



Africa, the United States, and the year ahead for the Obama administration

By Witney Schneidman and Mipe Okunseinde

There was frustration on the continent and in some U.S. policy circles that the Obama Administration had not paid more attention to the continent during his first term. His 2009 visit to only one country, Ghana, for less than 24 hours diminished expectations and conveyed a sense of detachment on the part of the first African-American president whose father was from Kenya. However, on his Summer 2013 trip to Senegal, South Africa and Tanzania, President Obama announced several initiatives that have the potential to be as transformative, if not more so, than those developed by his predecessors, Presidents Clinton and Bush. As President Obama seeks to implement these initiatives and address the simmering security challenges on the continent, 2014 will be a pivotal year for his Africa policy legacy.

The security challenges

South Sudan. A little over two years after gaining independence and becoming Africa's newest nation, South Sudan now stands on the brink of becoming a failed state. The U.S. government played a significant role in the creation of South Sudan and that history as well as the nation's powerful Washington constituency means that the Obama Administration is uniquely vested in ensuring its success. Although the U.S. will not intervene militarily, Uganda and Ethiopia are likely to play a key role in establishing a peacekeeping force that

would have to be sanctioned by the UN and the African Union. The Obama Administration will need to continue its aggressive push for diplomacy. The commencement of peace talks in early January was promising progress.

Nigeria. With one of the fastest growing economies in the world and an annual GDP growth rate averaging over 7% in the last decade, Nigeria has emerged as one of the largest economies in the region. However, the Nigerian government has failed to get a handle on the



Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images - President Obama reviews an honor guard on Wednesday outside the presidential palace in Dakar, Senegal.

increasing instability in the country's Northern region resulting from violence perpetrated by the militant groups Boko Haram and Ansaru. In November, the U.S. State Department extended considerable help to its strategic partner by designating these two groups as terrorist organizations, a move intended to "notify the world that the United States and Nigeria are jointly combatting the extremist violence of Boko Haram and Ansaru." The year ahead will show whether the consequences of this designation -- which include freezing of the organizations' assets, prohibition against provision of material support to the organizations, and denying the organizations' access to the U.S. financial system -- will be effective measures in reasserting control over these groups.

Mali. This time last year, the Malian government was embroiled in a military conflict against rebel forces who had taken over the Northern region of the country. By August, the worst of the fighting had been quelled, the government and rebels had entered into a peace accord, and a successful Presidential election had been held. With these positive signs that rebuilding is underway, President Obama restored the preferential trade benefits of the African Growth and Opportunity Act which were suspended at the start of the conflict. However, the conflict continues to simmer especially since the rebels have pulled out of the peace deal and reportedly begun to regroup their forces. With France planning to scale back two-thirds of its troops presence in the country by end of January, it remains to be seen whether the conflict

will boil over once again and, if it does, how the U.S. will respond.

Democratic Republic of Congo. The end of 2013 brought hopeful signs of peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the home of the longest-running armed conflict on the continent, after the M23 rebel

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forces accepted defeat and signed a peace deal with the Congolese government. In the coming year, the U.S. will need to continue to assist in securing the peace not only in the DRC but the Greater Lakes region as well. Stability will bring obvious benefits to the region including positioning it to receive the \$1 billion that the World Bank pledged to the region in Spring of last year.

Somalia. At the beginning of last year, the U.S. officially recognized the government of Somalia for the first time since 1991. At that time, the country had "a representative government with a new president, a new parliament, a new prime minister, and a new constitution," all of which then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton heralded as Somalia making

significant progress towards becoming a functioning democracy. In addition to receiving this diplomatic vote of confidence, Somalia also is now eligible to receive military assistance from the U.S. Continued support from the U.S., the UN and the AU should provide an important degree of stabilization to Somalia's shaky steps forward in the coming year.

Central African Republic. In the final months of last year, fighting amongst government forces and independent Christian and Muslim militia groups in Central African Republic reached unprecedented levels.

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Despite urgent pleas for peace and the deployment of an AU-French mission, the violence rages on. In addition, the conflict has displaced nearly one million people leading to a large-scale humanitarian crisis. A well-known proponent for humanitarian intervention, U.S. ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power has been the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit the country and she describes it as "on the brink." Thus far, Ambassador Power has succeeded in keeping the U.S. focused on the situation in Central African Republic and reportedly played a key role in securing the commitment of over \$100 million in humanitarian aid and military assistance. The coming months will show whether the U.S. and the rest of the global community will be able to pull this country back from the edge.

The development initiatives

Trade Africa. The rising consumer market in Africa has been described as "the single largest business opportunity" on the continent. However, there is a gross trade imbalance within Africa and between Africa and

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the rest of the world. The 12 per cent intra-trade figure is the lowest of any region globally and its 3 per cent share of global trade is far too small. President Obama has identified the East Africa region -- which has implemented a customs union and a free trade area -- as the initial focus of his Administration's efforts "to increase internal and regional trade within Africa, and expand trade and economic ties between Africa, the United States, and other global markets." The initial phase of the Trade Africa initiative will seek to double intra-regional trade in the member states of the East African Community (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda), restructure the East African trade hubs, and explore an investment treaty with the five countries.

Power Africa. Unreliable access to electricity is one of the biggest developmental challenges faced by Sub-Saharan Africa. Over the next five years, the Power Africa initiative aims to add more than 10,000 megawatts of cleaner, more efficient electricity generation capacity to an estimated 20 million homes and businesses across Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, and Tanzania. What is unique about the initiative is its focus on private sector engagement and mobilization. Although the U.S. government has committed more than \$7 billion in financial support and loan guarantees, the initiative has leveraged twice as much funding from private sector companies. Despite the name of

the initiative, President Obama has made clear that the U.S.'s primary interest in powering Africa is actually to transform the continent into a more viable trading partner.

U.S.-Africa Summit of Leaders. In his remarks at the University of Cape Town, President Obama announced that he is "going to invite heads of state from across sub-Saharan Africa to a summit in the United States to help launch a new chapter in U.S.-African relations." Although other nations, namely China and India, have held similar events, this will be a landmark opportunity for the Obama Administration to make the case for why the U.S. is a more preferable trading partner and "a good deal for Africa." However, if the U.S. truly wants to distinguish itself from its Asian counterparts, then it must also use the summit to address the human rights, security and rule of law concerns that continue to plague the continent.

Feed the Future. During his stop in Senegal, President Obama highlighted the accomplishments of Feed the Future and the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, his complementary global

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hunger and food security initiatives. The goal is to lift 50 million people out of poverty. The Obama Administration's work to eradicate chronic hunger and achieve global food security has been particularly successful and Administration officials have described it as "one of our signature development efforts" in Africa. With a FY 2014 budget request of \$1.1 billion for food security, it is clear that President Obama is looking to build on his progress in this area.

Washington Fellowship of the Young African Leaders Initiative. With 200 million people aged 15 and 24, Africa has the world's youngest population which also accounts for 60% of all African unemployed. Launched in 2010, the Young African Leaders Initiative is receiving a significant expansion in 2014 with the launch of the Washington Fellowship. The Washington Fellowship will bring 500 young African leaders to U.S. universities and colleges annually for training and mentoring in business and entrepreneurship, civic leadership, and public administration, with the goal of increasing to 1000 participants by 2019. This program will engage and help to enhance the skills of Africa's emerging leaders in business, civil society and public management.

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