

President Trump's Fundamentally Flawed Africa Policy

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Global Research, January 10, 2018

[Oriental Review](#) 9 January 2018

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#)

*After nearly a year in office, the outline of **President Donald Trump's** policy for Africa has emerged as fundamentally and seriously flawed. In a similar manner to his predecessors, Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama, Trump's African strategy suffers from a conceptual deficiency in its failure to recognize that the most fundamental human right is the right to life. Every human being is morally entitled to live a healthy, productive, meaningful life with the hope that the future will be an improvement over the present. If one examines the outlines of policy by President Trump and the State Department, such a guiding and indispensable principle is conspicuously absent. For Africa, where the largest number of people endure the greatest hardships of life of any continent, the absence of a full-throttled U.S. commitment to eliminate poverty and hunger as an essential feature of a strategic policy, is damning, and must be remedied.*

To ensure a prosperous future for what will be the most populated continent on the planet in 2050, by which time the population is expected to double, from 1.2 billion to 2.4 billion people, President Trump should emulate China's infrastructure-led development program.

The Trump administration is expected to reduce State Department and USAID-funded programs, among others, beneficial to Africa. Not to overlook the potential harmful effects of these cuts, there is a more fundamental shortcoming to Trump's policy. Like his recent predecessors, he is ignorant of, or ideologically blind, to understanding what is required to accelerate economic growth across the African continent. Africa needs, infrastructure, infrastructure, and more infrastructure, particularly in the vital categories of energy, rail, roads, and water management. Trump has been especially eager to support increased military deployments and kinetic warfare against violent extremists in Somalia, the Sahel, and northeast Nigeria. However, any competent and honest military leader knows an effective counter-terrorism effort must include economic development. If the Sahel, were not a barren, underdeveloped desert, the various terrorist militia would not be able so easily to occupy this region for their base of operations.



Security and Free Trade: Inadequate for Africa

The African continent has the greatest deficit in all categories of infrastructure on the planet. Thus, not surprisingly, Africa has the largest number of people living in poverty; living without the basic necessities of life. According to a [2016 World Bank report on poverty](#), Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest percentage of people, 41%, living in extreme poverty. That translates into the largest number of poor at 389 million, just over 50% of 767

million worldwide living below the poverty line of \$1.90 per person per day. Yet despite all the hype about Africa's "rising lions," referring to African nations with high growth rates of GDP, the number of people living in poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa is *increasing*.

Look at one critical area: access to energy which is the lifeblood of an economy. Abundant grid energy, accessible to all sectors of society, can transform an entire nation and lift its population out of poverty. Conversely, the lack of energy kills. According to "Energy Access Outlook 2017," of the 674 million people, globally, expected to be without access to electricity in 2030, over 600 million, or 90%, will live in Sub-Saharan Africa. For the developing sector nations in Asia and Latin America, the percentage of the population expected to have access to electricity by 2030 is 99% and 95% respectively, while for Sub-Saharan Africa, it is expected to be 50% or less. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of those without electricity is *increasing*, unlike like all other populations in the world. Africa requires a minimum of 1,600 gigawatts of electrical power to have the same standard of living as advanced nations.

In a related classification, cooking energy, the picture is also abysmal. Almost 80% of the people living in Sub-Saharan Africa do not have gas or electric stoves; instead they cook with solid biomass, i.e., solid waste, animal dung, wood, saw dust, wood chips, etc. This is not only destructive to the environment, but to human labor as well. I have witnessed, on numerous occasions in my travels throughout Nigeria, young girls collecting firewood and then carrying it on their heads for sale in the market. In Mali, young men are destroying trees to be used in the primitive method of charcoaling, aiding the expansion of the desert.

President Trump's Africa policy of security/counter-terrorism first, followed by trade and investment, fails to address Africa's underlying depressed conditions of life which allow violent groups to easily recruit. People who can't feed their families or provide the minimal necessities of life, and see no hope in the future, are led to violence out of manipulation and despair. Trade and investment, as proposed by the Trump administration, are not the solution.

