

Africa Policy Outlook 2003

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In 2003 U.S. policy toward Africa will be driven almost exclusively by geopolitical considerations related to Washington's war plans against Iraq, and by its geostrategic interests in African oil.

In a dangerous replay of the cold war, the U.S. is likely to ignore Africa's priorities, placing military base rights above human rights. The war against AIDS, by far the most important global war effort and an urgent priority especially for Africa, will continue to suffer from a lack of resources. An American war on Iraq would also have a major negative impact on the global economy with dire consequences for African development. In 2003, U.S. unilateralism is likely to be directly at odds with African interests in building multilateral approaches to its greatest challenges from HIV/AIDS to international trade rules and peacekeeping.

Last year African efforts toward building greater political and economic unity were often offset by failure to provide collective leadership on its most pressing challenges. The African Union replaced the 39-year-old Organization of African Unity as a framework for stepped-up cooperation across the continent. The new Union, as it is expected to evolve out of a process of accelerated integration, is seen as more ambitious than the European Union.

Africans welcomed the prospect of new commitments to unity. But many have raised the fear that African leaders are still unwilling to act more decisively as a bloc within international affairs, and equally unwilling to promote regional economic and political integration at the expense of nationalist interests. Under South African leadership, the African Union

embraced the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) as a plan for cooperation between African states, donor countries, and multilateral organizations. But critics charged that NEPAD adopted the failed economic policies and programs of the World Bank and rich-country governments while failing to lay the basis for the democratic participation of African people. Moreover, the framework initially failed in its major objective of winning substantially increased resources from the G-8 donor countries in terms of new economic aid, debt relief, or increased investment. NEPAD avoids any mention of Western obligations to support development in Africa and thus does not mention reparations.

The most dramatic failure for both African governments and world leaders last year was in combating HIV/AIDS. Despite the ever-louder chorus of warnings and promises, neither the rich countries nor most African governments moved beyond a snail's pace in responding to the emergency. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria received only a fraction of the resources needed. The South African government stalled on providing antiretroviral drugs to people living with HIV/AIDS. And both grassroots and government health programs around the continent continued to be crippled by lack of resources.

At the beginning of 2003, instead of giving priority to the fight against AIDS, the U.S. stood on the brink of war in Iraq, a prospect that cast a looming shadow over every other issue. In January, Nelson Mandela called on the world to



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“condemn both Blair and Bush and let them know in no uncertain terms that what they are doing is wrong.” At the meeting of the African Union in early February, President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa warned that war in the Gulf region could trigger an economic meltdown in Africa and set development back more than three decades. But Washington’s lack of regard for African opinion was illustrated earlier by the perfunctory cancellation of President George Bush’s projected January visit to five African countries.

In 2003 U.S. policy toward Africa will be driven almost exclusively by geopolitical considerations related to Washington’s war plans against Iraq, and by its geostrategic interests in African oil. At the end of January, President Bush surprised many by accepting, for the first time, the need to supply antiretroviral drugs and by promising additional resources for Africa to fight AIDS. But if the U.S. fails to at least triple its spending on AIDS this year, the gesture will be seen in retrospect as simply a public relations adjunct to the push for war on Iraq. Early signs were not encouraging.

What Policy Direction?

In 2003, African countries must cope with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its root causes while dealing with a myriad of other problems greatly exacerbated by this health crisis. It is a staggering prospect. The chances of success will be fundamentally affected by how much attention the world pays to Africa, and by whether rich countries contribute their share to addressing these global issues centered in Africa. The level of world attention, as well as Africa’s internal capacity to act, will in turn be affected by whether the United States starts a war this year and how long this likely war lasts.

Africa’s priorities have been fairly consistent in recent years, defined in part by the huge and

unavoidable challenges of HIV/AIDS, poverty and conflicts. There is also broad consensus among African and international nongovernmental organizations, most international agencies, and many African governments on what needs to be done. In January, Africa Action released “Africa Policy for a New Era: Ending Segregation in U.S. Foreign Relations” This report (available at <http://www.africaaction.org/featdocs/afr2003.htm>) reflects and summarizes this emerging consensus, and provides our formulation of positive directions for policy.

The policy agenda for the U.S. government can be summed up in a few words:

- Provide adequate resources for a serious war against AIDS, including affordable life-saving drugs for those who need them.
- Cancel Africa’s unsustainable and largely illegitimate debts.
- Support efforts by African diplomats and civil society to resolve conflicts, manage peace negotiations, and build peace.
- Support efforts to move beyond formal elections toward increased participation and accountability for both national and multinational institutions.
- Invest development resources in health, education, and other sectors that build African human resources, and in communications and transportation infrastructure necessary to make human resources economically productive.

Although there may be debate on details, African and international civil society groups are virtually unanimous in favor of such common-sense proposals. Similar views have significant support among opinion makers in international agencies



and African governments. On some issues there have even been breakthroughs, such as President Bush's belated acknowledgment that affordable antiretroviral treatment is imperative.

