Speaking with Many Voices: Continuity and Change in U.S. Africa Policies

by PETER J. SCHRAEDER*

The story of the blind men and the elephant is universally known. Each... concluded that the elephant had the appearance of the part he had touched. Hence, the blind man who felt the animal's trunk concluded that an elephant must be tall and slender... Others of course reached different conclusions. The total result was that no man arrived at a very accurate description of the elephant. Yet, each man had gained enough evidence from his own experience to disbelieve his fellows and to maintain a lively debate about the nature of the beast.¹

Thoughtful discussions among policy-makers, scholars, and the informed public concerning the trends and transformations in the Africa policies of the United States often parallel the story of the blind men and the elephant. Due to previous experiences or professional interests, Africanists inevitably focus on different episodes of Washington's relationships with the continent to explain the nature of the beast — in this case continuity and change in U.S. intervention.

For example, those attempting to understand why economic sanctions were adopted against South Africa in 1986 may look to the pressure exerted on a politically-atuned Congress by increasingly powerful and vocal anti-apartheid groups. Others wishing to explain the growing military commitment to Ethiopia during the 1960s may discount the role of Congress and, instead, focus on the bureaucratic infighting waged by the State Department. Still others interested in covert intervention in the Angolan civil war during both the 1970s and 1980s may choose to focus on the role played by the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.). The list can go on. Like the conclusion reached in the story of the blind men, the net result is that, although each explanation is partially correct, none is able to provide an accurate description of the elephant as a whole. Ultimately, these

* Assistant Professor of Political Science, Loyola University, Chicago.
widely divergent conclusions contribute to continuing debate over the
true nature of the beast.²

The purpose of this article is to shed some light on the nature of the
proverbial elephant. This understanding begins with a clarification of
the rôles played by various members of the foreign policy establishment
in the formulation and implementation of America’s Africa policies.
Furthermore, by looking at the ways these government agencies
interact, and by examining the patterns that have emerged as a result
of these actions, we can describe and explain continuity and change in
U.S. intervention in Africa since World War II. The central theme of
this study is that the nature of events on the continent has historically
affected the operation of the U.S. policy-making process and, therefore,
continuity and change in U.S. interventionist practices in Africa.

ROUTINE SITUATIONS AND BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS

The tendency has been for the President to relegate day-to-day
responsibility for overseeing U.S.–Africa relations, in the absence of
any crisis, to those national security bureaucracies which primarily
focus on the politico-military aspects of foreign policy relationships.
They include the State Department, the Defense Department, and the
C.I.A., as well as their specialised agencies devoted specifically to
Africa.

1. Bureaucratic Influence Within the Policy-Making Process

Three factors contribute to bureaucratic influence within the policy-
making process: the low level of attention typically paid to African
issues by the President; the executive’s traditional assumption that, due
to their historical colonial heritage, the European allies should assume
primary responsibility for western interests in Africa; and the East–West
dimension of a particular situation.

(1) Low level of attention paid to African issues

Standing at the apex of an immense bureaucratic machinery, the
President as commander-in-chief, head-of-state, chief diplomat, and
chief administrator embodies substantial powers, allowing the White
House to set the agenda for others within the foreign policy

² Of course, unlike the blind men, many analysts consciously choose to focus on one part of the
elephant to argue their views of what the beast does, or should, look like.
establishment. However, although 'The President is rightly described as a man of extraordinary powers', as John F. Kennedy explained, 'it is also true that he must wield those powers under extraordinary limitations'. Among these are the impracticality of one person monitoring relations with more than 150 countries (including over 50 in Africa), and the time constraints imposed by the elected term of office (four to eight years). In addition, the President must contend with a Congress that has a separate and often different foreign policy agenda, a sometimes unco-operative bureaucracy, and lagging levels of general public support.

Newly elected Presidents, therefore, must balance the overwhelming urge to completely reorient the goals, priorities, and substance of foreign policy with a recognition of the time constraints involved. In a process that almost inevitably leads to neglect of Africa, Presidents are forced by necessity to select those countries, geographical regions, and functional issues which receive priority attention by their Administrations. Indeed, although contacts between the U.S. and Africa have expanded in both quantity and quality during the post-World War II period, Presidents from Harry S. Truman to George Bush traditionally have been least interested in, and subsequently have paid least attention to, Africa relative to other regions of the world.

(2) Assumption of European responsibility

Africa's enduring relationship with Europe is a second element that reinforces the President's tendency to allow U.S. Africa policies to be heavily influenced by the national security bureaucracies. All Presidents (although in varying degrees) have traditionally looked upon the continent as a special area of influence and responsibility of the former colonial powers. Therefore, they have generally deferred to European sensitivities and maintained a low profile during routine periods when one of these nations has taken the lead on a particular foreign policy issue. This European component was best summarised in 1968 by George Ball, Under Secretary of State in the Kennedy Administration, who noted that the U.S. recognised Africa as a 'special European

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4 Even under President Jimmy Carter, Africa accounted for only 109 per cent of his Administration's foreign-policy actions in 1977, still trailing all other regions of the world (the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe were second with 146 per cent) and, in fact, decreased in importance by nearly 50 per cent over the next three years. For an explanation and discussion of these figures, see Jerel A. Rosati, The Carter Administration's Quest for Global Community: beliefs and their impact on behavior (Columbia, SC, 1987), pp. 123, 130, 139, and 147.
responsibility’, just as European nations recognised ‘our particular responsibility in Latin America’. Although these spheres of influence have become increasingly broached by both sides in the past two decades, there is no disputing the fact that the White House continues to look to its European allies – especially France, Britain, and, to a lesser degree, Italy, Belgium, and Portugal – to take the lead in their former colonial territories.

(3) East–West dimensions of the situation

Since 1947, when George F. Kennan formulated the doctrine of containment and the Soviet Union and communism became the central concerns of U.S. strategic thinking, policy-makers have tended to view Africa from an East–West perspective. Although there have been variations in the assessment of the Soviet threat and the utility of containment as originally conceived, all Presidents from Truman to Bush have sought to limit Soviet influence in Africa. The result of this has been increased presidential attention to African issues when the Soviet Union and its allies became significantly involved on the continent.

Yet, when the East–West element is lacking, there exists a high probability that the President will remain distant and uninvolved. Thus, the day-to-day responsibility of overseeing policy is left in the hands of the national security bureaucracies. Indeed, as the cold war continues to subside in the 1990s, Africans have cause to fear the decline of already low levels of presidential interest in their continent. As discussed later, some have even argued that growing U.S.–Soviet co-operation entails greater risks for Africa. For example, citing the traditional Swahili proverb, ‘when the elephants [superpowers] fight, the grass [Africa] suffers’, one Africanist claimed that ‘When the elephants make love, the grass suffers just as much.’

2. Bureaucracies and Organisational Missions in Africa

The net result of bureaucratic influence within the policy-making process is that the Africa policies of the United States become fragmented, interpreted differently according to the established

organisational missions of each bureaucracy that historically has been created to deal with a particular aspect of the foreign policy relationship. Subsequently, each fosters an institutional culture that both supports its 'mission' and 'socialises' individuals into working towards its attainment. Although other sources of behaviour are important, such as the substantive views and personal ambitions of the most influential bureaucrats, the critical theme of this section is that the latter often tend to interpret national security according to their agency’s rôle and mission in the foreign policy establishment.

The Department of State was the first among the national security bureaucracies to recognise the importance of the continent through the creation in 1958 of a separate Bureau of African Affairs, headed by an Assistant Secretary of State who, in turn, is supported by a Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary, three Deputy Assistant Secretaries, as well as a host of regional offices staffed by country directors and desk officers who monitor day-to-day developments within sub-Saharan Africa. (Events within North Africa are monitored by the State Department’s Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs.)

The primary mission of the Africa Bureau is the maintenance of smooth and stable political relationships with all African governments. The emphasis is on quiet diplomacy and the negotiated resolution of any conflicts that may arise. Career foreign service officers (F.S.O.s) within the Bureau are usually the most willing of any members of the executive branch to place policies in alignment with African aspirations. Consequently, they are also more sensitive to the importance that African leaders attach to regional political associations, such as the Organisation of African Unity (O.A.U.). These same F.S.O.s, when addressing the nature of conflict within a particular country, also tend to balance the traditional impulse to attach blame to external powers, such as the Soviet Union and its allies, with a well-grounded understanding of the conflict’s regional, cultural, economic, historical, and political roots.

The C.I.A. was the second among the national security bureaucracies to recognise the importance of Africa through the creation in 1960 of a separate Africa Division within the Deputy Directorate of Operations (D.D.O.) that is responsible, inter alia, for mounting covert actions

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8 African issues previously were handled by the Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs, and before then by the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs.

