

TRANSCRIPT OF DEVELOPMENT DRUMS EPISODE 17 – OBAMA IN GHANA

Host: Owen Barder. Guests: Chris Blattman and Todd Moss

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Owen Barder

Thanks for downloading Development Drums. This is episode 17 and today we will be talking about the U.S. and Africa. I'm joined by Chris Blattman, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale and by Todd Moss from the Center for Global Development and a former State Department official working on Africa. We will be discussing President Obama's speech in Ghana on Saturday, July 11th, 2009.

Development Drums is a podcast about international development issues. My aim is to discuss issues in more depth than is possible in the mainstream media, and to give my guests a chance to explain their point of view. You can download Development Drums from iTunes, and of course you can set iTunes to download it automatically whenever there is a new episode to listen to. You can also download Development Drums from the website, which is at developmentdrums.org, where you can also post comments or questions about the episodes. We have a Development Drums group on Facebook where you can suggest future topics, guests or questions. And you can follow Development Drums on Twitter as well.

On July 11th, President Obama made his first trip to Sub-Saharan Africa and he chose Ghana as the venue for a major speech about Africa. To talk about President Obama's speech and the U.S. government's Africa policies more generally I'm joined today by two well-known Africa watchers. Chris Blattman is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale. Chris's research examines the causes and consequences of civil war, the reintegration of ex-combatants and post conflict economic and social programs. For many people listening however, Chris will be better known for his widely read blog which is at chrisblattman.blogspot.com. And I've been trying get you on to Development Drums for a while now, Chris, it's great to have you on.

Chris Blattman

Thanks. I was successfully tricked this round into coming on to your program.

Owen Barder

My second guest is Todd Moss. Todd is Senior Fellow and Director of The Emerging Africa Project at the Center for Global Development in Washington D.C. He recently returned after serving as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of African Affairs at the U.S. Department of State from 2007 to 2008.

Todd's work focuses on U.S.-Africa relations and on the financial issues facing Sub-Saharan Africa. Todd is also the author of a very good book about development issues in Africa. *African Development: Making Sense of the Issues and Actors*, which I think is one of the most useful introductions for anyone interested in these issues. Todd, welcome to Development Drums.

Todd Moss

Thanks for having me, Owen.

Owen Barder

And, Chris, you use Todd's book as a course text, don't you?

Chris Blattman

Yes, I use it as the foundation for an undergraduate course I teach on development. It was a heartwarming day when I read that book and realized that my job became a whole lot easier.



Owen Barder

Excellent, excellent. So, we're going to talk today about President Obama's speech, but use it as a vehicle for looking at the U.S. administration's policy towards Africa more generally. Now several bloggers, including Bill Easterly and you Chris have attempted to grade different parts of the speech. So let's start with the overall perspective and with this section.

[Audio Presentation] Barack Obama speaking in Accra, Ghana, 11th July, 2009.

We must start from simple premise that Africa's future is up to Africans. I say this knowing full well the tragic past that has sometimes haunted this part of the world. After all, I have the blood of Africa within me, and my family's – my family's own story encompasses both the tragedies and triumphs of the larger African story.

Owen Barder

Now, Chris, both you and Bill Easterly gave that an A+. As Bill pointed out, what the West – while the West can do some modest things to help African individuals, we don't really have the knowledge or power to transform African societies. So I assume we all agree that the argument that Africa's future is up to Africans is a premise that we can accept.

Todd Moss

Well, I think it's something that we, of course, would accept. It's a little odd that we need to point that out in the case of Africa. I mean, I don't think anybody would say that Europe's future is in the hands of another region. So of course I think it's very, very welcome. I think that the tendency in Africa to blame outsiders is a little bit too convenient sometimes, so it's good that he's started off on that note. And I think it's something that is – it sets the right tenor for both the speech and the policy. The one thing I would just note is that we've had a version of this in the past. You know, 10 years ago everyone was talking about African solutions to African problems and I'm not sure how much that really changed the tendency to look to the outside to come in and fix problems that are still lingering in Africa.

Owen Barder

But as Obama says himself in his speech, the West is at least in part responsible for some of Africa's problems. And he talks about the legacy of colonization, and he talks about a tendency to treat Africa as if we were a patron rather than a partner. So it seems from that as if Africa's future isn't entirely up to Africans, because our policies and behaviors might have an impact on what happens next.

Todd Moss

Well, I think again that's true for everyone. What happens in the United States depends a lot on what China decides to do, on what Europe decides to do. So I think part of the progression we've seen with Africa's relations with the rest of the world is that it is part of the global economy, it's part of the international community and what happens on the outside matters a lot, but that the primary responsibility and the primary driver of what happens in a particular country, it depends on domestic forces. And I think we can see that particularly in Africa because we are getting such wide divergence among countries within Africa where we've got a subset of countries that are starting to do things well, and they are really moving ahead out of the pack and we are seeing a subset of countries that are not doing very well, and they are falling further and further behind.

And so one point about this sort of regularizing Africa, thinking about it just like any normal other region of the world, that I think was very positive about the Obama visit to Ghana, was that unlike President Clinton and President Bush he did not start with a week-long five-country grand tour. He just came to Ghana for one day just like you would do for any other region. And in a sense it was an early marker that, you know, we are going to treat Africa just like a regular region like it deserves to be treated, not as some special region that needs a particular trip that gets ring-fenced off from the rest of the world. So, I think that's actually quite a very – a very, very positive signal.



Owen Barder

Chris, do you buy the idea that African’s future is entirely up to Africans? I know you said that you thought that we should be aware that our role, for example, in supporting some of the big men of Africa in the past has had a big influence on where Africa is today?