Yet the resources to implement such an agenda are not available, and rich countries—particularly the United States—do not accept that providing these resources is both an obligation and a necessity for building common security in today's world. For their part, African governments still give more weight to pleasing donors and preserving their power than to meeting popular demands to address critical needs.

In Bush's Washington, when priorities are measured by resource allocation, war on Iraq comes first on the de facto agenda. This is followed by the U.S. push for free trade, designed to promote the interests of U.S. corporations. Africa's urgent needs to fight AIDS and promote human development are far, far down on a long list of priorities. Other rich-country governments as well as African governments are trying to slow Washington's rush to war, and they criticize the Bush administration's refusal to engage with multilateral responses to global problems. But with varying degree of nuance, they also buy into the imposed "Washington consensus" that places faith in free-market fundamentalism as the key to development—the discredited belief that opening borders for the free flow of trade and investment will eventually provide countries with the resources to meet their peoples' needs.

Popular pressure has forced African leaders and even President Bush to make new promises. The pressure to deliver on those promises will continue, regardless of events in Iraq. It is impossible, however, to deny the stubborn reality: to the extent that distraction, denial, and dogmatism prevail, constructive efforts to address Africa's needs this year will be diminished or

crippled. On issue after issue, the real test is not rhetoric but actions.

Following is a summary of questions to ask during the year, along with preliminary indicators of what answers are emerging on U.S. policy in particular.

HIV/AIDS, Health, and Human Security

In January 2002, writing in *The Nation*, Africa Action director Salih Booker noted that South African president Thabo Mbeki and U.S. president George Bush epitomized "the two greatest impediments to the fight against AIDS: denial and disregard." More than a year later, the South African government is still vacillating on its commitment to provide treatment for HIV/AIDS through the public sector. And, despite President Bush's pledge of \$10 billion in new "emergency" funds to fight AIDS in Africa, the administration even tried to block the congressional decision in February to provide an additional \$150 million from this year's budget to the Global Fund to fight AIDS.

The more one examines the fine print of the president's plan, the more gaps appear. As Africa Action and other activist groups quickly pointed out, the president's proposal, despite its "emergency" label, provided no new money for HIV/AIDS this year. The \$10 billion in new money would start small in 2004, with much less than \$1 billion in 2004 and with no guarantee that it would not be edged out of future budgets by rising costs of war in Iraq or other priorities pushed by powerful lobbyists. The *New York Times* has also noted that the increase in AIDS funds comes partly by cutting nearly \$500 million from international child health programs. "The White House should not be forcing the babies of Africa to pay for their parents' AIDS drugs," the February 17 editorial concluded. And although



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the president's promise was for additional funds for "Africa," his budget proposals count all money spent worldwide toward his pledge.

An equally important question is how the money will be spent. While the Global Fund to Fight AIDS is facing bankruptcy, the president's proposal calls for only \$200 million a year for the fund, essentially freezing U.S. contributions at the level of previous years. The bulk of the new funds apparently will be channeled either through the notoriously cumbersome bureaucracy of the U.S. Agency for International Development or through some new bilateral mechanism yet to be established—a further reflection of this administration's preference for "going it alone."

To the extent that such U.S. unilateralism prevails this year, the global response to AIDS will be further weakened and delayed. Some activists also fear that distribution of the funds may be used to advance right-wing religious agendas (e.g. the international "gag rule" preventing support for many reproductive health programs), or as leverage for other U.S. diplomatic aims.

Although President Bush acknowledged that affordable antiretroviral drugs are necessary, as of early March it remained highly doubtful that U.S. policy would in fact help countries to import such drugs or build manufacturing capability. A common-sense approach would be for rich countries and the Global Fund to work closely together to help African countries import drugs from Brazil, India, and Thailand and begin treating people immediately. Instead, U.S. trade representatives were still blocking even an agreement in principle on implementation of the 2001 Doha agreement of the World Trade Organization that called for loosened patent rules to facilitate such exports.

Negotiators freely admitted to journalists that the U.S. resistance to generics was being driven by

the pharmaceutical company lobby. The response to the AIDS pandemic will be the most telling indicator of U.S. and global response to African priorities. If past patterns prevail, congressional debate on the U.S. budget for fiscal 2004 may well continue into early 2004. Yet the Global Fund does not have sufficient funds for a third round of proposals in October 2003. The next summit of the G-8 will be held in June in France. The question is whether AIDS will even be on the agenda, and, if so, whether it will bring only new promises or real resources.

The level of response to AIDS also reveals and reflects the priority given by the "international community" to health and human development more generally. Countless international conferences have affirmed the need for additional resources, for partnership and participation, and for independent evaluation of results not dominated by bilateral political agendas. Yet all indications are that U.S. policy is moving in the opposite direction.

The Development Deficit

The United Nations estimated Africa's economic growth rate in 2002 at 2.9%, higher than the world average of 1.7%. But with more than 38 million people threatened with famine at year's end, and the continued escalation of the AIDS pandemic undermining capacity to respond at all levels, growth figures were deceptive. Families struggling to survive and governments hard-pressed to meet the minimum demands of their societies could find little comfort in such a report.

