

## Participate in the African Renaissance

The United States reflects a triple heritage that has shaped societies throughout the Western Hemisphere. This heritage includes Native American, European, and African elements. These civilizations, however, have by no means equally shaped the foreign policy outlook of the United States and its relationships with the rest of the world. People of African origin in particular feel excluded from the U.S. foreign policy architecture. From an African perspective, therefore, an “ideal” United States would be one that considered its African heritage on par with its European legacy. Such a tradition would suggest that Africa should be defined as important enough to be regarded as “vital” to U.S. national interests. From this designation would flow a U.S. commitment to become a full-fledged partner in the African Renaissance, which is an ambitious bid for continental renewal reflected in a series of political and economic initiatives involving such major powers as South Africa, Nigeria, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and other African partners.

Such a shift in policy focus would reflect the U.S. foreign affairs establishment’s assimilation of the reality of a socially diverse and multicultural electoral constituency. Based on U.S. 2000 census data, the white male electorate represents a demographically declining constituency in U.S. politics. Globally, a demographic shift is also underway toward an increasingly Afro-Asian world.

This demographic reality is one factor that has shaped an increasingly bipartisan approach to Africa over the last 15 years. The end of the Cold War

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and the effect of globalization on the U.S. economy and trade policy are others. In the past, U.S. Africa policy was the bailiwick of liberal Democrats and African American leadership. This situation no longer exists. Coalitions across party lines, including moderate Republicans, established U.S. sanctions against South Africa in the mid-1980s and, more recently, passed the African Growth and Opportunity Act. The photo finish to the U.S. 2000 elections, the even party distribution in Congress, and the perception that Africa is not of vital national interest makes a reasoned, nondivisive examination of U.S. policy feasible.

The point of departure for relations between the United States and Africa in the coming years should be based on initiatives that Africa's leadership is undertaking to control the continent's destiny, as embodied in the Millennium African Recovery/Renaissance Plan (MAP) spearheaded by South African president Thabo Mbeki, Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo, and Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika. MAP's aim is to build foundations for stability by emphasizing conflict resolution; then to coordinate assistance to fragile African economies, employing a combination of debt relief, investment promotion, trade concessions, and foreign assistance with built-in African conditions by which Africa's leaders must abide. To support this millennium plan, what could the United States do to add more substance to the greater attention that it has recently paid to Africa?

## **Pivot on Fora**

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One of the mistakes that Washington's policy apparatus made previously was depending on a network of pivotal African states that proved untenable for U.S. political involvement, especially in Angola in the west, in the Congo in the heart of the continent, in Sudan with its "invisible war," and in Ethiopia and Eritrea. The United States must not rely solely on "pivotal states" and regional influences. Rather, it may want to concentrate on linking its key bilateral relationships involving some leading countries such as South Africa and Nigeria with its relationships with the continent's subregional groupings, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in northeast Africa.

The model for such a strategy would be the recent combination of the U.S.–South African Bi-National Commission (BNC) with a regional U.S.–SADC Forum. The United States could expand such a forum beyond purely economic and trade issues to include a security and political dialogue. Alternatively, if the United States decides not to continue with the BNC frame-

work, an expanded U.S.–SADC Forum, including a greater peace and security cooperation focus, should be seriously considered.<sup>1</sup> Either way, this interaction would provide an avenue for sustained communication aimed at resolving the conflicts plaguing SADC in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Similar forums, with the added emphasis on peace and security, could be established with ECOWAS in the west, IGAD in the northeast, and the East African Community (EAC).

Engaging Africa's subregional actors would not be a substitute for cultivating bilateral relationships with Nigeria and South Africa. On the other hand, if the United States also engages Africa's major regional entity—the OAU—and other subregional bodies, Nigeria and especially South Africa would not feel vulnerable to the charge of being superpower surrogates manipulated from Washington. Indeed, a key challenge of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa is allowing their foreign policy interlocutors sufficient freedom of maneuverability and not make them feel like mere pawns of Uncle Sam. This consideration is particularly important for South Africa as well as Nigeria, which are still navigating delicate transitions of democratic consolidation. Further, the development of such ties between the United States and South Africa and Nigeria must consider the insecurities of Africa's other powers and numerous smaller states.

This approach would be compatible with definitive moves the continent is making toward transforming the OAU into an African Union linked to an African Economic Community. In assessing the potential for such a framework, considering first the actual prospects of forging a U.S.–African partnership during a Bush administration with Secretary of State Colin Powell at the helm of U.S. foreign policy is essential. Little can be accomplished in U.S.–African economic relations unless security affairs are also improved.

