

Africa's Prospects in the Obama Presidency

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Introduction

There is a lot of curiosity on the direction that the relationship between Africa and the United States, which has, at times, been hostile and disappointing, amusing and inspirational, will take because of Obama's unusual background. He is a product, and a beneficiary, of the success of anti-colonial and civil rights struggles in Africa and the United States although he has little first hand knowledge of those struggles either as a victim or a victimizer. With an African father and an American mother, he is the first African-American to become president. Essentially a child of two worlds, he prefers the world of America as opposed to that of Africa.

The excitement about Obama in Africa is also partly because he is a big contrast to his predecessor, George W. Bush, with whom he has some things in common. Both appeared to have rebellious streaks, had the best education in elite schools culminating in graduate studies at Harvard whether in business or in law. Both are sharp and determined political calculators with ability to play serious hardball. This might explain why each engaged in some sort of public service with disadvantaged African-Americans before releasing political ambitions in Texas for Bush and Illinois for Obama. Both succeeded with unexpected speed, Bush playing damn and Obama just the opposite.

The perceived contrast attracted people to Obama who eventually made him president. While to many Africans, Bush was a source of concern rather than inspiration, Obama was different and was "one of us". While some of the Bush policies appeared designed to victimize and blame Africans for the mess that Americans and their followers in the West had made, there is excitement about Obama and a belief that he would not commit the same blunders. He inspires forces that see in him a man through whom they can push different agenda that may not be in his agenda. To many such forces, Obama is likely to

disappoint because he is basically an American whose father happens to have been Kenyan, and he was not there when it counted.

Americans, Slavery, and Colonization in Africa

Pre-independence days for African relations with Americans were generally negative, and occasionally inspirational. Americans were part of the white world that brutalized Africans through slavery and colonialism. The lasting scar of that relationship is Liberia, created as a dumping ground for unwanted black people who happened to be “free”.¹ They championed the right of white men to rule and grab African lands with impunity. While in Nairobi in 1909, ex-president Theodore Roosevelt asserted that black people “have not governed themselves and never could,” and that “it would be a crime to the white races to fail to turn Africa into white man’s country”.² Exactly one century later, Roosevelt is probably turning in his grave watching a descendant of one of those who “never could” govern being the official resident at the White House.

American Inspiration to Africans

Moments of inspiration to Africans initially came from black Americans and then from a few top government officials after World War II. Men such as Booker T. Washington with his Tuskegee, Marcus Garvey with his Negro World, and W.E.B DuBois with his crusades for Pan-Africanism seemed like evidence that Africans could excel despite colonial adversities. They catalysed men like Mbiyu Koinange in Kenya, Kwame Nkrumah of the Gold Coast, and Azikiwe of Nigeria to attend American colleges. These men then imported into Africa, among other things, Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 Gettysburg Address about governments being of the people, for the people, and by the people. They became thorns to colonialism.

The United States emerged from World War II with an anti-colonialist image that quickly dissipated partly due to the Cold War which, argues John B. Judis, “shaped and distorted

¹ Macharia Munene, The Truman Administration and the Decolonisation of Sub-Saharan Africa, 1945-1952 (Nairobi: University of Nairobi Press, 1995), pp. 5-6

² Theodore Roosevelt, "The Prospect of British East Africa", Speech made at a dinner in Nairobi on August 3rd, 1909, as reprinted in Kenya Weekly News, August 14, 1959, pp. 44, 46.

the United States reaction to the powerful movements against imperialism.”³ Caught between championing anti-colonialism and condoning colonialism, Harry S. Truman launched his 1949 Point Four program which was poorly implemented⁴ and appeared to Kenya’s Tom Mboya in 1956, “as aid to colonial powers to ensure their continued ability to run colonies.”⁵

The American image improved slightly with the emergence of Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts as the symbol of American empathy with colonized Africans. He helped to fund the 1959 and 1960 East African student airlift to the United States. One of the major benefits of the airlift is that roughly fifty years later, there is a US president whose father was reportedly in one of the airlifts, Barrack Obama Sr. After becoming president, Kennedy not only continued with the student airlifts, he also mounted the peace corps program whose graduates today run many activities as experts, academics, diplomats, and heads of organizations dealing with Africa. The assassination in November 1963 of this symbol of American support for anti-colonialism marked the end of the period of inspiration, and many Africans felt the loss.

