

# Continuity, little change?: US-Africa policy under the Obama administration\*

**George Katito**

Researcher at South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg, writes that cultural issues in Africa continue to present unique challenges to AIDS workers.

*Correo electrónico: [George.Katito@wits.ac.za](mailto:George.Katito@wits.ac.za)*

## INTRODUCTION

The inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States was positively received at home and abroad as a welcome opportunity for change. Domestically, the Obama presidency would reverse the legacy of the previous administration as the United States struggled with an ailing economy and battled with public discontent over the state of health care, the quality of education and other social policy issues. On the international stage, the Obama presidency was also widely welcomed as an opportunity to alter the Bush era's approach to US relations with the rest of the world. At the least, the new guard would be less adversarial than its predecessor in its engagement with multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, which it famously snubbed to proceed with a fiercely contested 2003

military intervention in Iraq. The US stance on key global policy issues such as Climate Change and nuclear proliferation were also widely expected to be significantly different to those of the preceding administration. Perhaps most significantly, an Obama administration would seek to redefine the US's role as a global military superpower. Where the Bush presidency was willing to project and utilise military force to meet its foreign policy goals, greater restraint would be a defining feature of Obama era foreign policy. In his closely watched inaugural speech, President Obama committed to model his foreign policy on precedents set during more pacifistic periods in US history where "earlier generations faced down communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions (and they understood that power alone cannot protect (the United States) and nor (did) it entitle (it)

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\* Artículo recibido el 30 de noviembre de 2009. Aceptado el 27 de enero de 2010.

to do as (it) pleases. Instead, they knew that (US) power grows through its prudent use. (Its) security emanates from the justness of (its) cause; the force of (its) example (and) the tempering qualities of humility and restraint ” (Obama, 2007).

The Obama administration would thus usher in a sophisticated and nuanced approach to foreign policy while also tackling pressing bread and butter concerns at home. Unsurprisingly, the administration’s aspiration to transform US foreign policy captured the imagination of an attentive global audience - and most notable among them, citizens of African countries who were captivated perhaps more so by President Obama’s genealogy than his politics. While the values and vision of the Obama administration had resonance with a broad African audience, perhaps the most significant consequence of Obama’s ascendancy was an upsurge in expectations that the new administration would redefine America’s relationship with Africa-and play a more active role in resolving the domestic socio-economic, economic and political policy challenges that several African countries grapple with (Makgatlang, 2009, 3).

In practice however, a US administration under Barack Obama has not however ushered in an especially significant shift from the Bush administration’s engagement with the continent thus far. Much of the Bush administration’s Africa policy, which is widely cited as one of its isolated foreign policy successes, remains largely unaltered. Given the Bush era’s achievements in its engagement with Africa, this is largely positive. Under the Bush administration, and more specifically

its President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (Pepfar) initiated in 2003-over 1.3 million (a leap from 50,000 in 2003) Africans had ready access to HIV/Aids treatment at the end of the Bush administration’s tenure, in significant part due to \$18 billion invested into Aids treatment through Pepfar (Plaut 2009). Equally worth noting, the United States “more than quadrupled” its foreign assistance to Africa, thus elevating Africa’s importance as a policy issue in Washington under Bush (Moss, 2009). In addition to its unprecedented “expansive and elaborate” foreign assistance to the continent, the Bush Administration’s also created notable innovations to US- Africa policy that are the Obama administration would do well to keep in place --- among them Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compacts to improve the state of governance in Africa and Africom, its security engagement framework with the continent (Carson, 2009).

Thus the Obama Administration’s foreign policy toward Africa plays out under a context of heightened global expectations that US foreign policy would be markedly different from its predecessor’s, significant pressure at home for the administration to prioritise economic and other social policy demands, inflated expectations within Africa for a redefined, more engaged approach to interacting with African countries –and the need to consolidate the remarkable gains made under the Bush Administration’s policy toward African countries–.

Within its first year in office, the current US foreign policy team has already made political gestures to suggest that its interest in sustaining the preceding administrations’

US-Africa policy legacy is substantive and strong: Both the Secretary of State and the US President have paid visits to the continent, in addition to other senior level visits to various African countries. The Obama administration has also engaged the African diplomatic community within Washington DC on US plans to support African programmes to bolster food security on the continent and stimulate broader agricultural sector reform in African countries willing to follow through on such improvements on their end (Carson, 2009).