Chris Blattman

Well. I don’t think we can discount, you know, the past. I did feel that the speech discounted the past perhaps a bit too heavily. But it’s a speech, it’s a short speech, and he wanted to dwell on the future, so I think it was probably appropriate even if it sounded I think a little bit dismissive of this past which, you know, did not end in 1957 with Ghana’s independence. There’s been a great deal of meddling since then. And I – but the general message that Africa’s future is up to Africans is – it was good to say it.

I don’t think it’s entirely self evident. I don’t think it’s always self evident in Africa, but it’s certainly not self evident in the aid community or in the – in the public of – in the western public, and that made me wonder who the intended audience was for that, that particular comment. Whether it was Africa or whether it was us. And if I were well connected in the administration, which I am most certainly not, that’s actually one of the first questions I would love to ask them, is what – who are they aiming at principally there?

Owen Barder

Now the president’s speech focused on four themes. They were democracy and governance, growth and opportunity, and health and conflict. So let’s take those in turn and start with what he says about governance. And in particular, he has a section on how outsiders can support good governance and fighting corruption in Africa. Here’s what he says.

[Audio Presentation] Barack Obama speaking in Accra, Ghana, 11th July, 2009.

But what America will do is increase assistance for responsible individuals and responsible institutions with a focus on supporting good governance, on parliaments to check abuses of power and ensure that opposition voices are heard. On the rule of law, which ensures the equal administration of justice, on civic participation so that young people get involved, and on concrete solutions to corruption like forensic accounting and automating services, strengthening hotlines, protecting whistle-blowers to advanced transparency and accountability. And we provide support. I have directed my administration to give greater attention to corruption in our human rights reports. People everywhere should have the right to start a business or get an education without paying a bribe.

Owen Barder

Now Chris, you gave this a straight D in your grading of this passage. That’s a fail at Yale, isn’t it?

Chris Blattman

I think a B- is a fail at Yale, but that’s a different story.

Owen Barder

So what’s your problem? What...

Chris Blattman

Well, a couple of problems. First he starts with this big sweeping idea about governance very broadly, about the kinds of checks and balances that were envisioned even in the American constitution. And then he ends it with the concrete policy proposal being “send in the accountants”, and I just – and focusing on petty corruption, and those seem to me to be very distinct issues, the petty corruption one being just an order of magnitude less important and maybe just some small consequence of this lack of balance of power within the majority of African countries.

I’m sure if there is an organization out there called Accountants Without Borders, I’m sure they are – they gave an excited cheer at that moment, but I don’t think it’s necessarily going to advance good governance in Africa or really lead to any change in corruption, merely to sort of attack this culture of petty bribes.



Owen Barder

Tell us a bit more about your distinction that you are making between petty corruption and small bribery and the balance of power. What is that you think that Obama is failing to address here?

Chris Blattman

Well, in – I think in well-functioning democracies in, if I can use the U.S. as an example, and that’s not egocentric because I’m actually Canadian, but – and Canada is actually a bad example in some sense of a well-functioning democracy, if only because power is actually very centralized in the prime minister, we don’t have a very powerful upper house, the lower house generally just sort of follows the ruling party’s line and in some sense we’re just lucky in that I think there are checks and balances in civil society and in the judiciary. And as a consequence – or maybe we’ve just been lucky with very benevolent leaders, I’m not quite sure. And so as a consequence Canada’s been relatively well run.

And in Africa that’s not really the case. You saw relatively weak parliamentary systems, but parliamentary systems nonetheless, at independence across the board. And those very quickly became centralized systems of power with all of the military, judiciary, legislative and budgetary might, you know, concentrated in the hand of, not just one man although the president was in charge, but maybe that cabal around the one man. And that has really been what I think is at the root of a lot of this destructiveness. It means that there aren’t checks on abuses of power, it means that that group, or that cabal can get away with a great deal of corruption, it means they can’t be held accountable for terrible failures such as the failure to address petty corruption, and then it makes it very easy and desirable to capture that centralized power. And if you can it’s through a coup or through an invasion, and then you can install yourself relatively easily at the helm, good or bad.

And so this seems to me to be at the root, and he started off talking about that in this first few sentences and I started to get very excited and then the rest was just a complete let-down as it’s almost the policy implications, kind of, and the policy steps just missed the – missed that larger point.

Owen Barder

Todd, is that your view? That this focus on corruption in an accounting sense misses the bigger picture of the economic and political troubles that beset some countries and lead to these “big men”?

Todd Moss

Well. I am actually quite a fan of some of these more boring kind of mechanisms that raise the cost of doing corruption and make it more likely that people will get caught. So I think that, you know, forensic accounting doesn’t sound terribly exciting, but I think it actually can be quite useful. I think protection of whistle-blowers is a particular problem as we’ve seen a number of whistle-blowers, most prominently John Githongo in Kenya, not being protected. And I think, you know, the issue of raising corruption more frontally is a very positive step, I was glad that he mentioned it.

I think there were two surprises I had, though, on what the prescriptions are. One is, you know, to include corruption in the human rights report, okay that makes sense but it’s not really a very aggressive step. Those are quite long reports. I don’t think they are actually that well read and so you know that’s useful but it’s not very – you know it’s not really going to change the relationship between the United States and its development partners in Africa.

But I think the more surprising thing was in talking about what he’s directed his administration to do in terms of assistance. He didn’t even mention the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which is a signature U.S.-born assistance program designed specifically to target aid to countries with good governance. And there is a corruption hurdle in the eligibility process which means that for a country to even be considered for an MCC compact, they have to be above the average on the World Bank’s corruption score.