After Kennedy’s death, Africans were disappointed by American identification with the remaining racist colonies in Southern Africa. Ronald Reagan represented this racist attitude as he argued, "can we abandon this country [South Africa] that has stood beside us in every war we've ever fought?" in 1981 and in 1985 added, "they have eliminated the segregation that we once had in our own country."⁶ Racism in the United States continued to be a factor and the prism through which many issues were perceived and, despite Obama, it is doubtful whether it has stopped.

This was the case even as Africans were caught up in Cold War politics with its new master-state/client-state relationship, baptized *neo-colonialism*. Neo-colonialism was

³ John B. Judis, “Imperial Amnesia,” *Foreign Policy*, July/August, 2004, p. 55.

⁴ Munene, *The Truman Administration*, pp. 154-155

⁵ Tom Mboya, “Our Revolutionary Tradition: An African View,” *Current History*, December 1956, Vol. 31, No. 184, p. 345.

⁶ Quotes in Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman, “Remembering Reagan,” *Common Dreams*, Friday, June 11, 2004

symbiotic between individual leaders in client-states to protect the interests of the master-state while leaders in master-state protected their clients from the public; three varieties emerged. There were those leaders who chose their relationship with master states; those that were forced into that condition; and there were those who freely flirted with all camps and switched sides whenever it suited their purpose.

Neo-colonialism as a doctrine of external control lost its value to the West in the 1970s with the success of the “Marxists” in Africa and the humiliation of the Americans in Vietnam and Iran. In Angola, Americans appeared particularly sinister as they blessed South Africa’s invasion only to be countered by Cubans with Soviet arms. Angola, initially an ideological battlefield, lost direction and plunged into a looting civil war with no ideological validity. Symbiotic relationship with individual leaders proved unreliable and Washington, therefore, started abandoning what Henry Kissinger termed “the essence of postwar American foreign policy.”⁷

Looking for a way out of its predicament and restore a sense of self-worth, Washington decided to abandon leaders who reportedly had outlived their usefulness. It also sought to be seen to identify with the aspirations of ordinary people instead of the ruling elites⁸ and it developed two strategies. These were to reduce or minimize bilateral dealings with Third World leaders and to adopt new rhetoric in international discourse targeting Third World countries. The effect was to reduce visible American friendship with leaders who had become irrelevant. The irrelevancy of *neo-colonialism* gave way to the emergence of *postmodern colonialism*.

Postmodern colonialism tends to devalue states and regimes as manipulators, in master states, claim to understand the victim in his own context and then try to explain to the victim how he should understand himself. This “understanding” is like a palliative to the victim not to complain too much, given that his concerns and perceptions are reasonably

⁷ Henry Kissinger, Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century(New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), p. 29.

⁸ G. Macharia Munene, “Cold War Disillusionment and Africa,” in Macharia Munene, J. Olewe-Nyunya, and Korwa Adar, editors, The United States and Africa: From Independence to the End of the Cold War(Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), pp.25-49

accommodated. The victims are advised, guided, instructed, and ordered to downsize everything and to open up the country to international operators who do not assume responsibility for anything going wrong. The tools used are international bureaucrats who act like ‘missionaries’ for liberalization in small and weak countries, but behind such missionaries is the military might of the master states ready to flex muscles.

The ‘missionaries’ engaged in blame shifting that denies victims ability to demand redress by making the suffering to take the blame for suffering. Blame shifting is initially orchestrated at the intellectual level where ground is laid to rationalize denying assistance to the victims and to provide leverage to dictate laws to the victim countries. Master states remain officially invisible and avoid blame as control is tightened with the victim taking responsibility for whatever may go wrong. In this way, functionaries and officials on the ground become instruments of blame shifting and *post-modern colonialism*.