Yet, the substance of US policy toward Africa has displayed few signs of significant change or improvement upon Bush era engagement. Contrary to popular expectations that an Obama administration's ascendancy could signal a significant change in relations between Africa and the United States, much remains the same thus far. However, as changes occur within Africa, adjustments and improvements to Bush era US-Africa policy will be increasingly vital.

#### **A BRIEF BACKGROUND TO MODERN US- AFRICA RELATIONS: 1945 AND BEYOND**

While the historical trajectories between the United States and individual African countries undoubtedly vary, one can construe a clear narrative of how the US has engaged with the region in modern history. Following the end of the Second World War, US engagement with African countries was intimately linked with Cold War concerns-as the support of African countries, regardless of their domestic governance records, became valuable currency in the quest to expand US global influence.

The end of the Cold War, however, eroded the strategic importance of African countries within US foreign policy. Geographic areas elsewhere, that perceived as more critical to US economic and security interests, became more central to US foreign policy engagement, i.e. the Middle East, Central America and South East Asia became more critical foreign policy priorities (Schraeder, 1996) .

It would be the Clinton era which would reintroduce 'Africa' as a somewhat significant area of foreign policy-perhaps most notably through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The Act, signed into law in May 2000 would provide incentives to African countries to open up their economies and build free markets. African countries that demonstrated commitment to reforming their economic and commercial regimes would in turn enjoy more liberal trade access to the United States market. More specifically, countries would need to demonstrate progress toward developing market based economies, consolidating the rule of law, the elimination of barriers to USA trade and investment, commitment to protecting intellectual property, a strong anti-corruption ethic, commitment to poverty reduction, commitment to expanding access to health care and educational opportunities, the protection of human and worker rights and the elimination of child labour practices (US State Department, 2000). Under the Clinton administration, Post cold war US-Africa policy was thus informed in part by a drive to further the interests of US corporations in Africa, while providing incentives for African governments to improve their business and governance climates.

Equally critical to note -the Clinton era Africa policy also saw the United States emerge as an increasingly reluctant political actor on the continent- as the US administration sought to engage Africa on the basis of an ethos of 'cautious engagement'. Among other things, the United States under Clinton was extremely reluctant to provide US support to peace-keeping efforts or engage with the continent's most pressing challenges beyond a bare minimum. Clinton era hesitance is perhaps most vividly displayed through the long delay in the United States response to Rwanda's 1994 genocide (Martin, 2000).

Viewed within this historical context, the Bush administration's subsequent approach to US Africa relations marked a significant, unprecedented shift. Whereas its predecessors had pursued relatively narrow agendas-using Africa policy as a tool to increasing US global influence to Africa's demise as a US policy priority, the Bush administration significantly elevated its Africa policy. Through its substantial investments in public health and democracy promotion, the United States under Bush transformed into a more formidable 'development partner' to several African governments, establishing itself as a surprisingly popular 'friend' to many African states. In contrast to perceptions of Bush foreign policy elsewhere - in the Middle East and Central Asia where its interventions generated widespread criticism-perceptions of US-Africa policy under the Bush administration, in contrast, were significantly more positive (Ojala, 2000). It is this political capital that the Obama Administration has the opportunity to expand. More specifically, the Obama administration faces

the task of consolidating and improving upon specific programmes and initiatives formulated under the Bush administration, while responding to changes within the African context:

#### **THE PRESIDENT'S EMERGENCY PLAN FOR AIDS RELIEF (EMERGENCY PLAN/PEPFAR)**

The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is perhaps the most noteworthy contribution of the Bush administration to US Africa policy, and one that both restricts the scope for creativity in the Obama administration's Africa policy and presents significant opportunity to build upon the Bush administration's legacy. Proponents of PEPFAR are quick to note that it is "the largest international health initiative in history dedicated to a single disease and also the largest development initiative in the world." Its founding goals were far from modest-the emergency plan aspired to support the prevention of 7 million new infections, roll out treatment to 2 million and provide care to 10 million people living with HIV/AIDS, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). In contrast to other initiatives to tackle the pandemic, PEPFAR would also seek to provide a holistic response to tackling HIV/AIDS-incorporating the often separated arms of prevention, treatment and care. Impressively, in 2008 PEPFAR had accomplished its goal of providing treatment to 2 million people in its 'focus countries' in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Investments in treatment through PEPFAR were expected to prevent an estimated 3.28 million deaths by the end of 2009. By the end of the Bush administration's tenure, PEPFAR

had managed to exceed its goals related to the provision of care to people living with HIV/AIDS, while it also registering successes in rolling out Anti-Retro Viral prophylaxis that allows for the Prevention of Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission (PMTCT). In 2008, the initiative also provided support to programmes that foster the prevention of HIV/AIDS transmission that have a reach of over 58.3 million people-while boosting the capacity of organisations with the mandate of providing counselling and testing that have a reach of over 57 million people (Pepfar, 2009).

