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Celebrate or Hold Suspect? Bill Clinton and George W. Bush in Africa

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Ill at Ease with Africa: Clinton's First Term

When US President Bill Clinton was sworn into office in January 1993, there were already 25 400 US forces on the ground in Somalia. The forces had been ordered into that country by Clinton's predecessor, the father of George W. Bush.

Though the troops in Somalia were part of a United Nations operation, from the start it was clear that Clinton was uneasy with his Somali inheritance. Clinton, after all, had run a campaign against a 'foreign policy' president centring on the mantra "It's the economy, stupid", a reference to how sluggish the American economy had been through much of George Bush Sr.'s presidency. Through the use of polls and political intuition, Clinton had picked up on the American electorate's sentiment that foreign policy in a world without a Cold War threat comparable to the former Soviet Union left them cold. And though the public understood that the United States was the only superpower, the feeling was that priority had to be given to pressing problems at home. A *Time* and CNN poll at the end of August 1992 had confirmed as much when it asked: "Which of these is the main problem the candidates should be addressing?" Of the suggested answers, 2 per cent opted for foreign policy; 60 per cent said the economy (Mueller 1994:336).

In order to minimise Clinton's vulnerability in an inherited foreign commitment, his administration quickly set about trying to distance itself from the Somalia operation. To this end, a transition to UN command, organisation and leadership was begun in April 1993 and completed only a month later. Still, the profile of US forces remained high. For example, in June, when 23 Pakistani peacekeepers were killed, US forces were given the difficult task of arresting the man thought to be behind the ambush, Mohamed Farah Aideed. By August, eight US soldiers had been killed trying to achieve this objective. Then, on October 3 and 4, 1993, US forces lost 18 men and had 84 wounded in a 17-hour battle in Mogadishu. New reports flashed images of Somalis dragging dead US soldiers naked through the streets. Under intense pressure, Clinton announced the imminent end of direct US involvement in Somalia only three days later. By April 1994, the last American troops were out and the UN peacekeeping mission effectively over.

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One American pundit captured a widely held American sentiment: "No Third World interest can justify paying large costs or taking large numbers of [American] lives". The conservative American columnist Pat Buchanan went farther when he said the United States needed to look "with a cold eye on the internationalist set, [who are] never at a loss for new ideas to divert US wealth and power into crusades and causes having little or nothing to do with the true national interest of the United States" (Clough 1992:61).

The nature of the new foreign policy feeling in Washington soon became known. In January 1994, the US Congress passed laws imposing strict conditions on the future participation of US troops in United Nations peacekeeping missions. In the future, US participation was to be contingent upon, among other provisos, the UN producing a strategy and timetable for disengagement, other nations demonstrating a greater willingness to share the financial costs of operations, and, except under extraordinary circumstances, US troops remaining under US command. But it did not end there. Republican Party members in both houses of Congress drafted a National Security Revitalisation Act. While the bulk of the Bill focused on sharply increasing spending for defence, the Bill also sought to impose even more restrictive provisions for determining US involvement in UN peacekeeping. More startling yet, a section of the Bill proposed deducting the amount of voluntarily paid funds the US had given for UN-endorsed operations (such as those in the Persian Gulf, and even in South Korea) from those the United States owed as a part of its regularly assessed UN peacekeeping dues. Conceivably, if the Bill reached fruition and was passed, the US, according to American lawmakers, would go from owing the United Nations an estimated US$1.2 billion in 1994 to the US being owed US$400 million.

For some, the American backlash against the UN might not have been unexpected. In 1988, the UN was involved in five peacekeeping missions that had a budget of US$230 million to carry them out; by 1994 the number of missions had grown to 17 and the budget had ballooned to US$3.6 billion. With each passing year the expectations and demands for American support has increased. Somalia, however, had been too much. The estimated total cost for the US government alone for all Somali operations between April 1992 and July 1994 amounted to nearly US$2.3 billion . Moreover, 26 American soldiers had died in combat and still Somalia remained in chaos with widespread human suffering. Add to this a measure of American ambivalence in international affairs resulting from the collapse of global communism, plus economic uncertainty at home, and one finds there was fertile enough ground for just such a reaction.

So pervasive and vocal did opposition to American multilateral interventionism/peacekeeping become that, even when faced with outright genocide in Rwanda, the Clinton administration showed an extreme reluctance to intercede. In fact, as the massacres gained pace in April and May 1994, the formation of an African peacekeeping force was stopped when a US vote in the Security Council blocked its financing. Then, in a move that was to have dire consequences for nearly 800 000 Rwandans, the US led a vote to reduce the UN force already in Rwanda from 2 500 to 250 troops. The reason? In the eyes of one analyst: "American negotiators in New York were pressing the UN for a higher price for the armoured personnel carriers that were needed to carry out the UN-mandated mission" (Maynes 1995:35).