The strategy of blame shifting crystallized in the early 1980s and coincided with the presence into political power in key Western countries of like minded leaders who disdained Third World countries. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher led, the others followed, in forcing client states to listen to instructions from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the “missionaries”. Rejecting “special consideration”, they insisted that poor countries compete with the “developed” ones in a neo-liberal economic framework.⁹ Missionaries, making it their business to reorganize African states and resources in ways that hurt, became vocal in blaming the victims. They stressed state failure to provide services which then justified calling for privatization. This meant denying states the ability to provide services and giving foreigners a right to expropriate and control a country’s institutions.

Missionaries were supplemented by new political rhetoric and promotion of NGOs and *civil society* in a process of making the United States to appear to be on the side of the people. One of the ways it did this was to create a bipartisan organ, the National

⁹ Peter Gibbon, “The World Bank and African Poverty, 1973-91,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Volume 30, Number 2, June 1992, p. 198; Roger C. Riddell, “Aid Performance and Prospects,” in I. William Zartman, editor, *Europe and Africa: The New Phase* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1993), p. 144.

Endowment for Democracy in 1982/83 whose mission was to promote American values on free press, civil society, trade unionism, and political activism. It entailed support for NGOs and the promotion of *civil society* which then made a lot of noise about political pluralism and the shortcomings of their own states. It is this development that explains the pressure that the United States started putting on leaders of its client states such as Moi of Kenya and Mobutu of Zaire in the 1980s, long before the end of the Cold War, in what would become the New World Order.

The New World Order destabilized several African regimes that found themselves at the receiving end of American hostility and Kenya was one of them. Caught flatfooted in the new attitude, Kenya was seemingly tuned into a policy laboratory for diplomatic experiments on how to handle Africans. It was in Kenya that the idea of *conditionalities* was first mooted in the 1980s and where diplomatic *noise making* as a way of pressuring African leaders to do the bidding of the master state was inaugurated. Starting with Smith Hempstone, who survived expulsion only because the United States was a big power, other Western countries followed and as a result diplomatic *noise making* has, since 1990, become so common that it is expected as a norm.

Glaring contradictions between professed ideals and the crude behaviour in promoting perceived interests became evident in the Bush presidency. With the United States believing, as Condoleezza Rice claimed, that it had been called to lead,¹⁰ those who hesitated following the lead were treated roughly and Kenya is an example despite having things in common with the United States. Both countries had an anti-British colonial past, hold regular elections and occasionally have problems counting votes, have experienced aspects of petty and grand corruption, and both have been victims of international terrorism. Yet despite such similarities, there were serious disputes due to the fact that one is a *master state* and the other is a *client state*.

¹⁰ Condoleezza Rice, "Rethinking the National Interest: American Realism for a New World," Foreign Affairs, Volume 87, Number 4, Number July/August 2008, pp. 2, 26.

While the *master states* like to advise and instruct Kenya on what its interests should be, Kenya sought to pursue its own interests. This angered the *master states* which then undertook to contain Kenya¹¹ using NGOs and “civil society” organs fronting for selected politicians as well as raising the pitch in *diplomatic noise making*, both orally and in print. Ambassadors became columnists and guests in electronic media talk shows in which they advised Kenyans how to run the country, fight corruption, draft a constitution, and behave when relating to “donors”. They occasionally hurled insults at the country in the belief that they had a natural right to do so and that, more than Kenyans, they knew best what was best for Kenyans.¹²

The United States was involved in trying to bring Kenya to its knees for daring to act independently. It had failed to support the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, close the Iraqi embassy and seize Iraqi assets,¹³ exempt Americans from criminal prosecutions, and pass an anti-terrorist bill.¹⁴ It had even joined a Third World rebellion in the WTO Conference at Cancun. Having incurred the wrath of the *master states*, which became openly hostile,¹⁵ Kenya had to be punished and part of the punishment included spreading rumours that things in Kenya “could get really bad” since “people are fed up.”¹⁶