And that’s a really, you know, that program has been very high-profile and I think this would have been a chance for the administration to give that program a shot in the arm and they choose not to even mention it.



Chris Blattman

You know, actually, can I ask Todd a question?

Owen Barder

Sure.

Chris Blattman

Todd, so I wouldn't disagree. I think fighting corruption, forensic accounting, whatever types of standards we set for giving aid, say through the MCC or other sources is obviously important. We do face tradeoffs in where we focus our political energy, and what strikes me is, one that I am not sure that that fight is the fight that I would choose on a governance level if I had to choose between different agendas. And it's striking to me how much the discussion around Africa is about these corruption issues and how you never hear anyone talk about strengthening – or you very seldom hear people talking about strengthening legislatures, strengthening the press, a push for constitutional commissions that decentralized power, be it to a legislature, to a prime minister, to regional governors, to a move towards more federalism, towards decentralizing the budget and spending and taxation powers, to districts or counties or states or whatever a given country may have, and it's that imbalance that I find really striking.

Todd Moss

Well, you know I think that actually a lot of the things that you mention are promoted by outsiders, particularly the World Bank. But I think that the focus, particularly the media, has been on these anti-corruption commissions which go after, you know, high-level prosecutions. And that can be quite a powerful symbol but I think that we have to view these anti-corruption commissions as one very narrow weapon that can actually have – that can quite quickly become politicized and actually perhaps in many ways undermine the fight. So I think, you know, the attention is not necessarily always on some of the more mundane reforms. But, you know, I would agree with you, Chris, in the broad point that just, you know, just talking about fighting corruption and having high profile commissions is not necessarily the best way to tackle the problem in the long term.

Chris Blattman

And I think this speech just reinforces the lack of public debate and consciousness, whether it's within Africa or within the foreign policy or within the World Bank about, where this lack of debate and consciousness about this broader governance agenda and it almost hyper focuses again on the accounting and the petty corruption and I just thought that was a big disappointment.

Todd Moss

Yes, the one point I might add is that I think the frustration in Africa with sort of donor tolerance of high level of corruption is quite strong. I think Michela Wrong's very good book about Kenya, *It's Our Turn to Eat*, I think is just one example of that that shows that I think quite a lot of Africans believe that, you know, the West is just continually duped by leaders that are lining their own pockets while also receiving large sums of aid. So I think that is reflective of a widely held belief in Africa.

Chris Blattman

Right, although Obama didn't say – he didn't condemn, you know, Kenya's leadership for stealing 30% of GDP. He condemned a policeman taking a bribe and that's – so, if indeed, if we were tackling that bigger question of that high level corruption where, you know, gazillions of dollars are being stolen, then I think that might have been – that would – definitely would have been a step better.

Todd Moss

Yeah, I'd agree.

Owen Barder

I would like to move on. Todd, you mentioned the Millennium Challenge Corporation as – which of course is an initiative of President George W. Bush, and there is a short passage in President Obama's speech about American aid and the way that aid is given, and here's what he says.



[Audio Presentation] Barack Obama speaking in Accra, Ghana, 11th July, 2009.

As Africans reach for this promise, America will be more responsible in extending our hand. By cutting costs that go to Western consultants and administration, we want to put more resources in the hands of those who need it, while training people to do more for themselves. That's why our \$3.5 billion food security initiative is focused on new methods and technologies for farmers – not simply sending American producers or goods to Africa.

Owen Barder

Todd, let's look at what President Obama seems to saying here about the way that the U.S. gives aid. There's a reference to spending less on American consultants and to reforming food aid. But it seems quite a long way short from a more comprehensive reform of U.S. foreign assistance and it doesn't seem to be a big assault on red tape and inefficiencies of USAID in common with some other aid agencies. Do you think this is a sufficient agenda? Do you think that this is all there is planned by this administration? Or do you think perhaps this wasn't the time and place to go into broader reforms of USAID?

Todd Moss

Well, I think the focus on doing food aid smarter is something that the last administration tried and was unable to get done. And it is a good area to focus on. So I was very glad to see that particularly increasing the cash contributions, so you can buy from local markets rather than having to wait the four months to ship it from a silo in Kansas to the Horn of Africa.

I was also really pleased to see that he wasn't making grand pledges for new aid targets, something that I think has probably run its course for the next couple of years. You know, I think it's easy to attack administrative costs and consultants. We've actually seen USAID spend a lot more money over the last few years; the U.S. foreign assistance budget to Africa has almost quadrupled over the last eight years. At the same time we haven't seen staffing numbers go up at USAID and that's actually started to become a capacity constraint for dispersing money for managing and overseeing contracts. So, I think that nobody likes high administrative costs but in the real world you actually need people to oversee and manage money. So, I think that that's not necessarily the ideal focus for fixing a U.S. foreign assistance.

What we have seen from the administration is really not very much in the first six months. Clearly foreign assistance was an issue that the campaign was thinking about, but it has not been a priority of the administration. We still do not have USAID administrator and the whole process of foreign assistance reform – which is both sort of reorganizing the bureaucracy and also finding a mechanism for setting strategy – we still haven't seen any progress there and I think that's where – where the attention will have to focus.