Beyond precluding any direct, widespread American involvement in African peacekeeping – as one Clinton administration official was quoted as saying: "It is hard to imagine a situation where American troops would be deployed to Africa again in either a Chapter 6 or 7 operation" (a UN Chapter 6 operation is one in response to international aggression, such as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait; a UN chapter 7 operation is a peacekeeping operation) – there were other effects: the distancing of Africa in US foreign policy became a haemorrhaging withdrawal of American resources from the continent. By the end of 1994, personnel in the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs had been reduced to only 10 per cent of their number two years earlier. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) eliminated 90 organisational units in Washington in a major 'restructuring' effort, reducing staff by over a thousand. In addition, nine of 21 overseas missions closed were in Africa. But nowhere was the scope of withdrawal more evident than in the area of foreign aid allocations.

In the immediate aftermath of Somalia and Rwanda, American legislators had little incentive to view Africa as anything other than a continent of chaos and decline. To them, the bottom line was that in mid-1994 Africa was the only continent whose people, per capita, were worse off than they had been in the previous decade. On average, Africans' GDP per head had declined by 2.2 per cent per year through the 1980s, or by an average of 2 per cent between 1980 and 1994. Additionally, the external debt of states on the continent had doubled. All the while Africa's population had continued to grow at a rate of 3.2 per cent annually, and from this came the exacerbation of such social problems as high rates of unemployment, rapid urbanisation, environmental degradation, and many others – not helped at all by the existence of seven million refugees and 15 million displaced persons resulting from Africa's many wars and conflicts. This was the reality of Africa, it was pointed out in Washington, and all in spite of a significant increase in the total amount of foreign aid given to Africa through the 1980s. Draft Bills were subsequently introduced in the US Senate to cut America's foreign aid by more than US$1.2 billion, or 10 per cent, and to reduce by nearly 50 per cent US payments to the International Development Agency, the low-interest arm of the World Bank that lends to the world's poorest countries. While these cuts were to affect Africa indirectly, their impact was magnified as African-related allocations became a favoured target for law-makers' axes: the already low percentage of the US foreign aid budget that went to Africa (less than 8 per cent in fiscal year 1994, or about US$800 million for a continent of nearly 800 million people) was earmarked for a 34 per cent decrease, while funds for the African Development Foundation, the US government agency mandated to make grants to grassroots organisations, were to be cut by 33 per cent. For the most part the American public met such proposed cuts with apathy. In the words of one person: "Who cares about Africa? It is not important to us. Leave it to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank" (Maynes 1995:86).

Where was the Clinton administration in all of this? After initially acquiescing to the isolationist tide sweeping through Washington, in the autumn of 1995 the Clinton White House became more proactive in *appearing* to counter it. For example, President Clinton asserted: "As Africans turn away from the failed experiments of the past, they're embracing new political freedoms. It's a good sign, and the lights of freedom shine brighter" (US Information press release 1995). Vice-President Al Gore remarked: "Sweeping through Africa in this last decade of the 20th century is a wave of optimism". And Brian Atwood of USAID, reported: "What is most significant today is that a new group of African leaders has come to power. These leaders are pushing the continent to realise its potential" (US Information press release 1995). But the most profound public statement came from Anthony Lake, President Clinton's National Security Advisor, who had started his political career as a Foreign Service officer in Africa in the 1960s. Lake stated that the administration realised that reducing the federal deficit required cuts, which, in turn, required reducing foreign assistance. However, he said:

> Singling out Africa is not only unfair, it's unwise, [because] staying engaged in Africa is in America's interest. Today, the nearly 700 million people who live south of the Sahara comprise a major emerging market, and Africa's wealth of resources – from oil and uranium to cocoa and coffee – are in permanent demand here in America. Yet we have barely begun to explore all of the possibilities that trade with Africa holds for US companies and consumers.
>
> US exports to Africa totalled US$4.4 billion last year, and more than 80 000 American jobs depend on them. These exports – which exceed those to the former Soviet Union by nearly a quarter – can be vastly increased. But to do so, we must continue to help stability take hold and democracy take root throughout the continent. (TransAfrica Forum 1995)

Such comments hinted at what was to become the essence of the Clinton administration's (and more broadly, the US government's) Africa policy: a 'words rather than resources' approach.

The Africa Growth and Opportunity Act

To understand how and why the Clinton administration was ultimately able to implement a words rather than resources approach to Africa, all the while claiming it was constructively and substantially engaging the continent, one needs to return to April 27, 1997. It was then that several members of the African Trade Caucus, a bipartisan group supporting the opening of American markets to

African goods and services, introduced the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in Congress. As the only continent (with the exception of Antarctica, for obvious reasons) for which the United States had no trade policy, the AGOA's drafters hoped that its passing would fill a void. But in the broader sense they wanted to move Africa beyond its pigeonhole status within the context of budget battles and assistance programmes, to carving a legislative niche in and of its own right. As one analyst reported: "For Africa's potential to be realised [it] must be mainstreamed as a regular component of policy, instead of being pushed behind an 'Iron Curtain' of ignorance and exceptionalism. Only then will Africa be discussed seriously, criticised seriously, praised seriously, and engaged seriously just like any other region" (Federal News Service 1997). The AGOA promised to encourage just such 'seriousness' by giving Africa some semblance of permanence in American policy.

