

# BEHIND the HEADLINES

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Gleneagles:  
Assessing Canadian  
“leadership” on Africa

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**Canada**

## From Kananaskis to Gleneagles: Assessing Canadian “leadership” on Africa

DAVID R. BLACK

Three years ago, in the context of the Kananaskis summit of the G8, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien orchestrated an agenda that for the first time focused the attention of the world's richest countries on the monumental challenges facing the world's poorest continent. In early July 2005, this time at the instigation of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, at Gleneagles the G8 will do it again. In between, our government has focused more attention and resources on Africa than ever before. It is appropriate, therefore, to assess Canadian claims to leadership on Africa against this record of activity and, more substantially, to assess the extent to which Canada has been able to contribute to the improvement of sub-Saharan Africa's prospects.

The Canadian government's overall approach through this period has followed a “satisficing” logic: it has been, on balance, “good enough” to sustain Canadian leadership claims, at least in relation to other rich countries, but it has fallen short of genuine leadership in relation to the real needs of African countries and peoples. To be sure, there have been initiatives of real importance—on HIV/AIDS and the “responsibility to protect,” for example—supported by prodigious efforts on the part of individual Canadians within and beyond government. On the whole, however, Canada's more routine contributions have been just enough to be credible (and sometimes less than this), probably compromising more “heroic” initiatives of the sort noted above. As Canadian decision makers contemplate their ongoing role in Africa's affairs, therefore, they would be well served by focusing more on making consistent *contributions* to the continent's needs and on *good followership* of important initiatives by

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others, and less on the sometimes unseemly preoccupation with making and sustaining leadership claims.

Two important reports inform this analysis. The first is the government's recent International Policy Statement (IPS), *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, released in April of this year; the second is the report of the Commission for Africa, chaired by Tony Blair, entitled *Our Common Interest* and released the month before.<sup>1</sup> The latter, in particular, provides a wide-ranging, comprehensive, and in many respects highly impressive analysis and prescription for Africa that can usefully inform the thinking of Canadian policy makers and others interested in African affairs.

The analysis that follows is in line with the three Ds that government policy increasingly aspires to harmonize: diplomacy, specifically in the plurilateral context of the G8; defence, or more accurately human security; and development, through Canada's evolving aid program. This triple focus gives less attention to the increasingly important realm of commercial relations and corporate social responsibility than it deserves. However, such concerns are increasingly integrated into the priorities of diplomacy, security, and development in Canadian policy, so that commercial issues are not completely absent from the stock-taking below.

#### WHAT IS AT STAKE IN AFRICA?

There are both ethical and interest-based foundations for the increasing preoccupation with Africa in the "rich world"—the term used in the Commission for Africa's *Our Common Interest*. These are cogently summarized in the report. The raw facts are that sub-Saharan Africa is the world's poorest continent, with half its population living in absolute poverty and with average per capita incomes that are lower today than 30 years ago. This year, millions of child and maternal deaths will occur that should be easily preventable; 40 million children will not be able to go to school; and 2 million people will die as a result of HIV/AIDS, many of whom would have lived comfortably and productively had they had access to anti-retroviral drugs readily available elsewhere. In the meantime, agricultural subsidies in the rich world for the production of surplus food (which is then pushed onto the world market to the detriment of Africa's hard-pressed farmers) exceed Africa's *total* GDP. Ethically, then, the commission is entirely right to conclude:

The contrast between the lives led by those who live in rich countries and poor people in Africa is the greatest scandal of our age. To convey the enormity of that injustice we speak in

millions—and yet we have to remember that behind each statistic lies a child who is precious and loved. (p 22)

The interest-based calculus may seem less immediate, especially from the safe distance of Canada, but is no less compelling. A developmentally robust Africa would enrich the world; an impoverished and declining Africa compromises world prosperity—although, problematically, it has enriched individuals and companies within and beyond the continent who too often become obstacles to sustained renewal. An Africa populated by many fragile or “failing” states is one that cannot fulfill the elemental requirements of security for many of its people and becomes a locus of insurgency, instability, conflict, illicit trading, and refugees, that can and does provide support and succour to extremism (including terrorism), and can and does spill over into the affairs of rich countries in Europe and beyond.

