

Congressional Testimony before the  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
“U.S. Interests in Africa”  
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May 18, 2017

Good morning, Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel and members of this committee. My name is Ambassador (ret.) Reuben E. Brigety, II and I am the Dean of the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University. I thank you all very much for inviting me to testify before the committee today regarding “U.S. Interests in Africa.”

In my view, the bases of U.S. engagement with Africa in the near future should largely remain what they have been over the last three decades under both Republican and Democratic administrations. They include a commitment to broadening democratic governance, cooperating on matters of mutual security, strengthening healthcare systems and supporting economic development. I have elaborated at length about U.S. priorities in Africa in an article entitled “The New Pan-Africanism – Implications for U.S. Policy in Africa” published in the journal *Survival* in the summer of 2016. I submit the article to the record.

However, I would like to use the bulk of my testimony to emphasize that U.S. objectives in Africa cannot be realized with the dramatic and

draconian cuts to the United States Department of State and to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) which have been proposed by the Trump Administration.

In the Office of Management and Budget's document "America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again," President Trump proposes "deep cuts to foreign aid." The President's 2018 budget request for the Department of State and USAID propose a staggering 28% reduction from the 2017 annualized continuing resolution (CR) level. Recent media reports suggest that Secretary of State Tillerson plans to have a reduction of 2,300 foreign and civil service officers, or nearly 10% of the State Department's workforce, within the next two years.

Mr. Chairman, let me say clearly and emphatically that such deep cuts to the Department of State and USAID budgets will cause unavoidable damage to African partners and to American interests on the continent. The presumption by the White House and the Secretary of State that the ranks of the Foreign Service can be dramatically reduced without harming the national interests of the United States is incorrect, particularly as it relates to Africa. As a former U.S. Ambassador to the African Union and a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, I can attest to the fact that diplomacy in Africa is a retail business. Perhaps more so than in other parts of the world, engaging directly and repeatedly with government officials, business people, and civic leaders

is essential for building trust, gathering information, and advancing policies. It is self-evident that decreasing the number of diplomats available to serve in U.S. Embassies abroad (to include in Africa) will decrease our ability to shape events and advance our interests on the continent.

This is made all the more problematic because U.S. Embassies in Africa are already understaffed relative to our diplomatic missions in Europe. For example, when I was the Chief of Mission for the U.S. Mission to the African Union from 2013-2015, I never had more than four State Department Foreign Service Officers assigned to me at any given time. This was for a mission that was responsible for engaging a multilateral organization with 54 (at the time) sovereign members in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia that hosted over 120 diplomatic missions – any one of which could have been important for our country to engage at any given time. From Nouakchott to Nairobi, similar circumstances exist to a greater or lesser degree at U.S. Embassies across sub-Saharan Africa, where a relatively small number of diplomats (compared to our diplomatic footprint in Riga or Berlin, for example) must work exceptionally hard to develop the relationships needed to advance U.S. interests. Whether it be finding a way to end the fighting in South Sudan or facilitating an eventual political transition in Zimbabwe, it is impossible to foresee how *decreasing* our diplomatic presence in Africa can contribute to those and other important objectives.

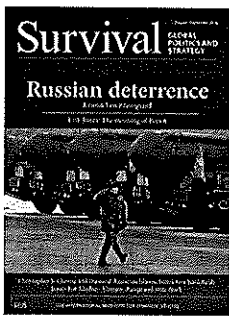
The problem is perhaps even more tangible as it relates to proposed cuts to the USAID budget. Advancing historically bipartisan U.S. objectives of democratic governance, humanitarian response, health, education, and economic development in Africa necessarily requires programmatic funds. With the breadth of challenges and scope of opportunities on the continent today, cutting the USAID budget will inevitably harm African partners and hurt American interests. The emerging trend of “constitutional coups” whereby long-serving leaders alter their constitutional arrangements to hold on to power threatens fragile democratic norms in Africa. As we sit here today, the world faces four current/near famines, three of which are in Africa. Further, Ebola is resurgent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The so-called “Youth Bulge” of dynamic but restive young people across Africa is coming of age, eager for work and education at home but willing to migrate across dangerous seas if necessary to build their futures. It is self-evident that massive cuts to the USAID budget, inevitably leading to the closure of USAID missions and the depletion of vital program funds, will cripple our ability to respond to these and other pressing challenges on the continent.