Though the AGOA's drafters were motivated to correct what they perceived to be a major oversight in American policy, they also realised that the success of the Act was tied to the appeasement of opposition on Capitol Hill. To this end, the AGOA stated clearly that African countries would have to agree to lower quotas and tariffs, pursue growth-oriented policies, and explore the creation of free trade areas in order to benefit from some of the Act's provisions, such as direct loans for small and medium sized businesses, and funds for infrastructural projects.

Perhaps unsurprising for a Bill drafted to appeal to everyone from Africa advocates to isolationists, views of the AGOA were varied. One of the Bill's drafters, Representative James McDermott, made the claim that the Bill was to "do something substantive for Africa". By contrast, a Senator's aide commented that the Bill would "throw a bone to the Africans – but not a very big bone" (*National Journal* 1998). The bill put some indivviduals at personal and professional odds. For example some black politicians who were for the legislation personally because they believed it would strengthen America's ties with Africa, and maybe lay the goundwork for even more legislation, were forced to oppose it publicly in response to protectionist calls from domestic labour interests.

An African Partnership to Call Its Own: Clinton's Second Term

It is not without irony that the Clinton administration, having failed to take the lead to develop a clear Africa policy, essentially hijacked the contents of the AGOA. In May 1997, in the run-up to the Group of Eight (G8) summit in the US city of Denver, Clinton announced an initiative called the Partnership for Economic Growth and Opportunity in Africa (PEGOA). Echoing the AGOA's contents but not referring to the Bill directly, Clinton stated that his Partnership would give African nations greater access to US markets through tariff and quota reductions. Additionally, his Partnership would seek to establish two funds worth US$650 million for the express purpose of boosting US investment in African infrastructure and private enterprise. However, there was a condition on the proposed Partnership: all was to be contingent upon African nations "pursuing a course of political and economic reform". For those African countries demonstrating "the greatest commitment to economic reform", Clinton added, again mirroring the contents of the AGOA, invitations would be extended to participate in annual economic meetings with US officials at the ministerial level, and extra trade preferences would be awarded. It was only then that Clinton offered a variation in his Partnership from the AGOA: that the United States would work to eliminate bilateral debt for the poorest of Africa's reforming nations, and maintain its leadership in the effort to reduce Africa's debts to the multilateral institutions.

Naturally, Clinton's Partnership requirement stood a good chance of causing a political furore. This was obvious when, shortly after Clinton announced the PEGOA initiative, one African lobbyist remarked: "The United States should not insist that African nations introduce specific economic policies. The country's citizens – not the US government – [should] determine the most appropriate economic development path for their country" (*Africa News*, 1997a). Still, the Clinton administration demonstrated an uncanny ability to turn political events in its favour 'on the cheap'.

One of the most pressing problems of African leaders was their countries' overwhelming debt obligations. Illustrating how extensive these had become, in the period from 1980 to 1995 sub-Saharan African debt had ballooned from US$84 to US$223 billion. In 1997, debt payments by sub-Saharan nations claimed 80 per cent of the region's foreign exchange earnings, and for 28 countries of 48 in the region their individual amassed debt equalled more than twice their annual income from exports of goods and services. Thus, when Clinton pledged to work with African countries to tackle the debt crisis as a part of his PEGOA, he was able to dampen criticism that he was proposing a one-sided partnership and instead exhibiting sincere American empathy for African concerns. Furthermore, as the host of the G8 summit in Denver, Clinton was better placed than his critics to 'spin' the merits of the Partnership and to broadcast them widely. As *The Guardian* (1997:27) in London observed: "Every summit has to have its crowning success, a diplomatic triumph that makes the whole razzmatazz worthwhile. President Bill Clinton has decided that the 1997 summit will be remembered for finding an answer to the debt burdens crippling countries in sub-Saharan Africa".

Economic Reform and Trade, Not Aid

Following the 'unveiling' and advocacy of Clinton's PEGOA in Africa, the Partnership repeating almost verbatim what was already said in the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act working its way through Congress, the course of America's 'words rather than resources' approach to Africa was refined and gained momentum. Specifically, nearly all goals and ideas came to be centred on economic reform and trade – to the point that political reform and other issues were made subordinate. New leaders such as Museveni, Meles and Kagame were to be praised especially for their economic liberalism; their intermittent autocratic tendencies were not to be mentioned. Jesse Jackson, appointed in October 1997 as President Clinton's Official Envoy to Africa, alluded to this reality when he stated: "We now have a new government policy and a new visionary leader in President Clinton who sees a new US–Africa relationship based on reciprocal trade. It's indeed a new day" (*Agence France Press,* 1997).