Spreading rumours was part of a process of manufacturing hostile consensus on Kenya. “Public opinion can be mobilized ... through the media and motivation of influential groups,” wrote England based Sunday Standard Columnist Fred Mudhai, in order to “stir

¹¹ Jean Kamau, “Let’s Do Not As Donors Say, But as They Did in The Past,” The Sunday Standard, April 3, 2005; Wanjohi Kabukuru, “Kenya: Sir Edward’s Crusade Has Clay Feet,” New African, May 2005, pp. 32-34; David Musila, “US Must Stop Piling Pressure on Kenya,” Daily Nation, opinion page, May 11, 2005; Fred Oluoch, “Will Kenyan MPs Bow to US Pressure or People’s Will?” The East African, July 4-10, 2005; Macharia Munene, “Expectations and Disappointments in Africa-US Relations,” The International Journal of African Studies, Volume 5, Number 2, Winter 2006, pp. 132-135

¹² Gitau Warigi, “Western Envoys are on Ego Trips,” Sunday Nation, November 6, 2005

¹³ Julius Bosire, “US Wants Iraq Envoy Kicked Out of Kenya,” Saturday Nation, April 5, 2003

¹⁴ Editorial, “What More Must Kenya Do?” The Kenya Times, June 21, 2003; J. Harrison Kinyanjui, “Anti-Terror Law Will Roll Back Kenya’s Civil Liberties,” The East African, June 30- July 6, 2003, pp. 4-5,17.; Kevin Kelley, “Watch Out, US Rights Groups Tell Kenyans,” The East African, June 30-July 6, 2003, p. 5; Mwangi, Makumi, “The Nationalisation of Terrorism: National Response to Terrorism Through National Legislation,” in Makumi Mwangi and Maria Nzomo, editors, International Responses to Terrorism(Nairobi: Heinrich-Boll/IDS, forthcoming)

¹⁵ Macharia Munene, “Africa and Shifting Global Power Relationships,” The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, Summer 2005, Volume 29, Number 2, pp. 120-121.

¹⁶ Fred Mudhai, “Where Negotiations fail ‘Public Diplomacy’ Works,” Sunday Standard, October 26, 2005

a revolution against the government.”¹⁷ There was effort to portray Kenya as collapsing, as being responsible for international terrorism,¹⁸ and not having a “valuable and civilized relations”¹⁹ with master states. There were then “objective” studies such as the one produced by the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, an American think tank with capacity to engineer consensus²⁰ that, in its July/August 2005 issue of Foreign Policy, declared Kenya to be a failed state. Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs Moses Wetangula dismissed it as “balderdash and ridiculous”.²¹

In effort to “mobilize opinion” against the government, *master states* believed that “their criticism should be treated as sacrosanct.”²² The local media helped them to feel “sacrosanct” and seemingly distorted stories to make the government look weak, and not acceptable.²³ At times the media committed journalistic fraud to give the wrong impression²⁴ and they became tools of turning low level diplomats into celebrities.²⁵

As local celebrities, these *noise making* diplomats tended to miss the irony of their own positions. British High Commissioner Edward Clay reportedly had a habit of flying in the Kenyan airspace without a license²⁶ and participated in a corrupt Journalist of the Year Award (JOYA) function at the Hotel Intercontinental in Nairobi where he accused Kenyans of voting on his shoes.²⁷ He was supported by his American counterpart,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Mwangi, “The Nationalisation of Terrorism”

¹⁹ See Clay Interview with Nation TV’s Louis Otieno, in Sunday Nation, June 29, 2003.