9 Other Bureaux in the State Department, although generally in agreement over the necessity to pursue diplomatic options, have missions which can conflict with those pursued by African Affairs. For example, the Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs is naturally more concerned with European sensitivities when African issues arise and, thus, serves to reinforce the executive branch’s tendency to defer to European, as opposed to African, sensitivities.
throughout the globe.^{10} (Not to be confused with the Deputy Directorate of Intelligence (D.D.I.) and its Africa-related Office of African and Latin American Analysis, or that portion of the C.I.A. committed to providing the Director of Central Intelligence (D.C.I.) and the White House with up-to-date summaries and analyses of gathered intelligence.) Even though it was created during roughly the same period as the State Department’s Africa Bureau, the Africa Division’s traditional official mission is radically different: to carry the ideological battle against the Soviet Union and communism to the continent, in efforts that range from the cultivation of local agents to the mounting of covert operations.

Subsequently, African aspirations and the regional causes of conflict on the continent have been downplayed by D.D.O. officers. They usually have had the greatest tendency within the executive branch to view Africa as a strategic East–West battleground, and to attribute instability in a particular country to externally-motivated communist aggression. Openly contemptuous of self-proclaimed Marxist régimes, ‘leftist’ leaders allied with the Soviet bloc, liberation movements, and, more recently, ‘radical’ activists, such as Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi, the C.I.A. prefers close liaison with the security services of European allies and friendly African régimes.

The Defense Department has been the relative latecomer among the national security bureaucracies in recognising the importance of Africa. Its Office of International Security Affairs (I.S.A.) waited until 1982 before appointing a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense to head the newly created Office for African Affairs.^{11} This tends to downplay local concerns in favour of the continent’s strategic position within the overall U.S.–Soviet military balance, as does the C.I.A. Moreover, the domestic nature of an African régime is not perceived as an impediment to military co-operation as long as it is pro-West in nature.

The primary mission of the Office of African Affairs is the co-ordination and facilitation of two major military objectives on the continent: maintaining stable, pro-West governments through the transfer of military equipment and the training of local forces in its usage; and ensuring continued access to strategically located bases and

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^{10} African issues previously were divided between the C.I.A.’s European and Middle Eastern Divisions. For a useful critical anthology of the Agency’s activities in Africa, see Ellen Ray, William Shaap, Karl van Meter, and Louis Wolf (eds.), *Dirty Work 2: the CIA in Africa* (Secaucus, NJ, 1979).

other facilities for responding to local crises and, most important, military contingencies in Europe or the Middle East. Subsequently, military objectives are carried out by the three major services—the navy, air force, and army—each of which has its own particular bureaucratic mission on the continent.12

Other components of the executive branch, of course, deal with the non-politico-military aspects of America's Africa policies. The U.S. Agency for International Development (A.I.D.) pursues economic development in select African countries through a variety of projects and programmes. The Departments of Commerce and Treasury, with their emphasis on strengthening and expanding the economy, seek inroads for trade and investment in the continent. Finally, the U.S. Information Agency (U.S.I.A.) promotes greater cultural understanding through, for example, exchange programmes and goodwill missions. Although each of these bureaucracies obviously plays an important African rôle, the emphasis in this article is on the politico-military or 'national security' aspects of U.S. Africa policies.

The impact that differing bureaucratic missions have on the implementation of policies is illustrated by a brief examination of the various representatives stationed as of 1987 at the U.S. Embassy in Djibouti, a former French colony and current military base for approximately 3,500 French soldiers.13 The Ambassador, John P. Ferriter (a career F.S.O.), sought on behalf of the State Department to maintain a correct, low-profile approach in Djibouti that would augment, but not replace, traditional French interests. Great emphasis was placed on consultation with the French, avoiding any actions that might appear to undermine their influence. The representative of the Defense Department, Major Brian McMillan, was less concerned with the political aspects of the U.S.–Djiboutian relationship than with this small country's strategic location adjacent to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. (Indeed, another military officer complained that the State Department's low-profile policy was too pro-French at the expense of American interests.) The C.I.A. chief of station's concern was with Soviet-bloc influence in Djibouti, especially from neighbouring Ethiopia; he naturally worked extensively with the local French intelligence service to monitor perceived Soviet threats. Finally, the A.I.D. representative, John Lundgren, eschewed both politics and questions of military/strategic interest, being primarily interested in

12 Also involved in a very minor way are the varying (but limited) sized security detachments of the U.S. Marines that guard American embassies in Africa.
13 These observations result from the author's internship with the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Djibouti during 1987.
Djibouti’s economic development and its rôle in the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development. In short, all four Americans were representative of, and assessed U.S. policy interests according to, their respective bureaucratic cultures and missions.

The U.S. response to ethnic strife in Burundi in 1972 provides an excellent example of how established organisational missions can affect the policy-making process in Washington.\(^{14}\) Through the spring and summer of 1972, nearly 250,000 members of the Hutu ethnic group were killed by the ruling minority Tutsi régime headed by Colonel Michel Micombero. For reasons to be explained, the President, Richard M. Nixon, and the National Security Adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, remained largely uninvolved in this issue, allowing policy to be formulated and implemented by the State Department’s Africa Bureau. The two officials recognised as responsible for the policy were the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, David D. Newsom, and the country director for Central Africa, Herman J. Cohen (as of 1989, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs).

The U.S. response to the internal crisis is revealing both for what the Africa Bureau did and did not do. In accordance with standard operating procedures, quiet diplomatic efforts were initiated to enlist the support of Burundi’s regional neighbours and the O.A.U. to press the Micombero régime to stop the killings. However, it soon became apparent that most African governments – themselves beset by the delicate political problem of how to deal with their respective minority populations – were opposed to this policy. Moreover, it was feared that further actions would run the risk of damaging relations with Burundi and other countries on the continent. Thus, decision-makers chose a course of inaction. Indeed, despite the fact that the U.S. imported nearly 75 per cent of Burundi’s primary export of coffee, potentially viable options, such as economic sanctions, were dismissed.

The Africa Bureau even suggested that Washington refrain from publicly denouncing the Micombero régime, although such inaction clearly would have been in direct opposition to international conventions and the frequently invoked U.S. commitment to human rights. The reason behind the decision, according to a group of specialists that included former State Department personnel, was simple: ‘For a bureaucracy which conceived its day-to-day job as the maintenance of untroubled relations with African governments, an

independent American response to the Burundi killings threatened that mission. As an official of the Africa Bureau noted afterwards: 'If we'd involved ourselves in this, we'd be creamed by every country in Africa for butting into an African state's internal affairs. We don’t have an interest in Burundi that justified taking that kind of flack.'

3. Bureaucracies and Maintenance of the Status Quo

The Africa Bureau’s tendency to rely on previously established ways of thinking in formulating policy towards Burundi underscores an important aspect of bureaucratic cultures. A fundamental resistance to change, or a predilection towards the maintenance of the status quo, has been long recognised by both policy analysts and practitioners alike. Among the most important factors contributing to bureaucratic conservatism are the safety of relying on established, standard operating procedures, as well as the realisation that undue risk-taking may permanently damage one’s career by effectively blocking upward mobility through the ranks. The net result, according to Morton Halperin, is that the ‘majority of bureaucrats prefer to maintain the status quo, and only a small group is, at any one time, advocating change’. Subsequently, members of a bureaucracy – especially its head – will often put up a fierce fight rather than submit to changes that they perceive as infringing on their ‘territory’, or threatening the integrity of their ‘mission’.

The importance of entrenched bureaucratic missions in contributing to the maintenance of the status quo is portrayed by the fierce struggle waged during the first two years of the Kennedy Administration over how to respond to Portugal’s colonial policies in Africa, most notably Angola. Prior to 1961, Washington consistently supported Portugal’s assertion that the management of its colonies was an internal affair, subsequently voting against (or at least abstaining) when the issue of self-determination was brought before the United Nations. Speaking with one voice, the various bureaucracies placed Portugal’s membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) Alliance and

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15 Brown, Freeman, and Miller, op. cit. p. 12.
17 See John R. Oneal, Foreign Policymaking in Times of Crisis (Columbus, Ohio, 1982).
19 For an excellent discussion of this theme, see Hedrick Smith, The Power Game: how Washington works (New York, 1988), especially chs. 8 and 15.
the 1951 joint U.S.–Portugal defence treaty—which allowed U.S. access to a highly valued military base on the Azores—above the demands of African nationalists.

