

Africa Policy Outlook 2009

The Obama administration must overhaul U.S. policy toward Africa



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Editor's note: The Africa Policy Outlook is an annual publication released jointly by Africa Action and Foreign Policy In Focus that highlights the key themes and trends in U.S. Africa policy. See the appendix below for a general schedule of African elections planned for 2009.

Overview

The outpouring of emotion across Africa when President Barack Obama was sworn in had as much to do with his heritage as with the possibility that he might reverse some of the Bush administration's disastrous policies. President George W. Bush trumpeted Africa as a foreign policy success, highlighting the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief ([PEPFAR](#)) as proof. He didn't mention the extremely unpopular ideological limitations on PEPFAR that he championed. He also failed to mention the impact of his administration's other key initiatives that were also important to African people. He didn't talk about the dramatic increase in military spending, the controversial creation of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), the extremely flawed war on terror, his unpopular unilateral and bilateral approaches to various countries, the collapse of Somalia, his support for undemocratic leaders, and the undermining of the United Nations, particularly its peacekeeping operations.

The Obama administration must immediately address the continent's three massive humanitarian crises in Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and respond to the desperate need for more United Nations peacekeepers in all three of these nations. Under Obama's leadership, U.S. policy also must help Africa recover from the crisis brought on by the recent spikes and sharp declines in food prices, cope with terms of trade that virtually ensure Africa can't compete in the global economy, and reverse a resurgence of undemocratic governance — particularly in countries that have strong military relations with our nation. In addition, Africa needs to address other pressing concerns, including education, climate change, agriculture, clean water, health and transportation infrastructure, and the effective coordination of foreign aid.

Expectations for President Obama have become sky-scraping. The challenges before him are enormous. One thing he can do at no cost to the U.S. taxpayer is change the tone of



our foreign policy and the way our policies are developed. Collaborative models in policy design and implementation would bring far more thoughtful and successful long-term strategies than the present competitive and self-interested models that time and again have left our policies misinformed, shortsighted, and ineffective.

Military Might and Flawed Force

While a U.S. military presence on the African continent is nothing new, the U.S. military footprint in Africa expanded in a very alarming way during the last eight years. In less than a decade it expanded from small units of U.S. forces stationed in strategic regions into [AFRICOM](#), which became operational in October 2008.

Needless to say, this overt militarization of U.S. policy towards Africa is a source for grave concern for African civil society, government officials, and advocates. The U.S. military doesn't have a good record on the African continent. In fact, its implicit and explicit support of regimes such as apartheid South Africa, Mobutu's Zaire, and Samuel Doe's Liberia were long factors in the destabilization inside and outside those countries. Today, U.S. military might is seen behind Rwanda's continued contribution in destabilizing the Congo. U.S. forces are seen as the rearguard to the Ethiopian army that overthrew the existing government in Somalia.

So what will 2009 bring? It's difficult to tell what the Obama administration will do, but what's not difficult to see is the need to rehabilitate and reorient U.S. policy towards Africa from military-guarded corporate exploitation to one that's centered on human security as a foundation for peace and development.

Somalia

Somalia is just one tragic example of where U.S. involvement has directly undermined the cause of peace and stability. The overthrow of the Islamic Courts Union and the subsequent Ethiopian occupation has been an overwhelming disaster. While many Somalis disapproved of some of the more fundamentalist ways of the original courts, most felt that they were well organized, disciplined, and effective civil administrators who had certainly provided Somalia with its first semblance of order and leadership since 1991.

Today, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is divided and ineffectual in the face of a growing Islamist insurgency. Basic services like food, water, electricity, transportation, and education are largely unavailable. Though the Ethiopian army has just pulled out of Somalia, its two-year tenure in Mogadishu was punctuated by numerous accusations of human rights violations. For two years, the TFG and the Ethiopian army



were both extremely unpopular, and yet they stand as visual proof of what the U.S. once called its model for the "Global War on Terror" in Africa. The Somalis completely ignored a peace [agreement](#) between the former moderate elements of the Courts, now called the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia and the TFG as they seethed over what has been done to them.

The civilian death toll since the invasion is now close to 10,000. More than one million people have fled their homes, including half of Mogadishu's population, and are now living in makeshift refugee camps. The UN now estimates that more than 3.25 million people currently need food aid. As desperation for food and security increases, it's not surprising to see disaffected Somalis resorting to piracy and other forms of violence. While every effort should be made to stop the violence, long-lasting peace and stability can only be reached when the root causes of poverty are addressed and a government responsive to the needs of Somalis first is in place.