On the other side of the ledger, there are clear signs of improvement. There has always been a dangerous tendency to overgeneralize about the depredations of the continent, while overlooking the countries and peoples that have achieved successes, sometimes against long odds, in development, democratization, and social mobilization. Countries such as South Africa (just over 10 years beyond apartheid), Botswana, Ghana, Mozambique, Senegal, and Tanzania can be regarded as relatively promising, notwithstanding the extraordinary challenges (of inequality, HIV/AIDS, etc.) they continue to confront.

More broadly, the G8 at Kananaskis and beyond were responding to a bold initiative from some of Africa’s most prominent and respected leaders, in the form of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).<sup>2</sup> There is a tendency to overstate the novelty of NEPAD, particularly in the claim that it represents the first comprehensive plan for African recovery and development to emerge directly from the initiative and vision of Africans themselves (to be truly “homegrown”). NEPAD does, however, contain important new emphases on the need for improved governance and on African responsibility for addressing and settling continental conflicts, and it proposes new institutional mechanisms to give them effect (notably the nascent African Peer Review Mechanism). The spread of multi-partyism and electoral democracy on the continent remains, on the whole, flawed and fragile but is moving toward consolidation in a number of key states. In appallingly destructive conflicts in countries which could and should be anchors of continental renewal—the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Sudan—as well as

in others that are less significant continentally but no less compelling in human terms, notably Sierra Leone, peace processes have begun that are immensely challenging but at least offer hope for the future. In short, there is much that is positive for the rich world to respond to—and a sense of opportunity that, if lost, could lead to regressive consequences ‘too ghastly to contemplate’.

For the Canadian government and its partners in the G8, these ethical and interest-based concerns about Africa are brought together by the challenge it poses to the promise of globalization, in which they are all so heavily invested. The first paragraph of the federal government’s new IPS argues: “Globalization ... has generated unprecedented levels of wealth. Yet many have been left behind and unexpected threats have emerged.” *Our Common Interest* notes starkly, “Globalisation must also mean justice on a global scale.” Failure to respond effectively to Africa’s manifold challenges sends the message that globalization, after all, cannot overcome (and is indeed complicit in) the marginalization and impoverishment of millions of the world’s people.

There are, of course, serious doubts about whether reform projects framed by the logic of globalization—as both NEPAD and *Our Common Interest* are—can in fact respond successfully to this imperative. Thus, if those who have been the principal beneficiaries of globalizing trends, particularly at their political apex in the G8, are to sustain the viability and legitimacy of this project, they must demonstrate the will and the ability to assist in the formidable challenges of improving Africa’s prospects.

#### THE PLURILATERAL DIPLOMACY OF THE G8

Canada’s engagement with Africa, which has waxed and waned throughout the post-decolonization era, has always been motivated and facilitated by its multilateral affiliations.<sup>3</sup> The large African memberships of both the Commonwealth and the Francophonie as well as the ongoing preoccupations of the United Nations with the political, security, development, and rights challenges of its African members have compelled Canada, as a dedicated multilateralist, to become much more engaged with African affairs than it would otherwise have been. These same historic affiliations and networks have also underpinned the trans-societal linkages between African and Canadian civil society groups that have been a persistent and often creative dimension of our relations with the continent.<sup>4</sup>

In light of the historic opportunity of hosting the G8 summit in 2002, combined with the heartfelt priorities of a legacy-minded

prime minister and the savvy introduction by prominent African leaders of their NEPAD vision at the Genoa summit in 2001, the prioritization of Africa at Kananaskis became compelling for Canada's political leadership. To the credit of those leaders and their public servants, they succeeded in sustaining this priority despite the shock of 9/11 and its aftermath. A full day of the two-day summit was devoted to Africa, and for the first time four African leaders—Mbeki of South Africa, Obasanjo of Nigeria, Wade of Senegal, and Bouteflika of Algeria—were full participants in the discussions. Ultimately, Canadian officials played a pivotal role in orchestrating agreement on an unprecedented Africa Action Plan (AAP) by G8 leaders at the summit itself.