The focus on economic reform and trade, rather than on political reform, offered a number of advantages for US foreign-policymakers. First, it was much easier to speak of how trade could benefit an African leader's countrymen, for example, than of how his political departure could do so. Second, economic reform and trade offered US foreign-policymakers both a 'carrot' and a 'stick' – in the first instance by enabling them to refer to specific trade benefits the US would extend when reforms were undertaken, and in the second, by suggesting exclusion and/or marginalisation if not. With this focus, US foreign-policymakers' words took on an almost proselytising confidence. Clinton's newly appointed Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Susan Rice (a woman some considered too young to be taken seriously in parts of Africa, but who had strong social connections in American political circles), conveyed this when she said:

> In the new Africa, bold market reforms are spurring unprecedented rates of growth. In short, the era of African dependency is ending. We seek to accelerate Africa's full integration into the global economy. As the world forges closer economic ties, Africa must not be left behind. Integrating Africa into the global economy entails simultaneous pursuit of several core activities: promoting economic reform, trade, and investment. (*Africa News,* 1997b)

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, speaking on behalf of the entire US foreign policy establishment, further elaborated:

> Today we know that in Africa, as elsewhere, the primary impetus for economic growth must come from the private sector. That requires strategies that make indigenous investment rewarding and foreign investment welcome. It requires privatisation, more open markets, and regulatory and financial reform. Today we know that aid cannot substitute for reform. (United Nations 1997)

Charisma Over Cash: Clinton in Africa

The façade of deep, substantive US engagement with Africa peaked when President Clinton conducted a six–nation tour between March 23 and April 2, 1998. His visit (the first of two he would make to Africa), in the words of Madeleine Albright, was "the first comprehensive trip to Africa ever undertaken by a sitting American president", and at 11 days was the longest foreign excursion of Clinton's presidency. The length of his visit, Clinton claimed, was proportionate to the promise he saw in Africa, where "from Cape Town to Kampala, from Dar es Salaam to Dakar, democracy is gaining strength, business is growing, peace is making progress".[1]

By making stops in Botswana, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda, Clinton and his entourage of 981 people said they wanted to spotlight some of the exemplars of the African continent – "the harbingers of an African awakening". To this select group his message was: "It used to be that when US policymakers thought of Africa – if they thought of Africa – they said 'What can we do for Africa or about Africa?' They were the wrong questions. The right question today is 'What can we do *with* Africa?'" (*Newsweek,* 1998:28). The answer, he maintained, was in Africans and Americans establishing a base of reciprocal respect, a partnership, and to "build on it with trade and investment". However, in line with the empathy he wanted to project, Clinton once again reiterated that he would ask the US Congress "for enough debt relief this year to wipe out all bilateral concessional debt". Of course the offer was a catch-22 for most African leaders. Clinton noted, in this case in the same sentence as the debt relief offer, that his efforts would be on behalf only of "the fastest reforming poor nations", and it would be leaders of reforming nations only who would be invited to a summit meeting in Washington "so that we can lay specific plans to follow up on this trip and the announcements I have made on it" (White House Press Office, 1998).

While Clinton wanted his economic reform and increased trade message to be heard throughout the continent, the places where he chose to deliver the message made another statement. Out of 11 days in Africa, only four *hours* were spent in Rwanda, for example, and these were in an aircraft hangar at the airport. Four full *days*, however, were spent in South Africa. It was not happenstance. South Africa had proved itself committed to an agenda congruent with the expectations and hopes of US foreign-policymakers, one where economic and political liberalism (two sides of the same coin in US foreign-policymakers' eyes) were equivalent.

Close to the time of his second Africa visit in August of 2000, Clinton signed into law his last Africa-related piece of legislation, the Trade and Development Act of 2000. The Act sought to move African governments to privatise and increase competitiveness, to adopt and sustain sound fiscal and monetary policies, and ultimately to entice foreign investment. In sum, the Trade and Development Act of 2000 embodied the core of US foreign policy toward Africa under Clinton: interest in increasing trade with little or no desire to commit significant resources directly for development or much else.

Later, the administration of George W. Bush adopted and perpetuated such Clinton-era themes as reform and trade. For example, in August 2003, President Bush renewed the AGOA giving select African countries preferential access to US markets. But whereas Clinton brought charisma to Africa and little cash, Bush has promised to direct an unprecedented amount of money toward the continent.

A Cool Reception: Bush in Africa

In July 2003, President George W. Bush conducted a five-day trip to five African countries. His visit was somewhat surprising to Africa watchers. As a presidential candidate Bush had called Africa a country rather than a continent, and had said that Africa would be low on his list of foreign policy priorities. During the 2000 presidential campaign he had even gone so far as to say that, if he had been president during the Rwandan genocide, he would not have sent US troops to prevent it. Yet, before his visit as president, Bush had met with at least 23 of 48 sub-Saharan African leaders. He had signed into law a Bill authorising US$375 million be given to Grameen Bank-like institutions in order to facilitate microloans to Africans and others. He had said he was committed to channelling US$100 million to various African countries to fight terrorism. He had pledged US$600 million for education. And then there were the centrepieces of his visit: (i) a proposal to spend US$15 *billion* over five years to fight HIV/AIDS generally, of which $10 billion was to go to 12 African countries (along with Guyana, Haiti and Cambodia) specifically as part of the President's new Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief,[2] and (ii) the establishment of a Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) to disperse US$5 *billion* in aid over three years to poor countries, many in Africa.[3] Still, on any given day in editorial pages and on call-in shows throughout Africa, one finds sharp criticism of the Bush administration. Why?