**A demographic shift is underway toward an increasingly Afro-Asian world.**

### **It's Stability, Stupid!**

Powell's anti-interventionist military doctrine is well known; his status as a U.S. hero, however, has not protected his military theory from scrutiny in Africa. How relevant are these critiques of Powell and the "Powell Doctrine" to a new U.S.–African relationship? Would a U.S. outlook based on the Powell Doctrine be an impediment to a workable U.S.–African partnership to promote Africa's peace and security? Or might this noninterventionist mindset offer an opportunity to define jointly a workable partnership that

emphasizes African economic capacity? Africans prioritize the end of many conflicts destabilizing the continent as the necessary precondition for economic renewal. The key question remains whether a U.S. noninterventionist doctrine will help or hinder African security.

In an age of limited wars involving inter- and intrastate conflicts, the aversion to committing U.S. power in such situations is described by some

commentators as reflecting a “hostility to limited war” even when such interventions may be the only means of decisively ending a conflict. According to Lawrence Kaplan, this belief reverses the Clausewitzian notion that political ends shape military means. As Powell is quoted, “We were able to constantly bring the political decisions back to what we do militarily.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the Persian Gulf War

against Saddam Hussein is judged a military victory masking a political defeat resulting from the U.S. failure to crush the Republican Guard.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of U.S. Africa policy, this doctrine is blamed for the botched intervention in Somalia in pursuit of warlord general Mohamed Farah Aideed and for the ill-fated assault in Mogadishu, resulting in the traumatic scene of a bloody U.S. military corpse being dragged through the streets. This scene chilled what had promised to be an activist U.S. policy of engaging the United Nations (UN) on a range of peacekeeping initiatives, including developing the rapid reaction force. Such engagement might also have prevented the Rwandan genocide in 1994. All things considered, the legacy is a frightful tale of U.S. complicity in a string of UN peace operational failures in Africa. As the February 21–22, 2001, African regional workshop on the Brahimi Report on UN peace operations (held at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg) showed, this dubious track record has resulted in some harsh African judgments about the UN’s intentions to reform its role in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peace building. Assessments about the credibility of the support by the UN Security Council’s five permanent members for peace operations in Africa were even more skeptical. As one experienced African general flatly stated, “The developed countries are not willing to enter into partnership with African countries to strengthen their capability for peacekeeping operations.”

Indeed, the United States under the leadership of Powell, as the first American of African descent in that post, may have something to prove after all. Not only must he ensure that Africa is not marginalized, but also that the United States will undo a decidedly unheroic demonstration of recent U.S. reticence to engage in the continent’s security affairs.

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One can argue, however, that the unilateral anti-interventionist impulse may actually dovetail neatly with the emerging African peace and security agenda. The logical extension of the Powell Doctrine appears to favor U.S. assistance in strengthening both the UN's capacity to undertake a range of initiatives as well as indigenous regional and subregional peace operational capabilities in Africa. This strategy reflects an emerging African peace and security consensus. Autonomous but complementary peace operations capabilities could support a stronger UN peacekeeping capacity while promoting African peace initiatives. This African peace and security consensus could well form the cornerstone of a U.S.–African peace and security partnership as an extension of the Powell Doctrine adapted to the needs of Africa. Although the United States is not interested in sending troops to far-off African countries about which the U.S. public knows little, Washington should ideally show its commitments through other means, such as helping with peacekeeping training in Africa or providing logistical support such as communications equipment, helicopters, and tanks.

The United States can also show Africa its support through its status as one of the five permanent members on the UN Security Council. The \$525 million approved by the UN Security Council to carry out the Lukasa cease-fire agreement to end the war in central Africa is woefully inadequate. As perhaps the greatest challenge to Mbeki's African Renaissance, the conflict spans half the continent across Africa's middle, from Angola to the Sudan. Its widespread effects deserve greater worldwide attention, which can only be gained through U.S. support of, and cooperation with, regional actors.

Assuming that the United States can muster the political will, the political geography of U.S. influence in this vast inter-African region could prove to be a decisive factor bolstering African peace initiatives. The United States holds strong links to major state actors in the Great Lakes area and greater Central Africa, including close relations with Uganda and Rwanda. This influence extends to Angola, a key Kinshasa ally widely seen as mentoring, with Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, the successor government of Joseph Kabila within the framework of the Republic of Congo's defense pact. On the other hand, some vested U.S. interests may prove to be a complicating factor in pursuing greater Central African peace diplomacy. For example, official U.S. relationships are complemented by U.S. mining interests which concern many observers.

**Does a U.S. doctrine of nonintervention help or hinder African security?**

To make progress in this thicket of interlocking regional conflicts and vested interests, the United States will have to build on the close relations recently forged with South Africa. Although Pretoria has been careful to project SADC states such as Zambia as key facilitators in the Congo peace process, South Africa has become an indispensable linchpin in the fragile Lusaka peace accords. The United States' possible retention of the BNC as a vehicle of bilateral interaction between Washington and Pretoria is a positive sign.

Through a joint review within the BNC bilateral framework, promoting a U.S.–South African strategic partnership could serve an indispensable purpose as a confidence-building measure in maintaining U.S. engagement in the continent. Discarding the BNC would only reinforce the perception that unilateralism is an ever-present impulse driving U.S. foreign relations.