When I was the U.S. Ambassador to the African Union, I said, the United States was the “natural partner of choice for Africa.” This was not only because we shared both a common history and common interests, but also because the United States was a leading partner with African governments on a host of issues, from battling the HIV/AIDS pandemic

to fostering economic growth.

If such draconian cuts to the Department of State and USAID budgets are allowed to proceed, then we will abdicate our position of principled partnership with African governments. We will, in effect, have gift-wrapped the continent and handed it to China. As has been widely reported, the Chinese have increased their diplomatic presence across Africa even as they have invested heavily in a variety of infrastructure projects on the continent. While there may be a coincidence of interests between the Chinese and American views of economic development in Africa, our agendas diverge sharply regarding our diplomatic motives and our priorities for democratic governance. We must not cede our position of partnership to China, which would surely happen if the Trump Administration's damaging budget proposals are adopted.

In conclusion, I commend the committee for examining the important issue of "U.S. Interests in Africa," an area of the world that has enjoyed broad bipartisan support and consensus over much of the last thirty years. Continuing robust engagement in Africa in the near term is squarely in the interests of the United States. Maintaining the capacity of the Department of State and USAID continue that engagement is also squarely in the interests of our country. Thank you.



## The New Pan-Africanism: Implications for US Africa Policy

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To cite this article: Reuben E. Brigety II (2016) The New Pan-Africanism: Implications for US Africa Policy, *Survival*, 58:4, 159-176, DOI: [10.1080/00396338.2016.1186985](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1186985)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1186985>



Published online: 19 Jul 2016.



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# The New Pan-Africanism: Implications for US Africa Policy

**Reuben E. Brigety, II**

The idea that Africa, a continent shared by more than 50 states with unique histories, cultures and interests, could be more than the sum of its parts dates back at least as far as May 1963, when an emerging sense of a common African destiny led the leaders of free Africa to gather in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to create the Organisation of African Unity. Almost 40 years later, a similar feeling of pan-African identity led to the founding of the African Union (AU). A sense of continental solidarity can be seen in cultural products such as the poetry of Léopold Senghor and the songs of Miriam Makeba, and in the behaviour of African states in multilateral forums such as the UN General Assembly and the World Trade Organisation. The tendency for states to adopt and adhere to common African positions (as they did in the negotiations for the Sustainable Development Goals, the Bali round of World Trade Organisation negotiations and the Ezulwini Consensus on UN Security Council reform) reflects an understanding of – and a commitment to – a set of particularly African interests that are best pursued collectively rather than individually. The persistence of nationalistic rivalries among, and the pursuit of divergent policies by, African states is not necessarily evidence that pan-Africanism has no political merit or consequence, any more than differences in policies or the persistence of tensions among European nations represent an indictment of the idea of Europe. Rather, it merely demonstrates the complexity of African states' foreign policies as they try to

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advance their interests both unilaterally, on the basis of their own national capabilities, and multilaterally, under the banner of African solidarity.

If the idea of 'Africa' has genuine purchase in international affairs, can the United States see Africa as a strategic partner? To answer this question, it is useful to look at what a strategic partner is. In recent years there has been a proliferation of strategic partnerships between the United States and other countries and entities. Today, the US has four such partnerships within Africa alone: with Angola, Nigeria, South Africa and the AU Commission.

A strategic partnership is a customary arrangement or formal agreement between two polities (such as a sovereign state or a multilateral organisation) to engage regularly in purposeful dialogue and to pursue mutual interests together over time. The strength of a strategic partnership depends on three elements: the breadth and coincidence of the partners' enduring interests; the degree of trust in the relationship; and the capacity of each party to apply resources for the advancement of their shared interests. The relationships that the United States enjoys with the United Kingdom and NATO exemplify the gold standard of strategic partnerships. Conversely, the failure of Washington's attempted 'reset' in relations with Moscow shows how clashing interests and mutual mistrust can limit a would-be partnership. What, then, are the current elements of, and future prospects for, a strategic partnership between the United States and Africa?