Chris Blattman

On that point about the administrative costs, I'd agree that there is – it's certainly on my top five lists of where I think Obama ought to focus his gaze. And there can be a tendency to navel-gaze, I think if you work in an aid agency and just to focus on internal reforms rather than some of the bigger issues. But, it's true in the real world that there are administrative costs, but as someone who's sort of – I feel like I'm often in the quote-unquote real world in Northern Uganda, Liberia or elsewhere, working with donors, working with NGOs who are trying to get programs funded, and in my case trying to get programs plus research funded, USAID is just second to UNDP as just sort of this behemoth, that it's not even worth sometimes applying to or trying to work with because it's just so difficult and frustrating and expensive. And I say that as someone who works regularly with other UN agencies, which are difficult and frustrating and expensive and too – in terms of admin costs.

And I have been told by a very excited USAID senior person in one of the countries where I worked that he would love to support the programs, he would love to support the research but frankly warned me just away. He actually pointed me to towards a UN agency for funding because he just said it would just be too difficult, impossible, expensive and lengthy to even bother trying to get this funded through USAID. And that sort of struck a real chord with me.



Owen Barder

So, more bureaucratic than the UN? That’s going to hurt!

Chris Blattman

Not more than the UNDP, but perhaps every other UN agency that I’ve encountered.

Owen Barder

The second theme was what he – what president Obama described as opportunity. And let’s look at the language here on trade and here is what president Obama has to say.

[Audio Presentation] Barack Obama speaking in Accra, Ghana, 11th July, 2009.

Aid is not an end in itself. The purpose of foreign assistance must be creating the conditions where it is no longer needed. I want to see Ghanaians not only self sufficient in food, I want to see you exporting food to other countries and earning money. You can do that. Now, America can also do more to promote trade and investment. Wealthy nations must open our doors to goods and services from Africa in a meaningful way. That will be a commitment of my administration.

Owen Barder

Chris, I know you said that you thought the absence of a real commitment on trade was the biggest flaw in this speech. How important do you think it is to make progress on trade policy?

Chris Blattman

I don’t know if I thought it as the biggest flaw. I mean I mostly defer to Todd, on trade here because he knows a great deal, I know very little. But what I do now comes from a few years ago, before my – a few months before my – I met my wife and ran off after her to study conflict and child soldiering, I was actually working in Kenya with the World Bank doing some firm and worker surveys in the manufacturing sector. And what struck me the most from talking to these firm owners and looking at the manufacturing sector in Kenya was just the ebb and flow of business and staffing and investment that accompanied the uncertainty around whether or not the – whether or not the U.S. was going to renew the African Growth and Opportunity Act which was giving preferential treatment to among other things textile firms, many of which were based in Kenya.

And this volatility and this sort of lack of stability in terms of “Are they going to renew it?” and “Are we going to have – how long are we going to have this treatment?”, something that was generating a lot of manufacturing investment that would suddenly plummet as the date to renewal or nonrenewal came. And that struck me as inherently damaging, that volatility in the manufacturing sector might even be worse than not doing it at all.

Owen Barder

Todd, the President’s speech did seem to fall quite a long way short of saying that the U.S. will extend the African Growth and Opportunity Act, let alone that it will provide stable and predictable access to U.S. markets.

Chris Blattman

It said nothing of the sort.

Owen Barder

He said nothing of that, right. So do we think that with Democrats on the Hill and in the White House, the administration will be keen to make progress on opening up U.S. markets to African exports?

Todd Moss

Well, let me make just a couple points on trade. You know right now because of AGOA, 97% of the trade that comes from Africa into U.S. comes in duty-free quota-free. So, clearly market access is not the major barrier to African exporting into the U.S. Chris’s point that you have to go back and renew AGOA every



couple of years and that creates uncertainties: absolutely correct. Certainly AGOA would be much better if it was made permanent.

But I think we have got two – you know, two barriers I think you are hinting at, Owen, to that. One is that the unions in the United States are not great fans of free trade agreements like AGOA. And they have not been keen. Particularly that's why there are so many additional textile provisions in AGOA that makes it very hard for African textile producers to export into the U.S. even though that's supposedly one of the sectors that it's supposed to help.

But it's – beyond that, the additional trade barriers that Africa faces vis-à-vis the United States, the things that – that the Africans particularly complain about are subsidies for cotton and sugar are not going to be dealt with bilaterally between Africa and the United States but are going to be dealt with at the WTO and the Doha round of discussions which right now are stalled. And quite frankly those issues will be decided between the big emerging markets, Europe, Japan, and United States, rather than Africa really being a player at the negotiating table on something like sugar subsidies.

Owen Barder

So that sounds as if you're not very optimistic that there will be much progress on this agenda.

Todd Moss

Well. On the one hand I am not that optimistic that we are going to have a very robust Doha agreement soon or that we'll have a big new U.S.-Africa trade policy, that's true. But on the other hand, I just don't think that on the list of priorities of things holding back African manufacturing, that U.S. trade barriers actually feature quite high on that list.

Some very, very good data-driven research by some of my colleagues including Vij Ramachandran and Alan Gelb at the World Bank, point to things like electricity, transportation costs and access to certain kinds of finance in Africa as much, much bigger barriers than trade right now.

Chris Blattman

That's true. But I feel like giving an incentive, an added incentive for this more outward orientation, this export orientation, would be a big help in strengthening the groups within these countries, especially the nascent manufacturing sectors in places like Kenya and Uganda to sort of gain even leverage in their own country's policy.