However, in the aftermath of Kennedy’s inauguration in 1961, this policy changed. Appealing to the President’s personal commitment to support the independence aims of African nationalist movements, two political appointees, G. Mennen Williams, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and Adlai A. Stevenson, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, outmanoeuvred the Europeanist elements within the executive branch and succeeded in altering the once cozy Washington–Lisbon relationship: restrictions were placed on Portugal’s practice of diverting U.S.-supplied Nato weaponry to counter-insurgency efforts in Africa; the C.I.A. and other components of the Administration were directed to open up contacts with nationalist elements in Angola; and, perhaps most significant, the U.S. for the first time cast a vote at the U.N. in favour of a resolution calling upon Portugal to make progress towards independence for Angola.20

This shift in policy, although denounced by proponents of the former status quo, did not galvanise opposition within the executive branch until significant bureaucratic missions were threatened or called into question. In a statement referring to what the Defense Department considered to be one of the most important U.S. military assets in Africa, the Portuguese President, António de Oliveira Salazar, threatened to refuse renewal of the 1951 agreement allowing U.S. access to the Azores military base—due to expire at the end of 1962—unless interference in Portugal’s Africa policies was terminated. The Defense Department, led by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, strongly argued that the Azores base was indispensable to security concerns in Europe and the Middle East, and therefore should not be compromised in order to curry favour with African nationalists.21

These military rationales were reinforced by political arguments underscoring the importance of maintaining the integrity of the Atlantic Alliance. For example, Dean Acheson, the vocal Secretary of State under Truman, argued that continued U.S. interference not only risked access to the Azores base, but would inevitably lead to greater instability in Portuguese Africa and even revolution in Portugal itself.22

The pro-Portuguese sentiments of both the military and political groups were ultimately supported by the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, and the National Security Adviser, McGeorge Bundy. The net result of this debate was a gradual return in late 1962 to the status quo policy of favouring Portuguese interests and, thus, a reversal of the short-lived victory by Stevenson and Williams in placing policy in greater alignment with African nationalist concerns.

4. Bureaucratic Incrementalism

The inherently conservative nature of bureaucracies prompts resistance to change. In turn, the self-interested nature of the various departments or agencies propels members to seek to widen the rôle of their own organisation within the policy-making establishment. The primary means of doing this, of course, is through greater amounts of economic and military aid, and by an expansion of activities within the host country. Other ways of achieving closer ties include the Africa Bureau’s pursuit of White House visits for Heads of State, the Defense Department’s growing interest in joint military manoeuvres with African régimes, and the C.I.A.’s willingness to share intelligence findings with friendly and trusted leaders. Regardless of the strategy pursued in strengthening ties with a country, the term ‘incrementalism’ best captures the resulting process of change: once a foreign policy relationship is established, the self-interest nature of bureaucracies often contributes to the gradual enhancement of relations with that country.

U.S. citizens posted abroad in an official government capacity are usually the most vigorous proponents of their host country’s interests, regardless of whether they are State Department F.S.O.s, Defense Department military attachés, or C.I.A. case officers. The reason behind this advocacy – derisively termed ‘clientitis’ by those who claim to be looking at the ‘big picture’ in Washington – are threefold. First, an individual’s perception of a country’s worth almost always rises once he/she lives there and gets to know the people. Second, the representative is often responding to constant pressure exerted by the host government to enhance the nature of the relationship. Most important, however, is that advocacy is inherent in the field officer’s job. As a former military attaché to Zaïre explained:

Because Americans measure success in terms of accomplishing something during their two-to-four-year term in-country, field officers are driven to get
something tangible to leave behind for the host government as proof of their success; the greatest inclination is to seek greater levels of aid.²³

The rationale for such an approach is simple: by leaving behind a successful legacy, the officer hopes to obtain the best of both worlds—good reviews with the in-country élite, as well as with superiors back in Washington.

Returning to our discussion of Djibouti, one finds that U.S. officials in the field (like their predecessors) attempted in 1987 to increase aid levels according to their perceived bureaucratic missions. The U.S. Ambassador, for example, in efforts backed by the C.I.A. chief of station, argued that increased levels of economic aid were necessary to ensure Djibouti’s political stability and pro-West path. Even though this small state was not perceived to be threatened with instability at the time, the rationale given was that additional aid would act as an insurance policy against possible negative future trends. The representative of the Defense Department, noting Djibouti’s strategic location in a region marked by growing instability, sought more military aid, doubtless bearing in mind that increased unrest in Somalia would result in the termination of U.S. access to military facilities in that country. Finally, the A.I.D. officer, who perhaps pushed the strongest for greater amounts of development aid, noted that support for the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development was of crucial importance to the long-term economic health and vitality of Djibouti.

The process of incrementalism helps explain why it is rare for there to be a significant change in the majority of U.S. Africa policies even when a new Administration has seemingly different beliefs than its predecessor. As noted earlier, the time constraints of a four-year term of office, coupled with the traditionally low level of attention paid to African issues by the President, favours bureaucratic influence and, therefore, general support of the status quo within the policy-making process. Perhaps the most significant barrier to change, however, is that the numerous activities of the bureaucracy simply do not fall under the realm of presidential action. As Rusk commented after Nixon had replaced Johnson:

A transition is not so earth-shaking. Of the thousand or so cables that go out of here every day, I see only five or six and the President only one or two. Those who send out the other 994 cables will still be here. It is a little bit like changing engineers on a train going steadily down the track. The new engineer has some switches he can make choices about—but 4,500 intergovernmental agreements don’t change.²⁴

²³ Confidential interview. ²⁴ Quoted in Halperin, op. cit. p. 292.
Rusk’s train metaphor suggests that established bureaucratic missions greatly strengthen the possibility that U.S. Africa policies will continue to chug along in existing tracks, until the Administration and/or Congress are faced by some kind of crisis that may precipitate a reassessment. In the absence of such a catalyst, the attention of the White House is usually focused elsewhere, as policies continue to be maintained and strengthened by the bureaucratic freight-train.

**Crisis Situations and the High Politics of White House Involvement**

The President plays a potentially pivotal rôle in reorienting U.S. Africa policies regardless of what happens in the continent. If a bureaucratic rift during a routine or non-crisis period cannot be decided at the level of the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense, for example, the issue, by necessity, may be pushed to the White House for resolution. Similarly, general policy reviews, especially at the beginning of a new Administration, as well as the internal processes that lead to the drafting and subsequent interpretation of influential documents and speeches, also offer unique opportunities for a more active stance to be adopted by the President. However, a major thesis of this article is that Africa’s low standing relative to other regions of the world ensures that presidential involvement is rare and episodic. It is generally only when the White House is confronted by a crisis situation in Africa that a formerly obscure country becomes the focus of the President and his closest advisers.\(^{25}\) If an African issue is perceived to be of such importance, then the departmental bureaucracies are likely to find that the White House is asserting control over the policy-making process.

1. *Crisis and Presidential Attention to U.S. Africa Policies*

The triggering mechanism for sustained presidential attention to African issues is usually the occurrence of some type of intense politico-military conflict, such as the 1977–8 Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia. The most important determinant of what becomes a crisis in the eyes of the President, however, is the nature of external intervention in the situation, most notably by the European powers and/or by the Soviet Union and its allies.

(1) Crisis and the rôle of European powers

U.S. Presidents have generally recognised European spheres of influence within former African colonies, in essence relying upon their allies to maintain western interests on a day-to-day basis. Similarly, U.S. reaction to a crisis in Africa is generally peripheral when a European power is embroiled. Specifically, if it is perceived that the latter can handle the situation, the tendency has been for the White House to defer to European intervention, essentially producing little if any change in policy.

The initial U.S. response to the 1967–70 Nigerian civil war provides an excellent illustration of White House sensitivity to European preferences in a crisis situation. After a year of spiralling ethnic violence, the Ibo-dominated region of Eastern Nigeria proclaimed itself the Republic of Biafra in May 1967. While Britain, the Soviet Union, and the majority of African states supported the Nigerian Federal Government when, nearly two months later, it launched a military attack to end the secession by force, France, Portugal, South Africa, Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, and Zambia provided Biafra with economic and military support. Despite Nigeria's significance to the West as Africa's most populous country, a major producer of oil, and one of the continent's avid supporters of a capitalist path of development, the U.S. embargoed the sale of arms to both sides and maintained a low profile. Characteristic White House sensitivity to British policy preferences was one of the major reasons for keeping out of the conflict, despite a variety of sympathies in the Johnson and Nixon Administrations, as well as repeated requests by the Nigerian Federal Government to purchase armaments. According to F. Chidozie Ogene, a former Nigerian diplomat:

It had been suggested by the British government that Britain should supply all the arms needed by Nigeria since Nigeria was a British sphere of influence. The U.S. ... according to the British proposal ... should not supply arms [but] was required to give full support for the British position in Nigeria.\(^{27}\)

In sharp contrast, when there is a politico-military power 'vacuum' in Africa – historically due to the inability or refusal of a weakened and withdrawing colonial power to maintain order – the tendency has been for the White House to take a much more active rôle, sometimes transforming U.S. foreign policy towards the country in question. For

example, prior to 1974, Angola remained a low priority for the White House, with Presidents Truman to Nixon ultimately deferring to Portugal’s efforts to maintain its colonies in Africa. U.S. policy continued to be dominated by traditional political and military arguments over the need to maintain access to military bases in the Portuguese-controlled Azores islands. However, the overthrow of the régime headed by Marcello Caetano in April 1974 set off warning bells in Washington. The coup d’état was carried out by a group of young military officers determined to end failing, and increasingly costly, counter-insurgency efforts in Africa by granting independence to Portugal’s colonies—all of which were confronted by guerrilla insurgencies supported by the Soviet bloc. As discussed more fully below, the potential for instability created by the voluntary withdrawal of Portuguese colonial rule ensured that Central Africa and, particularly, Angola would become top priorities for the White House.

