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# **OBAMA, AFRICA AND PEACE**

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## REFRAMING THE OVERALL APPROACH TO U.S. RELATIONS WITH AFRICA

The Obama administration has an opportunity to fundamentally remake U.S. relations with Africa during its tenure, and a cornerstone of that effort needs to be a much greater emphasis on the most cost-effective element of our foreign policy tools: peacemaking. An investment in ending some of the world's deadliest, most destructive, and costliest wars would yield great results in those countries and the positive repercussions from such engagement would rebound across the continent.

As the first president of the United States with immediate African roots, President Obama not only has an important reservoir of goodwill on the continent, he also has the ability to move beyond the tendentious "North-South" debate between developed and less developed countries that has made more transformational policies difficult to attain. Efforts by the dying generation of Africa's strong men who believe they should rule for life, such as Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, to portray President Obama as a former colonial master will have little resonance in Africa or elsewhere. President Obama will represent a fresh start, but the problems facing Africa and how best to address them will be no less acute.

Equally important, an Obama administration can also leave behind the "for-us-or-against-us" strategies of the Bush administration that tended to ignore the worst behavior of "allies" while demonizing every action of those who were deemed "enemies." The Bush approach was in many ways a return to a Cold War calculus and approach to relations with the continent that did little to ameliorate the fundamental forces driving conflict on the continent or to improve the overall capacity of states to address such tensions. To be fair, the Bush administration did make a considerable investment in HIV/AIDS prevention in Africa through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS relief, or PEPFAR,

and also deeply engaged in pursuit of an eventual peace deal between the Sudanese government and southern-based rebels. The Obama administration will need a much more nuanced approach, and it will need to work more closely with both governments and civil society on the continent to shape a shared agenda.

Given its thinly veiled hostility toward most forms of multilateral institution building, the Bush administration also placed limited emphasis on these issues in the context of Africa, despite a glaring need for Africa's regional institutions to improve their capability and effectiveness. The Bush administration's low regard for the United Nations in general also largely precluded the Security Council from playing an effective role in addressing Africa's multiple crises.

It is essential that the new administration invest significantly in peacemaking and take a smarter, more comprehensive approach to this peacemaking. However, it is vital that these investments in peacekeeping are accompanied by long-term investments in development, crisis prevention, and in shaping African regional institutions that are built around shared values. Too often, membership in African regional organizations has simply been a matter of geography—with democracies and autocracies lumped together. Yet, it is impossible to imagine effective regional institutions in Africa that lack a shared commitment to certain essential values, including democratic government, the responsibility to protect their own populations, and relatively open trade. Indeed, regional organizations in Europe and Latin America have only become more effective when certain membership criteria were added on top of geographic considerations.

The African Union in particular, has a wildly mixed record in this regard. As an organization, it has been far too willing to practice lowest common denominator policies, such as its relative tolerance of the Sudan regime's massive human rights abuses

in Darfur. Similarly, both the African Union and the Southern African Development Community have struggled to come to terms with President Robert Mugabe's ruinous rule in Zimbabwe. Yet, the recent decision by the African Union to suspend Guinea's membership unless the military officers who conducted the coup in that country restore "constitutional rule" is exactly the kind of behavior a regional organization should be demanding. This also suggests that with the right kind of long-term support from the United States the mantra of "African solutions to African problems" could move beyond empty rhetoric. This will require two important developments:

- African regional institutions need to become increasingly responsive to the needs of African citizens and not just the prerogatives of African heads of state.
- The broader international community must recognize that war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide are not "African problems." They are international problems that demand international solutions.

Reshaping the overall approach to Africa will also demand that the Obama administration face some hard choices. Development resources are increasingly dominated by spending on HIV/AIDS. While responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic is a crucial priority, if U.S. development assistance becomes skewed too far in this direction, it will become very difficult to make long-term investments in state-building, the rule of law, basic education, and economic growth—the elements that are fundamental to changing Africa's course over the long haul.