The plan incorporated “more than a hundred specific commitments” reflecting G8 consensus on where and how they should “respond to NEPAD’s promise.”<sup>5</sup> These commitments spanned the areas of peace and security, governance, resource mobilization, and human resources, among others. The AAP placed particular emphasis on channelling support to “Enhanced Partnership Countries” that “demonstrate a political commitment to good governance and the rule of law, investing in their people and pursuing policies that spur economic growth and alleviate poverty.”<sup>6</sup> This approach has been reiterated and reinforced in the IPS, as will be discussed below. Each summit government was left free to designate its own “Enhanced Partners,” however. Indeed, while the veteran summit watcher Sir Nicholas Bayne highlighted the similarities between the AAP and the seminal Marshall Plan for Europe of the post-Second World War years in a cautiously optimistic assessment of the former, he noted (among several important differences) that the G8’s approach to Africa was compromised by the lack of coordination between distinct national initiatives.<sup>7</sup>

What, then, can be concluded about the import of the AAP three years on—and about Canadian contributions to Africa through it? Viewed positively, Kananaskis can be said to have initiated a sustained process of engagement with African issues and governments. Follow-up was built into the initial agreement, with governments obliged to report on their progress toward meeting AAP objectives and with leaders’ personal representatives for Africa carrying on the work. In this regard, the fact that the Gleneagles summit will feature a strong focus on Africa can be taken as evidence of Canadian success, at least in setting the agenda.

On the other hand, the efforts of individual G8 member states have fallen far short of the needs and expectations alluded to in the

AAP. Beyond the issue of lack of coordinated effort, critics at the time noted that the AAP produced only a qualified commitment to devote to Africa half (roughly \$6 billion) of the \$12 billion already committed to increased development assistance at the Monterrey Summit on Financing for Development—far short of the \$64 billion in new financing the NEPAD program was estimated to require. The editorial verdict of the *Guardian Weekly* was that “they’re offering peanuts to Africa—and recycled peanuts at that” (4–10 July 2002).

Subsequent trends and analysis have underscored just how inadequate the commitments arising from Kananaskis have been. *Our Common Interest* notes that according to the 2005 report of the UN Millennium Project, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving world poverty by 2015, solemnly embraced by the world’s governments in 2000 and routinely reaffirmed since then, will be reached in Africa on current trends in 2150—135 years late. The commission’s analysis supports the need for an immediate doubling of aid to Africa—by an additional \$25 billion per year—in the coming three to five years, and a further increase of the same magnitude for 2010–2015 in order to meet the MDGs and its own programmatic objectives. Thus, the increased attentions to Africa initiated in Kananaskis have yet to elicit an adequately resourced and concerted response.

For its part, the Canadian government has earnestly pursued the commitments it helped to orchestrate through the AAP. Before the 2002 summit, in December of 2001, it established a five-year, \$500 million Canada Fund for Africa as, in the words of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), “a showcase for Canadian leadership in pursuit of effective development through a series of large-scale, flagship initiatives in support of NEPAD and the G8 Africa Action Plan.”<sup>8</sup> In reporting on its own performance before the Sea Island summit in 2004, the government noted that in May 2003 (according to the G8 Research Group at the University of Toronto):

Canada led the G8 in implementation of a selected set of 11 Africa-related priority commitments post-Kananaskis, with a final compliance score of 85%. A further study of interim compliance results in February 2004 concluded that, along with the UK, Canada continues to lead the G8 in implementation of 12 post-Evian issue areas.<sup>9</sup>

The paradox of this finding is that, if Canada is leading in compliance with AAP objectives, the overall strategy of plurilateral

mobilization through the G8 is at best compromised and at worst failing, since the objectives of the plan could be met only by mobilizing the much larger means of Canada's larger G8 partners. In the absence of sustained followership, as Cooper, Higgott, and Nossal concluded some years ago, claims to leadership will ring hollow.<sup>10</sup>

#### HUMAN SECURITY

Africa's rise to prominence on the Canadian foreign policy agenda in the context of Kananaskis was crucially foreshadowed by the rise of the "human security agenda" under the foreign minister-ship of Lloyd Axworthy from 1996 to 2000. Simply put, one could not take human security seriously as a policy priority without focusing attention on Africa, where human *in*security is more widespread than anywhere else on earth. This, juxtaposed with Canada's term on the Security Council in 1999–2000, created both motive and opportunity for a heightened level of involvement in a series of issues and causes of potential importance to Africa, as well as various specifically African human security crises. In general, the government has had more impact at the relatively lofty and abstract level of agenda setting, "norm entrepreneurship," and research, and less impact in specific human security crises on the ground, where the drawing down of the country's foreign policy resources over the 1990s has been telling. The longer-term question becomes: how long and how successfully can a country credibly pursue high-minded "soft power" objectives if it is unable to be more than a marginal player when resource commitments are called for—whether in an immediate crisis or in the long, hard slog of post-conflict peacebuilding?