Todd Moss

Yeah. I think that's true, but you know marginal changes to AGOA, I don't think are going to be a huge bump to African exporters. It will help a little bit. But I do think the other issue that Owen mentioned that's got a lot of potential is on the private investment side. There is an investment component to AGOA and there's actually quite a large public policy angle for many of the European donors, United States, Canada, do have private sector investment arms. In the United States it's the Overseas Private Investment Corporation which has been setting up private equity funds. They set up 13 private equity funds that target sub-Saharan Africa. And they've actually been, even though the international investment environment has been tough in the last 12 months, they've actually been quite successful in generating private investment into things like private healthcare, into infrastructure and into some of the sectors that we'd really like to see take off in Africa.

[Music]

Owen Barder

You're listening to Development Drums with me, Owen Barder, and my guests Chris Blattman and Todd Moss, and we're talking about U.S. policy towards Africa and President Obama's speech on Saturday July 11, 2009.

The third theme that President Obama addressed is health and one of the challenges that the aid world faces is the growth of these big, single issue global funds such as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and



Immunisation and the Global Funds for AIDS, TB, and Malaria, which have – and in the case of the U.S. Government, PEPFAR, the initiative on AIDS – which have tended to attract resources away from the much less sexy business of building up countries’ own health systems. And President Obama addressed this problem head on.

[Audio Presentation] Barack Obama speaking in Accra, Ghana, 11th July, 2009.

Yet because of incentives often provided by donor nations, many Africans doctors and nurses go overseas, or work for programs that focus on a single disease. And these create gaps in primary care and basic prevention.

Owen Barder

The part about focusing on a single disease went down well with Bill Easterly and indeed a number of other people interested in supporting African health systems. But Chris, you had a problem with the reference to doctors and nurses going overseas. What’s the issue here?

Chris Blattman

Well, I mean I wouldn’t rank this in terms of my top problems with the – with the speech, but it’s emblematic of the fact that there’s sort of these little issues that people love to plug in. One is the petty corruption that we discussed before and it’s – you know I just don’t think it’s that important. And the other is this doctors and nurses thing, which is an issue and important, but not anywhere near the top of the agenda. So, to get the sort of attention that it got in his speech strikes me as odd on the one hand and disappointing on the other.

It’s not clear to me that it’s really a big problem for a few reasons. One is that, giving – I think going abroad to become a nurse or a doctor is sort of like winning the lottery, except it’s a lottery where you can change your odds by investing in education. And in theory, you would think this would just bring lots more qualified, intelligent people into the health sector. I guess it will bring lots of unqualified, less intelligent people in the health sector as well. So, that could actually to lead a big increase in the number of people who are trying to train in Africa to become nurses and doctors and since visas are scarce, so a lot of them will end up staying.

Now, I would be worried if there was evidence that we’re stealing the good ones, and all the bad ones are being left behind, but I don’t know of any evidence that that’s true at all.

And then, I was reading an African business magazine, which is actually not really about African business but it’s often about African politics and policy, and excellent publication. And one of the columnists, a Kenyan, Wycliffe Muga, said – and I don’t – I’m not his fact checker, but he said that there is a third of nurses in Kenya unemployed at least in 2006, that there was just one Kenyan nurse living abroad for every two unemployed ones at home. And then the last time Kenya’s nurses asked for raise, which I think was 2001, or 2002, the government sacked the entire group that were asking for wage increase and then replaced them all with this big pool of unemployed nurses who were willing to work for the lower wage. So, this makes me think that there is a big supply of qualified people to give healthcare, and the problem is not us stealing them away.

Owen Barder

Todd, do you think the brain drain is a cause of Africa’s problems, either in general or in the health sector? Would you like to see more migration from Africa or less?

Todd Moss

Well, I think Chris’s point is exactly right, this common fact that you always – that’s always thrown around that there are more – about how many thousands of Kenyan nurses are working in NHS in the U.K. ignores the facts that there are huge stocks of unemployed nurses in a place like Kenya who face all kinds of incentives to work in a different sector of the economy or to not work at all. And the induced human capital that Chris refers to I think is a very, very powerful effect that we’ve seen in places like the Philippines. So, my personal view is that, and you know my family – certainly, the greatest change that ever happened in



the history of my family was moving from a very poor Eastern European country to the United States. The circularity of people is probably the greatest boon to development, certainly orders of magnitude greater than what we can make up for in something like foreign assistance or free trade agreements. So, I am a huge proponent of increased migration.

The point that you made about the vertical health funds; I don't think that the real criticism of that is that it's drawing doctors into fighting HIV/AIDS. I think the problem has been that there was not enough resources going in to fight HIV/AIDS ten years ago. And that to get that political momentum, particularly to get some constituencies like the religious communities in the United States on board as not just supporters but as active lobbyists for fighting HIV/AIDS, it had to be made very simple. You are not going to get people riled up over supporting health systems. And what we've seen PEPFAR and some of the other programs do, I think actually quite overtly and increasingly successfully, is to transition from just fighting HIV/AIDS to trying to use that money to leverage broader health systems.

And that makes sense politically and that also makes sense, I think, developmentally because you can't just fight – you can't just build an infrastructure to fight one disease because it's integrated with things like nutrition and basic health. So, I think we are starting to see that transition now and we will start to see much more flexibility in the use of HIV/AIDS funds for things like health system. And the risk there is that we may undermine some of the political support for using tax payer dollars for those purposes.

Owen Barder

Todd, I think you might be understating the potential damage that can be done by having these vertical programs. Here in Ethiopia, for example, this is a bit anecdotal but it's I think quite illustrative, I've heard about people saying that actually they now rather wish they had HIV/AIDS, because if they did they would be able to send their kids to school free, they'd get free healthcare, they'd be put on work programs, all because there is so much money flooding in to AIDS programs here, and very little money, I mean really very little money indeed going in to basic healthcare. Now, AIDS is not Ethiopia's biggest health challenge by some distance and although it's important that there's proper funding for it – it does seem that there has been a distortion arising from the AIDS programs that have left other health programs systematically underfunded and often under-resourced in terms of attracting doctors and nurses and other kinds of resources away from the health system. So, I don't think you can quite say well this was just additional political pressure and resources for AIDS and that is good thing. And I think there has been a cost to the rest of the health system.