Given its impressive track record in efficiently distributing its resources, it is not surprising that it is *the* defining component of US-Africa policy. Indeed, its successes have also provided the necessary impetus for further expansion of Pepfar through side bi-partisan support for the initiative. Through legislation that calls for an expanded and stronger US leadership role in tackling pressing global health challenges, the Bush administration effectively predetermined a critical component of its successor's US-Africa policy agenda (Pepfar, 2009). The Obama administration thus faces the moral imperative to sustain the Bush administration's global health agenda in its Africa policy.

However, while the need to build on the significant achievements attained through Pepfar is unquestionable - the imperative to honour the Bush era's legacy potentially restricts the Obama administration's latitude to innovate the US approach to supporting public health in Africa. Arguably, while US intervention to tackle HIV/AIDS in Africa is crucial-the lack

of strong public health systems and capable states more broadly speaking present an even more critical challenge. In other words, the more pertinent challenge lies in strengthening weak states and their ability to deliver locally funded, sustainable quality public health services. In its current form however, Pepfar provides a welcome intervention that addresses a critical problem but fails to address the broader context. Current thinking on Africa seems to support such sentiment where the case is increasingly made for targeting development assistance at building the capacity of African states to strengthen their public service systems as a more effective means to tackle pressing problems that are common to several African countries (Mata and Ziaja, 2009). While the need for initiatives such as Pepfar remains critical-equitable access to effective public health systems remains a larger, ultimately more critical problem in several countries battling with the epidemic. An increasingly important challenge for several African countries and its' development partners is therefore one of moving toward creating public health systems that are capable of both tackling the epidemic while increasing access to health services in the long term. A more holistic US response to Africa's public health challenges would be critical if it is to make sustainable long term impact with greater returns on its investments in African health systems-yet, Pepfar's design arguably restricts the Obama administration's capacity to pursue a more broad reaching, sustainable, long term response that would essentially entail building stronger, more capable health systems.

### **THE MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION (MCC)**

The creation of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is also widely identified as a critical contribution of the Bush administration to US-Africa policy. Established in 2004, the MCC carries the broad mandate of providing reform-minded poor countries access to “large scale grants to fund country-led solutions for reducing poverty through sustainable economic growth”. More pointedly, the MCC provides access to one of two types of grant - ‘compacts’, that are typically large, five year grants disbursed on the basis of an eligibility criteria that includes various indicators of commitment to good governance principles - and ‘threshold programmes’ that are smaller grants awarded to countries that do not completely comply with the MCC’s eligibility but demonstrate significant commitment to meeting the Challenges’ eligibility criteria. In addition to providing incentives for reform, the MCC also works in close cooperation with partner governments and existing local institutions that are responsible for disbursing MCC grants, facilitating public consultations on the implementation of the MCC and aligning MCC compact programmes to existing budget processes and other legal and constitutional requirements (Mandaville, 2007). As such, the MCC’s role as a tool for promoting democracy in Africa is frequently cited as a noteworthy achievement of the Bush administration’s US-Africa policy.

However, the development co-operation context in Africa is rapidly changing with the growing influence of ‘emerging powers’ in-