When the Bush administration pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol on Global Climate Change, now ratified by 125 countries, it seemed indifferent to the fact that changes in rainfall, for example, literally mean the difference between feast or famine in Africa. When the Bush administration downgraded its representation in Durban, South Africa at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, it was viewed as callous, given the massive impact racism has had in Africa, from the slave trade, to colonisation, to apartheid. Though US foreign-policymakers pointed out the downgrading had more to do with a move within the conference to declare Zionism racist, and therefore castigate Israel, than a failure to acknowledge racism in Africa, even this had a perverse effect. The statement reminded many of the perceived favouritism the Bush administration gives to Israel and the inequity of US foreign aid. The tiny country of Israel, for example, with its six million citizens, receives more US foreign aid annually than all of sub-Saharan Africa, a region with nearly 800 million people. Irrespective of whether Israelis are more important than Africans (a legitimate question to some), such American aid, it is widely held, bolsters Israel's ability to deny Palestinians their right to self-determination – which reminds many Africans of how they were suppressed and denied self-determination not so long ago. Additionally, with regard to some types of foreign aid, the Bush administration has made it common practice to distribute it in Africa, as elsewhere, with conditions. (In fact, nearly all aid to be distributed through the MCA is conditional.) One of the more odious conditions is that recipient governments must formally agree never to bring charges against US troops in the International Criminal Court. Again, this does not sit well with many Africans, given the long train of human rights abuses on the continent, the role militaries have often played in those abuses, and the fact that justice sometimes proves elusive at home; it also has a tone of neocolonial coercion. Given the above foreign policy realities, it is perhaps unsurprising that US Secretary of State Colin Powell was heckled and jeered when he attempted to address the UN's World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg, South Africa in September 2002.

Then there was the issue of Iraq. The American-led invasion of that country in March 2003 provided even more fodder for critics and sceptics on the African continent. For example, when President Bush visited Africa four months after the invasion, the remarks of Nelson Mandela received an exceptional amount of coverage. The Nobel peace prize laureate said that when it came to Iraq, Bush "cannot think properly" and that he was "disgusted" with the US leader's actions there. A pundit on *The East African Standard* typified how such comments could be, and were, used to call into question all aspects of Bush's Africa policy. "As Africa's foremost diplomat and respected elder statesman," the commentator claimed, "Mandela's thoughts, actions and utterances reflect Africa's conscience. Mandela spoke for the timid and intimidated who lack the voice to express their distaste for the excesses and outright bullish tendencies of America. He was telling President Bush that although he came to determine the agenda of this continent and even had to decide who to meet, Africa could do without him and his dollars" (*The East African Standard*, 2003).

Are such editorial comments just meant to sell newspapers, or is there cause for such vitriol?

Fighting AIDS to Aid Whom?

To the casual observer, it would be fair to assume the Bush administration could break free of extensive criticism if one turned to the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (sometimes referred to as his 'global AIDS initiative'). AIDS, after all, has already killed 20 million people around the world and threatens to kill twice that many over the next decade. Given that upwards of 70 per cent of the world's HIV-infected people are in Africa, any effort to combat the AIDS-causing HIV virus, no matter how flawed, has to be largely beyond reproach, correct? Wrong.

When the American Congress passed the United States Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Act of 2003 it promised to dedicate almost US$5 billion over five years to ongoing American HIV/AIDS programmes, and US$1 billion to the UN-endorsed Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. But US$10 billion was to be dedicated to supporting President Bush's global Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.[4] Before Bush departed for his July 2003 Africa visit, he appointed as his Global AIDS Coordinator Randall Tobias, a former executive of the pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly. This and other major pharmaceutical companies have sought to block the production and international trade of cheaper generic drugs for which they hold patents, including ones for suppressing HIV, presumably to protect their brand-name medicines and associated profit margins. It is worth noting that folded into the US law supporting the President's global AIDS initiative is a provision stating that any country which receives a grant as a part of the initiative may *not* buy generic AIDS drugs from non-American companies unless US regulators certify them safe and effective. In this light, many point out, Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief looks as much about subsidising US pharmaceutical companies as it does about combating HIV/AIDS.[5]

Scepticism also stems from the pattern of funding observed so far. Though the legislation relating to the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief allows for up to US$3 billion a year in funding until 2008, when Bush returned from Africa in July 2003 he requested about half that – US$1.8 billion – for fiscal year 2004; in the end, the US Congress appropriated one-quarter of his request, or US$450 million. Claims have been made that Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief was a public relations gambit meant to soften possible criticism of the President during his African tour. Similarly, it has been said that his global AIDS initiative, with its focus on Africa, was a 'compassionate conservative' ploy meant to win over black voters in Bush's bid for re-election in 2004. Either way, Bush's US$15 billion pledge certainly did receive more high-profile press than the subsequent actual allocations.

