



AFRICA PROGRAM POLICY BRIEF NO. 4



SOUTH AFRICA, THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY AND THE U.S.-AFRICA POLICY CONUNDRUM

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The following analysis was prepared several weeks prior to the just concluded African Union summit in Addis Ababa. The outcome of the contest to head the AU Commission (yet to be determined at the time of writing) is not considered to affect the main thrust of the options put forth in terms of US policy, especially with respect to the East African Community. Of course, if the desired outcome materialized, this will only reinforce what is advocated.

THE PERCEPTION THAT AFRICA TAKES a backseat to Asia in President Barack Obama's foreign policy view obscures a compelling strategic landscape the administration could construct were it ever to elevate the attention it apportions to Africa. With the global geo-economic center of gravity shifting from west to

east and north to south, Africa in general and eastern and southern Africa in particular constitute the missing piece in what could constitute the shaping of a coherent U.S.-global South strategy; one based on a convergence of Asia and Africa policies. But for this to happen, President Obama must afford comparable status to

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Kenya and the East African Community (EAC) to what he confers on Indonesia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

To be sure, the Obama administration has been preoccupied with Kenya's stability and, more broadly, with regional security in northeast Africa. Yet, it has not been moved to develop a broader regional initiative revolving around Nairobi comparable to what it is weaving around Indonesia and the ASEAN. Moreover, South Africa - and its bid to have Home Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma become the new head of the African Union (AU) - figures importantly in this calculus. But the first order of business should be creating convergence between Kenya and the EAC with Indonesia and the ASEAN as centerpieces in fashioning the U.S./Afro-Asian component of a global strategy. Here, Obama's Trans-Pacific Partnership would be the foundational element for a broader coalition with East Africa. Beyond that, Kenya and East Africa should be perceived in much broader geostrategic terms.

By ignoring the Kenya-EAC connection, it is as though President Obama has omitted a critical element in his biographical journey in sculpting a new foreign policy identity for America and his presidency; one grounded in his uniquely Afro-Asian cosmopolitan background as an African-American (which, in itself, provides ample potential for recasting America's foreign policy narrative). In other words, America's first "Pacific President" is also America's first president, not only of African descent, but of a lineage rooted in the very soil of the Rift Valley cradle of humankind.

This cradle happens to serve as a fulcrum around which revolves much of Africa's peril and promise. The peril refers to instabilities along the escarpment, from the threat of the Lord's Resistance Army which Uganda is combating with U.S. assistance, to war and mayhem in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, to the south Somali cauldron stretching into the Indian Ocean and affecting Kenya's cohesion, to the challenges in stabilizing the Sudanese contradictions of Juba and Khartoum. Indeed, this latter dimension has been likened to a "great game" pitting Beijing and Khartoum against Washington and Juba in search of alternate outlets for South Sudan's oil exports as a means of breaking Juba's dependency on Khartoum.

In fact, there are a number of North-South corridor infrastructure projects underway factoring South Sudan within the larger scheme of consolidating an eastern and southern African integrated market bordering the western Indian Ocean. The tripartite Kenyan Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (Lapsset) corridor scheduled to break ground in February 2012 is one such



initiative. Moreover, it may be in both the U.S. and China's interest to see Sudan and South Sudan "reintegrated" into an expanding EAC looking eventually to mutate into a political federation or "regional integration community."

This is all the more reason why Washington should consider ways of consolidating its regional priorities – security, diplomatic and economic – in East Africa by focusing on strengthening the East African Community, not just for itself, but as a "gateway" to the rest of central and southern Africa. For much of Africa's promise resides in the 600-700 million Grand Free Trade Area initiative amalgamating the EAC with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); a "Cape to Cairo" vision linking South Africa to the southern tip of the continent with a "new" Egypt and the northern crossroads of the eastern Mediterranean encompassing the Red Sea and the western Indian Ocean littoral. Such a U.S.-East African relationship would contribute to building the relationship between the EAC and

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its tripartite partners, COMESA and SADC and the ASEAN.

An U.S.-EAC forum initiative could represent the type of multidimensional structuring Washington's relations in greater East Africa, including the Horn (and the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development as a "security community" adjunct to the EAC), that could clearly underline America's support for an integrationist Africa policy agenda. This is where the model of the relationship being forged with Indonesia and the ASEAN comes in play. This would feed into the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership launched by South Africa, as well as Indonesia in 2005 at the 50th anniversary of the Bandung conference.

Purely in Africa policy terms, an U.S.-EAC forum could be conceived as a sort of "pilot project" for replication in other AU regions of the continent: an U.S.-ECOWAS forum to consolidate America's relations in West Africa and a revived U.S.-SADC

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forum in southern Africa encompassing relations with Angola, as well as South Africa. In the case of an U.S.-ECOWAS forum, such a structure could relate to the collaborative fashioning of a southern transatlantic cooperation with Brazil and Nigeria. The US Agency for International Development’s regional hubs for promoting intra-African trade might well serve as the vehicle for negotiating such forums into being in a regionalizing of the U.S.-Africa policy template.

