massive scale that involves both regional militants and government officials, and the continuing flaring of gas while Nigerian industry pleads for power. Ethnic and religious unrest is fed by land disputes, devious politicians, the availability for rioting of unemployed youth with little prospects for honest work, and a weak central government. Nigeria claims a pride of place in Africa for its size,

wealth, and historic contributions to African peace and stability. But none of those contributions are now apparent as it struggles with fundamental issues that have long gone ignored.

5

This administration has raised Nigeria to a higher priority and has acted quickly on the current political crisis. Strong statements by the Secretary of state, coordinated with those of European allies, helped stem the temptation for military intervention, and encouraged a constitutional approach to allowing the Vice President to assume acting presidential authority. The administration still hopes to sign the agreement for a bi-national commission even as Nigerian cabinet members are being dismissed and reappointed in crisis mode.

The bi-national commission offers some possibilities to help Nigeria address its problems. But the U.S. does not have that much leverage. Our aid, as discussed more below, is not that important to an oil-rich country, and it is concentrated in HIV/AIDS work that is not subject to political bargaining. What the administration should do in the commission is not confine the discussion of our “to do list” for Nigeria – electoral reform, peace in the delta, overcoming religious tensions, corruption, etc. – important as these are, but come up with positive ideas for developing the country. Innovative schemes for public-private partnerships to develop the infrastructure – even including China- should be advanced, along with using the food security initiative to help revive Nigerian agriculture. All of this should be accompanied by an active public diplomacy that engages widespread Nigerian business and civil society in the discussion of these ideas. Nigerians are just as concerned as Nigeria’s friends about the current situation, and will rise to the occasion if offered real opportunities for change. Nigerian elites should be similarly challenged to rise to a higher level of responsibility, by both our urging and that from the Nigerian public. This is our best chance for avoiding seeing Nigeria sink further into dangerous dysfunctionality.

Ethiopia

Here is a conundrum. Ethiopia is a valuable ally in the efforts to combat terrorism and Islamic extremism in the Horn of Africa. It has a rapidly growing population making it a force of rising influence and economic potential. China, India, Saudi Arabia, and other countries are actively investing in minerals and agriculture, and companies from all over the world are actively exploring for oil and other mineral deposits there. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is one of the smartest and shrewdest leaders of any country. He is a growing force in international negotiations, e.g., in shaping the African positions on climate change.

At the same time, Ethiopia has stopped the process of gradual democratization that was taking place in the previous decade. Elections in 2005 were of questionable validity, and considerable violence ensued. Since then opposition leaders have been arrested, convicted of treason, some amnestied, but then others rearrested. The upcoming elections are unlikely to be free or fair in terms of opportunities for opposition campaigning, freedom of the press, or the outcome. The bottom line is that this regime is not prepared to be voted out of power, and it will not take the chance that that could be the result of an election. In addition, in addressing unrest in the Ogaden region, there are reports of gross violations of human rights. In sum there are serious issues of democratization and human rights in this key country.

The problem is that U.S. leverage is limited. As in several countries as pointed out below, although Ethiopia is one of the largest recipients of U.S. aid, almost none of this aid is available for political leverage. More than 80% of U.S. aid is in the form of HIV/AIDS assistance, child survival, and emergency food. There is no question of interrupting life-saving treatment for AIDS sufferers, and none for stopping

emergency food deliveries. Add to that Ethiopia's strategic position, and U.S. leverage is limited. Prime Minister Meles knows that as well.

6

This administration will continue to press for more democratic practices, for better protection of human rights. It will argue, more privately than publicly, that this is good for Ethiopia's own future, and for its economic potential. But it will be caught between the public, civil society, and Congressional criticisms of Ethiopia on the one hand – and their urging of stronger administration actions – and a realistic assessment of its own leverage. Perhaps if the Somalia situation is resolved, and Kenya restores its previous positions of influence on regional affairs, and if Eritrea someday allows for a more reasonable settlement of its disputes with Ethiopia – perhaps then the strategic importance of Ethiopia will not bear so heavily on our diplomacy. But for the near future, Ethiopia will be a conundrum.