²⁰ Inderjeet Parmar, “Engineering Consent: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and American Public Opinion 1939-45,” Review of International Studies, Volume 26, Number 1, January 2000, pp. 35-48

²¹ Mwangi Githahu, “Report: Why Kenya is a failed State: US organization Underrate Its Economic, Political and Social Performance,” Sunday Nation, October 2, 2005

²² Gitau Warigi, “Western Envoys are on Ego Trips,” Sunday Nation, November 6, 2005

²³ Daniel Branch and Nic Cheeseman, “Briefing: Using Opinion Polls to Evaluate Kenyan Politics, March 2004-January 2005,” African Affairs, April 2005, pp.332-335

²⁴ Kodi Barth, “State House Needs Media Expert Advise, But Media is Courting Trouble,” The Sunday Standard, May 15, 2005

²⁵ Warigi, “Western Envoys are on Ego Trips”

²⁶ Baffour Ankomah, “Flying Without Licence,” New Africa, July 2005, pp. 6-7

²⁷ Kipkoech Tanui and Argwings Odera, “You are not Serious About Corruption,” The Standard, February 3, 2005; Editorial, “KUJ’s Night of Graft,” The Standard, February 4, 2005; Kwendo Oponga, “Rejected Trophy, Missing TV Sets, and Saga of KUJ’s Shameful Night,” The Sunday Standard, February 6, 2005; Mugo Njeru, “Police Probe Journalists’ Awards,” Daily Nation, February 4, 2005.

William Bellamy who praised Clay²⁸ and later promised to fund and encourage Kenyans “with the courage to stand up” against the government and probably, Foreign Affairs Minister Raphael Tuju wondered, effect a “regime change.”²⁹ There was then an upsurge of, as a Daily Nation editorial noted, “presumably well funded civil societies types”³⁰ demonstrating on the streets. An amusing spectacle involved a globe trotting professional demonstration organizer, once he saw TV cameras, unsuccessfully pleading with the police to shoot him.³¹

The demonstrations aimed at showing Kenyans were “fed up” with the government were fuelled by what Peter Mwaura of the Nation, termed “a rogue superpower seeking a regime change”.³² In the process, what The Leader called “self-appointed democracy watchdogs”³³ became, Mutuma Mathiu of Sunday Standard observed, “factional warriors in the NaRC wars ... taking sides in the power struggle” because the power struggle gave them “an opportunity to project more influence.”³⁴ As warriors, they funded political factions “under the name of civic education”³⁵ and were receptive to requests for “help in persuading Kenyans” to see things the expected way.³⁶

Seeing things the expected way appeared to have been in operation in the 2007 general elections when the *master states* seemingly encouraged defiance of the law and procedures. They, or through their proxies in *civil society* and NGOs, funded particular candidates and seemingly endorsed notions of making the country ungovernable if “their”

²⁸ Patrick Mathangani and Andrew Teyie, “US Freezes Aid,” The Standard, February 9, 2005

²⁹ William M. Bellamy, “Kenyans Must Step Up Fight Against Graft,” Daily Nation, Opinion page, July 5, 2005; Odhiambo Orlale, “US Envoy Hits Out at NARC Over Corruption But Tuju Warns Him Bluntly: Don’t Mix Politics With Aid,” Daily Nation, Front Page Story, July 5, 2005; Francis Openda, “You are not Fair to Kenya, Tuju Tells US,” The Standard, back page story, July 5, 2005

³⁰ Editorial, “Demos a Curse of Business,” Daily Nation, July 27, 2005

³¹ Oscar Obonyo, “One Man’s Obsession With Street Protests,” Sunday Nation, July 31, 2005

³² Peter Mwaura, “Military Coups no Longer Tenable,” Saturday Nation, November 5, 2005.

³³ Editor’s Word, “Foreign Funding Claims a Threat to Our Sovereignty,” The Leader, October 7-October 13, 2005; Kiruri Kamau, “Britain, Moi Strike Back by Funding the No Team,” The Leader, October 7-October 13, 2005 .

³⁴ Mutuma Mathiu, “Many Confusing Signals From Donors,” Sunday Standard, September 26, 2004.

³⁵ Editor’s Word, “Foreign Funding Claims a Threat to Our Sovereignty,” The Leader, October 7-October 13, 2005; Kiruri Kamau, “Britain, Moi Strike Back by Funding the No Team,” The Leader, October 7-October 13, 2005 .