### **The elements of partnership**

To begin with, the United States and Africa share common interests. The most recent articulation of US interests with regard to Africa can be found in President Barack Obama's strategy for sub-Saharan Africa. The strategy is based on four pillars: strengthening democratic institutions; spurring economic growth, trade and investment; advancing peace and security; and promoting opportunity and development.<sup>1</sup> Each of these areas of interest has been pursued in Africa as a matter of stated policy or actual practice by every US administration – both Republican and Democratic – since the end of the Cold War. Even more significantly, they are consistent with what Africa says it wants for itself.



With regard to democratic governance, the Constitutive Act of the African Union explicitly calls for 'respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance',<sup>2</sup> as well as 'condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of government'.<sup>3</sup> There is alignment on economic priorities as well, since virtually all African states have abandoned the socialist and Marxist economic models that many adopted shortly after they gained independence. Most now want to expand their private sectors, as evidenced by (among other indicators) the unanimous call by African states for the swift renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) by the US Congress in 2015.<sup>4</sup> On matters of peace and security, African states have made strong political declarations in favour of achieving a conflict-free Africa by 2020, and many have placed their own soldiers in harm's way to serve in AU and UN peacekeeping missions across the continent. The priority areas that African countries have defined for their own opportunity and development – improving food security, strengthening tertiary education, building climate-resilient communities and the like – directly align with the global-development agenda of the United States.

The picture is, of course, more mixed when one examines actual practice. In the area of democracy and governance, there is a significant gap not only between the interests professed by the United States and the realities of African life, but also (and more importantly) between what Africans say they want and how they are actually governed. Freedom House argues that Africa 'saw overall if uneven progress toward democratization in the 1990s and early 2000s. However recent years have seen backsliding among both the top performers ... and the more repressive countries.'<sup>5</sup> It considers only 20% of the countries and territories in sub-Saharan Africa to be fully free, and just 37% to be partially free.<sup>6</sup>

Economically, the picture is better, but significant improvement is still needed. Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole experienced an average annual GDP growth rate of 5.2% over the last five years, and is home to seven of the ten fastest-growing economies in the world.<sup>7</sup> In the last 15 years, the value of US exports to Africa has grown by an average of 11.3% annually, or by more than 300% over that period.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, protectionist trading policies adopted by African states continue to inhibit economic growth, with

less than 2% of all African trade occurring internally. At the same time, corruption has served to constrain American foreign direct investment. The US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act appropriately punishes American businesspeople who would seek to contribute to the more than \$52 billion in illicit financial transactions involving Africa every year,<sup>9</sup> causing many legitimate American businesses to avoid the continent – perceived to be rife with corruption – for fear of running afoul of the law.

There have been successes in ending deadly conflicts in Africa (such as the civil wars in Liberia, Angola, Mozambique and Sierra Leone), even as new conflicts have arisen in their stead, in places such as Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan and the Lake Chad Basin. As conflicts have ebbed and flowed, the capacity of African regional and continental organisations to address them has increased. AU peacekeepers have played pivotal roles in Somalia, Mali and CAR, operating on a shoestring compared to relatively well-financed UN missions. Yet important decisions remain to be made and implemented by the AU regarding the financing of a standing African military capability.

With regard to broad issues of opportunity and development, a significant gap between needs and resources remains, as do differences between Africa and donor countries on how to address it. Even as Africa calls on G7 members to fulfil their pledge to commit 0.7% of their GDP to official development assistance,<sup>10</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries are increasingly calling on developing countries, including those in Africa, to more effectively mobilise domestic resources in pursuit of their own development.<sup>11</sup>

Yet despite these gaps, there is substantial overlap between the outcomes sought by the United States and Africa for the continent. This consensus could certainly serve as the basis for a strategic partnership. Moreover, any differences between policy and practice are due less to a fundamental divergence in the interests of the two sides than they are to challenges of implementation or discrete political circumstances.