(2) Crisis and the rôle of the Soviet Union

Moscow’s influence and actions in the continent have constituted, perhaps, the most important factor in determining the levels of the President’s involvement in the Africa policy-making process since World War II. In those crisis situations in which an East–West dimension was lacking or somehow neutralised, the White House would generally avoid involvement in the conflict, resulting in foreign policy continuity—incrementalism prevailed. For example, returning to the example of ethnic strife in Burundi in 1972, it has been documented that the Nixon White House, although aware of the situation, left the formulation and implementation of the U.S. policy response to the specialists in the State Department’s Africa Bureau, almost certainly because the massacres in a region of little strategic concern lacked any hint of communist involvement.

White House inaction as concerns Burundi starkly contrasts with the marked degree of attention focused on Angola after the 1974 Portuguese coup d’état. One of the primary differences was that the U.S.S.R. and Cuba were the primary backers of Agostinho Neto’s Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (M.P.L.A.)—the other two guerrilla groups vying for power were Holden Roberto’s Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (F.N.L.A.), supported by the People’s Republic of China and...
Zaire, and Jonas Savimbi's *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (Unita), backed by China and South Africa. Ignoring the advice of those in the Administration who argued against assisting any of the guerrilla factions seeking military supremacy, President Ford, at the urging of his Secretary of State and the C.I.A., decided to covertly intervene on the side of the F.N.L.A.31 According to John Stockwell, the C.I.A. chief of the Angola task force who managed the covert operation to assist the F.N.L.A.: Kissinger saw the Angolan conflict solely in terms of global politics and was determined that the Soviets should not be permitted to make a move in any remote part of the world without being confronted militarily by the United States... Uncomfortable with recent historic events, and frustrated by our humiliation in Vietnam, Kissinger was seeking opportunities to challenge the Soviets.32 In short, the crucial element driving America towards involvement in the civil war was not identification with the aims of a particular guerrilla group, or even an interest in Angola. Rather, the fact that the Soviet Union aligned itself with one of the guerrilla factions was the deciding factor in turning the Angolan conflict into a crisis and, therefore, paving the way for U.S. support for the F.N.L.A. and Unita.

### 2. Crisis and the Impact of Administration World-Views

The process of bureaucratic incrementalism suggests that, in the absence of crisis, many of the Africa policies of a previous Administration are likely to continue, even though they may differ from the perceptions of the nature of the world held by the new President and his most trusted foreign-policy specialists (usually the Secretary of State and the National Security Adviser), which subsequently form the basis of their external initiatives. The reason behind this discrepancy between beliefs and behaviour is the traditionally low level of interest accorded to African issues by the White House. Thus, despite the inauguration of an Administration with widely varying beliefs from its predecessor, policies are often continued in accordance with established guidelines.

Indeed, the continent's lower priority relative to other regions of the world sometimes makes U.S. Africa policies particularly susceptible to White House domestic political considerations. For example, as already

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31 For a succinct analysis of this topic, from which the discussion throughout the remainder of this article is based, see Gerald Bender, "Kissinger in Angola: anatomy of failure", in René Lemarchand (ed.), *American Policy in Southern Africa: the stakes and the stance* (Lanham, 1981 edn.).

noted, despite Kennedy’s strong-anti-colonial beliefs, his Administration largely failed to move beyond rhetoric in the case of Portuguese-ruled Africa. Although it was argued that established bureaucratic missions played the major rôle in ensuring policy continuity, internal factors influenced Kennedy’s decision to decide in favour of the pro-Portuguese forces within the Administration. He allegedly feared that a rift in the Nato alliance (threatened by Portuguese leaders if the U.S. continued to interfere in its colonial affairs) would alienate security-minded Republicans in the Senate and, thus, doom any changes of congressional ratification of a much-desired U.S.–Soviet test-ban treaty. The President apparently also was looking ahead to the 1964 elections, and ‘had to take into account the possibility that the loss of the Azores, on top of a test ban, might open the way to a Republican attack on the administration for alleged neglect of vital national interests’.34

Yet, bureaucratic factors and domestic influences weigh considerably less when emergencies and setbacks prompt the White House to examine critically and review – often for the first time – the nature and goals of U.S. policy towards a particular African country. In addition, crisis situations also serve as natural opportunities for the President to shape public opinion, and to make the parochial policies of individual bureaucracies more consistent with each other, as well as with the Administration’s world-view, the most important element of which is the collective perception of the U.S.S.R. and its ability to create instability in the Third World.

For a notable example of the importance of the Administration’s world-view in contributing to a particular policy outcome during a crisis situation we need only return to our discussion of the civil war in Angola. In March 1975, U.S. policymakers faced a crucial turning point when the F.N.L.A. attacked the M.P.L.A., and a latent power struggle erupted into what would become an escalating civil war among the three competing guerrilla factions. The uncertainties created by Portugal’s abrupt withdrawal from the region, as well as Washington’s perception of the U.S.S.R.’s willingness to profit from the situation (Moscow sent nearly 100 tons of arms to the M.P.L.A. from March to July), prompted the White House to become more involved in the crisis. Kissinger (after receiving final approval from Ford) is recognised as the key architect of the interventionist response.

33 Marcum, loc. cit. p. 10.
Conflict had arisen among the national security bureaucracies, primarily between the C.I.A., which pushed for increases in aid to the M.P.L.A. (as well as for the initiation of assistance for Unita), and the State Department, especially the Africa Bureau, which argued against supporting any of the guerrilla factions. Although Secretary of State at the time, Kissinger dismissed the opinions of the State Department and leaned, instead, towards the C.I.A.'s policy of providing greater amounts of covert aid to the F.N.L.A. (and, shortly thereafter, to Unita). An important element of defeating the M.P.L.A. on the battlefield was reliance on funnelling significant amounts of covert aid through both South Africa and Zaire, as well as tacit support for those two countries to introduce their regular forces onto the Angolan battlefield. The net result was a significant shift in policy as the White House indirectly intervened in the civil war.

The critical aspect of this case is that the dramatic change in policy was the result of the world-view held by Kissinger, who initially perceived the U.S.S.R. as a traditional great power with which the United States could negotiate:

We have sought – and with some success – to build more constructive relations with the USSR, to reduce tensions in areas where our vital interests impinge on one another; to avoid destabilizing confrontations in peripheral areas of the globe – such as Angola.\(^{35}\)

However, constructive relations hinged on the Secretary of State's perception of the need to maintain and regulate the existing balance of power between the two superpowers in Africa. According to Kissinger, this was upset by the arrival of Soviet-backed Cuban troops to assist the M.P.L.A. régime: 'Let there be no mistake about it – the culprits in the tragedy that is now unfolding in Angola are the Soviet Union and its client state Cuba.'\(^{36}\) His concern, however, was not for Angola, described as of 'modest direct strategic interest', but the greater East–West issues of global stability and U.S. credibility. 'If the United States is seen to emasculate itself in the face of massive, unprecedented Soviet and Cuban intervention', explained Kissinger, 'what will be the perception of leaders around the world as they make decisions concerning their future security?'\(^{37}\)

Most important, by denigrating the regional aspects of the conflict in favour of its East–West dimension, intervention became justified, if not


\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.
necessary, to contain perceived Soviet expansionism. In accordance with the Nixon Doctrine and the constraints imposed by the Vietnam war on direct military involvement in the Third World, the proper means of intervention was indirect support of regional proxies (such as the F.N.L.A. in Angola) as aided by local client states (such as South Africa and Zaïre).

**EXTENDED CRISIS SITUATIONS AND DOMESTIC POLITICS**

The longer an African crisis continues, the greater is the likelihood that more factions outside the executive branch will become involved in the formulation of policy as debate eventually spills over into the public domain. This often leads to a situation in which domestic politics, generally played out within a congressional context, increases in importance as a determinant of policy. Although public opinion and the activities of interest groups theoretically can directly influence the deliberations of the President, the most common pattern is one in which Congress, either acting independently or as the result of public opinion and organised interests, takes the initiative away from the executive branch and asserts its influence within the policy-making process.

1. **Congressional Involvement in the Policy-Making Process**

Congress historically has played a limited role in the realm of foreign policy, particularly towards Africa. Among the most important reasons are the benign neglect of African issues by both the Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as the limited powers of Congress relative to the executive branch.

(1) **Benign neglect of African issues and sub-committee activity**

Re-election pressures and time constraints imposed by elected terms of office (two years for Representatives and six years for Senators) force members of Congress to give priority to those domestic and international issues which will receive their attention. Since the primary objective of most members is to be re-elected, and since most citizens know or care very little about the African continent, conventional wisdom suggests that it is politically smart to avoid

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38 See Jerel A. Rosati, 'Congressional Influence in American Foreign Policy: addressing the controversy', in *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* (New Brunswick), 12, Fall 1984, pp. 311–33.
unpopular issues. The rationale for such a perspective, as presented in its most cynical form: 'If my constituents don’t care about Africa, why should I?'