In recent years, U.S. economic policy toward Africa has revolved around the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), now possibly to be supplemented with plans for a new worldwide aid program called the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). While AGOA centers on



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expanding trade opportunities and the MCA focuses on development assistance, both initiatives feature implementation through bilateral agreements between the United States and selected countries, and unilateral determination by Washington of procedures, criteria, and evaluation of results. Although they may deliver some benefits to a small subset of recipients, neither initiative responds to civil society demands for reform of the international aid system. Indeed, they move in the opposite direction.

President Bush has asked for \$1.3 billion in 2004 for the MCA—\$300 million less than originally promised. The 10-15 countries expected to qualify include only three African countries: Uganda, Senegal, and Ghana. Eligibility will be based on 16 indicators, six for “governing justly,” four for “investing in people,” and six for “promoting economic freedom.” Inclusion of indicators for “investing in people” is a concession to the need for human development, but all indicators are based on data provided by a narrow range of institutions: 10 indicators from the World Bank, 2 from the International Monetary Fund, 2 from Freedom House, 1 from Institutional Investor magazine, and 1 from the Heritage Foundation. No African institutions are even considered relevant for assessing African conditions.

All indications are that Washington will continue to pursue this unilateral approach, while minimizing its participation in multilateral efforts to deal with African development issues. Despite its concessions to donor perspectives, the NEPAD approach to rich countries pursued by African leaders, with the support of Canada, Britain, and some other European countries, finds little backing from the White House or other U.S. agencies.

The U.S. approach forces each African country to compete with its neighbors in negotiating its relationship with Washington and its access to

resources or trade concessions under different U.S. government programs. President Bush may or may not fulfill his pledge to reschedule a visit to the continent for later this year. Whether he does or not, high-level attention in Washington to African priorities such as further debt cancellation, adequate funding for multilateral institutions at the global and African levels, and reduction in rich-country agricultural trade subsidies, is likely to be minimal.

War, Peace, and Human Rights

Despite inadequate levels of international support, African countries made several significant advances toward peace in 2002, reducing the overall level of conflict from the previous year. Angola and Sierra Leone moved beyond war to reconstruction. African leaders and the United Nations kept fragile peace processes alive in Sudan, Burundi, and Congo (Kinshasa). The cease-fire held on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border. In September, however, Cote d'Ivoire erupted into conflict that continued into the new year, and insecurity persisted in many other countries during 2002.

On the democracy front in 2002, Kenyans celebrated as the 24-year reign of Daniel arap Moi ended with December elections that were largely peaceful. In Zimbabwe, however, President Robert Mugabe stayed in power with elections that were widely critiqued as not free and fair. Despite suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth, political and economic crisis in that country continued to escalate during the year.

Seventeen other African countries held presidential or parliamentary elections in 2002. In almost all countries, however, civil society and opposition groups pointed to huge gaps between the promise and the practice of democracy.



In 2003, as in the previous year, the principal factors in resolving or aggravating conflict will be the actions of African parties to conflict, neighboring states, and the pressures of African civil society and public opinion demanding peace. Similar factors will determine the extent to which elections are free and fair, and whether human rights are defended against abusive rulers or other violent forces. Particularly influential both for their own sake and for their influence on neighboring countries will be the outcome of elections in Nigeria, the fate of peace processes in Sudan, Congo (Kinshasa), Burundi and Cote d'Ivoire, and the extent to which the new Kenyan government can begin to meet the high expectations of voters. Angola too faces enormous challenges in delivering on expected peace dividends. And Zimbabwe's stability is threatened not only by AIDS and famine, but by the escalation of internal repression and the failure of outside parties to force the government to moderate its stance.

Yet U.S. engagement with security and democracy issues in African countries is more and more driven by geopolitical considerations, in a dangerous replay of cold war disregard for African concerns. Increased U.S. interest in projecting military force into the Persian Gulf has led to a massive increase in the U.S. military presence in the Horn of Africa, and efforts to form alliances with African governments according to their perceived value in the framework of the war on terrorism. In West and Central Africa, U.S. policy makers are focusing on the strategic value of oil. This focus raises the same issue of whether issues of human rights and resolving internal conflict will be neglected in key countries such as Nigeria and Angola.

Resolution of the conflicts in Sudan and Congo (Kinshasa) and support for democracy in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Kenya should be among the highest priorities for U.S. political engagement in Africa. Rhetorical support for these goals already

forms part of U.S. policy. The question is whether this will be accompanied by additional diplomatic attention and resources for multilateral and civil society actors engaged with these issues.

As in the economic sphere, there may be positive U.S. contributions in these areas, at the initiative of some U.S. officials specializing in African affairs. But the chances that these contributions will grow and bear fruit will be slim indeed if the current drive towards war in Iraq continues. The U.S., the World, and Africa Africa's issues, as summarized above, are indeed global issues—HIV/AIDS, human development, new models for economic growth, peace, and democracy. World-wide consciousness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has even forced its way into the pages of a U.S. president's State of the Union address. In practice, however, priorities are being set by another agenda, a war agenda. 2003 will be a particularly decisive year in determining whether Africa and the world can build momentum for a change of course.

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