cluding China, India, Brazil and South Africa as sources of foreign assistance to African countries. The MCC thus operates in a rapidly changing and vastly transformed foreign assistance context as a result of this new crop development partners that provide alternative sources of foreign assistance, which in the case of China, are not necessarily tied to the compliance to democratic principles and good governance pre-requisites attached to the MCC. The incentive to compete for MCC grants and assistance is thus markedly lower among countries that have access to Chinese foreign assistance, as a case in point, that is less attached to a set of strings. While figures for China’s aid disbursements to Africa are vague due to the absence of clear, transparent records that reflect data on aid flows - what is clear is that China plays a growing role in delivering aid through grants, interest-free and concessional loans that are often accessible to countries that do not necessarily demonstrate visible commitment to democratic principles. China also maintains a ‘China-Africa Development Fund’ established in May 2007 with seed funding of \$5 billion that some seeks to finance easy market entry of Chinese firms into the economies of African countries on the basis of the economic viability of such investment. Pursuing a policy of non-interference with the internal political affairs of the countries in which they operate, China tends to foster economic investment in African countries often with no regard to the democratic record of their partner countries. Chinese engagement also extends to substantial investment in construction and infrastructure development in countries such as Ethiopia, whose governance

and democracy record is widely viewed as questionable, 50-60 percent of road construction was attributable to Chinese engagement. In 2006, at a summit of the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)<sup>1</sup> -China committed to double its development aid by 2009, afford 440 African export products non-tariff treatment, contribute \$37.5 million towards an anti-malaria campaign-and to make various investments in infrastructure development. Two-way trade between Africa and China is estimated at \$ 100 billion per year. Agriculture and food security have also become a significant area of engagement within China's Africa Policy. As of 2010, the Chinese government commits to expand its role in increasing its role in agriculture and food security policy on the continent - between 2010 and 2012, China looks forward to establishing a \$ 30 million trust fund with the goal of promoting food security on the continent through practical interventions that provide training to African 'agricultural technicians', transfer knowledge on emerging agricultural technologies and provide training on crop selection, farming, fish breeding and animal raising among other things (FOCAC, 2009).

As China actively strives to increase its importance and role in Africa, a clear challenge that the United States and Africa's other western development partners- face is one of engaging with China as an increasingly

important actor on the African continent. Indeed, the growing importance of China on the continent has begun to re-shape how Africa's other traditional development partners engage with the continent. The European Union (EU) that has slowly begun to appreciate the import and impact of China on Africa and as such, has sought to increasingly engage with China as a strategic partner in its engagement with African countries. In 2006, the EU revealed its first intentions to develop a "structured dialogue on Africa and explore avenues for practical cooperation on the ground in partnership with the African side" with China-thus, rhetorically committing to interact with the emerging power as a crucial partner to meeting its foreign policy goals on the African continent<sup>2</sup>. This initial expression of interest has since been followed up with commitments on EU-China-Africa cooperation on peace and security, infrastructure development, sustainable management of the environment and natural resources and agriculture and food security. While the EU's recognition of the importance of China as a growingly important actor on the African continent is instructive for Africa's other partners such as the United States-the management of the EU-China-Africa 'trilateral dialogue' has not been free of complications that are equally worth noting. Whether the Chinese share a similar enthusiasm as their European partners in participating in a tripar-

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<sup>1</sup> FOCAC is a multilateral platform established in 2000 to "further strengthen the friendly cooperation between China and Africa under the new circumstances, to jointly meet the challenge of economic globalisation and to promote common development".

<sup>2</sup> Adopted from a Communique of the first 2006 EU-China Summit.

tite engagement with Africa is often unclear. In the past, Chinese government officials have expressed concern at that they deemed to be an EU-dominated dialogue on Africa that also placed undue pressure upon the Chinese to adopt frameworks for development assistance to Africa to which it is not party to - including the OECD's rules governing Official Development Assistance (ODA) (Pang 2007). Similarly, the trilateral EU-China-Africa partnership is not uncritically received by the EU and China's African partners. Indeed it is often equated to a neo-colonial exercise that could enfeeble African states capacity to drive their own foreign policy agendas toward the EU and China (Alden and Sidiropoulos 2009). Yet, on balance, the emergence of China as a significant actor in several African countries impels a policy response from the United States and Africa's other 'traditional' partners. While the concept of trilateral cooperation is likely to present political contestation - if the MCC and other forms of US engagement - are to bear sustainable results, it is critical that US policy toward Africa reflect the growing role of China (among other emerging global powers on the African continent).

