

# The Significance of the African Union to the United States Strategy Objectives

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On June 14, 2012 President Obama signed a new Presidential Policy Directive (PPD) for Sub-Saharan Africa which sets forth the US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa. This new PPD is a logical follow up to the historic speech President Obama presented to the Ghanaian Parliament three years ago in which the President stated that Africa is a fundamental part of our interconnected world and called for a partnership with Africa that is “grounded in mutual responsibility and mutual respect.” President Obama, Secretary Clinton, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Carson and the entire US diplomatic team have taken a whole of government approach in being intentional about the fact that our role is to support the African continent in strengthening democratic institutions, spurring economic growth, trade and investment, advancing peace and security, and promoting opportunity and development.

The PPD states that the African Union (AU) serves as an important leader on the political, diplomatic and peacekeeping issues across the continent. It also recognizes the significance of African Regional Organizations in security cooperation and security sector reform as well as in regional integration to promote economic growth. The fact that the PPD acknowledges the importance of multilateral diplomacy makes the African Union and the regional organizations that make up the African Union significant to US Strategy Objectives, which center on the belief that strong democratic institutions lead to greater prosperity and stability and are more successful in mitigating conflict, countering transnational threats, and serving as stronger partners of the United States.

It is important to note that the United States was the first non-African nation to establish a diplomatic mission with exclusive responsibility to cover the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Since 2006, the United States and the African Union have developed a strong partnership working to foster a more stable, democratic, and prosperous environment for Africa as Africa takes its rightful place as a partner participating in shaping the global debate about the future of the African continent and the world.

The United States looks to the African Union, founded in 2002 with the expressed purpose of promoting peace, security, stability and development on the continent, as a respected voice that seeks to build consensus on African issues. In this context, the United States and the African Union engage in substantive and honest dialogue about supporting open, transparent, accountable democratic societies that foster and protect human and civil rights across the continent. Other areas of interest to both the United States and the African Union include climate change, food security, the development of opportunities for youth

and women, the reduction and elimination of trafficking in persons and drug trafficking. As a follow up to President Obama's African Youth Forum held in Washington, the US Mission to the African Union has supported the African Union in its efforts to engage, empower and develop young people on the African continent. The US Mission to the African Union and the African Union have exchanged youth interns through the AU Youth Volunteer Corps and the US Peace Corps. The United States is the first non-African nation to employ a member of the African Youth Corps in a diplomatic mission.

Over the last three and a half years, the United States has worked with the African Union to see post conflict transitions in Niger, Guinea (Conakry), Côte d'Ivoire, Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. We are still engaging the African Union and the regional organizations with the struggles in Madagascar, Mali and Guinea Bissau. Our long term support of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is beginning to produce positive results. We have witnessed Ethiopia and Kenya deal more successfully with drought and averting famine. We have seen South Sudan become an independent nation and we are working with the African Union and the international community to create a context for the mitigation of conflict and the promotion of lasting peace between Sudan and South Sudan. We have witnessed the peaceful transition of government in Malawi and Senegal. We have celebrated with the African Union the ratification of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance. This Charter illustrates Africa's dedication to universal democratic values and principles and calls for AU Member States to commit themselves to the transparent and accountable management of public resources, respect for human rights, and the creation of an independent and impartial political culture that supports free and fair elections. Working with the African Union in multilateral diplomacy to get the Charter ratified was more effective and efficient than trying to broker 54 separate agreements on democracy, elections and governance.

At the January 2012 Summit, AU Heads of State endorsed the Action Plan for Boosting Intra-African Trade and called for a Continental Free Trade Area by 2017. This Free Trade Area would increase intra-regional trade across the continent, allowing Member States to diversify their economies. In addition, the African Union is moving forward with its Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa and its Action Plan for Accelerated Industrial Development of Africa, which will open up the medium- and high-technology segments of global manufacturing that will drive dynamism and rapid growth in African economies. The combined impact of these initiatives will help unleash the human capital of Africa and move the continent forward toward a more prosperous and secure future. The US Strategy Objectives outlined in the PPD are very consistent with AU efforts to spur economic growth by promoting an enabling environment for trade and investment. Contrary to the unfounded yet far too widely held belief that investments on the African continent do not yield profits, the reality is that the return on investments on the African continent is very competitive. In the past decade, six of the ten fastest growing economies in the world—Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Chad, Mozambique and Rwanda—are African nations.

In May 2012, I met with President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania and USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah at the Grow Africa Conference on the margin of the World

Economic Forum in a preparatory meeting for the US hosting of the G8. The focus was on how the G8 partnership with African nations and the African private sector can create the kind of transformation of African-led agriculture and related agricultural infrastructural development that will be able to lift 50 million people from poverty. What will make this effort work is that seven African nations—Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Tanzania—are taking the lead working with the African Union, the World Food Programme, the G8, the World Economic Forum and other international partners in the public and the private sectors in Africa and abroad.

In an effort to broadly disseminate President Obama's Presidential Policy Directive, the United States Mission to the African Union provided separate comprehensive briefings to the African Union Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Commissioner for Peace and Security. The US Mission to the African Union also provided briefing summaries on the PPD to all of the AU Commissioners, the AU Chief of Staff, and AU Legal Counsel.

In an unprecedented move the African Union, in July 2012, wrote a comprehensive four page response to President Obama acknowledging appreciation for the US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa. The African Union's response states:

We are grateful and acknowledge the recently launched US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa by your Administration in June 2012...The US has continued to engage Africa on many fronts from peace and security; trade and investment; health; food security to infrastructure development. Your strategy toward sub-Saharan Africa signals to us an interest in addressing our high expectations and renews confidence in a relationship that is increasingly building on partnership and mutual interest...We are delighted that the US Strategy goes hand in glove with our African priorities.

The fact that the United States Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa and the African Union priorities have clearly articulated mutual interests is evidence of the significance of the African Union to the United States Strategic Objectives.