Chris Blattman

And to add an anecdote, the – you know it's interesting here in a place like Liberia where the HIV/AIDS infection rate is extremely low. Obviously, prevention efforts after war are very important, so it's good to see dollars pouring in but it's perhaps the least of the health worries by some measure in Liberia but it's one where the most funds are available and so you get this paradox. But Todd, what I'd be interested to hear you say is, I think, you were alluding to the idea that, hey, the global fund and PEPFAR and other – they're aware of this issue and maybe they're – maybe, I don't know, are they ideologically committed to sticking to their single disease focus or do you think that this is a problem that's going to start to work itself out.

Todd Moss

Well, look, I think it's obviously absurd to have an HIV/AIDS budget that's five times the national health budget in any country I think, and everyone would agree about that. But when you're talking about using public policy dollars and allocating them to specific things, you often get these distortions because these are inherently political decisions. If you look in the United States at the difference between the defense budget and the diplomacy budget, orders of magnitude difference and people would say this is obviously massively distorting U.S. foreign assistance. Well, that's true, but it's not a random accident, it's the result of a very deliberate political process and the constituencies that lobby for certain kinds of budgets. And I think it's unrealistic to expect that our foreign assistance or our global health budgets would be immune to those same kinds of political pressures.



That doesn't mean that we can't try to use those processes to leverage a better balance. Just as the State Department is trying to leverage some of the defense budget to its own needs, we can leverage the immense, incredible, historical support for global health investments targeting HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria and leverage that to tackle some other diseases that public health officials may think would represent a bigger balance. We – the global health budget got a shock with this super increase in money over the last six or eight years. And so, we are now adjusting to that reality and one example, I believe the new Chair of the Global Fund is the – just named, I believe, yesterday – the Ethiopian Health Minister. So, he should be in a particularly strong position to help influence the flexibility of those funds.

Owen Barder

I think that's absolutely right, and he is an exceptionally charismatic advocate for the need for more integrated health planning, so let's hope that that does make a difference.

And finally, President Obama's fourth theme is conflict. He says, rather gracefully, that Africa is not the crude caricature of a continent at perpetual war, but he does highlight the damage that conflict does.

[Audio Presentation] Barack Obama speaking in Accra, Ghana, 11th July, 2009.

America has a responsibility to work with you as a partner to advance this vision, not just with words, but with support that strengthens African capacity. When there is a genocide in Darfur or terrorists in Somalia, these are not simply African problems, they are global security challenges and they demand a global response. And that's why we stand ready to partner through diplomacy and technical assistance and logistical support, and we will stand behind efforts to hold war criminals accountable. And let me be clear, our Africa Command is focused not on establishing a foothold in the continent, but on confronting these common challenges to advance the security of America, Africa, and the world.

Owen Barder

Chris, you're one of those who thinks that conflict is by far and away the biggest obstacle to development in Africa and you've praised President Bush for the direct way that he helped to put a stop to wars in places like Liberia, South Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone. On the basis of this speech, did you think President Obama will do a good job, as good job as you say President Bush did?

Chris Blattman

Well, I have no idea because he didn't really say anything very specific, and so it's hard to tell what the policy is going to be. That said, I really don't know what was successful about the last 10 years in terms of reducing conflict. And we saw Bush make it a focus, or the Bush Administration make it a focus and we saw it go down and I think those two things are related, but Todd can probably provide maybe more insight on if I am mistaken or if those are just coincidences.

The things that we've seen the number of active and ongoing civil wars plummet in the last years. There are a lot of regions in Africa that are still unstable, even if not – there is not active fighting. So, Côte d'Ivoire is an example, South Sudan and Northern Uganda, and Central African Republic, where the Lord's Resistance Army and other dormant guerrilla groups are, it's another example, then we see lot of violence in Eastern Congo. So, there is a lot of things that could turn into active civil wars that for some reason are not. And I am actually very curious to hear from Todd what he saw inside the Bush Administration if he saw cause and effect between this push for stopping these wars and what worked because I would just like to see more of that in this administration at a bare minimum.

Owen Barder

So Todd, what worked, and do you think President Obama's going to do more of it?

Todd Moss

While I think the administration, rightfully, put a lot of emphasis on conflict resolution. I would agree with Chris with that it's the single most important thing that pushes people into poverty and can in a day wipe out 20 years worth of progress. The administration, quite proudly would trumpet that seven major conflicts



in Africa ended on the Bush Administration watch. And in several of those, the administration was very directly involved in negotiating the end and putting pressure on some of the combatants to find a resolution.

So, I think active engagement can produce a lot of results, active engagement certainly doesn't guarantee results particularly in very complicated situations where American influence and resources are by the nature of the problem going to be very limited, and with the United States fighting major wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the resources available for trying to find a resolution in other places is almost, by definition, diminished. And I think what's – what the new Administration is left with are a couple of the really tough cases, Darfur, Eastern Congo, and Somalia in particular. And in Sudan, I think we've got a very, very dangerous situation where despite extremely high level attention to this problem Sudan continues to threaten to blow up again, both the North-South and the lack of a peace agreement in Darfur. And we've got a referendum and elections coming up in Sudan which could spark – provide a spark for renewed conflict. And that will happen in the next, within the next two years, so I think the urgency has accelerated.

