

Africa urges U.S. to acknowledge worth

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concerts to pressure the Group of Eight (G-8) summit to double aid to Africa — is not sufficient to maintain the kind of commitment to the continent that is consistent with its more hard-headed interests.

"Recent assistance and humanitarian initiatives will likely suffer without a more comprehensive elaboration of U.S. interests in Africa, both to Congress and the public," according to the report, titled "More Than Humanitarianism: A Strategic U.S. Approach toward Africa".

"The United States must recognize and act on its rising national interests on the continent through a far higher mobilization of leadership and focused resources that target Africa's new realities," said the report, the product of a bipartisan task force headed by Anthony Lake, President Bill Clinton's first national security adviser, and former New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman, who headed the Environmental Protection Agency during Bush's first two years as president.

The report drew sharp criticism from a former CFR director for Africa studies, Salih Booker, who now heads a grassroots lobby group, Africa Action. He objected in particular to its dichotomy between "humanitarian" interests, such as debt relief and anti-AIDS efforts, and economic and political imperatives, like Africa's oil reserves and Washington's pursuit of allies in the "war on terror".

"They think they need to take this approach because the establishment is presumed to believe that we

don't have any interests in Africa other than humanitarian interests," he said.

"This approach establishes a hierarchy of U.S. national interests where the top priorities are fighting terrorism and securing access to oil, and African people's human rights are near the bottom," he said. "This is how Africa was viewed during the Cold War, and it's likely to have similar negative consequences."

Indeed, in presenting U.S. interests, the report lists Africa's status as an increasingly important source of oil and gas; growing competition with China; and the war on terrorism; the HIV/AIDS pandemic; conflict resolution and peacekeeping; democracy and human rights; and long-term economic development in that order.

The report commends the administration for launching two major Africa-related aid programs — the Millennium Challenge Account and the five-year, 15-billion-dollar President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief — as well as Bush's commitment earlier this year to double U.S. aid to Africa by 2010 and his offer to eliminate all tariff and subsidy barriers in agricultural trade is the European Union agrees to do the same.

Altogether, U.S. aid to Africa has increased five-fold over the past decade, according to the report, which argued that the public constituency for Africa has broadened from traditional humanitarian groups and the African-American community to include evangelical Christians, the public-health community, and "U.S. military commands in Europe and the Middle East"

focused on the "war on terrorism."

At the same time, however, there have been disappointments. Congress, for example, has fallen far short of Bush's requests to fund the MCA, and the administration's reluctance to support the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria has discouraged other donors from contributing more to that agency.

In addition, almost all increases in U.S. aid to Africa in recent years have been devoted to emergency assistance, as opposed to long-term programs, such as infrastructure and rural development, that "could lift Africa out of poverty."

Moreover, Africa too often gets the short end of the stick when it comes to key development and democracy-building programs, particularly when it is competition for regions that are considered more strategic, currently the Middle East, South Asia, and the Gulf regions.

It is in this context, the report argues, that policymakers should offer a more comprehensive elaboration of U.S. interests in Africa.

In particular, Africa's growing importance as an energy producer needs to be given greater prominence. West African producers currently provide about 15 percent of U.S. oil imports, but that is expected to rise to 25 percent by 2015.

At the same time, however, Washington faces much greater competition for those energy resources, as well as other raw materials, particularly from China, which, according to the task force, "does not share U.S. concern for issues of governance,

human rights, or economic policy".

In fact, the Bush administration has begun to engage China on its policies in Africa, according to Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendaye Frazier, who just returned from two days of "very productive and quite constructive" talks with her counterparts in Beijing late last

week. "I don't agree with the report that China's interests are in direct competition with the U.S.," she said.

On the war on terrorism, the report complained that Africa "does not receive sufficient political attention to the threat nor sufficient funding to combat it," despite the large and growing Pentagon and intelligence counter-intelligence initia-

tives for the Horn and the Trans-Saharan regions. The report calls for the State Department to exert more oversight over those initiatives to ensure that they do not provide "collusion or unintended support for repressive regimes," such as the military junta that seized power in Mauritania earlier this year.

Banker interim Ivory Coast leader

Tension over the naming of a transitional prime minister was broken recently when mediators appointed a central banker to lead war-ravaged Côte d'Ivoire into elections.

"The prime minister for the transition period is Mr Charles Konan Banny," said a statement signed by South African President Thabo Mbeki, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and Niger President Mamadu

Tandja. They said Banny, 63, would be given broad powers specified by the United Nations Security Council, including financial and human resources, control over security and defense forces and oversight of the electoral process.

Banny is governor of the Central Bank of West African States.

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