In addition to the increasingly significant role that China plays on the continent, Africa's multilateral organisations and continental initiatives also play an increasingly noticeable role in African policy and politics. Indeed, since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, African governments have sought to develop a network of continental institutions aimed at driving a continental integration process. While this emerging set of institutions often battles with poor funding, the lack of skilled human resources-they

seek to eventually drive an ambitious agenda through a continental parliament, human rights court and a peace and security council among other institutions. Meaningful US-Africa policy would thus need to more actively engage with initiatives including the African Union (AU), the continent's largest multilateral organisation, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)-an initiative to foster sustainable development through various programmes including a Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) developed to promote agricultural development - and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) the continent's flagship programme to foster good governance and democracy.

#### **AFRICA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO US SECURITY**

That Africa is not a central concern of US Security policy is beyond question when placed within the context of other key US foreign policy priorities-among them security and stability in the Middle East, South and Central Asia and Iraq. In Afghanistan alone, the presence of military troops is estimated to surge to 100,000 during the course of 2010 alone, while as is widely known, significant diplomatic and political resources have been committed to US engagement with conflict in the Middle East over the past six decades. In contrast, the strategic importance of Africa to US interests is not immediately apparent or self evident-in contrast to regions such as South-and-Central Asia where the activity and resilience of terrorist organisations that harbour strong anti-US sentiment pose a mo-



re potent threat to US security. In addition to Africa being a relatively lower priority on the list of US national security interests - the decrease of violent conflict across the African continent further diminishes Africa's status as a global security risk (Bellamy, 2009).

Yet, these trends should not suggest that Africa's relevance to US security interests is entirely negligible. In recent times, Africa has emerged as the breeding ground for piracy, as a passageway for narcotics in transit and is often viewed as fertile ground for terrorism-given the continent's several porous borders, large portions of ungoverned territory, poor governance structures, weak law enforcement frameworks and high levels of official corruption (Dickinson, 2009). Following the September 11 attacks, the US, recognising the potential implications of Africa's poor governance upon their own security, established the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), with the goal of boosting levels of professionalism and effectiveness among troops in Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. In a similar attempt to strengthen local armies while aiming to diminish the prospect of terrorism flourishing in the region -the US launched a similar programme to the PSI- the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative that added Algeria, Nigeria, Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia to its initial cache of target countries for army training and US counter terrorism efforts (Dickinson, 2009).

The significance of Africa to US security interests, while not overwhelming, was perceived as critical enough to warrant an even stronger policy response from the Bush administration. In February 2007, in an effort to demonstrate that Africa was indeed of stra-

tegic importance to the United States, the Bush administration announced its intention to reform its security engagement with the continent. To this end, the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) was established eight months later - firstly as part of the European Command (EUCOM) which assumed responsibility for US security relations with 42 of Africa's 53 countries. The remainder would be covered by its Pacific Command (PACOM) and Central Command (CENTCOM). A year later, AFRICOM was further developed into an independent, unified command whose sole focus would be US-Africa security engagement (Pham 2009). While the establishment of AFRICOM would, among other things, demonstrate the strategic importance of Africa to US interests (Dickinson, 2009), its mandate and objectives were however, not entirely clear to the US's African partners. As its mission statement, AFRICOM commits to "conduct sustained engagement through military-to-military programs, military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment in which to support US foreign policy". The key goal of AFRICOM was thus clearly one of "getting to know African militaries-to help train them, boost their professionalism and to generally serve as a good example to countries, many of which have never had a military that was subservient to a civilian government" as one US-Africa analyst articulates the purpose of the Africa command (Pham, 2009).

Yet, reactions to the AFRICOM initiative were not received with unanimous enthusiasm in Africa-as the core of its mission seemed to encroach upon the autonomy of African sta-

tes to fulfil the role of boosting the capacity of their own armies. African governments, with the exception of Liberia, generally opposed the AFRICOM concept-partly due to a widely held perception that the establishment of AFRICOM would result in a large US military presence on the continent. The establishment of AFRICOM thus, at the very least, exposed an extremely high level of suspicion among African policy communities. The motives behind US security engagement with Africa were and are thus held with deep suspicion on a continent that has a complex colonial history and understandably views extensive military engagement with scepticism (Pham, 2009).