Owen Barder

And what do you think the administration should do?

Chris Blattman

This strikes me as one of the most difficult and puzzling, sort of, policy areas on the planet. How to build stronger states and how to reduce the level of conflict, and whether or not those two things are in opposition with one another. There are scholars and others who argue that places like Latin America and Europe are more stable state-wise because they had a chance to fight it out and achieve more stable political equilibria, which essentially is – means there is a victor and a loser and that meant that the fighting would stop and states could solidify and businesses could develop.

I, in my own mind, haven't really decided whether or not I think that's true. Even if it is true, I don't think it's the path forward; I don't think the policy answer is to let Africa fight it out. I think we can probably inventively find better ways and Africans can find better ways to build stronger states and business sectors and things than through conflict in the future. So, it's just not an option.

But how do we create – how do we reduce these conflicts? And I do think that one of the reasons we see wars is because the people who start them, the people who make the decisions to fight, whether it's a guerilla leader or a president or both, do so because they are not internalizing these costs of war. They are really just thinking about the personal potential for gains or for their particular group or cabal. And what the role of an outsider can do – and that outsider could be the African Union or neighboring countries or the U.S. or Europe or ideally everybody together – can be that – sort of be that third party enforcer to sort of force that person to internalize the costs or to come up with other costs for them that makes it very undesirable for them to move into, sort of, violence.

The question then becomes, okay in the majority of cases we'll now have successfully avoided war but we've preserving – we are preserving unstable political equilibria, like we are seeing in Zimbabwe and Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire, and do we know how or do Africans know how, or does anybody know how to move these to actual stable states that aren't going to erupt in war the minute our vigilance diminishes.

Owen Barder

Todd, if you were in the State Department under this administration, what would you be recommending as ways to bring stability in what appear at the moment to be unstable equilibria?

Todd Moss

Well, I think the one area where we still under-invest, and I don't mean just about the United States which spends a lot of money in this area, but as an international community is in peacekeeping. It is very expensive to do this, but it's actually quite cost effective and it seems to have extremely high developmental benefits and other kinds of benefits. So I think that we could certainly improve our activity there.



The one thing I would say, just to pull something out from the Obama speech and from some of the criticisms that I read on the web is about AFRICOM, the Africa Command which you know really has just gotten a level of attention way out of scale to the importance of what it is. It's actually quite a mundane sort of reorganization of U.S. global military combatant commands. It's not a major new push. Africa Command comes with zero new troops, and what you've basically just done is taken parts of the different European and other commands and just consolidated them in one office. And it's really a way to make sure that what U.S. military thinks about in Africa is done in a strategic sense and not done only as the kind of leftover fourth priority of a bunch of other commanders that have bigger problems to deal with. So that's actually...

Chris Blattman

It wouldn't surprise me though if that – it wouldn't surprise me if the main rationale within the military might have been let's get the guys who are actually focusing on the other issues to stop having to focus on this pointless bunch of Africa issues; in some sense to try to discard it down the ladder to a different general who could worry about that mess.

Todd Moss

Well, it's certainly the case if you're responsible for Eastern Europe and also some parts of Africa that your attention is going to be focused elsewhere and you are not going to be able to build the internal knowledge and capability to actually deal with a particular region of the world that faces quite different challenges. Thinking about what U.S. military should be doing in Germany is totally different from thinking about what's the appropriate role of the U.S. military in West Africa, and so trying to build that knowledge inside the military I think is quite positive. A lot of the African press completely – partly the fault of the Pentagon for getting the rhetoric ahead of the reality, just really had a fit that this was about naval bases and colonization or, it was about oil access and it's really not about any of those things.

Owen Barder

Do you think, given the importance, Todd, that you've attached to peacekeeping, that it's a pity that President Obama didn't talk more about the Africa – and indeed didn't talk at all about the African Union, and role that it's increasingly paying in promoting peace and security in Africa? He really didn't talk about regional institutions much at all.

Todd Moss

That's right. I think there is a lot of unrealistic sort of rose-colored views of regional organizations. There isn't much evidence that African governments themselves put much stock. They don't seed much authority to the regional organizations, they don't fund them. So, they have been almost across the board a huge disappointment. The one exception I would say is, is the African Union which I was quite skeptical when they just chopped off one letter of the acronym and it was still the same old organization of the past.

Owen Barder

Let me just explain to people that you're referring to the move from the Organization of African Unity which was set up in 1963 as something of a liberation organization and it was re-branded as the Africa Union, much more modeled on the European Union. And that's the chopping off of the letter. But it was a more fundamental change than that, wasn't it? I mean it was a conscious move on from the liberation structure of the OAU in the past.

Todd Moss

Yes, well, that's absolutely correct and I actually think that the AU has done surprisingly well in dealing with coup d'états in Africa and they have been quite firm in a number of areas in ways that the old OAU never would have been. So, that's been very positive. I think the problem that lingers is that it is still an organization, it is still a club of mostly bad governments and they have when necessary circled the wagons to protect each other and I think you need no better example of that than the AU's total weakness in dealing with the Zimbabwe situation. But, I think the African Union certainly has great potential, it's still very young, some of the commissioners are extremely capable people and I think we are only going to see the AU get stronger.



Owen Barder

Chris, would you have liked to see more specifics on the conflict part of the speech, and do you have a sense of what you would be recommending if you were trying to advise this administration on how to tackle the kind of conflicts that you study and work on in Africa?