The U.S. military and intelligence presence throughout this debacle seriously hurt the U.S. standing throughout the continent. Strategic blunders in Somalia include: the U.S. role in orchestrating the Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia, the CIA's funding of warlords, the U.S. role in imposing a handpicked government, and not least, cruise missile attacks on Somali villages resulting in civilian casualties. These actions have engendered strong feelings of hostility towards the United States among Somalis.

If poverty and failed states are the biggest challenge on the global terrorism front, then the U.S. military is assuming a role in which it can't succeed. The military is neither a policymaker nor a humanitarian agency, and it's certainly not known for its sensitivity and understanding of local issues. This is a role better played by a strong United Nations and, one day, a strong African Union.

The United States should also reassess its heavy reliance on the military in Africa. The U.S. military isn't designed to manage long-term issues of poverty reduction, lasting security, building infrastructure, and good governance. Rather, the United States should consider establishing a Department of Global Development, headed by a cabinet-level secretary that would take a comprehensive approach to these issues in the name of lasting security.

Sudan

This will be a critical year for Sudan's future. The crisis in Darfur has grown and now affects the entire region's stability. Conflicts in Sudan and Chad have become mutually reinforcing. The joint UN-African Union force (UNAMID) peacekeeping force authorized in July 2007 remains too understaffed and under-equipped to be effective.



Civilian displacements and killings in Darfur continued throughout 2008 as UNAMID was reduced to bystanders because of acute shortages of troops, road transport, and helicopters. To date, [less than](#) half of the authorized 26,000 full UNAMID force has been deployed. Pursuing a parallel track of counterterrorism intelligence sharing with Khartoum has undermined the capacity of the United States to use diplomatic and economic leverage to pressure the Khartoum government into ending the genocide and allowing the full deployment of UNAMID. Supporting UNAMID must be a priority in 2009.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) calls for free and fair elections early this year. Presidential, parliamentary, state, and local elections are scheduled for February but chances are they will be delayed. A controversial census was conducted in 2008 but hasn't been released yet. Some are already challenging its authenticity.

The elections will take place at a time when the sitting President, Omar Al Bashir is in line to be indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and possibly genocide. While some analysts fear that an indictment will derail the elections, Bashir's National Congress Party has given several indications that they will try and derail the elections anyway. The ICC indictment should serve as a pressure point to promote peace and justice in the entire Sudan and surrounding region. These prospects for justice could be reversed if the UN Security Council votes to suspend the charges. Article 16 of the Rome Statute — the accord that established the ICC — allows the UN Security Council to suspend the ICC prosecutions for a period of 12 months. This suspension is reviewed annually and can be renewed indefinitely. The United States has rightly opposed invoking Article 16 but must now take the next step by signing on to the Rome Statute to participate in and help strengthen this global tribunal.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

In the DRC, the high hopes for peace and stability that attended the historic 2006 multiparty elections are giving way to despair and desperation as deadly fighting continues in the North Kivu region between government forces and rebels loyal to General Laurent Nkunda. Nkunda's recent threat to expand his rebellion beyond the eastern region to overrun Kinshasa threatens to plunge the whole country into deadly civil war again. Experts estimate that 1,000 people die every day in the DRC due to conflict-related causes. Over the last decade the death toll is estimated at 5.4 million, making this the world's deadliest conflict since World War II. Continued fighting has displaced millions and created an impossible situation for humanitarian workers. Food shortages have resulted in mass malnutrition and starvation.



Naturally, the DRC's vast mineral wealth continues to be at the center of conflict. Corporations and local elites continue to use instability as a cover to plunder the country's natural resources.

As tensions escalate, both government forces and rebels have been fingered in gross human rights violations. Women in particular have been the worst affected, as all sides to the conflict have deliberately committed despicable sexual atrocities. According to Professor [Yakin Ertuk](#), the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, "the situation is most acute in South Kivu, where non-State armed groups, particularly foreign militia, commit sexual atrocities that are of an unimaginable brutality and aim at the complete physical and psychological destruction of women with implications for the entire society."

The UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (known by its French acronym MONUC), despite being the largest UN peacekeeping mission in the world, has failed to contain rebels or protect civilians. Over the last year the mission's credibility suffered severely due to repeated accusations of sexual abuse, and illicit guns for drugs and minerals trade with Hutu rebels who committed genocide in Rwanda.

