



AFRICAPLUS

## Council on Foreign Relations: President Obama and Sub-Saharan Africa

DECEMBER 12, 2012 / AFRICAPLUS

By Richard Joseph

*In his most recent article, Richard Joseph analyzes the Obama administration's June 2012 policy paper on Africa and provides specific policy recommendations for the President's second term. This article was written as a guest post for John Campbell's 'Africa in Transition' blog on the Council of Foreign Relations' website. It can be read below, or on the Council's website [here](#).*

On June 14, 2012, President Obama affixed his signature to the “[U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa](#).” It identified four focus areas: democratic institutions; growth, trade and

Follow

investment; peace and security; and opportunity and development. The response from the policy community was a shrug. [Mwangi Kimenyi](#) of the Brookings Institution claimed that the policy document was neither “new” nor “strategic,” and did not establish a “foundation for creative engagement with an emerging Africa.”

The Obama administration must confront two challenges. First, it must convey more effectively the important contributions the U.S. has already made toward these priorities. Second, Mr. Obama has to put his personal stamp on specific initiatives he considers central to his legacy.

The president’s talk in Ghana in July 2009 electrified the audience by declaring that America was ready to help the continent build a broader base for prosperity. The gateway to that transformation was eliminating bad governance. While this message was repeated in the June 2012 policy document, it is lost in the long list of program initiatives.

The president’s critics suggest that the U.S. should focus on the great opportunities in an economically resurgent Africa. Look at the dizzy expansion, they say, of China in Africa and how its engagement in mineral extraction, trade, construction, and infrastructure has been supported by frequent visits from China’s top leaders.

Often overlooked in these critiques is that the American predominant role in advancing global peace and security includes Africa. This is an argument Mr. Obama himself needs to make. Africa is not only a continent of “frontier economies,” it remains one of “frontier states.” The U.S. plays a unique role in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and increasing good governance within African states.

Mr. Kimenyi suggests that Mr. Obama should “shelve” his June 12 strategy and “start afresh.” I won’t go that far. But Mr. Obama needs to step up to the plate. He should plan a visit to Africa in 2013 that includes stops in several countries, convene a roundtable on Africa to garner policy ideas from academic experts and analysts, and lay out his “Agenda for Africa” in a major address to the American public. Moreover, he should lead a comprehensive international effort to end the relentless wars and economic predation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The consequences have been genocidal for the Congolese people.

Despite the economic upswing, and China’s growing presence in African infrastructure,

manufacturing accounts for a paltry share of Africa's output. Mr. Obama should highlight the contributions American corporations can make to industrialization and job creation in the continent. He should put forward incentives for American institutions to pursue deeper engagement with their African counterparts, especially in higher education and health care. Mr. Obama's name is on a dozen program initiatives in Africa, but who knows it? That must change, and soon.

Copyright © 2012 AfricaPlus

---

**Share this:**



Loading...

**Related**

[President Barack Obama and Africa's Uncompleted Journey, Part I](#)  
In "American Roles"

[Forum for African Democracy: Africa Demos Forum in the News](#)

[The American Presidency and Democracy Promotion in Africa](#)  
In "American Roles"