The desire for career advancement is also relevant. For example, due to their limited financial and staff resources, the Africa Sub-Committees of both the House and the Senate are usually not held in high regard by those aspiring for a more influential forum, and some just use their membership as a 'launching pad' for more prestigious appointments, such as those relating to East-West or European affairs. As explained by Charles C. Diggs (Democrat, Michigan), former chairperson of the House Sub-Committee on Africa: 'As soon as somebody on the Foreign Relations Committee becomes eligible for a sub-committee, that person is usually given Africa.' Yet, 'as soon as they can... they move on to something else'.

A simple analysis of the evolution of activity within the House and Senate Sub-Committees on Africa underscores both the historical neglect of the continent within Congress, as well as a growing (although still small) voice for increased attention to African concerns. Although established by the Foreign Relations Committee in 1959, the Senate Sub-Committee on Africa suffered from a rapid succession of chairpersons, and did not become really active until 1975 (over 16 years after its creation) under the leadership of Senator Dick Clark (Democrat, Iowa). But his successor in 1979, Senator George McGovern (Democrat, South Dakota), avoided controversial issues on Africa because of waning popularity at home. Senator Nancy Kassebaum (Republican, Kansas), perhaps the most active of any sub-committee chairperson during the 1980s, originally did not want to

39 Danaher, op. cit. p. 49.  
40 Confidential interview.  
41 Danaher, op. cit. p. 61.  
43 Interview with Charles Diggs, 13 June 1989.  
44 The greatest lack of interest occurred in 1963 when no Senator was willing to chair the Sub-Committee on Africa after Albert Gore (Democrat, Tennessee). The Majority leader, Mike Mansfield (Democrat, Massachusetts) who, in his own words, ultimately took the post 'to avoid the embarrassment of leaving it unfilled', had no time for the Sub-Committee, which became dormant. See John Joseph Seiler, 'The Formulation of U.S. Policy Toward Southern Africa, 1957–1976: the failure of good intentions', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, Storrs, 1976, p. 275.  
focus on Africa, and instead sought to head the Sub-Committee on Latin America.\textsuperscript{46} Finally, the chairperson since 1987, Senator Paul Simon (Democrat, Illinois), is perceived by some of his peers as lacking the necessary interest and drive to make the Sub-Committee effective.\textsuperscript{47}

In sharp contrast, the House Sub-Committee on Africa has boasted a relatively stable leadership of five chairpersons from 1959 to 1991 (as opposed to 11 for the Senate Sub-Committee during the same period), becoming an active and aggressive challenger of executive branch policies in Africa, beginning in 1969 with the tenure of Diggs,\textsuperscript{48} and continuing under his successor, Stephen J. Solarz (Democrat, New York), until he left in 1981 to lead the more prestigious Asia and Pacific Sub-Committee. During the next 10 years, Howard Wolpe (Democrat, Michigan), not only brought distinguished Africanist credentials to the position of chairperson, but earned high marks among numerous knowledgeable groups for his active oversight of executive branch policies. Since 1991 Mervyn Dymally (Democrat, California), a distinguished member of the Congressional Black Caucus, has been an outspoken proponent of greater attention to Africa, especially as regards human rights and famine relief.

Yet, it is important to remember that both Sub-Committees, even with highly motivated chairpersons and members, face an uphill task in pushing African issues to the forefront of congressional debate. As Wolpe once noted, the House Sub-Committee on Africa represents only nine members of Congress (six Democrats and three Republicans in 1991), 'who must seek the support of a majority of their 435 colleagues in the House if their efforts are to have their fullest impact'.\textsuperscript{49} Even if legislation originating in the House Sub-Committee on Africa is voted out of the House Foreign Relations Committee and passes the full House, inevitable differences with a Senate version must be overcome. (Assuming, of course, a similar bill has been adopted by the Senate Sub-Committee on Africa, the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, and the full Senate.) Although all bills must follow this legislative process, congressional neglect and indifference regarding African issues make it very difficult to secure the needed enactments.

(2) **Powers of Congress relative to the executive branch**

The twin themes of political survival and career advancement have not only fostered disinterest in Africa, but have ultimately reinforced the already limited constitutional rôle of Congress in framing U.S. Africa policies, generally restricted during non-crisis periods to four realms.

(i) **Confirmation of presidential appointees.** In one of its most basic but vital legislative rôles, Congress confirms numerous presidential appointees who will carry out the policies of the Administration, including the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and designated ambassadors. Although approval for Africa-related appointments has rarely been denied, this power has enabled members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to temporarily frustrate the wishes of the President.50

(ii) **Convening of hearings.** Other congressional oversight responsibilities include the sponsorship of fact-finding missions to Africa, the convening of meetings with visiting Heads of State and other dignitaries, and the conducting of hearings on African issues, which increased dramatically in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Able to request testimony from knowledgeable persons, including those responsible for any decisions being taken or planned in the continent, hearings serve to broaden congressional awareness and understanding of the Administration’s policies, as well as provide the basis for informed debate.

(iii) **Authorisation and appropriation of aid.** A more significant aspect of the power of Congress is its constitutionally-mandated rôle of authorising and appropriating all military and economic aid requested by the executive branch.51 Traditionally, Congress and the Administration have usually been less willing to do battle with each other over aid priorities in Africa as opposed to other regions of greater concern. In addition, the combination of governmental priorities and the traditional congressional reflex to cut levels of foreign assistance has led

50 For example, Senator Jesse Helms attempted to derail the Reagan Administration’s policy of ‘constructive engagement’ by delaying Chester Crocker’s confirmation as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs over a period of six months during 1981.
to Africa finding itself placed last in the hierarchy of foreign aid. (In F.Y. 1991, for example, Africa received only roughly 6 per cent of all U.S. economic and military bilateral aid.) Indeed, due to Africa’s low status in the eyes of most policy-makers, aid to the continent is especially hard hit during times of tight budgetary restrictions, such as in the aftermath of the 1986 Gramm–Rudman–Hollings deficit reduction act.

(iv) Legislation. Finally, Congress can affect U.S. Africa policies by passing bills on issues of particular importance. Although such enactments ‘theoretically’ offer an almost unlimited avenue for Congress to assert its influence within the policy-making process, in order to be successful, the efforts must transcend the innumerable partisan and ideological splits both within and between the Senate and the House of Representatives. Historically, these differences have limited the ability of Congress during non-crisis periods to pass legislation either independent of, or counter to, the established Africa policies of the executive branch. As Stephen R. Weissman, former staff director of the House Sub-Committee on Africa, is quick to point out, the executive branch enjoys several ‘natural advantages’ in the realm of foreign policy. Among these are its veto power, superior organisational capacity, and the political clout of Senators/Representatives and interest groups, especially those affiliated with the White House. The executive branch’s natural advantage is further enhanced by the large degree of apathy among most members of Congress concerning Africa.

2. Interest Groups and the Public

Defined as individuals ‘who share some common attitudes and orientation toward the political process’, interest groups have traditionally attempted to get their views articulated in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The potential for influencing Congress is especially great in that the majority of members do not exhibit much knowledge and/or concern about the continent, and hence are potentially responsive to any highly organised and articulate ‘lobby’ in this field. Even more important, this responsiveness increases when the views of the interest group are shared by constituents in an elected official’s congressional district.

52 Interview with Stephen R. Weissman, staff director of the House Sub-Committee on Africa, 17 May 1989.
As Congress has increasingly involved itself in matters of foreign policy from the mid-1970s onwards, the potential has grown for interest groups to be taken seriously in the formulation of policy. Among those that have sought to influence the substance of U.S. Africa policies are (i) academic organisations, such as the African Studies Association (A.S.A.), an Atlanta-based grouping of scholars; (ii) non-profit organisations, such as the Chicago-based Mozambique Support Network; (iii) foreign lobbyists, such as Fenton Communications, a Washington-based company which has served as an agent of the Angolan régime; (iv) private institutions, such as the Ford Foundation, with its supervision of the much acclaimed Fulbright Scholar Program; (v) private corporations, such as Foote Mineral, with its active lobbying in pursuit of the repeal of sanctions against Southern Rhodesia in 1972; and, finally, (vi) human rights organisations, such as the Washington/New York/London-based Africa Watch.

An equally important aspect of domestic politics is the nature of public opinion. In general, most Americans remain largely unaware and disinterested in U.S. Africa policies, with what can best be described as a National Geographic outlook on the continent: lush jungles, exotic animals, and, more recently, drought and famine. These images are reinforced by a popular press which highlights the negative and sensationalist aspects of African politics, as well as the ‘safari tradition’ of U.S. journalism: sending generalists on short assignments, as opposed to those willing to make a long-term commitment to becoming authorities on Africa.

