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"Compassionate Conservatism" Comes to Africa

SALIH BOOKER AND ANN-LOUISE COLGAN

The Bush administration's foreign policy priorities over the past year have left Africa worse off in a variety of ways. America's preoccupation with the "war on terrorism" and its military misadventure in Iraq have distracted attention and resources, injuring Africa politically and economically. The White House has turned the continent into geostrategic real estate, defining its value in terms of access to oil and military bases, and viewing US-Africa relations again through a cold-war-like lens. More broadly, to the extent that American actions have undermined the very notion of multilateralism, they remain directly at odds with Africa's interests. Africa's priorities—in particular, the fight against HIV/AIDS and poverty—are being ignored, and US unilateralism threatens to undercut international cooperation.

Yet the Bush administration also has purported to place Africa at the center of its compassionate conservative agenda. Starting with the president's January 2003 State of the Union promise to significantly boost anti-AIDS funding, the administration has misled the people of the United States and the people of Africa. It claims to be taking action on African priorities. In reality, it continues to mask broken promises and harmful policies with high-sounding rhetoric.

Even the few new initiatives announced by the president, on foreign aid and HIV/AIDS, are fundamentally flawed. The Bush administration prefers a selective approach to Africa policy, making a few African countries eligible for such initiatives, thereby rewarding those whom the United States unilaterally deems "worthy." This strategy risks neglecting the countries most in need of assistance. Moreover, it blocks the emergence of a more comprehensive and coherent response to Africa's challenges, which are rooted in specific regional realities. This approach is essential to addressing crises such as HIV/AIDS and poverty.

These negative trends likely will continue to drive US relations with Africa in the year ahead. They will influence both the priorities evident in the policies of the Bush administration, and the challenges faced by Africa's people. The United States is holding a presidential election this year; it remains to be seen whether relations with Africa will feature prominently in the debate, and whether a new approach to today's global challenges can emerge.

BROKEN PROMISES

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is the greatest challenge facing Africa. It is also the greatest global threat to human security in our time. Despite this reality, and despite the Bush administration's rhetoric, the lack of US leadership in addressing the crisis persists.

Africa is ground zero of the global AIDS crisis—home to just over 10 percent of the world's population but more than 70 percent of the world's HIV/AIDS cases. In many southern African countries, HIV prevalence rates now stand at over one-third of the population. While almost 30 million Africans are living with HIV/AIDS, less than 2 percent of these people have access to life-saving treatments that have cut death rates so dramatically in the United States and other wealthy countries.

Africa has been hit hardest by HIV/AIDS because poverty has left its people most vulnerable, and

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because the continent's marginalization has allowed Western governments to deny the urgency of the crisis. For too long African governments also were in denial. Though some still are, most are now trying to tackle the problem, but without adequate resources. More than 18 million lives have been lost in Africa—25 million globally—and the pandemic is still in its infancy.

January 2004 marked the anniversary of President George W. Bush's promise in his 2003 State of the Union address to spend $15 billion over five years to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean. The pledge was quickly undermined by the president's own budget request for 2004—only $450 million for the new initiative instead of the promised $3 billion installment. (Congress ultimately appropriated more than the president proposed.)

The president's 2005 budget request for funding for HIV/AIDS in Africa, submitted in February 2004, once again included far lower levels of funding than what is needed, and what was earlier promised. The White House's request for next year includes only $2.8 billion for programs to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria worldwide, with just a portion of this money going to Africa. Indeed, almost immediately after the president made the $15 billion promise in 2003, the White House broke it, not only by cutting the funding request, but also by recasting its proposal as a broader scheme, the "US Global AIDS Initiative," rather than one aimed at Africa and the Caribbean.

Without an immediate and significant increase in funding, the HIV/AIDS crisis will not be defeated. Rather than slowly ramping up funding in future years, the United States should spend the promised $15 billion immediately to help get the pandemic under control. A real commitment now will avoid exponential increases both in infection rates and in funding requirements later. There are many ways in which this money can effectively be put to use. An urgent priority is providing treatment for the 6 million people in immediate need of anti-retroviral therapy, most of whom are in Africa. Providing medicines and infrastructure to meet this need would cost at least $10 billion in the first year.