³⁶ David Mugonyi, “Uhuru, Raila Meet US Envoy in Bid to Block Wako Draft: Six Other Countries Joined Two Hour Talks With MPs,” Daily Nation, Friday, August 26, 2005.

man did not win. They had preconceived positions on who should not win. London, reportedly threatening to pull out of Iraq if it did not get its way in Kenya, appeared to be the driving force with Washington and Berlin tagging along.

A new doctrine of encouraging favoured losers to mount electoral robbery with violence in order to attain what failed in the ballot box seemed to be in the works. In the midst of the crisis in January 2008, for instance, they ignored the fact that the media can set agenda that injures a country's interests³⁷ and promote genocide as happened with Radio Mille Collines in Rwanda.³⁸ In Kenya, the Kriegler Commission concluded that the media "added fuel to the flames."³⁹ And the ambassador of the United States seemed to enjoy inciting people to violate laws by declaring, "I am very happy that ... I am violating the ban because I do not agree with it."⁴⁰ He declared that in a live FM station that was known for telling its audience to "clear the weed", referring to potential victims.⁴¹ The ambassador, concluded Makumi Mwangi, "broke the rules of diplomacy by violating a rule of law in the receiving state, and doing so deliberately."⁴² He did that because he represented a *master state* that has capacity to violate other countries' sovereignty at will.⁴³ He made Americans look as if they were inciters to violence in harmony with the new doctrine.

Such seeming arrogance informed African reaction to the creation of the African Command or AFRICOM that, admitted Mary C. Yates, was poorly explained and one that many African countries were reluctant to host.⁴⁴ In itself, AFRICOM, is an indication

³⁷ George Ogola, "Media Has Abdicated Its Role to Politicians," Business Daily, March 26, 2009

³⁸ Michael Chege, "Weighed Down by Old Ethnic Baggage, Kenya Races to Another Historic Election," Africa Policy Forum, June 22, 2007, Online Africa Policy Forum-<http://forums.csis.org/africa>

³⁹ Report of the Independent Review Commission on the General Elections held in Kenya on 27 December 2007, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Quote in Vincent Bartoo, "Envoy Defies Broadcast Ban," The East African Standard, January 24, 2008.

⁴¹ Lawrence M. Mute "Kenya: Legislation, Hate Speech, and Freedom of Expression," Distributed by AllAfrica Global Media (allAfrica.com), 23 October 2008

⁴² Makumi Mwangi, The Water's Edge: Mediation of Violent Electoral Conflict in Kenya(Nairobi: IDIS Publications on International Studies. 3., 2008), p. 79

⁴³ John Lewis Gaddis, "Grand Strategy in the Second Term," Foreign Affairs, January/February, 2005, p. 7

⁴⁴ Ambassador Mary C. Yates, "Lessons Learned From a New Combat Command-AFRICOM," May 12, 2009, U.S. Department of State, Diplomacy in Action, PPC Briefing, <http://fpc.state.gov/123292.htm>; Ed Blanche, "Africom's Agenda Still Baffles Africa," New African, February 2009, pp.46-47.

that Africa is moving up in the radar of US security importance.⁴⁵ Given that AFRICOM was a Bush creation with his ‘grand strategy’ involving the doctrine of pre-emptive strike on those not seen to toe the line,⁴⁶ the suggestion sent fears. This is essentially so since AFRICOM is expected to outsource services to Private Security Companies, PSC,⁴⁷ who operate like sanitized mercenaries.⁴⁸ The number of such PSCs in Africa is on the increase and Andrew Bearpark, Director General of the British Association of Private Security Companies, noted, “carry out activities previously performed by national militaries” and the US leads in outsourcing.⁴⁹

The Obama Inspiration

There was great excitement in Africa, and Kenya in particular, with Barack Obama as president of the United States. He is the first president to have had direct Kenyan experience, including traveling in *matatus* and having relatives who show up unannounced and expect to be attended to. Considered one of “us”, there were high expectations that he might be better than Bush. But beyond being an inspiration, Obama is first and foremost an American.