To protect the Congolese people, the United States needs to work cooperatively with the UN and civil society to provide stronger civilian protection and resolve to end the conflict. Again, the dismal relationship between the United States and the United Nations undermined the capacity of the international community to robustly respond to the crisis. With full U.S. support, a beefed-up and more professional UN peacekeeping force in the DRC would be much more effective. Experts suggest that MONUC must be expanded from the present force of 20,000 to 50,000 to effectively contain rebels, protect civilians, and carry out its peacekeeping mandate. While the African Union played a very important role in brokering the peace that led to the historic 2006 multiparty elections, it's clear the AU presently lacks capacity to go it alone in the DRC. Increased U.S. support to both the UN and AU efforts in the DRC is absolutely vital to enduring peace.

Women didn't participate in previous peace negotiations, and they continue to be ignored despite the fact they are often specifically targeted. Henceforth, all peace, justice, and accountability negotiations must include the newly formed Coalition for Women's Human Rights in Conflict Situations Working Group, in the Great Lakes region. The working group is comprised of the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Urgent Action Fund, Women and Law in Development, and the Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women.

Furthermore, the United States needs to reassess its relationship with the powerful Rwandan Army. Today Rwanda is a proxy for U.S. interests. Even while U.S. officials



insist that Rwanda isn't intervening in the DRC, the recent [report](#) by the UN Security Council Group of Experts confirms vast Rwandan support for General Nkunda's Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). This report included extensive evidence of high-level communication between the government of Rwanda and the Tutsi rebel group. Further, it details that Rwanda has facilitated the supply of military equipment, officers, and recruits, some of them children, and held fundraising meetings and opened bank accounts for Nkunda. Clearly, U.S. support for Rwanda hasn't resulted in greater security in the Great Lakes Region. Instead, the reality has been further destabilization and violence.

Zimbabwe

Since Zimbabwe's 2008 elections, the longstanding political and economic crisis has exploded into a serious human tragedy. The country's crucial social services, such as health, water distribution, and education, have virtually collapsed. An unemployment rate estimated at 90% and an inflation rate of [over 230 million percent](#) have left millions of Zimbabweans condemned to abject poverty and the Zimbabwean currency virtually worthless. A nationwide cholera epidemic has killed more than 2,000 people and continues to infect thousands more.

Mugabe keeps his illegitimate grip on power primarily through coercion and patronage. U.S. dollars are used to buy loyalty from the security forces.

As Zimbabwe plunges deeper and deeper into crisis, the reality of a capitalist class profiting from the misery and exploitation of people in Zimbabwe can't be ignored. Mugabe's closest supporters continue to profit from deals secured with unscrupulous businessmen in Europe and the United States. The United States must support the UN Stolen Assets Recovery Initiative (StAR). This would hold developed countries accountable for the role they play in the corruption present in developing countries. This bilateral initiative would target the source of corruption, which often includes bribes and other illegal income provided to governments from firms and individuals in developed countries. StAR would also force developing countries to invest recovered funds in social and anti-poverty programs. The World Bank [estimates](#) that for every \$100 million recovered, more than 600,000 people could receive treatment for HIV/AIDS, or 100 million people with malaria drugs.

The political situation in Zimbabwe is characterized by a costly political stalemate, as the Global Political Agreement signed between Mugabe and the opposition in October 2008 is yet to be consummated because of continued squabbles between the two leading political parties — the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (Zanu PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) — over distribution of power. U.S. support



for building an international consensus on Zimbabwe based on human rights and will be crucial for breaking the political stalemate in 2009.

Financial Crises

The financial crisis has shaken the U.S. economy and had a rippling effect around the world. Initially, developing countries were first largely unaffected by the crisis, given that many of their local banks are less integrated into the global financial system. However, in November the World Bank [revised](#) its economic outlook for developing countries and acknowledged that developing countries "are now much more vulnerable, with dwindling capital flows, huge withdrawals of capital leading to losses in equity markets, and skyrocketing interest rates."

The U.S. government has a rare opportunity to build a new global economic system and reform the failed policies of international financial institutions (IFIs). A responsible lending framework would redefine the role of development finance as a more equitable and transparent course of action. Imposing inflexible and strict conditions on development-oriented loans has undercut the Millennium Development Goals, causing developing countries to divert critical resources for HIV/AIDS programs, education, and other important needs to pay almost \$14 billion annually on debt service to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Debt cancellation needs to become a priority in reexamining the global economic system. In 2008 the "Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanded Debt Cancellation" ([HR 2634/ S 2166](#)) passed in the House of Representatives by a 285-132 vote and cleared the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on June 24, 2008. It failed to pass by a narrow margin in the full Senate and most likely will be reintroduced in 2009. It would allow for expanded debt cancellation in developing countries and require an audit of past loans.