The litany of Canada's norm- and institution-building contributions, during and since the Axworthy years, is well known. The Ottawa Convention on land mines, the heightened focus on civilians (especially children) in armed conflict, Canada's contributions to the creation of the Rome Statute launching the International Criminal Court, and its role in sponsoring the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty and championing the responsibility to protect arising from this commission are all diplomatic achievements that could, over time, hold significant human security benefits for Africans. Nevertheless, from a more critical perspective, it is important to ask whether such "freedom from fear" achievements are mere palliatives if the underlying structural causes of insecurity and conflict, rooted in global as well as national inequalities and injustices, remain unaddressed. Far less successful have been

efforts to promote action on the containment and rollback of the global trade in small arms.

Somewhat more concretely, during Canada's term on the Security Council our UN ambassador at the time, Robert Fowler, did important work in sharpening the impact of sanctions as chair of the Angola Sanctions Committee. The creation of an unprecedented panel of both government and non-governmental experts produced results when the panel's pointed report successfully highlighted key features of the Angolan war economy and produced recommendations that helped choke off the UNITA rebel movement's ability to sustain this brutal, decades-long conflict. Similarly, the role of Canadian state and non-state actors in supporting the emergence of the Kimberley Process to undercut the trade in conflict diamonds is a significant, if still fragile and partial, achievement. But efforts to come to grips with the activities of Canadian resource extraction companies in situations of insecurity and exploitation, such as those that have prevailed in the Sudan or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have had less success. Such Canadian companies have become major players on the continent (accounting for \$62 million of a total of \$362 million in corporate mineral exploration activities in Africa in 2000, for example<sup>11</sup>). Yet the Canadian government's unwillingness to bring pressure to bear on Talisman Oil about the human security implications of its activities in southern Sudan before the company's disinvestment illustrated how ineffectual its approach has thus far been on issues of corporate social responsibility (CSR). How Canada responds to the Commission for Africa's clarion call for a "sea change in the way the business community ... engages in the development process in Africa," in particular through the promotion and reinforcement of various initiatives on CSR, will be an important indicator of its willingness to act in an area where the activities of Canadians have real impact and leverage.

Generally speaking, Canada has had least impact in situations of immediate human security crisis and in fragile recoveries under the auspices of multilateral peacebuilding operations. This is most obviously due to our very limited ability to make concrete resource commitments ("put boots on the ground"). There are many indicators of Canada's modest capacity, but the starkest is that as of April 2005, of the tens of thousands of troops deployed in Africa on multilateral peace support operations, precisely 23 were Canadians (slightly up from 13 of 35,000 when UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan addressed Canada's parliament in the spring of 2004, and further increased by the commitment in May 2005 of 31 Canadians

to the UN operation in Sudan). Of course, it will rightly be argued that small contributions, with appropriate focus and skills, can be very helpful. Nevertheless, when deployments to Africa are compared with the 949 troops deployed in Afghanistan, or even the residual force of 83 in the Balkans, it is hard not to see the numbers as a telling sign of the relative priority of Africa's compelling human security needs in Canadian foreign policy.

How does Canada's low profile affect its credibility and effectiveness in pursuing the long-term normative and institutional innovations discussed above? It is hard to answer this question with any degree of precision. However, it is worth juxtaposing Canadian leaders' ongoing efforts to win support for the cosmopolitan and expansive principles associated with the responsibility to protect against our commitment of resources to the humanitarian emergency unfolding in the Darfur region of Sudan since early 2003. As Prime Minister Paul Martin said at the UN in September 2004, the responsibility to protect means that the international community should have a legal right (and implied duty) "to intervene in a country on the grounds of humanitarian emergency alone when the government of that country is unwilling or unable to protect their people from extreme harm as a result of internal war, repression or state failure." Ever so slowly the Canadian government has, in the company of other donor states, ratcheted up its commitments of humanitarian aid and logistical support to the African Union (AU) force that has been deployed to the region. In May 2005 it announced additional commitments, bringing total support to \$198 million since 2000, as well as the creation of a special advisory team to promote and coordinate Canadian initiatives. (Interestingly enough, and for the first time ever in Canadian political history, the context for these announcements was a situation in which the fate of the minority Liberal government could be directly affected by its responsiveness to Africa.)