The administration will also need to take a hard look at continued agricultural subsidies in the United States. These subsidies continue to drain federal funds at a time when there are unprecedented budget pressures, while simultaneously making it harder for many African states to compete in one

of the few areas where they enjoy a comparative advantage. Cutting these subsidies would benefit Americans in three ways: They would pay fewer tax dollars to support unneeded subsidies; they would enjoy the fruits of greater competition as consumers; and, over time, they would need to invest fewer dollars in development and humanitarian relief as Africa has the chance to achieve greater prosperity. The same can be said for European agricultural subsidies. While it may sound strange to tie the issue of agricultural subsidies back to the questions of war and peace on the continent, it is essential to do so. For too long, U.S. efforts in development, economic development, trade, humanitarian relief, and diplomacy on the continent have been poorly connected threads, and all of these efforts have collectively suffered as a result.

## A FOCUS ON PEACEMAKING

Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Chad, and northern Uganda are part of a region of east and central Africa that is battered by chronic conflict, with millions dead and even more displaced over the last couple decades. It is the deadliest zone of conflict in the world since World War II. Congo and Sudan alone account for nearly 8 million deaths due to the legacy of war in the past two decades.

As part of its fundamental rethink of Africa policy, the Obama administration will need to shift U.S. policy from simply managing the symptoms of Africa's biggest wars—in the form of billions of dollars in humanitarian aid and peace observation missions that are often unable to effectively protect civilians—to ending these conflicts. The existing model of conflict resolution in Africa has focused on one conflict at a time, treating Africa's wars as if they occur in isolation. Extreme examples of this include dealing with Sudan's north-south war while setting the issue of Darfur and eastern Sudan to the side; focusing on the situation in Somalia without effectively addressing the standoff

between Ethiopia and Eritrea that fuels the conflict; and negotiating in northern Uganda without involving or sanctioning Sudan's ruling party, which has long supported the Lord's Resistance Army as a proxy force. Most of Africa's wars are complex and regional in nature, and they cannot be addressed by a bureaucratic process that encourages stove-piping rather than coordination and synthesis.

The new administration needs to make an investment in competent, sustained conflict resolution, backed by focused leverage that transforms the logic of regional combatants from war to peace.

## ENHANCING U.S. CAPACITIES FOR PEACE

The basic elements of an enhanced peacemaking strategy would include the following:

**a) Diplomatic capacity:** Additional diplomatic slots should be assigned and staffed in embassies throughout East and Central Africa with the primary emphasis of these positions on support for various peace processes in the region. Country teams in each embassy would work closely with Washington and with existing regional efforts to step up support for peace efforts. U.S. diplomats would meet quarterly in the region to coordinate peacemaking strategies, strategize, and share information. Country and issue experts would be hired and shared regionally to support the ongoing and new peace processes with a focus on making them more effective. In general, the U.S. embassies on the continent are not only grossly understaffed, but are badly lacking country and issue experts with specific peace-building experience.

**b) Inter-Agency task force:** A senior official from the State Department or National Security Council should oversee and coordinate a Task Force that helps shape the diplomatic strategy in each of the conflicts of East and Central Africa: Sudan, Congo, Somalia, Chad, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Central African Republic, and the Lord's Resistance Army threat. The

situation in Zimbabwe would also likely be included in this group. The Task Force can ensure the sharing of resources, personnel, and intelligence across the region to guarantee maximum coordination and provide strategic direction to multilateral efforts on each of the processes. Additional country and issue experts should be contracted to support the work of the task force and to purposefully think outside the box of existing approaches. Staff should also be placed in New York and Brussels to support enhanced diplomacy within the U.N. Security Council and European Union.

**c) Special envoys:** When appropriate, the president should appoint special envoys to add gravitas to peace efforts for specific conflicts. Envoys would work closely with the enhanced regional and D.C.-based capacities, and would be deployed when key messages need to be delivered or support for negotiations is required. Special envoys are by no means a magic bullet, and the effectiveness of many envoys in the past has been undercut by simmering tensions with existing bureaucratic structures and officials. This suggests that special envoys should only be deployed when they are sufficiently senior to command respect within the system and actually serve as a focal point for coordination and effective policymaking. The relationship between any such special envoy and the task force described above would need to be clearly articulated before such a person was deployed.

**d) Washington Meetings:** When appropriate, the Obama administration should host ministerial or working-level meetings in Washington with key actors, including key diplomatic allies, to help jump-start stalled peace processes or launch new ones. The ability of the United States to bring warring parties to the negotiating table has been sadly underutilized in recent years.