The president's AIDS initiative was formally established in late 2003, housed in the State Department, and headed by former pharmaceutical executive Randall Tobias. This new US bureaucracy competes with, and may duplicate, the efforts of other much more important vehicles, such as the Global Fund, an international organization established in 2001 to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. The administration's AIDS office is likely to pose a challenge to other aid providers and recipient countries because its approach favors prevention over treatment and abstinence over sex education and condoms, and its close ties with the pharmaceutical industry place it in opposition to ensuring access to treatment for HIV/AIDS using low-cost generic drugs.

Tobias has consistently avoided making a commitment to using the lowest-cost generic medicines available, and instead will likely give preferential consideration to the procurement of brand-name medicines, which are far more expensive. The United States continues to pressure African countries not to take advantage of the 2001 Doha Declaration at the World Trade Organization, which accorded public health primacy over intellectual property rights, allowing countries to take advantage of existing international rules to acquire low-cost medications for their people.

The Global Fund itself still faces huge financial challenges, due in large part to inadequate US support. The United States has promised only $200 million per year over the next five years, which is less than the one-tenth of what would represent its fair share of the fund's original $7 billion to $10 billion per year spending goal. The Global Fund hopes to announce its fourth round of grants in the summer of 2004, but its ability to fund effective HIV/AIDS programs in Africa and other poor regions will depend on its financial stability. Even at a minimal level of operation, the fund still needs at least $5 billion over the next two years.

SELECTIVE ASSISTANCE

Africa faces huge human development challenges, but the United States remains unwilling to make a real commitment to support African efforts in this area. African countries are striving to meet the Millennium Development Goals—seeking to reduce hunger and poverty, and promote health and education—set by the United Nations in 2000. In response to these goals, the Bush administration has launched the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). This initiative, announced in 2002 but unfunded until this year, will be run by the newly created Millennium Challenge Corporation. It is intended to increase US foreign aid over the next three years, so that by 2006 funding will double the current levels. For this year, Congress appropriated $1 billion for the MCA.

Overall, this initiative still proposes a far smaller increase in assistance than the United States can and should provide. In relation to the size of its economy, America currently ranks at the bottom of all donor countries, with only 0.1 percent of GNP, or just over $10 billion, going to foreign aid worldwide. (Roughly half, or $5 billion, goes to just two countries: Israel and Egypt.) Only one-hundredth of one percent of the entire US budget (that is, $1 billion) is spent on aid to sub-Saharan Africa. In this context, the MCA increase can only be seen as a relatively meager doling out of resources from the wealthiest country in the world.

Moreover, aid through the MCA will be channeled in a highly selective manner. Only a handful of countries meeting certain economic and political criteria, defined by Washington, will be eligible to receive aid through the MCA, and only three of these countries are projected to be in Africa (Uganda, Ghana, and Senegal). The eligibility criteria are based on sixteen indicators: six for "governing justly," four for "investing in people," and six for "promoting economic freedom."

With the focus on energy security and terrorism concerns, US relations with Africa are likely to become increasingly militarized.

These eligibility criteria, unilaterally dictated by the United States, are not dissimilar to the conditionalities of previous aid programs and, like prior restrictions, are likely to be overridden by political priorities, such as the "war on terrorism." In each case the programs refuse to support African efforts to define their own development priorities. They also create competition among poor countries for a portion of the relatively meager MCA funds. This selective approach to development assistance risks punishing those countries whose people are the worst off and in greatest need of international support.

OBSTACLES TO DEVELOPMENT

Successive US administrations have highlighted trade as the engine of African growth and the key to integrating the continent into the global economy. The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is described as the cornerstone of the Bush administration's trade and investment policy toward Africa. This legislation, approved in 2000, focuses on the promotion of free markets and the expansion of two-way trade and investment, offering trade preferences and other economic benefits to countries that are pursuing market reform measures.

Africa's share of total world trade has declined to less than half of what it was in 1980, and now rests at only 1 percent. African countries remain over-dependent on primary commodities and are extremely vulnerable to swings in market prices. Total trade between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa dropped considerably in 2002 (the year for which the most recent figures are available), with a decline in both imports and exports. Two-way trade amounted to about $24 billion, or 15 percent less than the previous year. Most US trade with Africa is with a handful of countries, and almost 80 percent of US imports from Africa in 2002 were oil and other energy products, minerals, and metals.