The Other Issues: Climate change and trade

Climate change. Africa will be significantly affected by climate change, indeed is already so. The predictions are that drought and flooding will become more severe, agricultural lands will change in aridity and fertility. Large-scale migrations are predicted both within Africa and in pressures on Europe and the Americas, as populations flee unproductive lands. The implications for security are only now being assessed, but they can expect to be serious as large numbers cross borders, congregate in cities, or press upon scarce resources. With USAID only slowly being staffed, the implications for aid policy, especially the new food security initiative are still to be imbedded in aid programs. African institutions have begun to analyze these factors in some depth and there is a need for much more collaborative analysis and policy development between donors and African experts.

Trade. Trade policy is another area needing much more attention. In spite of AGOA and other trade supporting activities, Africa still has a tiny share of global trade and, with few exceptions, is unable to supply major markets in the U.S. or elsewhere. One of the most promising developments in Africa is the progress toward larger economic trading and investment zones. Significant progress is being made in the East Africa Union – now comprising Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi – toward lowering trade barriers. On a larger scale similar progress is being made in the east and southern Africa association, COMESA. If the Zimbabwe situation were resolved, SADC could be making similar progress. These larger economic units offer large markets for investors, help African farmers and entrepreneurs move into larger, cross-border markets, and help Africa become more capable to undertake global levels of production and trading. Yet this process is being undermined by the EU's proposed Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). These seek to develop individual country trading agreements that in effect will break up the unity of such sub-regional blocs. Africa is further threatened by moves to extend quota and duty free access, the concessions Africa enjoys under AGOA in the U.S. market, to all least developed countries, putting Africa into competition with major textile producers like Bangladesh, Cambodia and other countries.

The U.S. has not developed a broad trade policy in Africa that can support the sub-regional development and counter these threats. In particular, there is no consensus on how long Africa should continue to enjoy the AGOA preferences, i.e., when Africa should be forced to compete on a worldwide scale, and no real effort to counter the EPA process. One way to counter the EPAs would be to support a WTO ruling declaring Africa a single trading unit, so that the varying economic levels among African countries do not produce dysfunctional demands from the EU or others. But the U.S. has not taken up this issue.

The irony is that in spite of AGOA, reasonably substantial aid for trade programs, and other U.S. support to African trading capacity such as through the Millennium Challenge Account, African countries side

7

with Brazil, India and China in the Doha trade round against the U.S. and the EU. This is true even though tariffs on African manufactured goods are as high or higher in China and India as they are in Europe or the U.S. The U.S. needs to bring its various trade-related policies and programs together, make some decisions on what more it is prepared to do to help Africa become more effective in global trade, and then broach with Africa basic policy questions that encompass the future of AGOA, the support needed for sub-regional economic zones, and a counter to EPAs through the WTO. In the context of this total U.S. strategy the U.S. should seek greater African understanding and support of U.S. trade positions in the WTO.

Declining U.S. leverage

As we look at U.S. Africa policy, we have to recognize that for reasons of our own good intentions, the U.S. may experience diminishing leverage with African countries, especially with regard to sensitive issues as democracy, human rights, freedom of the press, and the like. This is true despite a tripling of aid to Africa under the Bush Administration and promises of even more aid from the Obama Administration. The reason is that more and more of our aid is concentrated in areas that are not amenable to political bargaining. As noted, our aid to Ethiopia is more than 80% in HIV/AIDS, child survival, and emergency food, areas that the U.S. is not prepared to reduce due to differences over political developments. But this is not an anomaly. The figures for countries experiencing similar "democracy deficits" are Niger 81%, Uganda 89%, Nigeria 91%, Senegal 58%. For Africa overall these categories constitute 75% of all U.S. aid.

There are of course other areas of assistance that are more flexible. One is the Millennium Challenge Account, but by definition this aid goes to countries doing relatively well on the index of good governance. The fact is that the U.S. will need to utilize influence of its overall leadership, character, and by engaging not only African governments but civil society and business interests in support of better governance, democracy, and human rights. Our aid burnishes our image and our credibility, but it is not something that can be used as a bargaining chip. Indeed, as the U.S. share of life-saving treatment of HIV/AIDS victims grows, the relationship between the U.S. and Africa may move into uncharted territory.