Perhaps most disturbing for sceptics of the Bush administration's Africa–related policies is the latent connection between the President's global Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and some of America's largest defence contractors. In late 2004 a draft contract for the distribution of HIV anti-retroviral medicines throughout Africa came to light. The contract was set to be one of the largest contracts of international health services ever, involving US$7 *billion* over five years. At the same time, it also became known that the US government's second-largest defence contractor, Northrop Grumman (maker of America's stealth bomber) and Dyncorp (a defence contractor which had benefited from US government contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan) were considering bidding for the contract. Unsettling for some was the fact that Northrop Grumman and Dyncorp officials started to visit organisations such as Catholic Relief Services before a draft of the contract was even posted.[6] These officials, one could speculate, had inside information on a potentially lucrative business opportunity and were looking to partner with organisations to help their bid. The *military* industrial complex, one could say, was looking to diversify into the *medical* industrial complex. The administration does not seem concerned. On March 22, 2005, in a 127-page report entitled "Engendering Bold Leadership: The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (First Annual Report to Congress)", Bush's Global AIDS Coordinator, the man charged with overseeing the allocation of all resources associated with his global AIDS initiative, spoke of the manifold benefits of pursuing public–private partnerships.

Clinton's Africa Policies: Suspect?

One way to summarise Bill Clinton's Africa policies is to say that they were reactionary during his first term and opportunistic during his second. Consider when the bloody 17-hour Battle of Mogadishu took place on October 3 and 4, 1993. Barely had the names of America's 18 dead and 84 wounded soldiers become known when, on October 7, Clinton declared that all US troops would be withdrawn from Somalia. In Rwanda, the administration's response to genocide in 1994 was to employ the UN's bureaucracy to minimise US involvement: when the head of the UN's forces in Rwanda, General Dallaire, proposed a plan on May 13 to create safe havens in the countryside, Clinton's UN Ambassador at the time, Madeleine Albright, was instructed to negotiate a modification of the plan to create protected zones at Rwanda's borders; when on May 17 the UN requested 50 armoured personnel carriers (APCs) from the United States to establish the safe havens, the Clinton administration spent two more weeks negotiating how much America was to be reimbursed for the APCs and who was going to pay the transportation costs. These responses to events in Somalia and Rwanda leave ample room for criticism, if not condemnation. Possibly hundreds of thousands of Africans could have been spared strife, starvation and outright genocide had matters been handled differently.

As for his second term, Clinton 'rediscovered Africa' only after the Republican-run Congress had carved back US foreign aid to unprecedented lows and had crafted most of the AGOA. This Act proved to be the Clinton administration's second-term panacea because it articulated grand aims for Africa – namely peace and prosperity – without requiring the marshalling of significant American resources to achieve those ends. In fact, the legislation provided the framework for Clinton's PEGOA, an initiative that administration officials touted as proof of its commitment to substantive US engagement with the continent. On occasions when it was pointed out that both the AGOA and Clinton's Partnership with Africa consisted of more words than resources, the mantra response was that African prosperity would come just as readily from economic reform and trade as from foreign aid. In terms of trade, administration officials chose to avoid pointing out that the bulk of total US–Africa trade involved very few African countries and only one commodity in particular: oil. Perhaps this is why, in spite of the Clinton White House's claims that it supported economic reform throughout Africa (and democracy, and human rights, and ...), the Clinton administration failed to question vigorously the military rule of Sani Abacha in Nigeria, or the actions of Dos Santos in Angola.

It is intriguing, given the above facts, how popular Clinton was (and arguably still is) with ordinary Africans. As a case in point, when Clinton stopped in Senegal during his first African tour in 1998, his visit looked as much like a superstar event as a presidential visit. At one point in Senegal's capital, Dakar, Clinton waded into a cheering crowd surging forward to see and greet him. Nowhere in the jubilant crowd were there signs condemning Clinton for his incompetence in

Somalia, his unwillingness to stop genocide in Rwanda, or his reluctance to share America's largesse with the world's poorest continent. No protestors were evident during Clinton's second African visit either, a brief four–day tour in August 2000 – not even to condemn Clinton's ill-placed order to attack a Sudanese pharmaceutical plant in response to the 1998 American embassy bombings in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. (At the time, the Clinton administration thought the plant had ties to Osama bin Laden, whose al-Qaeda terrorist network was behind the American embassy bombings, and that it was making nerve gas. All was later proved untrue and the US government paid the plant's owner compensation.)

Perhaps when it came to everyday Africans, they understood during the Clinton years that America could not be everything to everyone, that the US President's military obligations in the Balkans and his efforts to broker a Middle East peace, for example, were more deserving. Perhaps the effort led by the Republican Party to impeach Clinton over his peccadilloes with a subordinate intern, Monica Lewinsky, garnered him popular sympathy. In all likelihood, ordinary Africans responded more to Clinton's style and rhetoric than to the efficacy and content of his Africa policies.

Of course not all Africans embraced Clinton. African elites in particular were more inclined to see his administration's policies for what they were. In fact, during Clinton's first African visit, South African President Nelson Mandela, with Clinton at his side, said: "Our people have welcomed President Clinton with open arms. I hold him in high respect. [But] the fact that we have respect for him does not mean we have no differences." One of those differences was the US Congress's Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, and by extension, President Clinton's PEGOA. Noting that America's involvement with African countries was to be contingent upon what African economic reforms US foreign-policymakers thought appropriate, Mandela commented: "This is a matter over which we have serious reservations. To us it is not acceptable." Thabo Mbeki, South Africa's Deputy President during Clinton's first visit, was even more direct: trade should not replace aid. "Africa needs both," he insisted (Hesse 2001:298).