Chris Blattman

I guess I'd say a few things. I agree with Todd that the AU is – can be weak, and can be dithering on certain issues like Zimbabwe; that's probably true of any international organization. The UN because of the way the Security Council is structured is weak and dithering and ineffective on countries that are of strategic interest to its members. This is always going to be true, and so that's maybe a good reason why we have lots of different of these potential sources of peacekeeping forces.

Strengthening the AU's capacity to peace-keep is – strikes me as very important. Mahmood Mamdani in his book on Darfur, *Saviors and Survivors*, accuses the U.S. and UN, and I think he's probably right of actually really undermining the effectiveness of the – or at least not seeking to strengthen the AU peacekeeping force because they would like to see an international peacekeeping force. And that's certainly not the way to sort of build the capacity of Africans and African nations to police other places when there is the political will to do so, as there seems to be in this case.

But more broadly this first point, which I started out with, which is about this broader sense of governance, is that I think one of the – and seeking for checks and balances – I think one of the outcomes of having more checks and balances and more balance of power, strengthen legislature, strengthen judiciaries, freer presses, stronger civil societies, is that it gives opposition groups a – one, a voice and two, an opportunity to pursue power through peaceful means.

And so as long as we do not see the opportunity to achieve power, to achieve change, social change in one's country, to achieve wealth for good or for ill through peaceful means I think we are going to see it – continue to see it through violent means. And so this attention to the smaller governance issues, in the absence of a real public debate about decentralization and powers and checks and balances, is fundamentally what's going to drive conflict in the long run. We have to find an alternative route other than warfare and victors to create stable political equilibria and I think my hunch is that's it.

Owen Barder

Thanks, Chris. So overall, we've got a sense from this speech of what the Obama Administration's approach to Africa might be. Todd, you served in the State Department working on African Affairs under President Bush. What's your sense of whether and how this administration will have a different policy on Africa than the last administration? Where do you think it's going to go, and what do you think – what would you be advising it to do, overall?

Todd Moss

Well, I think, given the President's personal links to Africa, he is in a unique position to have influence and to take the U.S.-Africa partnership to the next level. And I think the issue will be whether he is able to focus the resources of the U.S. government to actually try to achieve that.

Now, obviously, I worked in the previous administration, so I am slightly biased, but I do think, having watched Africa policy in Washington D.C. for almost 20 years now, that the Bush Administration elevated Africa within the foreign policy hierarchy to a degree that we've never seen before. The attention on Africa was greater than we've ever seen, that's reflected in things like the budget, in things like the number of meetings, in the level of engagement that we've had. And that the record, the Bush record in Africa is actually incredibly positive and something that the new administration I don't think necessarily needs to run away from, and I think that's something that they actually recognize. The basic pillars on which the U.S.-Africa partnership stand, in terms of political freedom and democracy and ending conflict, of fighting disease, promoting economic opportunity, those are fundamental, bedrock American national interests and those also do not change when the administration changes.



I certainly have found that there is just not that much partisanship within the Africa policy community, so I do not expect – for all of those reasons, I do not expect major changes. In fact I think the challenge that the administration is going to face is actually trying to maintain that level of engagement, given the economic situation in the world, given the very strong pull that the foreign policy community will get toward Pakistan, toward China. It's actually extraordinary, I think, the level that Africa has reached, and I think just trying to keep that and to manage the expectations within Africa itself about what the U.S. can and is willing to achieve, I think, will be the big challenges.

Owen Barder

Chris, you gave the speech overall an A-minus, I think, which is a pretty good mark from a professor at Yale, are you optimistic that President Obama will do enough on Africa, what would you be advising, overall?

Chris Blattman

Well, considering that Yale students customarily get 50% As or A-minuses, maybe it's not quite so generous, but I do sincerely – I did like it as a speech. It's easy to point out the flaws. I think I was disappointed on the lack of specificity on some of the bigger questions like conflict and governance, but you know, what do we expect from a short political speech on the first, on the first visit to Africa. What there has been a lack of is just clarity on what the Africa policy is going to be going forward, and that would excite me in the coming months, is a sense from somebody in the administration, probably Johnnie Carson, I suppose, to really lay out what the strategic focus is going to be and how they feel about some of these issues.

I think the reason I liked it overall is because it was this message of optimism and hope and it was a focus on a successful country and on how to be successful and on taking responsibility and looking towards the future and that's something that, you know, sometimes surprisingly to me isn't said more often, and it's – it would be a wonderful message and perspective for the aid community in general to adopt.

Owen Barder

You've been listening to Development Drums with me, Owen Barder in Ethiopia, and with Chris Blattman at Yale, and Todd Moss at the Centre for Global Development. Chris, Todd, thanks very much for coming on Development Drums.

Chris Blattman

Thank you.

Todd Moss

Thanks, Owen.

[Audio Presentation] Barack Obama speaking in Accra, Ghana, 11th July, 2009.

Ghana, freedom is your inheritance. Now it is your responsibility to build upon freedom's foundation. And if you do, we will look back years from now to places like Accra and say, "This was the time when the promise was realized. This was the moment when prosperity was forged, when pain was overcome, and a new era of progress began. This can be the time when we witness the triumph of justice once more." Yes, we can. Thank you very much. God bless you. Thank you.

Owen Barder

Thanks for listening to Development Drums, I am Owen Barder and my guests today have been Todd Moss and Chris Blattman. Thanks to both of them.

Thanks too to my father, Brian Barder, for making Development Drums possible. It's he that arranges the links between me here in Addis Ababa and far-flung places such as, in today's episode, Washington D.C. and Connecticut.



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