For the bilateral connection to work properly, Washington must be sensitive to Pretoria's need to not be seen as a surrogate doing the United States' bidding on the continent.

This lapse of sensitivity may have torpedoed South African and SADC participation in the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), a U.S. policy response to the Rwandan genocidal fallout from the Somalia debacle. The \$25 million per annum that the United States provided was less than

what the Nigerian government spent per month during its military intervention in Sierra Leone.<sup>4</sup> This example typifies the fundamental question of how much the United States is willing to invest in African peace and security capacity-building.

Can the United States, through the U.S.–SADC Forum, resurrect the ACRI in Southern Africa? In the view of some South African security specialists, this action may constitute as much of a challenge for South and southern Africa as for the United States. The crux of African skepticism over UN peace operation reforms is a perceived lack of willingness on the part of developed countries to engage Africa in meaningful security partnerships. If, in fact, plans are afoot for the ACRI to devolve into a program for building a regional brigade capacity, could this maneuver not constitute the starting point of a U.S.–SADC security partnership compatible with an evolving division of labor between SADC, the OAU, and the UN? Otherwise, "African solutions for African problems" may devolve into little more than a roadmap for mutual disengagement between Africa and the United States, as well as other major powers.

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## The Global Challenge

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What Pretoria might want to develop from a U.S.–SADC security dialogue is unclear. Certainly, Pretoria—as a means of safeguarding its own credibility with its neighbors—does not want to be perceived as a junior partner in a joint U.S.–South African hegemonic partnership within a southern African peace and security framework. Washington has a global agenda that looms much larger than its relations with South Africa and the African continent; Pretoria also has a global agenda to manage. Although the United States unavoidably occupies a major place on that agenda, Pretoria is not inclined to organize its global relations with the United States as the fulcrum. Therefore, Washington may have to opt increasingly for a greater multilateralization of its relations with Africa, particularly with regional fora as previously advocated.

Foreign and national security policy planners within the African National Congress government have not really articulated a comprehensive strategy, but the thrust of South African foreign policy is quite clear: cultivate an Africa-centered, south–south hemispheric alignment as a counterweight to the Euro–U.S. hegemony of the northern hemisphere, especially on the global economic front. South Africa’s triumvirate with Nigeria and Algeria on behalf of MAP, for example, is complemented by a larger tri-continental alignment of South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Brazil, and India. The primary motivation is to mobilize a lobby of developing and newly industrializing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America behind the reform of the global trading system currently institutionalized in the World Trade Organization.

Washington may be well advised to begin taking Africa and its leading powers more seriously. North–South polarization is clearly not the intent behind Pretoria’s southern strategy. Within this context, however, the global demographic future is essentially Afro–Asian (according to UN Population Fund projections), suggesting a world in which a fledgling African Union may potentially represent a more coherent actor on the world stage alongside the other major concentrations of humanity, China and India.

Will a hostile Afro–Asian countervailing bloc networked through the capitals of Pretoria, Abuja, Cairo, New Delhi, and Beijing emerge? Will an Africa led by South Africa and Nigeria carve out a role as a third party—a pivot, if you will—between the Atlantic powers and an unpredictable Asia–Pacific region anchored by such giants as China, India, and perhaps Russia? Certainly, if the United States and its Western partners do not begin to take Africa more seriously, then a less benign “G-8 of the South” may be inevitable. Whether such a G-8 could become an effective countervailing force to northern hegemony is another debate altogether. The onus is on Wash-

ington and the industrialized powers of the world to show good faith to relate to Africa.

The formation of a G-8 is not necessarily an idle consideration for the United States. Given that the United States is becoming less demographically Eurocentric with each passing decade, it will need to adjust its national security perspective to incorporate the emergence of Africa as an increasingly central fulcrum in a changing international system. In the current climate, dismissing Mbeki's African Renaissance and African Century as mere slogans of hope in search of reality is easy, but these global perspectives encompass Africa's ambition within the world at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

## Notes

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1. Simon Barber, "U.S.–SA Commission, a Clinton Creation, Has Bitten the Dust," *Business Day*, March 14, 2001, 2.
2. Lawrence F. Kaplan, "Yesterday's Man: Colin Powell's Out-of-Date Foreign Policy," *New Republic*, January 1 & 8, 2001, 18; John Barry and Evan Thomas, "Colin Powell: Behind the Myth," *Newsweek*, March 5, 2001, 10–14; Ellis Cose, "The American Dream in Living Color," *Newsweek*, March 5, 2001, 15.
3. Kaplan, "Yesterday's Man," 18. Though Kaplan infers Powell is to blame for this militarily victorious political defeat, some see this failure more broadly as a Bush administration political defeat.
4. The International Peace Academy (IPA)–based Nigerian scholar, Adekeye Adebajo, often reminds us of this fact pertaining to Nigeria's regional role in West Africa.