Bush's Africa Policies: Celebrate?

George W. Bush has proved willing not only to promote trade with Africa, but to offer aid for Africa in unprecedented amounts and ways. First, he has renewed Clinton-era policies such as the AGOA. His administration has also created the global Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (EPAR), the largest international health initiative in history undertaken by a single government to address a single disease. It is true that one can question whether the EPAR favours American multinationals like Eli Lilly or Northrop Grumman. Yet what is irrefutable is that in December 2002, one month before Bush announced his global AIDS initiative, the World Health Organisation estimated only 50 000 people were receiving lifesaving anti-retroviral therapy in all of sub-Saharan Africa. Eight months after the first US money started flowing through the EPAR, 152 000 Africans – three times as many – were receiving treatment support. And then there is Bush's Millennium Challenge Account (MCA).

US foreign aid to Africa has too often been doled out to less than decent regimes. For example, even Jimmy Carter's Africa policy during the Cold War – irrespective of his great human rights efforts after leaving the White House – meant that four of Africa's biggest recipients of American 'development assistance' were Samuel Doe of Liberia, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, Siad Barre of Somalia, and Jonas Savimbi of the Angolan rebel movement UNITA. None of these African leaders can be associated with positive democratic or human rights records. The MCA *weakens* the US President's ability to give tangible American support to bad leaders and their worse policies. Though funded with US taxpayer money, the MCA is administered by a government-created private organisation, the Millennium Challenge Corporation. A board of directors evaluates prospective aid recipients, scoring applicant countries on a complex rubric which takes into account such criteria as civil liberties, political rights, rule of law, control of corruption, public primary-education spending, primary education-completion rates, immunisation rates, what percentage of GDP gets spent on public health, the country's credit rating, and how long it takes on average to start a business in the country. There are signs that the MCA is making US foreign policy less subjective and less tolerant of awful African leaders and policies: the first recipient of MCA funds was Madagascar.

This said, it must not be forgotten that Bush is first and foremost a national security president. Yes, he likes to speak of "Americans' good hearts". Yet it is no coincidence that his global Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and his MCA emerged *after* September 11; in Africa, they are vital pieces in the Bush administration's struggle to head off what it sees as grave and growing strategic concerns. Such concerns are not hyperbole. In February 2003, a taped message from Osama bin Laden indicated that West Africa generally, and countries like Nigeria specifically, where large Muslim populations are ready for 'liberation', offer a broad range of opportunities for his followers.

Both Bin Laden and Bush know there are swathes of Africa which are poor, Islamic and antagonistic (usually this antagonism is directed at citizens' own corrupt or inept governments, but it could be redirected at the United States). Both know that America already imports as much oil from Africa (principally from Nigeria and Angola) as it does from Saudi Arabia, and that the amount of American oil imports from Africa is projected to double in the next 20 years. Finally, both understand that poverty provides fertile ground for fundamentalism, and that failed or failing states often provide a ready springboard for projecting misery. A chaotic Africa could produce, and indeed has produced, terrorists.

Increased trade between America and Africa does serve American interests through the acquisition of oil. But increased US–Africa trade could also deter terrorism because it would ideally lift many Africans out of poverty. Better-off Africans, it is assumed, will be less inclined to adopt radicalism. This said, in a global economy of almost US$39 *trillion*, sub-Saharan Africa's share is only 2 per cent, or a mere US$780 billion. For perspective, the United States' share of global GDP is almost 28 per cent, or nearly US$10.8 trillion. In 2004, two-way total trade between the US and Africa was a little under US$45 billion, with American exports to Africa totalling US$8.6 billion and African exports to America totalling US$35.9 billion, a small fraction of the African continent's already small GDP.[7] Moreover, US exports to sub-Saharan Africa were concentrated in a few countries; the top four markets – South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Angola – accounted for more than 70 per cent of US sales. In terms of sub-Saharan exports to America, four countries – Nigeria, South Africa, Angola, and Gabon – accounted for more than 85 per cent of US purchases; three of these were major crude oil suppliers, while South Africa was an important supplier of platinum, diamonds and steel.[8] In sum, the nature and scope of US–Africa trade today, and therefore its possible benefits to Africans, is limited. Consequently, in the Bush administration's eyes, substantial US aid spent well and wisely, namely through the global Emergency Plan for AIDS and the MCA, is just as crucial as trade and arguably more so.

The possible good US aid could do in Africa should not be understated. Consider how poor Africa's people are: real incomes in Africa are nearly one-third less than those of South Asia, the world's next poorest region. Taking into account income disparities within and amongst countries, it is estimated that more than half of all Africans live on less than one US dollar a day. Tragically, Africa holds the dubious distinction of being the only continent where poverty is on the rise, which at once reflects and perpetuates its high incidence of HIV/AIDS. As more breadwinning adults die from AIDS, and do so in lingering ways which sap already scarce family resources as loved ones expend time, money and effort on care, societies have become more unstable. Fully funded to the tune of US$10 billion, Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief could help stop a downward spiral that might, just might, be creating desperate social environments. To the Bush administration, these desperate envvironments could become flashpoints for the breeding and nurturing of future enemies of the United States.