Practitioners from all sections of the ideological spectrum in the United States agree that the 30 million African-Americans are potentially the most important lobby for African interests, not least because they comprise roughly 12 per cent of the electorate. Yet, this ‘black voice’ has historically been rather weak, especially when compared to the strength of other ethnic groups in support of their ‘homelands’, most notably Jewish-Americans. One of the primary

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reasons for this lack of influence has been the absence of an organised constituency capable of effectively working within the U.S. policy-making establishment.58 'Blacks as blacks may identify with Africa', noted Martin Weil in a prescient article in 1974, 'but it is only as Americans that they can change U.S. foreign policy in Africa.' If African-Americans ever 'gain leverage', he continued, 'it will be those black politicians who are most successful within the system who will do so – those who can command the respect of their black constituents and reassure white America at the same time.59 The establishment and evolution during the 1970s and 1980s of the Congressional Black Caucus and TransAfrica are indicative of efforts by African-American elites to increase their leverage on U.S. Africa policies.

(1) The Congressional Black Caucus

The C.B.C. was formed in 1971 by 13 members of the House of Representatives who were determined that Congress should take more seriously the domestic plight of African-Americans and U.S. Africa policies. Yet, at the time most C.B.C. members were lacking in seniority (and, therefore, power) in the House and, perhaps of greater significance, were willing to leave issues concerning Africa largely in the hands of Diggs, who chaired not only the C.B.C. but also the House Sub-Committee on Africa. It would not be until Diggs had politically passed from the scene in the late 1970s, that more members would assume greater responsibility for African issues.60 Most important, the 1980s witnessed the doubling in size of the C.B.C. (26 members in 1991), as well as the dramatic rise in the seniority of its members. Not only has the Democratic Caucus chairperson, William H. Gray, III (Democrat, Pennsylvania), assumed the office of Majority Whip (one of the most powerful positions in the House), but four full House committees, one select committee, and 13 sub-committees are also chaired by C.B.C. members. As Bob Brauer, special counsel to Ronald V. Dellums, proudly noted in 1989: 'The power of the C.B.C. is disproportionate to its numbers. We now have a significant constitu-

60 Interview with Bob Brauer, special counsel to Representative Ronald V. Dellums, 25 May 1989.
ency in the House. 61 Despite such glowing reports, C.B.C. members are quick to note that their primary responsibility will continue to be the domestic plight of African-Americans.

(2) The TransAfrica Lobby

Whereas the C.B.C. is constantly organising support within the House of Representatives, the strategy of TransAfrica—a political lobby for a broad range of issues concerning Africa and the Caribbean—is to mobilise the African-American electorate. ‘There must be as many as 100 congressional districts across the country in which we can make a significant difference in the voting patterns of congressional members’, notes Randall Robinson, executive director of TransAfrica, and ‘Our efforts are focused on those people in those districts’.62 The commitment to forge this pressure group emerged from the Black Leadership Conference convened by Diggs and Andrew Young in September 1976 in opposition to the Ford Administration’s policies in Southern Africa. Incorporated as a political lobby in July 1977, TransAfrica as of 1991 boasts over 15,000 members located in 15 chapters throughout the country.

Although the C.B.C. and TransAfrica constitute a powerful lobbying apparatus potentially able to mobilise a growing African-American electoral voice, the fact remains that they rarely have the power to significantly alter U.S. Africa policies during routine periods. Like both the House and Senate Sub-Committees on Africa, members of the C.B.C. and TransAfrica face an uphill battle in any attempt to persuade the largely uninterested majority in Congress that changes are needed. Part of a ‘critical mass’ of individuals that coalesced during the late 1970s, these two groups are nonetheless regularly concerned about Africa, and can be counted on to make their voices heard in Congress.63 For example, they helped to defeat the conservative elements that attempted in 1979 to repeal the sanctions against Southern Rhodesia that had been reinstated two years previously by Congress at the request of the Carter Administration.64 In this sense, the C.B.C. and TransAfrica have an important ‘watchdog’ role to play

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61 Ibid.
63 The terminology is that of Weissman, op. cit.
in defending established policies which they perceive as beneficial to U.S. interests in Africa.

3. Extended Crisis and Domestic Politics

The combination of congressional and popular neglect of African issues relative to the more extensive and consistent involvement of the executive branch and, particularly, the national security bureaucracies, has two conclusive results. First, a relatively disinterested Congress, in the absence of crisis, will generally not support the efforts of small groups within that body, or among the general public, to alter existing U.S. Africa policies significantly. Second, even during short-term crises when an issue may attract the attention of many members of Congress, as well as a variety of interest groups and portions of the general public, control of the policy-making process naturally flows to the President and the bureaucracies of the executive branch. A typical aspect of such situations is that the President is generally able to rally public and congressional support for the Administration’s foreign policy objectives.

The longer a crisis continues, however, the greater is the possibility that the extent of U.S. involvement in a particular African country will become the concern of more and more members of Congress, and of other interested individuals outside the Administration. This is especially true if an issue becomes the focus of popular opinion. When executive branch policy veers too sharply away from mainstream congressional opinion – which tends to mirror that generally held by the public – the combination of extended crisis and popular pressure may result in congressional attempts to alter the line being taken by the President. In this regard, the media often plays a crucial rôle in determining whether a previously ignored aspect of U.S. Africa policies is transformed into a mainstream domestic political issue. Specifically, the mobilisation of sympathetic public support for a more activist rôle by Congress is generally fed by extensive media coverage of a particular event – a phenomenon which, in turn, is fuelled by extended crisis situations and their ability to sell newspapers.

The potentially significant rôle that domestic politics can play in affecting U.S. policies in Africa during extended crisis situations is clearly portrayed by our ongoing discussion of U.S. intervention in Angola’s 1975–6 civil war. The Ford Administration, under the personal direction of Kissinger, originally intended to shield its covert operation in Angola from what almost certainly would have been congressional disapproval. Decisions concerning the ever-expanding
U.S. commitment to the F.N.L.A. – from $300,000 in January 1975 to $30 million six months later – were made within the restricted policy-making circles of either the Administration’s ‘40 committee’ or the N.S.C. Yet, the visibility that inevitably accompanies rapidly expanding covert operations led to accusations in the press that the Ford Administration was actively intervening in Angola with Zaïre’s assistance.

The initial response by members of Congress to growing allegations of U.S. intervention provides an illustration of their general lack of interest in African issues. Only one Senator attended any of the hearings conducted by the Sub-Committee on Africa in June and July 1975, namely its chairperson, Dick Clark. As newspaper accounts continued to mount, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a closed meeting in November 1975 at which witnesses for the White House admitted that the Administration had authorised a covert operation in Angola. Yet, Congress continued to acquiesce due to the secrecy requirements surrounding these executive branch initiatives, and the fact that most members were neither attuned to, nor interested in, distant Angola. In the ensuing weeks, however, a series of leaks to the press led to numerous newspaper articles being published and, finally, to Kissinger’s public acknowledgement of U.S. covert involvement in Angola. This admission was extremely important, according to Gerald Bender, because it ‘not only ignited a major debate in the media and among the public but also lifted restrictions from Congressmen who had been unable to introduce legislation (to cut off U.S. participation) on the grounds that it was not a “public” matter.’

In the wake of Vietnam and fearful of the United States being mired in yet another distant civil war, the Senate voted in December 1975 to cut off all aid to any guerrilla faction in Angola by adding the Clark Amendment to the 1976 Foreign Assistance Act. Although this was vetoed by Ford in an attempt to stem congressional influence, the Senate responded by successfully attaching the Tunney Amendment – which cut off all covert aid to Angola – to the 1976 Defense Appropriations Bill.

Three aspects of the Angola episode are worth noting. First,
Congress asserted its influence by passing legislation that effectively terminated an unpopular, but staunchly defended, White House policy. Equally significant is that congressional action reflected the public's desire in the wake of Vietnam to avoid any commitment in distant civil wars. 'The country's mood', Bender explains, 'indicated that the American public, embittered and disillusioned by recent American losses in Southeast Asia, would not support even minor involvement in another remote and confusing conflict.'\(^68\) Finally, the passage of the Tunney Amendment served as an important indicator of a more activist Congress - regardless of the nature of the situation in Africa or in any other region of the world - in the aftermath of the highly controversial and politically divisive Vietnam war. In addition to mirroring rising public dissatisfaction with that war, attempts to reassert the rôle of Congress within the foreign policy process were sparked by disclosures of ill-conceived foreign covert operations and domestic excesses by the Nixon Administration (which, opponents argued, contravened U.S. law), and, most important, by general perceptions of an 'imperial presidency' increasingly at odds with the cherished constitutional precept of 'checks-and-balances'.\(^69\)

It is important to note, however, that Congress took the lead in altering U.S.-Angolan policies not so much as a result of public pressures but, rather, due to widespread anti-interventionist concerns. This example, therefore, underscores how Congress can act independently when it feels that the executive branch is pursuing a misguided policy. In contrast, when Congress has been pressured by public opinion or organised interests to seek similar changes in U.S. Africa policies, the impetus has usually been some type of humanitarian-related crisis that has captured the nation's imagination. For example, as it became widely publicised in the U.S. press that Washington's neutrality in the Nigerian civil war was indirectly supporting the Federal Government's highly effective methods of starving the secessionists, popular opinion, most notably expressed by thousands of letters to members of Congress, led to increasingly vocal demands in 1968 that the White House end its neutrality and provide, at a minimum, humanitarian relief to the starving Biafrans. Similarly, nightly broadcasts of famine conditions in the Horn of Africa from 1983 to 1985 led to the tremendous outpouring of popular support for

\(^{68}\) Bender, loc. cit. p. 99.