Africans would be foolish to expect different outcomes from those of Bush if there is a conflict between the perceived interests of the United States and those of Africa. This point was made clear by Johnnie Carson, the new Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, who stated that there will be no change since Republicans and Democrats have a bipartisan attitude towards Africa. When Carson was ambassador to Kenya, serving the Republicans, there were frictions between Kenya’s interests and his perception of what

⁴⁵ Sean McFate, “Briefing, US Africa Command: Next Step or Next Stumble,” *African Affairs*, Volume 107, Number 426, January 2008, p. 113; Michael Moran, “The New ‘African Command,’” Council on Foreign Relations, http://www.cfr.org/publication/12583/new_african_command.html.

⁴⁶ John L. Gaddis, “A Grand Strategy of Transformation,” *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2002, pp. 50-57; Michael Barone, “Bush’s Grand Strategy,” *US News and World Report*, 2/26/06

⁴⁷ McFate, “Briefing, US Africa Command,” p. 119.

⁴⁸ Andrew Rowell and James Marriott, “Mercenaries on the Front Lines in the New Scramble for Africa,” in Steven Hiatt, editor, *A Game As Old As Empire: The Secret World of Economic Hit Men and the Web of Global Corruption* (San Francisco, Ca: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2007), pp. 113-132;

⁴⁹ “Interview With Andrew Bearpark,” in *International Review of the Red Cross*, Volume 88, Number 863, September 2006, pp. 449-457

those interests should be; he was *noisy* in making clear what the instructions to Kenya were.

The situation is not thrilling when looking at the statements and behavior of some players in Obama's team. In Obama's major policy speeches, to start with, Africa hardly features. One of his key economic advisors is Larry Summers whose views on Africa, if they have not changed, are not flattering. Summers advocated what is termed "garbage imperialism" that is tantamount to global environmental racism⁵⁰ in which all types of wastes include nuclear, expired medicines, technological out-of- dates, and even contaminated foods can be dumped in Africa. In reportedly advising the World Bank in December 1991 to export "dirty industries" to LDCs, he argued that parts of Africa are "under-populated" and "vastly under-polluted."⁵¹ The question is whether he is still giving that kind of economic advice to Obama. If he is, then expect the dumping of toxic wastes in order to make Africa less "under-polluted."

Conclusion

Obama has chance to recapture lost credibility and he has asserted that he would like to do that. If he buys into Condoleezza Rice's belief that "an international order that reflects our values is the best guarantee of our enduring national interest, and [that] America continues to have a unique opportunity to shape this outcome,"⁵² he might need to take into account the advice by John Lewis Gaddis to display "better manners" and to realize that "it is always a bad idea to confuse power with wisdom."⁵³ He generally seems to have started well.

⁵⁰ Joan W. Kimani, "Hi-tech Yet Highly Toxic: Electronic and E-Waste," *The Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa*, Volume 1, Number 2, 2009, pp. 46, 54; Cahil Milmo, "Dumped in Africa: Britain's Toxic Waste, Children Exposed to Poisonous Material in Defiance of UK Law," *The Independent*, Wednesday, 18 February 2009 ; Najad Abdullahi, "'Toxic Waste' Behind Somali Piracy," *Aljazeera Net*, Saturday, October 11, 2008 09:21 GMT

⁵¹ Jim Vallette, "Larry Summers' War Against the Earth," in *Counter Punch*, 1999, Global Policy Forum gpf@globalpolicy.org

⁵² Rice, "Rethinking the National Interest," pp. 2, 26.

⁵³ Gaddis, "Grand Strategy in the Second Term," p. 7

Obama is an American looking after perceived American interests which are not necessarily synonymous with African interests. While the fact that he has relatives in Africa is inspirational and might attract some tourists to Kenya, he can be ruthless in promoting whatever he perceives to be American interests. The difference being that he will not be accused of racism if he harasses African countries into compliance with American dictates.