Africa suffered greatly from 500 years of slavery and colonialism, 1450-1960. Following the initial success of the independence movements, the financial predators moved in to loot the continent's vast wealth in natural resources. Extractive industries provide revenue, but they do not add/create wealth or generate a significant number of jobs. Africa doesn't need more investors intent on making profits under the guise of applying the distorted "laws" of free trade and the marketplace. African nations require real economic growth that creates added value, increases the total wealth of society, and provides productive jobs to the restless masses of unemployed youth.

In 2014, Africa's share of value added in global manufacturing is reported to be a pitiful 1.6%. This sorrowful state of economy can and must be reversed. The manufacturing process is vital for every healthy economy. It adds wealth by transforming natural resources into finished and semi-finished products to be either consumed domestically or exported. This requires technologically advanced capital equipment, and skilled labor, all embedded within an integrated platform of infrastructure. State-directed credit and long-term, low-interest loans invested into critical areas of the economy, such as infrastructure, are indispensable for the growth of a manufacturing sector. Witness previous successful periods of economic growth in the U.S. (and in China today); these were accomplished through public credit, not hedge fund speculators and Wall Street day traders.

The most valuable natural resource of Africa, is not its mineral wealth, which is the target of the financial and mining/commodity predators. Rather, its greatest natural resource is its immense quantities of arable, yet to be cultivated land, along with the abundant water sources in its numerous lakes and river systems. Africa is capable of feeding its people and eliminating hunger. It can also potentially help feed Asia, if properly developed with a manufacturing sector, and food-processing industries, coupled with a massive expansion of infrastructure.



What Does China Know About Africa That the U.S. Doesn't

Over the last thirty-five years, China has lifted over one-half billion of its citizens out of poverty. This has been accomplished by massive state-directed investment into essential categories of infrastructure, along with its deep commitment to advance its economy through attaining new levels of science and technology. Both Chinese **President Xi Jinping** and **Premier Li Keqiang** have publicly stated their desire to help African nations eliminate poverty. This universal mission by the leadership of China, expressed concretely in the “Spirit of the New Silk Road,” has led to a revolution in joint infrastructure projects in Africa. New railroads are being built across the continent, replacing colonial locomotives and tracks built over one hundred years ago. On the East Coast, an entry zone for the Maritime Silk Road, new and expanded ports, with connecting rail lines vectored westward into the interior of the continent, are creating the potential for a fundamental transformation of the economies of several African nations including; Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Djibouti.

The “ChinaPower Project” reports that between 2000 and 2014, China funded 2,390 projects across Africa totaling \$121.6 billion, just over one-third of China’s total global financing. In Africa, 32% of the financing went for transportation projects and 28.5% for energy.

“[Dance of the lions and dragons](#)” a study completed by McKinsey & Company in 2017, analyzed privately owned Chinese companies operating in Africa. They estimated that there are 10,000 such private Chinese businesses that have committed \$21 billion to infrastructure, which is more than combined total of the African Development Bank, European Commission, World Bank, International Finance Corporation, and the G-8 nations. And 31% of these companies are involved in manufacturing which accounts for 12% of Africa’s industrial production—valued at \$500 billion.

Conclusion

The U.S., along with the other Western powers, virtually abandoned the nations of Africa as soon as they had overthrown their colonial masters. **President John F. Kennedy** stands out among U.S. presidents, following the death of Franklin Roosevelt, as a champion for the newborn African nations. His collaboration with Ghanaian **President Kwame Nkrumah** in the early 1960s to construct the Volta Dam Hydro-electric Aluminum Smelting Complex is a singular moment in U.S.-Africa relations over the last six decades. America lost its vision for development, resulting in its refusal to build the power plants, dams, railroads, and ports that Africa needs. China has made a commitment to Africa and now is contributing to the most expansive building of new infrastructure the continent has ever seen.

President Trump’s recently released [National Security Strategy \(NSS\)](#) is totally hypocritical:

it attacks China for becoming Africa's largest partner, and accuses China of undermining "Africa's long-term development." Trump's NSS expresses the same old British geopolitical mentality of winners and losers competing in a zero-sum war for global hegemony.

Throughout my travels in Africa, I have found expressions of affection for America and its ideals; even among those nations that the U.S. has abused. That positive attitude is beginning to wane. However, it is not too late for the U.S. to chart a new course, one of cooperation with China and Africa to transform the continent. Saving Lake Chad from extinction and transforming the Lake Chad Basin, is an urgent task for such a tripartite cooperation.

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