

REFLECTIONS ON THE SUMMIT: WHITHER US-AFRICA RELATIONS?

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The Obama Administration hosted the US-Africa Leaders Summit from 4-6 August, 2014. This summit, whose main theme was “Investing in the Next Generation,” was an opportunity to discuss key issues and define a way forward for US-Africa relations. The gathering was historic for a number of reasons. It was the first-ever US-Africa Summit since most African countries gained their independence some fifty years ago. In this regard, the summit was long overdue, especially considering that the US has long held summits with other regions of the world, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union, and the Organization of American States (OAS). The summit was also ground-breaking because other major countries and economic blocs (China, France, Japan, India, and the European Union, etc.) had long established, recurring summits with Africa in recognition of the continent’s ongoing transformation and its emergence as a global actor in several areas. In this regard, the United States is playing catch-up. The summit was also notable for the opportunity that it provided to shine the spotlight on a continent that remains largely hidden from and is often overly negatively stereotyped by most Americans.

THE SUMMIT AGENDA AND ITS ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

The summit was preceded by much debate within the Africa-interested community about the summit’s timing, focus and anticipated outcomes. There were several issues of concern. One was the perceived misalignment of African and US protocol and expectations. In particular, the lack of

bilateral meetings between President Obama and African leaders was seen by many as a major problem. Another concern focused on how the summit’s execution and resulting outcomes would compare to other Africa summits, such as those conducted by China and Europe, and what this would mean for

long-term US-Africa relations. Yet another concern pertained to the official summit agenda. Some argued that it was overly focused on trade, investment and big business while minimizing the centrality of issues related to good governance, human rights and the rule of law. Argument was made for an official agenda that reflected a better balance in addressing both Africa's opportunities and challenges. In the end, the summit – consisting of official, as well as side events hosted by a multitude of non-governmental organizations, think tanks, as well as other government and private organizations – was an extremely busy and vibrant affair. More importantly, the summit concluded with the announcement of a dizzying array of US commitments and initiatives spanning the governance, security and economic spectrum. Overall, it appears that, as an event, the summit was a success.

SUMMIT OUTCOMES

Summit commitments include new initiatives, as well as plans to bolster existing US programs in several areas, such as supporting African capacities for conflict management; addressing transnational threats, especially terrorism; enhancing inclusive governance; improving agricultural systems; addressing climate change and resilience; empowering women; and investing in Africa's next generation. The First Lady's Spousal program, led by Mrs. Michelle Obama and Mrs. Laura Bush, also generated \$200 million in commitments aimed at improving education, health, and economic opportunity across the continent. The issue

of trade and investment generated a lot of attention. Notably, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which is currently set to expire in 2015, was a key topic of discussion. Overall, there seemed to be great support from both Africa and the United States for AGOA's renewal, expansion and enhancement. In addition to AGOA, there was much discussion about trade and investment opportunities at the sub-regional and bilateral levels. Ultimately, the summit generated business deals totaling \$37 billion, including those under an enhanced Doing Business in Africa Campaign, Power Africa (which generated more than \$300 million per year in assistance), as well as numerous private sector deals amounting to \$14 billion. This focus on trade and investment is perhaps not surprising given that US business engagement with Africa lags by a large margin that of other regions, including China and the European Union. Taken as a whole, US pledges across the governance, security and economic spheres appear to signal a growing commitment to Africa. The key question now is: **What do the summit, and the commitments resulting from it, mean for Africa and for long-term US-Africa relations?**

THE SUMMIT AND THE FUTURE OF US-AFRICA RELATIONS

In hosting this summit, the US has finally recognized Africa's ongoing transformation, its growing potential as a player in the global arena, and the opportunities that the continent offers. It also appears that the US has finally recognized that Africa increasingly has choices

with regard to how and with whom it partners. And, through this unprecedented summit, the United States has clearly signaled its desire for enhanced engagement with Africa. However, it is too early to assess the impact of the summit on the future of US-Africa relations. This will depend on a number of factors, including the following:

1) Delivery on Summit Commitments:

The ability of the United States and African governments to demonstrate immediate and sustained progress towards translating key summit commitments into concrete deliverables in the months and years ahead will be the most important determinant of success.

2) African Perceptions of the Summit:

During the summit, several African delegations indicated that the summit had been a resounding success because they were returning home with tangible deliverables, i.e. business deals and other financial commitments. However, it is too soon to tell how many of the African delegations share this view. Was there a perception of winners and losers, or did every country feel that it benefitted in some way from the summit? Beyond the official African delegations, the assessment of ordinary African citizens on how this summit improves their overall socio-economic and political well-being will also be a key factor.