Nevertheless, this process has been so tardy and so limited in relation to the magnitude of the emergency that Gerald Caplan was moved to publish a powerfully argued op-ed piece in the *Globe and Mail* on 6 August 2004 titled, "To our great shame, 'Canada doesn't do Africa.'" To be sure, situations like that in Darfur are wicked problems, and Canada has hardly been alone in its dereliction. Nor are our contributions—for example, through the supply of chartered helicopters and military equipment to the AU observer force—unwelcome or unhelpful. But the kind of statist logic that keeps our commitments respectably in line with (or even modestly ahead of)

those of comparably positioned “friends of Africa” seems a far cry from a response driven by the real needs of Africans. Moreover, if Sudan has become the place where the Canadian government has now felt moved to concentrate its political and humanitarian “firepower,” one must ask what is to become of our engagement with less media-worthy but critically important situations in, among others, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or Ivory Coast.

It is hard to determine precisely what the government’s IPS presages for Canada’s erstwhile “human security agenda.” To be sure, the very marginal place of human security language in the statement suggests that policy makers are retreating from human security as a “hallmark” of Canadian foreign policy, as it was in the Axworthy years and their immediate aftermath. Certain prominent human security priorities from this period, notably children in armed conflict, appear to have largely dropped off the policy map. On the other hand, the reinvestment in and reorientation of the Canadian Armed Forces, the forthright commitment to promoting the responsibility to protect, and the creation of a five-year, \$500 million Global Peace and Security Fund “to provide security assistance to failed and failing states, as well as resources for post-conflict stabilization and recovery” (IPS, p 14) are signs that core elements of the human security agenda are being reinforced, at least in its relatively limited “freedom from fear” manifestation. Nevertheless, one must ask whether we are prepared to allocate the sort of resources, and take the sort of risks, that being serious about a responsibility to protect would entail; and whether, if we are not prepared to do so, we can credibly persuade others to.

#### DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Our inability to contribute substantial security resources to African operations would matter less if Canadian aid commitments had been more robust and consistent. In fairness, since the start of the current decade the government has been engaged in a protracted process of rebuilding and redesigning the aid program. But it is a long road back: between 1988–1989 and 1997–1998, defence spending was cut by 22 per cent and all other government programs by 5 per cent, but the aid program suffered a 33 per cent reduction. These cuts significantly exceeded the overall trend among donors in proportional terms and hit Africa hardest. Between 1990 and 2000, bilateral aid declined by 7.2 per cent for Africa, 3.5 per cent for the Americas, and 5.3 per cent for Asia.<sup>12</sup> On a continent where, in the

absence of major commercial relationships and geographic proximity, Canada's most important linkages often revolve around development assistance, it is hard to overstate the disruptive implications of cuts of this magnitude. The cuts occurred, moreover, in apparent disregard for the stagnation and privation of African countries faced with implementing wrenching structural adjustment programs and, in some places at least, mired in conflicts of unprecedented deadliness.

Of course, there have been serious concerns about the effectiveness and, at times, irresponsible and destructive repercussions of aid to some African countries. Nevertheless, the overall record concerning responsible aid spending is positive, and, as the analysis of *Our Common Interest* demonstrates, it is simply inconceivable that the continent could mobilize the resources required to meet the Millennium Development Goals and related priorities for renewal without a major infusion of "good aid."

The Canadian government's process of reinvestment and redesign has been associated with the ongoing pursuit of "strengthening aid effectiveness," as a key 2001 CIDA discussion document labelled this goal. Since then CIDA has moved, gingerly, toward the objectives of an aid program with more focused recipients and sectors, and toward closer coordination with the priorities and practices of the donor community as a whole. The baseline from which this process began was the most diffuse bilateral aid program in the world. (In Africa, in 2000, Canada was among the top three donor countries in only Gabon and Swaziland, and spent at least some aid funds in every African country other than Libya.) On the other hand, there have been concerted moves within the international donor community toward common principles for effective development assistance and much closer donor coordination through such mechanisms as World Bank-sponsored Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAPs).