The current US administration however has a unique opportunity to clear misconceptions about AFRICOM's alleged sinister motivations and to project a more nuanced image of the command's goals. In contrast to the Bush administration - the current US leadership enjoys a markedly higher level of international goodwill for its less combative approach to the use of military force in achieving foreign policy ends: and would be well-placed to clarify the role that AFRICOM intends to play as a partner to African governments in preventing conflict and to act as a partner in meeting the security goals of African countries (Forest and Crispin, 2009). The Obama administration also has an opportunity to provide further transparency on the AFRICOM's operations within the United States itself-given that a strong critique meted against its establishment is that it was created in an authoritarian manner-without making due consultation with African leaders and indeed without liaising with counterparts beyond the US Department

of Defence under the leadership of the then US Secretaries of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates (Burgess, 2009). Therefore, a challenge that the Obama administration faces in its US-Africa policy as it pertains to security is that of re-building trust with African governments through greater consultation, an aggressive campaign to clarify the command's objectives and through concrete follow through on AFRICOM's promises to provide training and other services to African militaries.

## CONCLUSION

The Obama administration's challenge of engaging with the African continent is thus clearly one of building upon the achievements of the preceding presidency in the area of its Pefpar health initiative, engaging new powerful actors on the continent - China and Africa's multi-lateral organisations being chief among them - and equally importantly, salvaging the US's image *vis-à-vis* its' security engagement with the continent.

While it is arguably too early to offer an assessment of the Obama administration's Africa policy - and to measure its success toward responding to the positive and negative aspects of the Bush era's legacy - its first set of public engagements with Africa suggest a shift in the tone (albeit at rhetorical level) of US engagement with the continent.

The most notable shift in tone has been one toward a tougher, more critical stance on the negative aspects of African political culture including rampant corruption and poor governance-and markedly less hesitance to

place the responsibility of solving key problems such as poverty and underdevelopment upon the shoulders of Africans themselves. In his first speech to a Sub-Saharan African audience in Ghana, President Obama delivered a candid critique of rampant corruption across the continent, widespread disrespect for the rule of law, the dearth of African leaders willing to take full responsibility for their role in fuelling the continent's underdevelopment and the need for Africans to take greater charge of their own development trajectories (Harding, 2009).

Similarly, US Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton conducted a multi-country tour to various African capitals in August 2009 where a similar tone and message was evident. In her visits to Kenya, South Africa, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Liberia and Cape Verde-the Secretary of State repeated the need for stronger commitment by Africans to foster their own economic growth, boost the quality of the rule of law in their respective countries and aim for greater self sufficiency in tackling their own problems. (US State Department, 2009). In rhetoric not too dissimilar to that of the president, Secretary Clinton has spoken about the role that "strong internal management" will play in providing solutions to 'the bulk' of Africa's problems, taking Rwanda as a case in point. Rwanda, in her view, vividly illustrated the role that greater transparency, accountability and standards of good governance should play in salvaging African countries out of a persistent set of developmental challenges. Unlike several other African countries, Rwanda had managed to maintain "positive economic results and

socio-economic indicators despite the global economic recession". African states would thus need to duplicate Rwanda's governance practices-while also making an effort to jointly tackling its most pressing problems through, among other things, increasing trade among themselves and by removing barriers to Intra-African trade. In keeping with the current administration's shift toward a tougher, more critical approach - the United States will be more discerning and critical in its choices of African countries to engage with according to Senator Clinton. Increasingly, the US would opt to engage with countries already committed to reform (thus maintaining the Millennium Challenge Corporation approach) and in countries such as Rwanda that that have already signalled their intention to reform specific sectors of their economies-Rwanda having committed to reform its agricultural sector under the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) (Clinton, 2009).

Yet, whether the shift to a more critical tone will translate into a significant change to the substance of US-Africa policy remains to be seen. President Obama has committed to sustain the work of Pefpar in its current form, while few indications point to any substantial strategy to adapt US-Africa policy to meet the challenges of a stronger Chinese presence on the continent, engaging African multilateral organisations and in improving the dim views held about US security engagement with the continent. Contrary to high expectations within Africa that the Obama presidency would herald a new age of US-Africa relations, the reality thus far seems to suggest continuity

rather than change. What is evident is a new, firmer rhetoric rather than a substantive sea change from the previous administration. However, placed within the broader historical context of US relations with Africa, seeking to build upon the Bush administration's legacy is neither imprudent nor negative.

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Katito, George.  
"Continuity, little change?: Us-africa policy under the Obama administration", en *Oasis*, 2009, núm. 14, Centro de Investigaciones y Proyectos Especiales, CIPE, Facultad de Finanzas, Gobierno y Relaciones Internacionales, Universidad Externado de Colombia, pp. 145-157.