As of late 2007, 11 of 24 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) surveyed by the International Monetary Fund were facing litigation from 46 different commercial creditors, also known as "vulture funds." A [vulture fund](#) is a fund or investment company that seeks to profit by buying distressed debt and suing for exorbitantly high returns. Debt cancellation advocates are focused on a particular subgroup of vulture funds — those that target distressed sovereign debt. These companies buy up the debt of poor countries at a big discount from the original owner (either a government or a commercial creditor) with the purpose of suing the indebted country in court once the poor country has some money (often after debt cancellation) to recover the original debt and make a profit.



Of these 46 creditors, 25 received court judgments against HIPC's amounting to about \$1 billion on original claims of \$427 million. Their activity has increased the debt burden of the world's poorest citizens and undermined the gains of debt cancellation.

On August 1, 2007, Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) introduced the Stop VULTURE Funds Act ([HR 6796](#)). This bill would outlaw profiteering from sovereign debt by capping the amount of profit that a fund can reap through litigating against poor countries to collect defaulted debts. It also requires disclosures from any fund that pursues vulture fund activity through the U.S. courts.

This bill is one of the most important that must be passed by the 111th Congress.

If accruing debt weren't dire enough for some of the world's poorest countries, limits on social spending and agricultural subsidies under the guise of trade liberalization are often required for development assistance. Due to this fact, developing countries have suffered from increased food and oil prices, which have been a source of conflict and have driven more people below the poverty line. It's [estimated](#) that nearly 840 million people around the world are chronically hungry. These numbers will likely rise as developing countries are forced to spend a disproportionately large amount of their income on food items. Ironically, the response of the developed countries to the crisis, including the United States, has been to increase spending on subsidies on our own agricultural produce.

The World Trade Organization's Doha Round mistakenly attempted to fix global food challenges by liberalizing agricultural markets. Poorer producers have been left without government support and developing countries have grown increasingly dependent on imported food. Even given the enormity of the financial crisis, the U.S. government continues to perpetuate failed solutions for Africa. More must be done to protect the poor. Fair, not free trade must be adapted immediately as a part of creating a new global economic system.

Sustainable Solutions on HIV/AIDS

2008 was a landmark year for U.S. leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa. In July, the U.S. Congress passed [The Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Reauthorization Act of 2008](#) that provides up to \$48 billion in pledges over five years to stop HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis worldwide. The latest figures indicate that the annual number of AIDS deaths is beginning to level off globally, after decades of increasing mortality. But [according](#) to a 2008 UNAIDS report, Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the worst affected area, accounting for over two-thirds of all people living with HIV. With numbers



still exceedingly high, more needs to be done in order to meet the challenges of the pandemic.

A gender-sensitive approach to alleviating HIV/AIDS must specifically target women and young people. Vulnerable populations continue to be disproportionately affected by the pandemic, with an [additional](#) 370,000 children under 15 becoming infected with HIV in 2007. National government strategies need to acknowledge the distinctiveness of male and female experiences in addition to gender specific health risks. This will begin to address the root causes of health disparities related to HIV/AIDS.

In 2009, the U.S. government must continue the progress that has been made in funding for HIV/AIDS. There's still much work to be done to ensure that scientific evidence, not ideology, drives funding for programs. By allowing greater flexibility for local participants (including civil society) to develop a plan to employ U.S. foreign assistance, countries are able to develop a specific program that will reach more people, more effectively. This also encourages for greater transparency and accountability.

Long-term sustainable solutions that include prevention, early detection and testing, and treatment must now be integrated into a bold new vision for global health and U.S. foreign assistance. Focusing more attention on using U.S. assistance to help build a health infrastructure will improve Africa's ability to deliver services, particularly in poorer and rural communities. Without laboratories, nurses, or doctors to deliver life-saving anti-retroviral (ARV) medicines, the effects of our efforts are greatly reduced. An investment in health infrastructure for HIV/AIDS can also be practical in treating other diseases, such as tuberculosis, malaria, cholera and more.

To accomplish this scale-up, the United States must reform the way it coordinates foreign assistance. A new Department of Global Development should be formed that would have a mandate for policy consistency on the full range of U.S. policies affecting poor countries, such as health care, education, agriculture, trade, debt and climate change. Human rights and development must be integrated into the defense and diplomacy discourse to ensure that the failed approaches to Iraq and Somalia are never repeated. This new agency could prevent short-term (and short-sighted) political goals from undermining long-term development objectives.

Cultivating Conflict: Climate Change

The need for strong global leadership to fight climate change has never been greater. As United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) Executive Director Achim Steiner [said](#) in 2007, Africa "is the continent with the least responsibility for climate change and yet it is perversely the continent with the most [to lose] if greenhouse gases are not cut."