What of the extent of trust between the US and Africa? For both sides, perceptions and behaviour have been greatly influenced by two key historical events, the Cold War and the liberation struggle. There is, of course,

overlap and interplay between the two periods, both of which have done much to shape the complexities of the relationship. Like elsewhere in the world, US engagement in Africa for most of the second half of the twentieth century was heavily influenced, if not outright defined, by its Cold War competition with the Soviet Union. US policies in Africa and elsewhere were designed less to support democratic institutions and more to cultivate supporters and check Soviet clients. This led to some unsavoury associations – with South African apartheid and Mobutu Sese Seko’s Zaire, for instance – that are hard to defend today. At roughly the same time, much of Africa was agitating for independence from its colonial masters, either through diplomacy or through force of arms. Many Africans believed that, by prioritising its Cold War competition over legitimate African aspirations for freedom, the United States was on the wrong side of history. This belief remains entrenched among members of Africa’s liberation generation, many of whom now hold power. It has fed suspicion of US motives for the intervention in Libya, the Young African Leaders Initiative and the US Africa Command.<sup>12</sup>

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*Africans are  
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Despite this history of suspicion, Africans are willing to embrace American leaders who stand with them. President George W. Bush is widely praised for the life-saving President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, and lauded for creating a new model of development assistance through the Millennium Challenge Corporation. President Obama was rapturously welcomed during his July 2015 visit to Kenya and praised for his tough-love speech at AU headquarters calling for African leaders to observe term limits and respect their constitutions. Africans are also avid consumers of American culture. One can hear American hip-hop music, or African versions of it, on virtually every radio station on the continent, and Jay-Z and Beyoncé are as well known in Nairobi and Lagos as they are in New York and Los Angeles. Finally, many African political and business leaders completed a portion of their studies at US universities, giving them an understanding of (and even an affinity for) American culture.

Notwithstanding leftover suspicions from the Cold War, the bonds of trust between the United States and Africa are growing and could serve as the basis for a stronger future relationship.

Does Africa have the capacity to bring unique capabilities to a strategic relationship with the United States? The answer, again, depends on the area under consideration. In the realm of peace and security, the answer is a resounding 'yes'. What African states have lacked in financial resources and material capability they have made up for in their willingness to fight and in their bravery under fire. Somalia today has a civilian government for the first time in a generation due to the willingness of forces from Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti to do battle with al-Shabaab under the banner of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) even during some of the darkest days of the conflict. AU troops have proven willing, and decisive, in addressing crises in CAR and Mali, and are engaging Boko Haram as part of a multinational effort. On matters of democracy and governance, however, the picture is more mixed. African continental and regional diplomatic missions have proven essential in countering the coup in Burkina Faso and in encouraging respect for democratic processes in Nigeria. Yet the challenges of regional politics have made it harder for African institutions to encourage – or demand – respect for constitutional limits or clean electoral processes in Burundi, Zimbabwe and elsewhere. The capacity for partnership is arguably weakest in matters of economic growth, trade and investment. Even though bilateral trade between the United States and Africa has grown dramatically over the last 15 years, the continent has thus far proven itself incapable of decisively addressing the greatest barriers to improved economic cooperation by, *inter alia*, confronting corruption, building multinational markets of scale, and ensuring transparency and respect for the rule of law consistent with international business standards.

It is clear that there is a convergence of interests, a sufficient degree of trust and the collective capacity to establish a strategic partnership between the United States and Africa. Such a partnership holds the potential to help define the twenty-first century. Many of the challenges that will confront the international community in the coming decades – adaptation to climate change, ensuring peace and security in an age of violent non-state actors,

ending extreme poverty and expanding economic opportunity – are at play in Africa. To solve them, the United States needs Africa as a whole, in addition to individual countries, to be a willing, capable and dependable partner.

### **Building partnership**

There are at least four ways, in addition to current initiatives, in which the US could advance the project of African unity in a manner that would support both sides' interests: by actively supporting the idea of pan-African unity; by substantially increasing financial, material and technical support for African democratic institutions; by involving the US private sector to an even greater extent; and by improving problematic US bilateral relationships on the continent.