When he completes reviewing United States national security and foreign policy positions to reflect his stated desire not to be bogged down by ideology, his position on Africa might be clear. Will he avoid the trap of American ideologies overriding “facts and reality”? He talked of some countries being on the wrong side of history yet in many instances it was the United States that was on the wrong side and had to adjust. With Obama, the prospects for major changes in attitude remain to be seen given that Africa is still relegated to the bottom of the foreign policy pecking order. They may be, commented Yates, “nuanced a bit” but she does not “expect major changes.”⁵⁴

With Obama, African admiration of Americans might increase and the United States will continue to be looked upon to offer leadership because it has more might militarily, technologically, and economically than any other country. It has played this role well many times, whether it is in financing UN operations or providing disaster relief. The admiration for things American is apparent in the media, educational institutions, and in music and the cinemas. Africans follow events and elections in the United States, were amused by ballot counting problems in Florida and were excited by Obama’s election.

Whether Obama is there or not, it is the dark side of the Americans where perceived hypocrisy and double standards become their hallmark, that is of concern. Americans talk of freedom of movement of people and goods and then close their doors to all others, especially the Africans. The idea of “open doors” is seemingly for others to open theirs for Americans to come in freely but not for others to enter their market or country. As an

⁵⁴ Yates, “Lessons Learned From a New Combat Command-AFRICOM,” May 12, 2009

object of concern, it appears to be a bully, mean, arrogantly ignoring international laws that it expects others to follow. It piously talks of democracy while ignoring the democratic wishes of others and has seemingly subscribed to the doctrine of encouraging losers to mount electoral robbery with violence in order to acquire power.

It pursues its interests vigorously and would not allow anyone else to tell it what those interests are, and yet it purports to tell other countries what their interests should be or how they should pursue them. It does not blink when violating the sovereignty of other countries and yet it appears to be surprised that other countries would want to pursue their own interests vigorously. Will Obama be different? I doubt whether the harassment that Africans get trying to obtain visas will stop now that Obama is in the White House.

An impression exists that the United States is out to impose its will at any time, on whomever it wants, and in any manner that it wants. It seems to subscribe to the view that powerful countries do not have to obey international laws because they are big.⁵⁵ Africans expect “better manners” with Obama. He has given impression that he might obey international law. The question is whether he will instruct his representatives in Africa to have “better manners” and to obey “local laws” as required in diplomatic practice. Another one is whether he still will be held hostage on African issues by former colonial powers.

So what is the general picture? It is one in which Africa’s desire to make independent decisions is hampered by over dependency on, and subservience to, the *master states*, led by the United States, who then believe that they have a right to do anything they want, irrespective of the law. Their diplomats behave like colonial governors and in dealing with governments, like that of Kenya, they are crass since their apparent intent is to humiliate rather than reach amicable understanding on what mutual interests are. Will Obama assume, like Bush before him, that the United States is the only country on the right side of history? In turn, African governments shoot themselves in the foot by

⁵⁵ Jack L. Goldsmith and Eric A. Posner, The Limits of International Law(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 4.

seemingly tolerating people of questionable values, who can be used to undermine them, in policy making positions. This is a weakness *master states* are quick to exploit with relish and Obama, in pursuing American interests as he thinks, is likely to continue with the tradition.

The United States leads other *master states* in the way of relating to poor countries although it is sometimes held hostage on African issues by former colonial powers, partly because it considers other regions more valuable than Africa. Americans started attacks on African states in the form of diplomatic *noise making* that Britons and Germans later seemed to enjoy. Will the United States, under Obama, start new diplomatic behaviour that displays “better manners” in relating to Africa? Will this beneficiary of African anti-colonialism and American civil rights movement free himself from the Euro-American disdain for Africans and show some respect to Africans? Will he liberate himself from the American mentality that European powers have a right of preference in their former African colonies? If he does, less powerful *master states* will most likely do one of two things. They will either pay attention to the American lead in relating to Africans, or simply ignore him.