

## Bush Has Quietly Tripled Aid to Africa

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Increase in Funding to Impoverished Continent Is Viewed as Altruistic or Pragmatic

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President Bush's legacy is sure to be defined by his wielding of U.S. military power in [Afghanistan](#) and [Iraq](#), but there is another, much softer and less-noticed effort by his administration in foreign affairs: a dramatic increase in U.S. aid to Africa.

The president has tripled direct humanitarian and development aid to the world's most impoverished continent since taking office and recently vowed to double that increased amount by 2010 -- to nearly \$9 billion.

The moves have surprised -- and pleased -- longtime supporters of assistance for Africa, who note that because Bush has received little support from African American voters, he has little obvious political incentive for his interest.

"I think the Bush administration deserves pretty high marks in terms of increasing aid to Africa," said Steve Radelet, a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development.

Bush has increased direct development and humanitarian aid to Africa to more than \$4 billion a year from \$1.4 billion in 2001, according to the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. And four African nations -- Sudan, Ethiopia, [Egypt](#) and Uganda -- rank among the world's top 10 recipients in aid from the United States.

Beyond increasing aid to Africa, Bush has met with nearly three dozen African heads of state during his six years in office. He visited Africa in his first term, and aides say he hopes to make a return visit next year.

Although some activists criticize Bush for not doing more to end the ongoing genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan, others credit him for playing a role in ending deadly conflicts in Liberia, the Congo and other parts of Sudan. Meanwhile, Bush has overseen a steady rise in U.S. trade with Africa, which has doubled since 2001.

"He should be known for increasing -- doubling development assistance and tripling it to Africa after a period in which U.S. development assistance was essentially flat for decades," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in a recent interview with the Associated Press. "He should be known for the largest single investment in AIDS and malaria, the biggest health investment of any government program ever."

To many longtime Africa supporters, all of this is surprising for a president who is often criticized as lacking curiosity about much of the world and who heads a political party traditionally skeptical of the efficacy of foreign aid.

But attacking African poverty has become a growing priority of some of the religious groups at the core of Bush's political base, and some lawmakers credit them with stoking the president's interest in the subject.

"The evangelical community raised the awareness of HIV and AIDS to the president," said Rep. Donald M. Payne (N.J.), the top-ranking Democrat on the House International Relations subcommittee on Africa. "When the Bush administration came in, HIV and AIDS were not an overwhelming priority. Now we have seen a total metamorphosis."

Current and former White House aides and independent analysts say Bush's interest in Africa is rooted in the numerous humanitarian

crises that continue to bedevil the continent, as well as in the growing importance of Africa in a world increasingly linked by economics and terrorist threats.

"I think there are two reinforcing trends here. One of them is the upside of foreign policy moralism," said Michael J. Gerson, a former Bush aide who was a persistent and persuasive advocate for Africa. "Another one is the growing strategic significance of Africa: the conflict with radical Islam; the problem of failed states and terrorism; and the growing importance of Africa on the resource side: oil."

Some advocates suspect that the Bush administration's interest in Africa is motivated more by business ambitions than altruism. Grants made by the Millennium Challenge Corp., a foreign aid program developed by Bush with the aim of rewarding poor countries that practice good governance, are also partially predicated on whether countries have open markets that allow widespread foreign investment.

"I know a lot of activist groups who believe that the president's stated commitment to Africa is, at best, a play on words," said Nii Akuetteh, executive director of Africa Action, a Washington-based advocacy organization. "First of all, much of the aid is emergency food or medical aid, rather than true development assistance. Then there are conditions that are attached where the emphasis is more on countries that open up their markets so American companies can go in and privatize things like water and electrical service or have access to certain resources."

Bush launched his \$1.2 billion malaria initiative in June 2005 with the goal of reducing malaria-related deaths in 15 African countries by 50 percent. The disease kills more than 1 million people a year, most of them African children under age 5.

The malaria program complements the president's largest global health initiative, the \$15 billion, five-year plan known as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Under the program, about 800,000 Africans are receiving drugs that enable them to live longer with the disease and help to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the virus.

"We launched one of the most important initiatives in American history, as far as I'm concerned, and that is the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief," Bush said at a recent conference on malaria.

PEPFAR, which often funds programs through religious organizations, has come under criticism for promoting faith-based ideology over science, emphasizing abstinence programs and giving inaccurate information about the effectiveness of condoms in preventing HIV transmission. Payne says such concerns have been allayed in recent years, and he and others credit PEPFAR with saving hundreds of thousands of lives.

The Bush administration's efforts in Africa have dovetailed with a rise in aid to Africa from private groups, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as loan forgiveness from organizations such as the World Bank and stepped-up assistance from other countries, including [Britain](#) and [France](#).

"I think [increasing aid to Africa] will be one of the things the president is most proud of when he leaves office," Gerson said. "It doesn't fit the preconception, the caricature that the president somehow has a preference for using the blunt instruments of force in international affairs when in fact on a variety of topics, the president has been a root-cause thinker in an unexpected way."

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