#### *Supporting pan-African unity*

The achievement of a peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa is the *raison d'être* of the AU and a goal that enjoys unanimous rhetorical support across the continent. Given the strength of this political ideal, the United States should be a proactive advocate of pan-African unity. Many (if not most) Africans would interpret such a position as American support for the destiny that Africans have chosen for themselves. This would likely improve levels of trust in American motives among the African political class. Moreover, American support for goals that Africans have already made a rhetorical commitment to (such as respect for human rights, democracy and economic prosperity) could be a powerful statement on the convergence of American and African interests. Conversely, US ambivalence or hostility toward pan-African unity can only fuel mistrust about American motives on the continent and limit the possibilities for the United States to influence its political development.

As the institutional project of building African unity proceeds apace, a debate has emerged within US policy circles about whether a stronger and more united Africa is good for America. On the one hand, an Africa that can speak more authoritatively about its own interests and that can enforce its own standards on matters such as economic integration and respect for human rights could be a powerful ally of the United States for the advancement of mutual interests both in Africa and beyond. On the other hand,

there is a legitimate fear that a more united Africa could act against US priorities, as it did, for example, in 2013–14 with its rejection of International Criminal Court jurisdiction over sitting African heads of state, or as it might by supporting adversarial Chinese or Russian positions in the UN Security Council and elsewhere.

This debate resembles similar discussions in the 1990s concerning how a strengthened European Union might affect American interests in Europe and beyond. On balance, in the nearly 25 years since the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, it has become clear that a strong EU has been good for American interests as well. Any differences between the US and the EU on matters such as World Trade Organisation disputes or the wisdom of the 2003 Iraq War have been overshadowed by the strong cooperation they have demonstrated in other areas, such as in jointly fighting piracy off the Horn of Africa and in responding to the Ebola crisis of 2014.

A similar dynamic could develop between the US and Africa. A generation from now, the project of African unity could be both far more advanced than it is today and demonstrably beneficial for both US and African interests. Achieving this result will require consistent rhetorical support from American foreign-policy leaders for the pan-African ideal. At the same time, it will also require specific policy initiatives to advance regional integration on the continent.

For example, the US should allow multiple African countries to submit joint project proposals for funding by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) that would advance the integration of regional markets through the construction of transnational highways or multinational manufacturing parks. This would facilitate the creation of regional markets with the necessary scale and scope to more readily attract US foreign direct investment. Currently, only individual countries can apply for MCC compacts, and their success in winning them depends on the ‘scorecard’ they receive from the MCC on key governance indicators, such as ruling justly, investing in people and encouraging economic freedom. If multiple countries were able to submit joint proposals for MCC funding, there would be productive pressure from all of the applicant nations on each other to achieve the threshold standard of the MCC governance indicators. This would not only be a tan-

gible tool for the United States to encourage strong governance in support of pan-African Unity, but the projects themselves would enhance regional economic integration to the benefit of both African countries and American companies seeking to do business with them.

In addition, the United States should substantially strengthen its diplomatic engagement with the eight regional economic communities (RECs) that form the building blocks for the political organisation of the continent. In most cases, the United States accredits its resident ambassadors to the countries in which the RECs are based as representatives to the RECs themselves. For example, the US ambassador to Botswana is also dually accredited as the US representative to the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the headquarters of which is in Gaborone. Yet the duties of these US representatives concerning the RECs are at best of secondary importance given that, in most cases, there is no formal political framework to advance the mutual interests of the United States and the REC in question. Conversely, the United States and the AU Commission have a formal agreement that has helped strengthen their partnership, culminating in the visit by President Obama to the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa in July 2015. A concerted effort to invigorate and deepen the political dialogue with the RECs would expand the reservoir of trust between Africa and the US, identify tangible initiatives for strengthening regional integration that could be pursued jointly, and improve US understanding of regional dynamics that affect continent-wide challenges.

#### *Increasing support for African democratic institutions*

Although Africa's political commitment to democratic governance is strong, its institutions to support democratic governance are relatively weak. Understaffed and underfunded, entities such as the AU's Department for Political Affairs (which is charged with vital functions such as election monitoring and political mediation) could be important drivers for strengthening democratic governance on the continent. Yet both African states and external partners alike have invested far more heavily in the continent's security architecture (such as in AU peacekeeping missions) than they have in Africa's governance structures.