The IPS indicates that the government is set to move Canada's aid program decisively in the direction of greater focus and closer coordination. Most contentiously, it announced the government's intention to concentrate two-thirds of the bilateral aid program in 25 core "Development Partners" by 2010. This would appear to be a significant step toward the focus on "Enhanced Partnership Countries" promised three years ago in the G8's AAP, among other documents. In line with AAP commitments, 14 of these 25 core partnership countries will be African.<sup>13</sup> The criteria applied to identify them are threefold: level of poverty (that is, aid will be concentrated in poorer developing countries); ability to use aid effectively (a

value-laden judgement that will be significantly shaped by the World Bank's *Country Policy and Institutional Assessment*), and "sufficient Canadian presence to add value." In addition, the aid program will be concentrated in four key sectors, firmly in line with MDGs and wider donor community priorities: governance, private-sector development, health, and basic education. Environmental sustainability and gender equality are retained as cross-cutting priorities.

What can be said about the implications of these steps? First, they should be treated with a healthy dose of skepticism. Aid priorities have been notoriously malleable, permissive, and inconstant. It does not inspire confidence that as recently as 2003 CIDA issued a major new policy document prioritizing agriculture and rural development—a priority that has disappeared in the IPS. Similarly, closer scrutiny of the "fine print" in the IPS brings into question how much *real* concentration of bilateral aid allocations will arise from the process of designating core partnership countries.<sup>14</sup> It remains to be seen, therefore, whether the priorities spelled out in *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World* will be durable and defining.

Second, however, Canada's aid program is long overdue for the sort of geographical and sectoral focus that has been announced. Whether the country priorities established are the right ones and whether they will be politically sustainable are more troublesome questions. Two considerations suggest that the selections are problematic. First, given the emphasis elsewhere in the IPS on the need for timely support to post-conflict countries, one wonders whether there will be sufficient flexibility within the bilateral program to support such countries through the difficult yet critical transition toward long-term stability and development. Countries like Sierra Leone, to cite one key example, are likely to require dedicated and stable aid partnerships for at least a generation if they are to successfully navigate the journey toward a more peaceful and sustainable future. Second, it could make more sense in terms of aid effectiveness and influence to concentrate on aid partners within particular sub-regional contexts, as opposed to a dispersed group of states across the continent. Since politics and development are increasingly framed in sub-regional terms (such as within the Southern African Development Community or the Economic Community of West African States), regional as well as bilateral country focuses would have been advisable.

Third, while all the sectoral priorities chosen are important, each in its own way, together they are firmly within and supportive of the evolving parameters of the neo-liberal aid consensus. The

emphases on governance as a largely technical challenge, on private-sector development, and even on health and education (as necessary elements in enhancing productivity) reflect the overall vision of the World Bank and allied institutions. Important questions remain, however, about the ability of a market-centred, neo-liberal development strategy to deliver equitable growth and environmental sustainability to African countries and peoples—an issue to which I will return in concluding.

Finally, there is the symbolically as well as practically important question of resource commitments. As noted above, aid spending was savaged in the 1990s. It declined from 0.49 per cent of GDP in 1990 to 0.25 per cent in 2000, dropping Canada well down the donor “league table” (it is 16th of 22 OECD Development Assistance Committee member states in 2000). Given the disruptions caused by cuts of this magnitude, it is hardly surprising that aid effectiveness (as well as CIDA morale) would suffer. In the IPS the government reaffirms its intent to increase aid by 8 per cent per year, thereby doubling international assistance between 2001 and 2010. Aid to Africa is slated to double in the more compressed timeframe of 2003–2004 to 2008–2009. All well and good. However, with the world falling behind on its MDG commitments, and with a growing list of rich countries (including the G8 partners Britain, France, and Germany) committing themselves to firm timetables for reaching the long accepted (but widely unmet) international aid target of 0.7 per cent of GDP by 2015, the Canadian government’s failure to do so is perplexing.<sup>15</sup> The charitable view of its position is that it prudently wishes to avoid making commitments it may be unable to keep. The less charitable interpretation is that its commitments to addressing poverty and inequality, notably in Africa, remain truncated and weak compared with those of true leaders in the field.