**e) Clear top-level leadership:** Senior-level officials in the administration should run point for their departments and agencies to ensure maximal coordination and rapid response. Cabinet officials

should clearly assign responsibility for leading on African conflict resolution issues to a senior official within his or her department or agency, thus minimizing confusion over responsibility. At times, these assigned officials could take a more direct role in support of negotiations if appropriate, and in close coordination with the Task Force described above.

## THE THREE DEADLIEST CONFLICTS IN AFRICA

Sudan, eastern Congo, and Somalia are the three deadliest conflicts on the continent and deserve immediate attention and a new strategy. At the same time, the administration will also need to develop new plans and a new approach to dealing with the Lord's Resistance Army, relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and the general situation in Zimbabwe. Forthcoming Enough papers will address the Lord's Resistance Army and Zimbabwe.

With regard to the three biggest conflicts on the African continent, we offer the following recommendations:

### 1. Sudan

Nowhere else is a new approach to making peace more needed than in Darfur and southern Sudan, where Enough has called for a concerted "peace surge." There remains no comprehensive, internationally supported initiative for making peace in Darfur, and no effective and high-level strategy for implementing the existing peace deal for southern Sudan. The Obama administration should focus on helping build an effective peace process, maximally coordinating with China as the biggest investor in Sudan, with Qatar and its fledgling efforts, and other key Arab states that have economic leverage with the Khartoum regime and who do not want to see their investments put at risk by a widening conflict in Sudan.

The timing is auspicious. The International Criminal Court will likely issue an indictment of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir early in 2009, and the United States will have an opportunity to quietly build an effective coalition of countries that demands peace and justice for Sudan in the form of a peace deal that addresses the root causes in Darfur, the implementation of the north-south peace deal, steps to ensure accountability, and a practical strategy to remove Bashir as president.

Beyond support for the ICC indictments of Bashir and some of the rebel leaders, leverage should be built through intensive work in the U.N. Security Council to go after the assets of Sudan's ruling party (particularly President Bashir, his family, and associates) and rebel leaders who are undermining peace in Darfur. Other leverage-building initiatives could include the initiation of NATO planning for a credible no-fly zone with muscular follow-up actions in the event that the Sudanese regime cuts off humanitarian aid access in response to the imposition of the U.N. ban on offensive military flights. The effort to fully staff the U.N. force in Darfur at 26,000 should be accompanied by a shift in the U.N. forces mandate that would allow it to protect civilians who want to go home to their villages of origin, which should be the ultimate goal of our Darfur policy. In addition, the administration should take a hard look at steps to increase pressure on Port Sudan, a vital transportation link for Sudanese oil exports, recognizing that this would require intensive diplomacy with China given its impact on oil shipments.

Lastly, the administration will need to take a much more integrated look at the problems spilling over the borders in Chad, the Central African Republic, and western Sudan, recognizing that state weakness and internal conflicts in both Chad and the CAR continue to make the Darfur conflict more difficult to resolve.

## 2. Eastern Congo

Local, national, regional, and international factors continue to fuel the deadly war in eastern Congo. At the local level, disputes over land and citizenship contribute to considerable tensions. At the national level, poor governance and fundamental insecurity have created a vacuum in which numerous spoilers have considerable room to operate. At the regional level, militias such as the Rwandan FDLR, the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army, and very bad relations between Kinshasa and Kigali have created an environment of permanent instability and hostility. Lastly, the international trade in minerals has created a self-financing mechanism for militias and others hoping to continue to exploit violence to their own gain. The Obama administration should focus on more robustly supporting existing conflict resolution efforts led by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, and taking action to help end the atrocities being committed against civilian populations. Priorities would include:

- High-level support for a negotiated deal with the main rebel groups and a practical road map for implementing this deal
- Leadership in fostering and provision of technical support for a multilateral military and sanctions strategy to deal with the FDLR and CNDP
- Political and intelligence support for the International Criminal Court's investigations into war crimes in the Kivus
- Real support for security sector reform and DDR strategies
- An investigation into what must be done to end the predatory extraction of "conflict minerals" in the East, the insatiable demand for which traces back to the electronics industry in the United States, Asia, and Europe

Improving the situation in eastern Congo will demand some very tough diplomacy, and a firm message from Washington that the administration will not tolerate either the Government of Congo or Rwanda offering direct support to militia groups on the ground. The use of these proxy militias continues to be a cancer in the region.