On the domestic end, a clearly resolved integrationist strategy on the continent could have the potential to restructure constituencies of Africa interest in America. This could involve a greater role for Americans of African immigrant descent as well as African-Americans of historical lineage in a real pan-African partnership spanning the Atlantic. Such a recasting of America’s constituency for Africa alongside a comparable realignment of constituencies in support of the administration’s trans-Pacific strategy should help propel an overall adaptive reconfiguration of the U.S.’ global posture toward a changing strategic landscape that is shifting south as well as east.

The forgoing is suggestive of an emerging “big picture” against which Washington’s Africa calculus

may need rethinking. Among other things, this would need to include a more strategically pragmatic bilateral relationship with South Africa. This is where the Dlamini-Zuma AU candidacy figures as a critical factor in U.S.-South Africa and broader Africa policy considerations. Her candidacy is centered on the institutional strengthening, efficient functioning and geopolitical credibility-building of the AU in the service of continental and regional integration. The goal: continental sovereignty.

There have been various allegations and denials of external lobbying on behalf of both Dlamini-Zuma and the incumbent seeking a second term, Gabon’s Jean Ping. Yet, it can be assumed that Paris has invested heavily in Ping’s retention as chairman of the continental governing body (AU Commission) that has come up short in several African crisis situations, Côte d’Ivoire and Libya among the most prominent cases in point during 2011. Hence, the not-without-foundation notion that with francophone Africa remaining a French bailiwick, Paris’ interests are best served by a weak AU, a predicament that might serve the interest of other actors as well, particularly China.

Owing to the weight of France’s sway in its former colonies and South Africa’s own diplomatic missteps on Côte d’Ivoire and Libya, Dlamini-Zuma’s is considered an uphill candidacy. Given France’s influence, this speaks volumes of Africa’s overall lack of continental sovereignty in a period wherein a widely perceived “new scramble” for Africa is underway. Although there have been denials surrounding alleged EU support for Dlamini-Zuma, South African President Jacob Zuma’s visit to his counterpart in Abuja, Nigerian President



Goodluck Jonathan no doubt had much to do with fence-mending in advancing Dlamini-Zuma's candidacy.

2011 was not a banner year in the bilateral South Africa-Nigeria relationship. Neither was it an especially stellar year in relations between the U.S. and South Africa. But this may be as much a commentary on the state of U.S.-Africa policy as it is on South Africa's diplomacy. For the latter's part, Côte d'Ivoire's crisis introduced an element of divisive regionalism between ECOWAS and SADC with Angola being implicated.

Luanda reportedly influenced South Africa's reversal from its original support for the African and international consensus on Ouattara having won the disputed presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire. As a result, South Africa's moral and political high ground coming out of the Abidjan crisis was diminished. The Libyan imbroglio was equally if not more convoluted.

What is critical is that irrespective of Washington and Tshwane-Pretoria divergence on these

and other issues, it is in both countries' interests to support the strengthening of continental governance. This will benefit American and African interests in an increasingly competitive strategic economic environment on the continent. Africa's interests most of all must be divested from colonially-rooted spheres of influence and those that might arise from new claimants among emerging powers. America as well as Africa has a stake in African continental sovereignty. This may be what is at stake in the current contest over the next head of the AU Commission.

Despite differences between Washington and Tshwane-Pretoria, a shared pan-African integrationist commitment revolving around Dlamini-Zuma's candidacy and President Obama's Kenyan-based East African lineage, could provide broadly beneficial common ground between the two countries. In terms of strategic convergence, emerging from such synergies could, initially, revolve around the Indian Ocean. This would involve the Indian Ocean's link into the 'Indo-Pacific' trajectory of Obama's trans-Pacific geo-strategy and the growing Indian and South African southern sea lane maritime commitments.

At the end of 2011, India took over as the chair of the Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC). This has, as important members, Indonesia and Australia as well as South Africa and India. South Africa, meanwhile, is set to assume the chair of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). IONS complements the American-led Western Pacific Naval Symposium.

Much, however, depends on what South Africa

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and India make of their respective chairmanships over the next two years in conjunction with their collaboration with Brazil in the India-Brazil-South Africa Maritime Exercise (IBSAMAR) compact. Involved here is the strategically critical need for constructing a framework of maritime security and functional cooperation in the Indian Ocean and South Atlantic. This could make for synergies with American maritime and naval strategy in the western Pacific while fostering interregional Afro-Asian economic and commercial relations in what Wilson Center senior fellow Martin Walker has dubbed CHIMEA: the China-India-Middle East-Africa nexus.

Such a convergence of strategies between South Africa, India and the U.S. should also help in constructing an alternative narrative of Indian Ocean dynamics to that associated with Robert Kaplan's "monsoon" scenario of Sino-Indian rivalry with Uncle Sam serving as referee. If linked to South Africa and India's IBSAMAR partner, Brazil, this could for the first time reflect a homegrown American brand of global South tri-continentalism in

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foreign policy and global posture. The upshot would be the tying together of America and trans-Pacific Asia with Africa at the center and South Africa serving as the southern sea lanes central pivot.

Thus is a "rising Africa" the unavoidable strategic centerpiece of a much needed U.S. southern hemispheric geo-strategy in adapting to and shaping a post-hegemonic global order retaining American leadership at the core. But such a prospect will only happen if the Obama administration elevates Africa alongside Asia as a priority in its foreign policy.





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