#### FROM LEADERSHIP TO FOLLOWERSHIP?

What emerges from this stock-taking is a strangely mixed picture. On the one hand are high-profile and relatively low-cost initiatives at the macro level, with potentially significant but uncertain long-term benefits for Africa. On the other are sharply limited and intermittent resource commitments to the immediate needs of Africans. This is not to gainsay the dedication of the many Canadians, within and beyond government, who continue to work with Africans in pursuit of a better life. Nor is it to suggest that initiatives need be expensive to be “good” or influential. Beyond those already discussed—notably the championing of the responsibility to protect—

another low-cost initiative with potentially very important implications is the passage of legislation allowing drug companies to provide anti-HIV/AIDS drugs to African countries at low cost. A third is Canada's continued support for an effective International Criminal Court, whose potential usefulness has been underscored by the recent Security Council decision to support prosecution under the auspices of the court of those held responsible for the atrocities in Darfur. When set against the real needs and challenges of Africans, however, as opposed to donor league tables and comparative "initiativemanship," it is tempting to conclude (as Jean-François Bayart has done with regard to both the United States and most of Europe) that Canada has shown "a lack of thought and seriousness" in its overall approach.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, Africa's challenges are not amenable to quick fixes; true friends must be prepared to make long-term commitments and to stay the course, learn hard lessons, and make difficult adjustments. A government of Canada's size and means must make hard choices and be prepared to stick with them long enough to give them an opportunity to succeed—a point emphasized by Jennifer Welsh in *At Home in the World*. In the past several years, the Canadian government has reaped what it has sown through the diminution of its foreign and development policy capacities. It must continue—indeed accelerate—its reinvestment in both material and (just as important) intellectual capabilities if it is to make a sustained and meaningful contribution to African renewal. Britain offers a compelling model in this regard.

This brings us back to *Our Common Interest*. The commission itself was a diverse group with a majority of African members, but it was chaired by Tony Blair and prominently featured the UK's chancellor of the exchequer, Gordon Brown (as well as Ralph Goodale and Bob Geldof!). It thus represented a carefully designed effort to simultaneously privilege African voices and catalyze western political will (even if the voices of commissioners themselves were elite ones). A proper review and analysis of the commission's many recommendations, collectively embodying a plan for a "comprehensive 'big push' on many fronts at once" (p 13), is beyond the scope of this brief article. When Canada's overall record is set against the vision, intellectual depth, and comprehensiveness of the commission's report, however, it looks timid and shallow.

Among the admirable features of *Our Common Interest* are a sophisticated and sympathetic interpretation of African history and politics that grounds its analysis and prescriptions; an emphasis on

shared responsibility for Africa's problems, highlighting western complicity and corruption as well as African abuses; and an emphasis on the contradictions and hypocrisy (for example, surrounding trade liberalization) embedded in the current manifestations of globalization and sharply limiting the ability of Africans to benefit from it. More concretely, it calls for ambitious programs of, among other things, debt cancellation, extractive industry transparency, and massive investment in health, education, and infrastructure. Like other recent reports it emphasizes the need for governance reforms and effective action to promote peace and security, while setting out a wide-ranging and coherent set of steps toward these objectives.

There is much to be skeptical about in the report. Most fundamental is the viability of its "third way" vision, combining a firm commitment to market-led economic growth on a global scale with a vigorous call to ensure that the benefits of this process extend to the poor and that the exclusion of marginalized groups is ended. As the report eloquently asserts, "The more global the market, the more it must be balanced by a global culture of solidarity, attentive to the needs of the weakest." (p 66) But can the logic of global capitalism be successfully integrated with a project of global social amelioration and poverty alleviation, especially in a late-developing region like sub-Saharan Africa? Can a vision premised on dramatically increased rates of economic growth be successfully combined with the urgent imperatives of environmental sustainability? (The UK government has said its two key priorities for the Gleneagles G8 Summit are Africa and global warming.) Can Africa's disparate states, the product of bizarre colonial boundary-making, become the vehicles of good governance that the commission regards as essential to the achievement of both its growth and "social upliftment" objectives? Can the ambitious and multi-dimensional "coherent package for Africa" advocated by the commission be successfully combined with "greater flexibility, open-mindedness, and humility" (p 33) on the part of the responsible policy makers?