By the end of 2003, 37 African countries had been declared eligible for AGOA benefits, though only slightly more than half of these had exported goods under the program by mid-2002. In fact, AGOA benefits are highly concentrated in a few countries and in the petroleum and mining sector, and US imports under AGOA have been predominantly energy-related products. This trend will only increase now that Angola was added to the eligible countries list at the end of 2003. While the Bush administration continues to promote AGOA as an engine of economic growth for Africa, existing US trade policies have benefited few African countries and have failed to promote sustainable economic development. They have, instead, perpetuated the continent's role as a source of raw materials and cheap labor.

The new trade arrangements do not address directly another important economic problem: the $33 billion in crippling foreign debt under which African countries continue to struggle. In 2004, the World Bank and IMF are marking their sixtieth anniversaries, yet no new initiative on debt cancellation is likely, and no major reform of these institutions is planned. The United States is the single largest shareholder in both the World Bank and IMF, to whom most of Africa's debts are owed, and it could use its power to support the call for debt cancellation for Africa.

At the moment, most African countries are required to spend more on debt service to these institutions each year (an average of $14 per person) than they can spend on health care and battling HIV/AIDS (less than $5). Pressure on the Bush administration to encourage debt cancellation for Africa is likely to increase, especially in light of the White House's exceptional efforts to gain the cancellation of Iraq's foreign debts of some $120 billion.

A "HANDS OFF" APPROACH

As with its economic policies, America's support for efforts to promote security, democracy, and human rights in Africa also remain inadequate. The 2003 crisis in Liberia clearly illustrated official US disdain. Despite unique historic ties and important national interests, President Bush was ultimately unwilling to make a commitment to stabilize Liberia and support its people. The United States sent some ships to sit off the coast of Monrovia, Liberia's capital, last summer, but was unwilling to deploy troops to enforce a cease-fire or provide broader security for a political settlement.

As Liberia struggles to find its political balance, and as the countries of West Africa work to end insecurity in the broader region, the United States can still play a crucial role. Congress did succeed in appropriating $200 million for Liberia in a supplemental bill for 2004. But what is needed most from the United States is the political will to vigorously back West African efforts to stabilize that country and the larger region.

Elsewhere in Africa in 2003, the United States played a minor role in encouraging some of the peacemaking initiatives of African leaders, including in Sudan. Sudan, the largest country in Africa, has been devastated by civil war for four decades. In early 2004, the signing of an agreement between the central government and southern rebels on the sharing of oil revenues between north and south marked the latest step toward a settlement of the conflict, though key challenges to achieving peace and stability remain.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell traveled to Kenya during the Sudan negotiations in October 2003, and a US special envoy has recommended long-term American engagement with the peace process. But, while the United States seems interested in Sudan's geostrategic importance and its recently developed oil wealth, this has not meant a real diplomatic investment in achieving a just political settlement that addresses the demand for democracy throughout the country and not only in the south.

In negotiations to bring an end to civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other conflicts, the United States was largely invisible in 2003. In Congo, the United States has a particular historic responsibility for the conflict, given its special relationship with the country (formerly Zaire) during the cold war. Washington should take responsibility for the destabilizing effect of its years of intervention, and should actively encourage all sides to take part in a process by which a legitimate and democratic government may be elected. Unfortunately, under the Bush administration, a "hands off" approach appears likely to continue.

Likewise, the United States has supported democratization rhetorically in international forums, but its support in the African context has not been coherent or sustained. Nigeria's 2003 presidential elections captured the state of democracy across much of the continent. While the election sustained civilian rule, the practice of democracy was far from perfect. There, as everywhere, democracy is still a work in progress. Nigeria faces serious challenges to its political stability in the form of an economic crisis and internal ethnoreligious and regional divisions.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation—home to more than 130 million people. It is as such a pivotal country, and its fate affects that of the entire continent. Nigeria represents an important African partner for the United States particularly, but not only, in economic terms. A long-term view of US-Nigerian relations must confront fundamental issues of democracy, conflict resolution, resource use, the environment, and poverty. Nigeria's interests are in harnessing the country's wealth to achieve development while building a stable democratic political system. US long-term interests are the same. If the United States wants to help promote stability and development in Nigeria, Washington must look beyond Nigeria's oil and consider its people and their environment.