Global warming threatens farmers and fishermen, flora and fauna, coastlines and deserts, wetlands and savannah, and the critical industries of tourism and agriculture. Dealing with the consequences of the rich industrialized nations' irresponsible climate management must not fall to Africans alone. The richest countries must start holding themselves accountable to the mandates of the Kyoto protocol and the United States in particular now has a chance to leave harmful ideology behind and provide the leadership the world desperately needs. Simultaneously, global polluters must extend resources and strategies for African countries to adapt to the consequences of climate change themselves.

The most natural international architecture to support African adaptation to climate change is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). With 197 state parties, the UNFCCC (which led to the Kyoto protocol) is the most universally supported multilateral environmental agreement. The UNFCCC mandates that Northern countries provide resources to the Global South to finance climate adaptation and mitigation programs according to the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" among wealthy and developing nations. Financial obligations under the UNFCCC are considered distinct from existing commitments to provide official development assistance (ODA).

Rather than pledging support through the UNFCCC or developing an alternative funding mechanism, the U.S. and other donors have turned to the World Bank to finance climate adaptation and mitigation efforts in Africa and the rest of the Global South. From both an environmental and economic justice perspective, the Bank is the [wrong institution](#) to take on the climate crisis in Africa. The World Bank remains a big investor in polluting industries. During 2007 and 2008 it has spent more on fossil fuel projects than on renewable energy and efficiency programs. The Bank continues to follow a flawed approach in pursuing major infrastructure projects such as the disastrous [Chad-Cameroon](#) oil pipeline. It's among the world's least transparent and democratic institutions, burdened by fundamental issues of trust with the very constituencies it professes to serve.

Despite these criticisms, in September 2008, donors pledged over \$6.1 billion to the Bank's Climate Investment Funds (CIFs). These funds are being claimed by donors to fulfill existing ODA commitments, effectively pitting climate adaptation and mitigation programs against other development needs. Even more disturbing, CIFs are being issued in the form of new loans, rather than grants, forcing African countries to accumulate new debt to deal with a predicament for which they bare no responsibility. This will result in diverting resources from education, health and transportation infrastructure, anti poverty programs and other important needs.



Climate change is a catalyst for crisis in Africa — from land use rivalries in Sudan to persistent famine in Ethiopia. [According](#) to James R. Lee, director of American University's "Inventory of Conflict and Environment" project, there will be several likely correlations between global warming and conflict. First, conflict will arise from scarcity of arable land. As people are forced to move from the hardest-hit areas and compete with others for a new home, land and fresh water with neighbors will develop. However, a potential offset to this is the possibility that certain areas that were once uninhabitable may soon be accessible, and precious resources may be easier to extract.

To alleviate and take responsibility for the effects of climate change in Africa, the United States should lead by example and take bold action to reduce its own carbon emissions and offer responsible financing to African countries threatened by climate change. This means adequate grants (not loans) must support adaptation and mitigation mechanisms whose design is informed by local input. This financing should be channeled through the UNFCCC or a new funding instrument grounded in the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities" and a truly multilateral decision-making process. While it's important that environmental impact assessments inform development policy in general, specific climate initiatives are vital to ensuring the health, welfare and human security of the African people.

Elections Appendix

Democratic governance is the foundation for stability and economic progress. Nearly 20 nations on the African continent are planning elections this year. The international community can play an important role supporting democracy and human rights. The U.S. Government must support international treaties and existing peacekeeping missions that uphold the rule of law, government accountability, and civilian protection. The African Union (AU) can play a key role in elections on the continent, but financial, political, and logistical support remains a challenge.

Algeria

General elections (presidential and parliamentary), April and December respectively

Angola

Presidential election, September

Botswana

Parliamentary election, October

Chad



Parliamentary election, date not yet determined

Comoros

Parliamentary election, April

Congo (Brazzaville)

Presidential election, March

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Gubernatorial elections, date not yet determined

Equatorial Guinea

Presidential election, December

Gabon

Parliamentary election, January

Malawi

General elections (presidential and parliamentary), May 19

Mauritania

Presidential elections, May

Mozambique

General elections (presidential and parliamentary), December

Namibia

General elections (presidential and parliamentary), November

Niger

General elections (presidential and parliamentary), November

Somaliland (an autonomous region, part of Somalia)

Presidential election, April

South Africa

General elections (presidential and parliamentary), between April and June

Sudan

General elections (presidential and parliamentary), from January to April



Tunisia

General elections (presidential and parliamentary), October

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