3) Restoring and Sustaining High-Level US Diplomatic Engagement with Africa:

The ability of the US to sustain and build on the momentum generated by the summit will be another precursor to success. In part,

this will require high-level US diplomatic and political engagement on the ground in Africa. Unfortunately, as of July 2014, ten of the 28 US ambassadors awaiting confirmation are to African countries. The stalled confirmation process hurts the ability of the US to effectively follow up on summit commitments. It also hurts the US in other ways. For example, some of the affected African countries are faced with significant transnational security challenges, including terrorism. In addition, this ambassadorial void contradicts a key message of the summit: that Africa matters to the United States and that the US wants to partner with Africa. This gap between rhetoric and reality is not lost on Africans, and it raises a huge credibility problem for the US. For all these reasons, it is imperative for the US Congress to move quickly to act on ambassadorial hearings in order to restore, and in some cases elevate, the United States' bilateral political and diplomatic engagement with Africa, but also with other similarly affected parts of the world.

4) Enhancing Development While Assuring Good Governance and Human Rights:

As indicated earlier, a key focus of this summit was on increasing US-Africa trade and investment. This is a move in the right direction. However, even as it seeks to expand its economic and business footprint on the continent and works to guard against significant security threats in parts of Africa, the US government must remain steadfast in its commitment to democratic governance, human rights and the rule of law. Without these fundamental underpinnings, trade and investment and human security will not be sustainable over the long-term. There are

clearly some major short- and long-term challenges for the United States in this respect.

One of the issues requiring immediate attention is follow up on the invitations to the summit. The White House decided to invite all African countries except those under African Union or United Nations sanctions, and those without official relations with the United States. While the White House was heavily criticized in some quarters for including African leaders with serious governance challenges, and for excluding the Central African Republic (which some argued warranted special consideration given the situation inherited by the interim president), alternate criteria on which the invitations could have been issued were not forthcoming. In the end, it was hard to find a clearly articulated invitation list that would have satisfied all constituencies. That said, the criticism served as a powerful reminder to policymakers that good governance is the foundation for, and most important driver of, Africa's success. There is a real possibility that some of the aforementioned African leaders may interpret their invitation to the summit to mean that the status quo on governance, human rights and the rule of law is acceptable to, perhaps even sanctioned by, the United States. The US government must take immediate and unequivocal action to guard against this. In part, this would require immediate high-level political and diplomatic engagement with these leaders to clarify that invitation to the summit does not equal endorsement of current governance trajectories, practices and records. More importantly, the US government should articulate a long-term strategy to continue to

press these leaders on governance, human rights and the rule of law. This is especially critical for those countries with "negative" governance records that also received tangible financial and other commitments during the summit. This strategy must also take into account the actions of other international actors in Africa, and how that interplay affects US engagement on governance and other issues.

5) Ensuring Security and Governance:

The US government unveiled several peace and security initiatives during the summit. These commitments include programs that seek to build on Africa's rapidly growing role in maintaining peace and security on the continent, as well as its increasing presence in global peacekeeping. While much more remains to be done, the progress that Africa has made in the peacekeeping arena over the past decade is to be applauded. However, there are still key challenges. For example, some of Africa's best peacekeeping troops belong to governments with significant governance, human rights, and the rule of law challenges. Similarly so for some of the countries facing critical transnational security threats. These realities present a dilemma for the United States in its engagement in the security and conflict management spheres. For example, the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Initiative (APRRP) and the Security Governance Initiative (SGI) are two of the new peace and security initiatives unveiled at the summit. The APRRP is designed to build the capacity of African militaries to rapidly deploy peacekeepers. There is no doubt that this is a much-needed program. Africa's lack of deployment capacity (rapid or otherwise) has

haunted African peacekeeping missions for many years. The SGI is a presidential initiative aimed at improving security sector governance. This is another area in which some African countries have registered improvements over the years, but in which much more is required. While the countries included in the initial phases of these two programs are indeed critical and valued contributors to security and peacekeeping in Africa, a few of them also face serious challenges related to governance, and to military and security sector professionalism. It is not yet clear how or if these two programs will overlap in terms of focus countries, or how these initiatives articulate with other US security and governance programs in Africa. The challenge for the United States will be how to carefully balance its need for reliable security partners in Africa with an uncompromising push for enhanced and institutionalized good governance.

6) Translating Economic Growth into Development and Human Security:

A good number of African countries continue to make economic gains. The fact that Africa accounts for six of the world's ten fastest growing economies was referenced time and again during the summit. Africa's advances in this area should be acknowledged, applauded and encouraged. However, it is important to remember that **economic growth does not equal development**. The real achievement will be when African governments are able to translate this economic growth into development that benefits the vast majority of ordinary African citizens in terms of enhanced human security – i.e. poverty reduction, increased access to health, water, housing, and

education, etc. Moving forward, the US must focus on policies, programs and measures that more effectively facilitate economic growth **and** human security and sustainable development.