The long-term economic growth and political stability of Africa is dependent on its ability to solidify still-fragile and uneven gains in democratic governance in accordance with its commitments. It will be challenging at best, however, for Africa to achieve this result on its own. Though several African countries, including Ghana, Mauritius and South Africa, have established strong democratic political cultures, there is no democratic centre of gravity on the continent that can meaningfully exert positive pressure on less democratic countries to improve their governance. In contrast, the prospect of enjoying the economic prosperity and political freedoms of the EU (as well as the requirement to implement the EU's *acquis communautaire*, or body of laws) were powerful incentives for the former communist countries of Eastern Europe to reform their political systems in line with the requirements for EU membership. In this case, the established democracies of Western and Central Europe exerted a kind of gravitational pull to help the newly independent countries of Eastern Europe accelerate and solidify their commitment to democratic governance.

In the absence of such a democratic centre of gravity in Africa, the best alternative is for external partners to strengthen democratic institutions through financial assistance and technical support. The AU Commission, and in particular its departments of political affairs and of peace and security (which has responsibility for continental early warning and conflict mediation) have shown a keen willingness to support democracy in Africa in a manner consistent with AU declarations and statements of principle. For example, the Department of Political Affairs played an important role in the Nigerian elections of March 2015, working assiduously behind the scenes to convince both parties to ensure a free and fair voting process, and to accept the ultimate outcome. Due in no small part to this proactive diplomacy, Nigeria experienced the first peaceful transfer of power from an incumbent president to an electoral challenger in its history. Similarly, the Department of Peace and Security, as well as the Peace and Security Council, moved swiftly to condemn the military coup in Burkina Faso in September 2015, emphasising that the seizure of power by force and unconstitutional changes of government were unacceptable.<sup>13</sup> Yet there have also been recent setbacks. Months of quiet diplomacy by senior AU officials could not con-



vince Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza to stand down from his bid for a third term, in clear violation of the Arusha Accords, particularly as he received support from some heads of state in Central and Eastern Africa who were likewise poised to seek unconstitutional third terms in office. In addition, the AU, as the only external organisation invited to monitor the most recent federal elections in Ethiopia in June 2015, stunningly declared the process 'to be calm, peaceful, and credible as it provided an opportunity for the Ethiopian people to express their choices at the polls', despite the fact that the ruling party won 100% of the seats in parliament.<sup>14</sup>

To improve the ability of African institutions to advance democratic governance on the continent, the United States and its like-minded donor partners should propose a substantial support package at both the continental and regional levels that identifies the most promising institutions with which to work on democratic governance, that develops jointly with African stakeholders action plans to strengthen those institutions, and that makes multi-year commitments of financial resources and technical assistance to implement those plans. It is vital that the United States take the lead in this initiative, given its belief in the efficacy of democratic institutions for social stability and prosperity. African concerns about American hegemony, however, mean that it is equally important that such an initiative include a mixture of donors with similar commitments to democracy (such as the EU, Japan, Australia, India and Brazil), and that it be carried out in close cooperation with African multilateral organisations themselves.

If this democracy-building project were successful, Africa could well become the largest democratic region in the world. A generation ago, few would have predicted that most of Moscow's Warsaw Pact allies would one day be part of a democratic Europe, or that almost all of Latin America would be governed by freely elected leaders rather than unaccountable despots. Africa has the potential to be the world's next democratic success story, but both the continent and its partners will need to take specific actions to realise this vision.

#### *Engaging the US private sector*

Private-sector-led economic growth will be vital to writing Africa's next chapter. The security and prosperity of the continent depend on the genera-

tion of enough jobs to employ more than 200 million young people intent on building their futures. For most African leaders, the prospect of large numbers of unemployed young people is not simply an economic challenge, but also a political and societal threat. As such, US political influence in Africa will likely depend at least as much on economic linkages with African economies as on political ties to African governments. The United States, therefore, has a vital economic and political interest in facilitating the entry of American businesses into virtually every sector of Africa's economy. At the same time, opportunities for American firms to engage in profitable enterprises in Africa are multiplying as many African economies continue to expand, and as labour in Asia becomes more expensive.