Needless to say, ensuring a decent standard of living is not always enough. Many of the September 11 terrorists were educated and fairly well-off. Most, however, came from civil and political situations primed for terrorism. In the case of the 15 of 19 hijackers from Saudi Arabia, one of the few places they could express dissent in their country was at the mosque, not at the polls. Once in the mosque, some clerics proved adept at instilling or fomenting hate for the United States. In other countries, angry men sometimes entice protégés through their doors by offering educational and social services the government does not, or cannot, provide. Thus, when President Bush pledged US$5 billion for his MCA and said money would be granted only to countries that are "ruling justly, investing in their people, and encouraging economic freedom", it spoke to his administration's strategic concerns in Africa. On one hand, the MCA is meant to tempt governments into governing better: try ruling well and your country has a chance at a sizeable pool of US funds. On the other hand, the MCA is meant to strengthen the good efforts of countries: keep ruling well and your country will likewise have a chance at a sizeable pool of US funds. In both instances, the MCA is meant to promote civil and political conditions adverse to extremism.

Conclusion

In assessing whether the Africa policies of the Clinton and Bush administrations merit praise or suspicion, there is another point to consider. Generally speaking, the American public has shown little interest in, and even less understanding of, African-related issues. Consequently, unless voters' concerns and the national interest intersect with Africa, American lawmakers have had little incentive to spend much time on the continent either figuratively or literally. As a result, the tone of US foreign policy in Africa, if not its content, tends to fall to the US President by default. He is overwhelmingly the face and voice of his country's African agenda.

Bill Clinton as President was charismatic, eloquent and clever. He used these qualities to good effect to turn a tragic and muddled Africa policy in his first term into a coherent one in his second. The fact that this coherence consisted of rhetorical efforts to advance economic reform and trade, and little else, did not dissuade most ordinary Africans from thinking well of him. Where Clinton had trouble winning hearts and minds was with African leaders like Mandela and Mbeki of South Africa. They understood that his administration's 'engagement' and 'partnership' with Africa was based more on words than resources – a fact that changed little even after the American bombings in East Africa in 1998.

President George W. Bush is not endowed with the same people skills as Clinton. But he does exercise assertive leadership. This is primarily why a perception endures that the Bush administration seeks to impose its way in Africa (and elsewhere) and is most concerned with serving limited American interests – from exploiting Africa's oil, to fighting terrorism (riots reportedly occurred in Malawi in July 2003 when US authorities spirited away five foreigners with suspected links to al-Qaeda), to helping American multinational companies which have a commercial stake in the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The fact that American interests, enlightened or otherwise, may hold benefits for Africans is often lost on the public.

Nevertheless, it is telling that few African political leaders have openly or harshly criticised the Bush administration. Consider the 'New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) leaders' of Africa, namely: Presidents Mbeki of South Africa, Obasanjo of Nigeria, Bouteflika of Algeria, and Wade of Senegal. All have good working relationships with, if not close ties to, the Bush White House. Through their NEPAD initiative, these African leaders are pushing for democratic, transparent governance in Africa that upholds the rule of law and boosts private sector investment – the very things Bush's MCA emphasises and is suppposed to reward. Like Bush, they see the potential of US–Africa trade. Yet they also acknowledge that HIV/AIDS, failed or failing states, and terrorism pose threats. A country which does not take all of this into account, in Africa and beyond, does so at its peril.

Notes

1. From a personal interview with Francis Kornegay Jr., Director of the African–American Institute, on May 8, 1997 at the African–American Institute, Johannesburg, South Africa.
2. For information on the HIV/AIDS initiative, see the Bush administration website at http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/hivaids/.
3. For information on the Millennium Challenge Account, see the Bush adminstration's website at http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/developingnations/millennium.html, or refer to the Millennium Challenge Corporation's homepage at http://www.mca.gov.
4. For analysis of the United States Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Act of 2003, see the Kaiser Family Foundation's policy brief "US Government Funding for Global HIV/AIDS Through FY2005", available at http://www.kff.org/hivaids/7110.cfm.
5. See the 108th US Congress's legislation H.R.4818. Additional information can be found in the US House of Representatives' report: House Rpt.108–599 – Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs Appropriations Bill, 2005.
6. For additional details, listen to National Public Radio's broadcast "Government Defence Contractors Are Bidding on a $7 Billion Grant to Supply Aids Drugs to Developing Countries", aired October 14, 2004 on its morning edition programme (Brenda Wilson reporting). Written articles include "HIV/AIDS and STDs; Defence Contractors to Apply for PEPFAR Funding", *Africa News* (in conjunction with the Kaisernetwork.org), October 14, 2004; and "Defence Contractors Seek $7 Billion Drug Grant", on the National Public Radio website at http://www.npr.org/tenplates/story/story/php?storyId'4108743.
7. Statistics are from the Office of the US Trade Representative at http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2005/Apr/26-505429.html.
8. These figures are from the US government's Africa Growth and Opportunity website at http://www.agoa.info/, and its Office of Africa, Market Access website at http://www.export.gov/exportamerica/NewOpportunities/no_SubSahara.html.

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