7) The United States, China and Africa-Avoiding Cold War, Part 2 Rhetoric:

There is no doubt that the success of this summit and its impact on long-term US-Africa relations will also depend on how well the US positions itself vis-à-vis other international actors on the continent. Some are already framing the United States' desire for increased engagement with Africa as a reaction to the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), and especially to China's growing engagement with Africa. They correctly point out that China has held similarly-styled summits with Africa since 2000, and that the US is basically playing catch-up. This rhetoric of competition between China and the United States has to be viewed as a concern from both Western and African perspectives for a number of reasons. For some Africans, it has raised fears of a "New Scramble for Africa" driven by discoveries of oil, gas, minerals and other natural resources in Africa. Others see the US-Africa summit as part of the emerging "New Cold War" between the United States and China. While there are some very real differences between the United States' and China's engagement with Africa, the US must avoid being pulled into such a narrative. Many Africans remember the Cold War between the United States and the USSR. From their perspective, Africa suffered the most from and is still struggling with the lingering effects of that era. Or, as many Africans will point out:

“When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.” The United States must focus on engaging Africa because it is the right thing to do, and because such engagement benefits both the United States and Africa - not because China is doing it. More importantly, the United States’ engagement with Africa must be seen to be grounded in the values of good governance and in safeguarding human rights and the rule of law.

8) African Commitments and Accountability:

While African commitments are implied in the final summit statements, it is striking to note that these were not more concretely specified. In addition to the US commitments, it would have been important to identify three to four major commitments made by African leaders. These would have been useful in demonstrating a two-way commitment and partnership between the United States and Africa; for showing accountability of African and US leaders to their people; and for providing benchmarks against which the value and long-term progress and success of the summit could be measured.

9) Institutionalizing the Summit:

The Obama Administration is to be commended for this landmark summit - for recognizing Africa’s on-going transformation, and for seeking to solidify, expand and strengthen US engagement with the continent. To this end, the summit was a good start, especially as it helped to reinforce some of the key tenets of the 2012 US Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa. With all of these considerations, it is clear that a one-off summit would result in more harm than good to US-Africa relations. Africans would read this

as a sign of a lack of US commitment to Africa. Therefore, it is hoped that the summit would be institutionalized and regularized. As a first step in this institutionalization, there should be a broad and inclusive after-action review to determine key successes, as well as lessons learned, from this summit. In addition, US agencies that made commitments should begin to chart and coordinate their strategies and action-plans for implementation, monitoring and reporting on key summit outcomes and commitments. A US-Africa summit office (the foundations of which already exist) should be formalized to serve as the nerve center for engaging with various US agencies and entities that made commitments, and for collating, disseminating and publicizing - in a manner that is accessible to the publics in the US and in Africa - progress towards realizing the summit commitments. The office would also plan future summits. Such institutionalization would go a long way in ensuring effective coordination on the delivery of summit pledges, and demonstrating a growing US commitment to Africa across successive administrations.

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Prior to joining the Wilson Center, she served as Academic Dean at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) from 2002 to 2013. In this capacity, she oversaw all curriculum and programs at ACSS, including in the areas of Security Studies, Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Threats, Civil-Military Relations, Defense Economics and Resource Management, and Conflict Management. She served as Professor of Civil Military Relations at ACSS from 2000 to 2003.



From 1997 to 2000, she worked as Director of Research and then Vice President for Research and Policy at the National Summit on Africa. In these capacities, she was responsible for developing and overseeing the organization's programs, research and publications aimed at enhancing U.S.-Africa relations. Her work at the Summit culminated in a national summit, which resulted in the development and publication of "The National Policy Plan of Action for US-Africa Relations in the 21st Century," a set of recommendations for improving and strengthening US-Africa relations

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Monde holds a Ph.D. in International Relations and a BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from the University of Oxford, as well as a BA in Public Administration and Economics from the University of Zambia. She was a Rhodes Scholar, a Wingate Scholar, and the University of Zambia Valedictory Speaker for her graduation class.

THE AFRICA PROGRAM

The Africa Program's mission is to analyze and offer practical, actionable options for addressing some of Africa's most critical, current and over-the-horizon issues; to foster policy-focused dialogue about and options for stronger and mutually-beneficial US-Africa relations; and to challenge the dominant narrative about Africa by enhancing knowledge and understanding about Africa in the United States. The Africa Program has four programmatic pillars: i) governance and leadership; ii) conflict management and peacebuilding; iii) trade, investment, sustainable development and human security; and iv) Africa's evolving role in the global arena. The roles of youth, women, and technology are critical to Africa's future - to good governance, securing peace, mitigating poverty and assuring sustainable development. As such, these issues are addressed across all four thematic areas.

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