In recent years, the US government has taken a number of steps to facilitate American business involvement in Africa. For instance, at the August 2014 African Leaders Summit in Washington, the US government's Doing Business in Africa Campaign announced over \$33bn in new commitments to support economic growth in Africa. The US Department of Commerce has increased the number of Foreign Commercial Service officers on the continent, and opened an office in Addis Ababa – the diplomatic capital of Africa.<sup>15</sup> The Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) has nearly quadrupled its investments in Africa in the last decade, financing around \$4bn in projects.<sup>16</sup> And Power Africa, President Obama's signature initiative, has involved dozens of American companies in supporting the objective of adding 30,000 megawatts of reliable energy-generating capacity for the continent.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, more could be done, particularly in the area of non-energy infrastructure development. In January 2012, the AU's Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA).<sup>18</sup> PIDA is a collection of over 50 projects across sectors (such as transportation, telecommunications, trans-boundary water resources and energy) designed to support economic development in Africa by strengthening regional and continental access to sound infrastructure. Establishing mechanisms for American firms to profitably engage in PIDA projects would simultaneously support several US interests as once. Firstly, it would be a strong signal that the United States is an active proponent of regional and continental integration consistent with the vision

that Africa has adopted for itself. Secondly, it could enhance Washington's long-term political influence in Africa as American firms helped build and operate African roads, ports and water networks, while also employing and training large numbers of African workers. Finally, the successful completion of profitable projects would benefit US companies and further strengthen US ties to African markets.

American firms participating in PIDA projects currently face two key challenges. Firstly, given the perceptions of political risk associated with doing business in Africa, and the length of time required to complete many infrastructure projects, it is very difficult for US firms to obtain project financing at rates that can compete with those enjoyed by rival firms from China and elsewhere. Secondly, concerns about the long-term stability of African regulatory regimes (or, indeed, of African governments themselves) often make US firms skittish about undertaking ambitious infrastructure projects in Africa.

Yet proactive diplomacy and skilful financing could go a long way towards overcoming both of these challenges, and the United States and African stakeholders should jointly launch an initiative to mitigate these risks. African partners could agree to issue tenders for PIDA projects that take into account more than just the cost of the project, including factors such as labour standards, training for indigenous workers and project quality – all areas in which American firms excel. In exchange, OPIC could work with private investment banks to float bonds to finance specific PIDA projects in a way that would spread the risk among potential investors and thus decrease the interest rates of the loans. OPIC could also provide political-risk insurance to assuage the concerns of firms leery of taking on longer-term construction projects in Africa. Finally, a key element of this initiative should be a structured, regular dialogue between the US government, African governmental stakeholders and American private-sector representatives to identify and address structural barriers to the competitiveness of US firms interested in participating in PIDA projects.

#### *Resolving problematic bilateral relationships*

The political importance of pan-African unity means that the nature of US bilateral relationships with individual African countries can have regional,

and even continental, ramifications. The relationship between the United States and Cuba, and its implications for American engagement in the Western Hemisphere, is an appropriate analogy. For decades, the hostile character of US–Cuban relations had a dampening effect on US relations with Latin America as a whole. Thus, a major factor in the Obama administration’s calculus in normalising relations with Cuba was the positive impact that such a move would have for US standing in the entire region, in addition to the implications for the bilateral relationship.

The strength of the pan-African narrative in African politics is arguably even stronger than the call for regional solidarity in Latin America. Thus, it is essential that the United States take into account the impact of its bilateral relationships in Africa on its engagement with certain sub-regions, or indeed with the continent as a whole, and that it calibrate its diplomatic engagement accordingly. While there are a handful of US–African bilateral relationships that have regional or continental ramifications, the most important of these is with Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe’s president, Robert Mugabe, along with more than 100 individuals and some 70 legal entities, have been the subjects of targeted sanctions since 2003. The sanctions were first imposed following the seriously flawed 2002 elections, which many election observers described as marred by blatant irregularities and voter intimidation.<sup>19</sup> Designed to isolate those most responsible for the political violence and to pressure Zimbabwe’s leadership to create a freer political environment, the sanctions have had, at best, a mixed record of success.