\(^{69}\) See U.S. Senate, Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders: an interim report of the Select Committee to study governmental operations with respect to intelligence activities, 94th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C., 1975).
drought and famine aid to Ethiopia, despite the avowedly pro-Marxist, pro-Soviet nature of the ruling régime.

The most notable example of public pressure for congressional action was marked by the passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986. In the face of the extended crisis in South Africa (and the refusal of the Reagan Administration to act), TransAfrica spearheaded a protest drive in November 1984 that eventually mobilised such popular domestic support for change that Congress two years later adopted sanctions against Pretoria despite the President's veto—overridden by the House (317 votes to 83) and the Senate (by a margin of 78–21) — thereby providing the Reagan Administration with one of its greatest foreign policy defeats.70

The reasons for this dramatic setback were basically fourfold. First, the rising electoral strength of African-Americans was translated into increasingly effective political organisations that were capable of bringing pressure to bear on Congress. For example, the number of African-Americans registered as voters in the South had doubled from less than two million in 1968 to nearly four million in 1988, while those holding key political offices at the federal, state, and local levels had quadrupled from roughly 1,500 in 1970 to over 6,000 by 1985.71

Second, some leaders in Congress were becoming increasingly concerned with the issue of race in U.S. foreign policy, a factor which contributed to divisiveness within the Republican Party in 1986 so crucial to the passage of sanctions legislation in the Republican-controlled Senate. In 1984, for example, 35 Republicans sent a letter to Bernadus G. Fourie, the South African Ambassador to the United States, warning that they would support sanctions against South Africa unless meaningful steps were taken to begin the dismantling of apartheid. The authors of this letter belonged to the Conservative Opportunity Society, a group of young Republicans who recognised the growing political influence of African-Americans and wanted to channel this into support for their party.72

A third reason was the steady growth of 'grass roots' anti-apartheid organisations. National leadership for hundreds of such groups was provided by the American Committee on Africa (and its counterpart in the capital, the Washington Committee on Africa), the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, and the American Friends Service Committee. 'Since the 1970s, these groups had made slow but steady

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71 Ibid.  
72 Ibid.
gains’, as explained recently by Pauline H. Baker, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York; ‘However, their impact increased significantly after 1984 as the public became more aware of the issue through extensive media coverage of the South African crisis.’ For example, by 1986, 19 state governments, 68 cities and counties, and 131 colleges and universities had adopted various types of restrictions that affected nearly $220,000 million of institutional assets related to pension and endowment funds. In addition to seeking divestment at the local and state levels, these groups provided invaluable organisational support when the sanctions movement became a national phenomenon in 1986. Specifically, they became part of a national network that was able to co-operate with liberal allies within Congress – and, particularly, the House Sub-Committee on Africa – to seek the passage of anti-apartheid legislation. The efforts of these groups ranged from the collection of data crucial to congressional hearings to the provision of expert witnesses and the co-ordination of massive letter-writing campaigns to wavering members of Congress.

The most important factor contributing to the 1986 sanctions legislation was the unfolding of what became perceived by Americans as an extended crisis situation in South Africa. Reagan was initially able ‘to hold the line’ in 1985 by signing an executive order that mandated an extremely weak package of sanctions, thereby demonstrating that even during short-term crises, when an issue attracted the attention of Congress, initial control of the policy-making process naturally flowed to the President and the bureaucracies of the executive branch. However, as the violence in South Africa continued to intensify in full colour, night after night, on all the major television networks, U.S.–South African relations became a domestic political issue for an electorate increasingly prone to equate protests in South Africa with the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Specifically, rising popular demands for the Government to ‘do something’ to stop the unfolding tragedy in South Africa galvanised the activities of the African-American lobby, Republican splinter groups, and grass-roots anti-apartheid organisations. These in turn placed increasing pressure on vote-conscious members of Congress who

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73 Ibid. p. 31.
74 Ibid.
recognised the popular political backlash that would accompany the defeat of some sort of sanctions package. In hearings devoted to the question of what action to take against South Africa, the crucial relationship between events there and the policy-making process was emphasised by Wolpe, who rhetorically demanded:

Why are we so concerned with the passage [of sanctions legislation] at this point? The reason, very simply, because of the very dramatic – very dramatic, I want to underscore that – deterioration of developments in South Africa.76

The fact that these developments were obviously linked to the politicisation of the issue of apartheid within U.S. domestic politics was underscored by the Republic leader, Robert Dole: ‘Let’s face it’, he explained in 1986, ‘there’s a lot of politics involved... this has now become a civil rights issue.’77

PATTERNS AND PROCESS IN PERSPECTIVE

It is necessary to go beyond the individual conclusions reached by the blind men in their quest to determine the true nature of the beast in order to really understand continuity and change in U.S. intervention in Africa since World War II. Hence the need to analyse the nature of the events which historically have affected the operation of the policy-making process. Although this cannot be neatly divided into mutually exclusive categories of either bureaucratic, presidential, or domestic influence – indeed, the often ‘messy’ politics of policy formulation and implementation is inherently blurred – the evolution of U.S. Africa policies has followed three general patterns, as outlined in Table 1.

1. Routine Situations and Bureaucratic Influence within the Policy-Making Process

Due to the historic neglect of the continent by both the White House and Congress, U.S. Africa policies – perhaps more so than those directed towards any other region of the world – are best explained by focusing on the character of the bureaucracies concerned. Specifically, policies during routine periods tend to be driven by the established

organisational missions of the national security bureaucracies comprising the executive branch, including the State Department, the Defense Department, and the C.I.A., as well as their specialised offices devoted to Africa. The net result of bureaucratic pre-eminence in the policy-making process is an incrementalist outcome in which the potential for change in interventionist practices is extremely limited. In fact, the best predictor for future policy is current policy.

2. Crisis Situations and Presidential Influence within the Policy-Making Process

When situations in Africa change from routine to crisis, the likelihood increases that the President and his most senior advisers will assert their control over the policy-making process. Historically, the most important determinants of such developments have been the nature of European involvement, as well as that of the Soviet Union and its allies. Crisis situations not only prompt the White House critically to examine and review the nature and purpose of the relationship with a particular African country, but also serve to make the parochial policies of individual bureaucracies more consistent with each other, as well as with the world-view of the Administration. The net result of presidential involvement in the policy-making process is an uncertain outcome in which the possibility for change in interventionist practices is extremely great.
3. Extended Crisis Situations and Domestic Influence within the Policy-Making Process

Finally, the longer that a crisis situation continues, the greater the possibility that more groups and individuals outside of the executive branch will become involved in the policy process as debate spills over into the public domain. This can lead to a situation marked by domestic politics in which Congress, either acting independently or as a result of public pressure, removes the initiative from the Administration and takes the lead in formulating policy. Although the possibility for change is then significant, congressional ability to influence events dramatically decreases in the absence of a crisis as traditional partisan and ideological rivalries prevent the Senate and the House of Representatives from taking unified action.

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Together these three patterns capture the dynamic nature of U.S. Africa policies, and provide the framework for analysing the relations with various régimes that have evolved as a number of groups in the foreign policy establishment assert their influence at different points in time. One can, therefore, conceive of intervention as a sort of continuum in which periods of bureaucratic influence are briefly interrupted by episodes of presidential and domestic involvement during crisis and extended crisis situations. Yet, even if changes have consequently occurred in a given relationship, policy usually soon falls under the realm of the national security bureaucracies, and the process of routine incrementalism again prevails, albeit in an altered form.

THE FUTURE OF U.S. AFRICA POLICIES

Regardless of whether one focuses on the national security bureaucracies, the President and the White House, or Congress and the African affairs constituency, the Soviet Union and anti-communism constituted extremely important guiding forces of U.S. Africa policies during the post-World War II period. In this regard, critics were correct in noting that Africa in the 1950s and 1960s had the misfortune of beginning its era of independence at the height of the cold war struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. In the roughly 30
years that followed, two themes aptly captured Africa's place within the various strategies of containment initially outlined by the Truman Administration and applied to Africa, albeit in varying forms, from Presidents Eisenhower to Reagan.