## 3. Somalia

As Ethiopia withdraws from Somalia, there will be an opportunity to create a more rational diplomatic and security strategy aimed at isolating the hard-line Islamist elements in the Shabaab militia. The Obama administration should focus on buttressing and upgrading the existing U.N.-led peace process (the Djibouti Process), while resisting efforts to put in place a poorly thought out, poorly resourced, and poorly staffed U.N. peacekeeping mission with a murky mandate.

Much more work will need to be done to build a genuine government of national unity from the bottom up, with the objective of creating a real power-sharing formula that includes key clan-based leaders, businessmen, and moderate Islamists. A wider security strategy focused on building an alliance of clan-based networks and functioning local governing authorities from Somaliland, Puntland, and throughout the South would further isolate hard-line elements within the Shabaab if it feeds into the transitional governing authority and supports the provision of security and social services, the two things Somalis most crave. Targeted sanctions should be aimed at hard-line Islamists and reactionary warlords who continue to undermine peace and the construction of a legitimate government and the external actors that support them.

Furthermore, a parallel diplomatic effort should be launched to deal with the simmering Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict, including conclusive border demarcation followed by internationally backed bilateral talks on issues of mutual concern. The

standoff between these two countries has helped fuel conflict in Somalia over the past decade. The latest chapter in their proxy competition has been particularly deadly and dangerous, further destabilizing Somalia and bringing the two states closer to the possibility of renewed interstate war, an outcome that would be devastating for the Horn of Africa.

### CHANGING THE TONE

The Obama administration could also do a great deal to change the tone in how the U.S. government talks about Africa in public statements, at the United Nations, and in its policy documents. Major opportunities exist in East and Central Africa, and because expectations are so high throughout Africa, President-elect Obama will have more space than usual to help take the lead in forging a global commitment to end these crises rather than to continue managing their symptoms.

The good news is that we know how to resolve complex conflicts. Working closely with African peacemakers and peace advocates on the ground in war zones throughout the continent, sustained and competent international diplomacy contributed to the end of wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Burundi, and southern Sudan. It helped dismantle apartheid in South Africa and helped guide the birth of the nation of Namibia.

Africa's remaining wars require outside-the-box thinking in this new era of diminishing resources. The cheapest and most effective instrument we have is vast American experience in peacemaking. The cost-effectiveness of ending wars rather than continuing to manage their symptoms is undeniable. It requires a decision by the incoming president that containing the damage from the status quo is an untenable goal, which must be replaced by a full-scale multilateral effort to resolve Africa's multiple, interlocking wars. The costs of reassigning diplomats to these war zones (real transformational diplomacy) and appointing a handful of senior officials and envoys where appropriate are relatively negligible when compared with the billions we will continue to spend on clean-up, conflict containment, and counterterrorism in the context of the present "conflict management" approach.

The Obama administration begins its work facing a host of deadly conflicts in Africa and few easy solutions. Yet President Obama also has a historic opportunity to fundamentally reshape relations between the United States and the African continent in a way that will be truly transformational. Many forces and voices within America's foreign policy bureaucracy will suggest Africa is a problem and an opportunity better left for another day; it will take genuine leadership from the top to make clear that the future is now.



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Enough is a project of the Center for American Progress to end genocide and crimes against humanity. Founded in 2007, ENOUGH focuses on the crises in Sudan, Chad, eastern Congo, northern Uganda, Somalia, and Zimbabwe. ENOUGH's strategy papers and briefings provide sharp field analysis and targeted policy recommendations based on a "3P" crisis response strategy: promoting durable peace, providing civilian protection, and punishing perpetrators of atrocities. ENOUGH works with concerned citizens, advocates, and policy makers to prevent, mitigate, and resolve these crises. To learn more about ENOUGH and what you can do to help, go to [www.enoughproject.org](http://www.enoughproject.org).



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