More problematic, however, has been the unintended impact of the sanctions on the relationship between the United States and the SADC. Harare has successfully convinced its African neighbours that the American sanctions are fundamentally unjust. To support this thesis, the Zimbabweans regularly point to the close relationships that the United States enjoys with other countries – both in Africa and beyond – that allegedly have even worse governance records than Zimbabwe. Furthermore, they have convinced their African allies that there is nothing the government of Zimbabwe could do to satisfy American demands regarding democratic norms and respect for human rights. As a result, the SADC membership (which covers the

most stable and prosperous region of Africa) has rallied around Zimbabwe and made it exceedingly difficult for the United States to have a meaningful diplomatic and economic relationship with the organisation. This sentiment has spread to the rest of the continent as well. In January 2015, African heads of state elected Mugabe as the chairman of the Assembly of the AU, rather than passing him over in favour of another Southern African leader. And, in her remarks preceding Obama's historic speech to the AU in July 2015, AU Commission Chairperson Nksozana Dlamini-Zuma praised the United States for normalising its relationship with Cuba in a thinly veiled plea to do the same with Zimbabwe.

However justified the sanctions regime against Zimbabwe's anti-democratic leadership may have been at its inception, it has not succeeded in achieving its principal objective of improving the democratic climate in the country. Worse, it has impeded cooperation with the SADC, contrary to both parties' mutual interests. The United States should rethink its Zimbabwe policy and adopt prudent adjustments to achieve its desired outcome of improved governance in the country without prejudicing its relationship with Southern Africa as a whole. This should include further refinement of the list of those targeted by sanctions to include only President Mugabe and the handful of people in his entourage most responsible for the repressive climate in the country. Changes to the sanctions policy would counter the Zimbabwean narrative that there is nothing the country could do to satisfy the demands of the United States. The onus would be more clearly on Zimbabwe's senior leadership to improve governance in exchange for additional sanctions relief. And, most importantly, it would open many more possibilities for US-SADC cooperation in support of both sides' economic and political interests.

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Africa is more than a collection of countries sharing the same landmass. It is also an idea, encompassing the belief that all Africans should live in harmony, prosperity and dignity. It is an idea that is no less powerful, and no less achievable, than the aspiration of the Founding Fathers of the United

States to build a country in which life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were guaranteed to all. The current state of Africa's complex politics and myriad challenges does not render this idea invalid. Rather, Africa's problems make it all the more attractive. As the United States grapples with unprecedented global challenges in the coming decades, it will need Africa to be a partner in seeking solutions. It is therefore in the interests of the United States to work with Africans to make the idea of Africa a reality.

## Notes

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- 2 'Constitutive Act of the African Union', Article 4, paragraph (m), [http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/ConstitutiveAct\\_EN.pdf](http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/ConstitutiveAct_EN.pdf).
- 3 *Ibid.*, paragraph (p).
- 4 For example, in a meeting with US Secretary of State John Kerry on 1 May 2014, Erastus Mwencha, deputy chair of the AU Commission, called for 'a seamless reauthorization for a period of at least 15 years to enable Africa's transformation with more jobs created for both Africa and the US': 'Remarks by Erastus Mwencha Deputy Chairperson, African Union Commission at the U.S.-African Union High-Level Dialogue', 1 May 2014, <http://www.au.int/en/speeches/remarks-erastus-mwencha-deputy-chairperson-african-union-commission-us-african-union-high#sthash.VH1bMj4v.dpuf>. President Obama signed the legislation reauthorising AGOA for ten years on 29 June 2015: Jim Kuhnenn, 'Obama Signs Trade (Incl. AGOA), Worker Assistance Bills into Law', Associated Press, 29 June 2015, <http://agoa.info/news/article/5740-obama-signs-trade-incl-agoa-worker-assistance-bills-into-law.html>.
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