Finally, and most practically, can the Blair government win sufficient buy-in for the commission's vision from its G8 and European partners to give it a reasonable chance of success? One otherwise sympathetic British media commentator doubts it: "I fear there's not a cat's chance in hell of much of it happening. The US will make mealy-mouthed noises and bin it."<sup>17</sup> Similar apprehensions could be expressed about other G8 members.

Yet the commission's argument remains a thoroughgoing, "blis-

teringly honest” (p 22), and in many respects highly compelling vision for the continent. It is the product of a forthright engagement between leaders from Africa and the west, supported by the formidable research and analytical capabilities which the British government has successfully nurtured over an extended period of time under New Labour in its Department for International Development and other arms of government. It is a vision that the current Canadian government should be able to support fully. Ironically then, as its own capacity deepens, the Canadian government may be able to do more to advance its stated objectives of African renewal by placing greater emphasis on good followership and consistent contributions to the vision of others, and less on the self-conscious pursuit of high-profile “leadership initiatives.”

#### ENDNOTES

1 Government of Canada, *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, www.international.gc.ca.; *Our Common Interest* (11 March 2005), www.commissionforafrica.org.

2 For a useful discussion of the process and argumentation surrounding NEPAD, see Janis van der Westhuizen, “How (not) to sell big ideas: Argument, identity, and NEPAD,” *International Journal* 68, no. 3 (2003), 369–94.

3 For an elaboration, see D. Black, “Canada and Africa: Activist aspirations in straitened circumstances,” in I. Taylor and P. Williams (eds.), *Africa in International Relations* (Routledge, 2004), 140–43.

4 Consider, for example, the important role played by the Canadian NGO Partnership-Africa-Canada in promoting awareness of the issue of “blood diamonds,” and the progress toward the governance arrangements embodied in the Kimberley Process. See I. Smillie, L. Gbarie, and R. Hazleton, *The Heart of the Matter: Sierra Leone, Diamonds and Human Security* (Partnership-Africa-Canada, 2000).

5 Robert Fowler, “Canadian leadership and the Kananaskis G-8 summit: Towards a less self-centred foreign policy,” in *Canada Among Nations 2003: Coping with the American Colossus* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 239. Fowler was the prime minister’s sherpa for the Kananaskis summit as well as Chrétien’s personal representative for Africa—an appointment he retained following the summit itself.

6 Ibid.

7 Nicholas Bayne, "The New Partnership for Africa's Development and the G-8's Africa Action Plan: Is this a Marshall Plan for Africa?" in M. Fratianni, P. Savona, and J. Kirton (eds.), *Sustaining Global Growth and Development: G7 and IMF Governance* (Ashgate, 2003).

8 Canadian International Development Agency, *Canada Making a Difference in the World: A Policy Statement on Strengthening Aid Effectiveness* (September 2002), 26; www.acdi-cida.gc.ca.

9 Canadian International Development Agency, *Canada and the G8 Africa Action Plan: Maintaining the Momentum* (2004), 2; www.acdi-cida.gc.ca.

10 A. Cooper, R. Higgott, and K. Nossal, "Bound to follow? Leadership and followership in the Gulf War," *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (1991).

11 Kairos: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, *Africa's Blessing, Africa's Curse: The Legacy of Resource Extraction in Africa* (2004), 15.

12 These statistics are drawn from David Morrison, *Aid and Ebb Tide: A History of CIDA and Canadian Development Assistance* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 413; and North-South Institute, *Canadian Development Report 2003*, 78.

13 The proposed African Development Partners are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, and Zambia.

14 I am indebted to Denis Stairs for this point.

15 The Canadian Council for International Cooperation, an umbrella coalition of development NGOs, estimates that on current trends the government would not reach the 0.7 per cent target until 2027. See Gerry Barr, "Our hearts are bigger than this," *Globe and Mail*, 21 April 2005.

16 Jean-François Bayart, "Commentary: Towards a new start for Africa and Europe," *African Affairs* 103, no. 412 (2004), 456.

17 Madeleine Bunting, "Taking on the bribe givers," *Guardian Weekly*, 11–17 March 2005.

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