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Hagel, Kerry, and Brennan Senate Confirmation Hearings: U.S. Policy on Sub-Saharan Africa

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Following President Obama's inauguration, the Senate will hold confirmation hearings for three key Administration positions: Senator John Kerry (D-MA) for Secretary of State, former Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) for Secretary of Defense, and White House chief counterterrorism advisor John Brennan for director of the CIA. These nominees have strongly supported President Obama's foreign and defense policy, suggesting little policy deviation from President Obama's first term.

Confirmation hearings provide an important opportunity for Senators and, by extension, the American public to ask hard questions about the Administration's and the nominees' views on crucial issues of American foreign and defense policy.

U.S. Interests in Africa. Africa has not been a priority for U.S.

foreign and defense policy historically. For most of the past century, most African nations have been either ruled by European colonial powers or subjugated by strongmen bent on self-enrichment and maintaining power.

While many African governments remain under the control of authoritarian leaders who limit economic freedom and commit human rights abuses, there has been a gradual shift toward democracy, the rule of law, and more market-oriented economic policies. These improvements have contributed to stability and development. As Africa has prospered, American interests in the region have increased.

There are four main issues that highlight America's foreign and defense interests in Africa that Senators should ask the nominees.

1. Rise of Terrorism. Terrorism remains a major U.S. national security concern in Africa, where the chaos accompanying the Arab Spring destabilized countries throughout North Africa and created additional opportunities for terrorists.

■ **Libya.** The collapse of the Muammar Qadhafi regime created a governance vacuum in Libya that has been exploited by

terrorists. The attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi, Libya, that killed four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens, is a stark reminder that al-Qaeda remains strong in North Africa.

- **Algeria.** Algeria has long been beset by al-Qaeda-linked terrorist groups. The American citizens recently taken hostage by an al-Qaeda-linked group in Algeria has underscored that fact that they remain active and effective.
- **Mali.** For the better part of a year, northern Mali has been occupied by a coalition of Islamist militants. This week, militants succeeded in breaching Mali's north-south demarcation line despite military intervention by France.
- **Nigeria.** Boko Haram in Nigeria continues to wreak havoc across the northern part of the country. The terrorist group has also expanded its operations to Mali and neighboring countries such as Cameroon.
- **Somalia.** Though the African Union's Mission to Somalia has seen noticeable progress, the

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newly appointed central government controls little territory outside Mogadishu, and terrorist groups remain an ongoing threat.

2. Regional Stability and Security. Approximately one-third of the world's ongoing conflicts are in Africa, and half of all U.N. peace-keeping operations are in the region. These conflicts take a dire toll on lives, impede economic growth and development, and undermine human rights and the rule of law.

In creating AFRICOM, the U.S. took an important step in elevating the security profile of the region. This helps focus U.S. attention on the unique challenges in the region and provides a conduit for targeting resources on bolstering regional capacity for action, including training and professionalization of African militaries.

3. Partnering with Africa for Economic Growth and Development. One of the first countries President Obama visited during his first term was Ghana, where he sent a strong message that "Africa's future is up to Africans."¹ This message contained a key truth—while America can help, Africans must take the initiative and lead the way toward their own progress. To overcome challenges to development, governments must adopt policies that bolster free markets and entrepreneurship, good governance, and

the rule of law. Foreign assistance cannot overcome corruption, repressive economic policies, or poor governance.

The record for Sub-Saharan Africa in recent years is mixed. Last year, The Heritage Foundation noted in its *Index of Economic Freedom* that "no region has made greater strides in economic growth over the past two years than Sub-Saharan Africa."² However, in Heritage's 2013 edition, the *Index* finds that "the region's movement toward greater economic freedom has stalled."³ Similarly, Freedom House's 2013 *Freedom in the World* index reports that Africa's "scores for all seven topical categories measured in *Freedom in the World* showed decline, with substantial downgrades for those that fall under the umbrella of civil liberties."⁴

President Obama has not been consistent in using America's aid to encourage progress. The Obama Administration has kept foreign assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa steady (\$9.89 billion in 2008, \$9.8 billion in 2009, and \$9.7 billion in 2010), but there is little evidence to suggest that the U.S. is prioritizing aid to encourage good policy and discourage poor policy. Governments such as the corrupt, illegitimate Kabila regime in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have seen aid increase under the Obama Administration despite widespread human rights

abuses and evidence of fraud during the 2011 presidential election.⁵ The U.S. should follow through on President Obama's rhetoric and be more discriminating in distributing aid to reward good performers.

4. Untapped Potential for Trade. Africa has long been an important source of raw materials, but as African nations prosper, the continent has become more relevant as a market for U.S. goods and an investment destination. In 2000, the U.S. attempted to expand economic ties with Africa via the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), a trade-preference program structured to promote growth by reducing American barriers (e.g., tariffs) to African exports. More than 30 Sub-Saharan African countries benefit from AGOA membership. AGOA was expanded in 2002 under President Bush and was renewed by Congress last September.

While AGOA is useful, it is an incomplete approach to increasing U.S.–African trade that ignores the benefits that Africans could experience from lower tariffs on U.S. imports. AGOA should be expanded into a free trade agreement to maximize its economic benefits.

The U.S. should also take immediate action to facilitate U.S. investment by establishing bilateral investment treaties or trade and investment framework agreements with interested African nations.

1. News release, "Remarks by the President to the Ghanaian Parliament," The White House, July 11, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-ghanaian-parliament> (accessed January 18, 2013).
2. Terry Miller, Kim R. Holmes, and Edwin J. Feulner, 2012 *Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones & Company, Inc., 2012), p. 40, <http://www.heritage.org/index/download>.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
4. Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2013," 2013, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FIW%202013%20Booklet%20-%20for%20Web.pdf> (accessed January 18, 2013).
5. U.S. Department of State, "Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Assistance, Summary Tables, Fiscal Year 2010," <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/124295.pdf> (accessed January 17, 2013).

Additionally, the U.S. should remove onerous fiscal burdens on investors by negotiating treaties with African governments to eliminate double taxation.

Clarity and Guarantees on the Important Issues. The Senate should use the confirmation process to question each nominee on the above mentioned issues.

In particular, the Senate should seek clear guarantees from Senator Kerry that he will:

- Reassess the allocation of foreign assistance to African countries to encourage good policies. Aid cannot substitute for sound economic policy and good governance, but judicious allocation of aid can possibly encourage positive steps.
- Seek deeper economic ties through free trade and investment. America stands to benefit greatly from a stronger economic relationship with Africa both as a source of raw materials and a partner for trade.

The Senate should seek clear guarantees from Senator Hagel that he will:

- Partner with African militaries to support regional stability. President Obama has stated that Africans are in charge of their own future. This includes security. The U.S. should support regional operations that bolster U.S. national security interests. The Administration should give particular attention to assisting capable African partners in professionalizing their military force so that, in the event that military action is required, Africans have the skills to manage the crisis.

The Senate should seek clear guarantees from John Brennan that he will:

- Develop a more effective and aggressive strategy to counter terrorism in Africa. Since President Obama took office, terrorist groups in Africa have expanded

their networks and coordinated their operations. Mali is a striking example of how quickly such entities can exploit a security vacuum. This trend must be reversed.

The Obama Legacy. African nations are facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Regrettably, in his first term, President Obama did little to follow through on his promise of partnership with Africa and has instead adopted a caretaker approach. Moving forward, it is important that the individuals who are confirmed in the upcoming hearings seek to empower African countries rather than attempt to fix their problems for them.

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