In Zimbabwe, political and economic turmoil continued in 2003 as President Robert Mugabe's government came under increasing pressure from the international community. Mugabe's response—

A *Current History* Snapshot . . .

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"Getting along without Africa was part of the Western tradition until two or three generations ago. All of a sudden Africa's importance has loomed up before us just as we thought of making our way into the future without much thought about the continent. . . . No longer can we disregard the desires of people whom defeat once made the involuntary servants of our economy."

"Africa in a World Setting"
Current History, May 1956
Harry R. Rudin, Yale University

to resign from the British Commonwealth of nations in December 2003—only made clear that state violence against government opponents, impatient with Mugabe's increasingly authoritarian rule, would continue, and that the people of Zimbabwe would continue to suffer as a result.

Zimbabwe deserves attention because it represents an erosion of democracy in a country that had relatively strong democratic institutions. The United States and the European Union have imposed sanctions on the Mugabe regime. But they have failed to develop a strategy to address the roots of Zimbabwe's political and economic crisis, and to foster a democratic solution. African states, South Africa foremost among them, have similarly failed to create momentum for a peaceful solution.

The countries of Africa did make a major stride forward in bolstering human rights when the continent's leaders, at a 2003 summit of the African Union, adopted the protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. It was a significant development, reflecting a growing commitment to address the discrimination and rights violations suffered by women in Africa. The signing came at a time when African women continue to suffer human rights abuses in many parts of the continent, with increasing reports of rape being used as a weapon of war. Even so, there is little evidence that US policies have contributed to the progress on human rights, or that such rights are an important consideration in the Bush administration's policies.

GUNS AND OIL

For the Bush administration, the real priorities in Africa policy are oil and strategic military relations. By all indications, the administration will continue to deal with Africa on its own terms, and its policies will be driven by its interests in these areas in the context of the war on terrorism.

In recent years, the United States has become increasingly interested in African oil resources as an alternative to Middle East sources. Indeed, the United States now defines African oil as a strategic national interest. The American preoccupation with "energy security" makes certain African countries—Nigeria, Angola, and Gabon—especially important because of their oil reserves. In 2002, sub-Saharan Africa supplied almost 14 percent of US crude oil imports. The National Intelligence Council projects that US oil supplies from West Africa will increase to 25 percent by 2015. This would surpass US oil imports from the entire Persian Gulf.

Growing US interest in projecting military force into the Persian Gulf has led to a significant increase in the American military presence on the continent, especially in the Horn of Africa. The largest US troop presence in Africa is in Djibouti, where close to 2,000 troops are now stationed. In June 2003, the president announced a new $100 million initiative to help East African countries increase their counterterrorism efforts. The Pentagon has begun training and equipping armies in parts of Africa that officials see as potential havens for terrorists and long-term sources of oil. There are also plans to rotate US troops regularly into bases and airfields throughout Africa.

With the focus on energy security and terrorism concerns, US relations with Africa are likely to become increasingly militarized. Washington's new preoccupation with Africa's natural resources and its geostrategic importance resembles the disastrous policies and interventions of the cold war era. Then, as now, the United States ignored the priorities and challenges of African partners.

AFRICA'S PRIORITIES

The Bush administration's Africa policy continues to be characterized by a duplicity that clearly emerged in the past year. Africa's concerns are being marginalized and undermined by an American foreign policy preoccupied with other parts of the world. At the same time, the Bush White House callously manipulates Africa, claiming to champion the continent's needs with its compassionate conservative agenda.

While the HIV/AIDS crisis is the most urgent threat facing Africa and the world, the Bush administration's current orientation is to delay action. In contrast, Washington's interest in African oil and the specter of terrorist cells quietly shapes the immediate course of US Africa policy. A different vision of American global leadership may emerge from this year's presidential election. In the meantime, US policy continues to belittle Africa's most pressing priorities. ■