(i) Africa as the means for solving non-African problems. The most important aspect of Washington's containment policies was an approach that looked upon the continent as a means for solving non-African problems. Africa generally was not perceived as important in its own right but, rather, as a means for preventing the further advances of Soviet communism. As a result, relationships with African states evolved according to their perceived importance within this East–West framework. Not only was this preoccupation with anti-communism manipulated by African leaders to obtain greater levels of economic and military aid, it also served as an important rationale for Washington's general disregard for the authoritarian excesses of various régimes.

(ii) Africa as a proxy battlefield in East–West conflict. Washington's containment policies also led to the emergence of Africa as a battlefield for proxy wars as both the U.S. and the Soviet Union became involved in regional conflicts. In almost every case, these were exacerbated by the reaction of one superpower to the other in a particular crisis situation. All too often even the mere 'threat' of Soviet intervention was enough to capture the attention of the White House and, usually, resulted in an escalation of the dispute. As a result, local conflicts having little, if anything, to do with the ideological concerns of communism, or capitalism, threatened to become flash-points between East and West.

The cold war rationale that largely guided U.S. Africa policies from the 1940s to the 1980s was dramatically called into question by the radical changes in the Soviet bloc initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev after his emergence in 1985 as the undisputed leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. His adherence to the theme of 'novoye myshlenye' (new political thinking) has been the crucial factor behind the recent search for a form of international co-operation that is reminiscent of Roosevelt's post-World War II vision. In the case of Eastern Europe, this approach entailed Soviet tolerance for the fall of single-party communist states, and a recognition of the need to allow the peoples of these countries to determine their own political paths independent of Soviet control. Throughout the Third World, the new thinking
entailed a rejection of revolutionary struggles, and the need for negotiations and compromise to resolve ongoing regional disputes and civil wars.  

If the U.S.–Soviet co-operation indicative of the 1990s continues to replace the antagonistic relationship characteristic of the four decades following the end of World War II, it stands to reason that Washington’s cold war-driven Africa policies will change accordingly. In this regard, five major trends, some of which have already become evident, will either emerge or intensify in the years to come.

1. Africa as a ‘Back-Burner’ Issue

Although many Africans have been quick to note the tremendous negative impact of the cold war, this ironically did lead to greater U.S. attention to the continent. However, as superpower co-operation and political changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe continue to dominate the agenda of the U.S. policy-making establishment, many have rightly begun to question what this means for Africa. As aptly noted by B. A. Kiplagat, permanent secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kenya, ‘Eastern Europe is the most sexy beautiful girl, and we are an old tattered lady’.  

As he and other African diplomats have correctly discerned, the most likely outcome of U.S.–Soviet co-operation in the 1990s is to reinforce the tendency for Washington to ignore African issues in favour of other regions of greater concern, such as Western and Eastern Europe and, more recently, the Middle East. Indeed, as noted by one analyst, Africa in a sense is again becoming the ‘dark continent’. In the absence of the rallying points of Soviet expansionism and anti-communism, the myriad of seemingly insuperable socio-economic and politico-military problems besetting Africa fosters a tendency within the foreign policy establishment to relegate the continent to the care of ‘other’ nations which ‘surely know Africa better than we do’.

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82 Confidential interview.
2. Declining Levels of Economic and Military Aid

The dramatic decrease in U.S. aid to Africa during the 1980s and 1990s constitutes one of the most vivid examples of the continent's declining fortunes relative to other regions of the world. From 1985 to 1990, for example, U.S. military assistance (minus the roughly $2,000 million given annually to Egypt) fell from $280 million to $39 million, with development aid dropping approximately 50 per cent during this period. The crucial reason for this decline is that Washington has higher priorities elsewhere. Already hard-hit by the requirements of the 1986 Gramm–Rudman–Hollings deficit reduction act, U.S. economic and military aid to Africa has been increasingly trimmed by both the White House and Congress in their search to reward the transition to democracy in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, as well as pay for the enormous costs associated with 'Operation Desert Storm'. As the United States continues to seek ways of balancing its budget, almost certainly it is going to be increasingly difficult to maintain, let alone increase, current levels of aid. As succinctly noted by the former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker: 'Africans could end up paying for the expanding frontiers of freedom everywhere else. That would be an obscene response to the African crisis.'

3. The National Security Bureaucracies as the Primary Driving Forces of U.S. Africa Policies

In the absence of the high-level attention that inevitably resulted from the introduction of an East–West dimension into a particular conflict, the White House undoubtedly will defer increasingly to the Africa 'specialists' within the State Department, the Defense Department, and the C.I.A. Moreover, their position is likely to be strengthened by the on-going ideological and partisan splits within and between the House of Representatives and the Senate, despite the growing watchdog rôle of Congress. As a result, bureaucratic interpretations of the national interest as perceived through the parochial filters of organisational missions will serve as the primary guides for the evolution of U.S. Africa policies during the emerging post-cold war period.

The U.S. response to the intensification of the Liberian civil war

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83 'A Longing for Liberty', in Newsweek (New York), 23 July 1990, p. 27.
during 1990 demonstrates the importance of focusing attention on the national security bureaucracies in understanding the future evolution of U.S. Africa policies. In the absence of a significant East–West component, the Africa Bureau managed to gain White House approval to seek the negotiated departure of Samuel Doe, the Liberian dictator, and, failing that, support for a multilateral occupation force led by Nigeria and solely comprised of African troops. Although the United States ultimately sent in the Marines to ensure the safe departure of the 1,000 or so American civilians and diplomatic personnel residing in the country, their actions were solely limited to this humanitarian goal. At no point did U.S. forces seek to determine militarily the outcome of the fighting between the Liberian régime and the two guerrilla factions vying for control.

In other words, the White House deferred to the Africa Bureau’s recommendation to support African efforts to resolve what, in essence, was an African problem. Most important, the major impetus for bureaucratic interest in the special relationship that has existed since 1847, when Liberia was founded by freed American slaves, was Washington’s anxiety not to jeopardise a number of valuable assets. These include the unimpeded landing and refuelling rights for all Defense Department aircraft and ships; the presence within Liberia of one of eight navigational stations found throughout the world that guide U.S. ships and aircraft within the Atlantic Ocean; and the maintenance of two extremely valuable communications relay stations that carry nearly all U.S. diplomatic and intelligence transmissions (inclusive of the Voice of America) throughout sub-Saharan Africa.84

4. Resolution of Regional Conflicts

An extremely fruitful outcome of growing U.S.–Soviet co-operation could include superpower involvement in the resolution of regional conflicts in Africa.85 A most dramatic example of what this can yield was demonstrated by the 1988 U.S.-brokered accords for a phased withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola in exchange for South Africa’s promise of independence for Namibia. This was achieved in March 1990 when one of the few multiracial, multiparty democracies on the African continent was inaugurated under the leadership of Sam

Nujoma. The resolution of this long-festering regional conflict was due in large measure to Crocker’s tireless efforts to make the U.S. a peace-broker in the negotiating process, as well as the Soviet Union’s willingness to pressure its Angolan and Cuban allies to accept the proposed ‘linkage’. Both of these ingredients – which built upon the crucial willingness of regional African participants to seek a diplomatic resolution of the conflict – were obviously by-products of a decline in cold-war tensions beginning in the late 1980s.

A highly favourable, and logical outgrowth of U.S.–Soviet cooperation in facilitating Namibia’s independence has been similar discussions over disputes which also became internationalised due to the East–West confrontation. For example, the various conflicts in the Horn of Africa were raised at a meeting in June 1989 between Herman Cohen, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and Anatoly Adamishin, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister. This has led to further U.S.–Soviet collaboration aimed at resolving any continuing major differences, as well as more direct U.S. involvement in finding a peaceful resolution to Ethiopia’s civil war. Similarly, both superpowers have indicated their willingness to seek a negotiated settlement of Mozambique’s and Angola’s civil wars – both of which are seemingly on the path towards final resolution – as well as to work together in encouraging a peaceful end to apartheid in South Africa.

5. Multiparty Democracy as a Precondition of Closer U.S. Ties

A final trend of U.S.–Africa relations has been a growing debate over making multiparty democracy a precondition for the improvement of economic and political relations with Washington. Specifically, the dramatic downfall of single-party régimes in Eastern Europe has raised important questions concerning the viability of this model in Africa. And just as political democratisation became the precondition for dramatically expanding levels of U.S. aid to Eastern Europe, so this concept appears to have been accepted by the State Department, including the Africa Bureau. In Kenya, for example, the American Ambassador, Smith Hempstone, enraged President Daniel arap Moi by publicly calling for Kenya’s single-party system to be scrapped. Similarly, Donald K. Petterson, former Ambassador to Somalia (1978–82) and Tanzania (1986–9), wrote an editorial in which he argued for tying development aid to political reforms.86

This raises an important dilemma, because whereas Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have been the principal foci of attention within the U.S. policy-making establishment during the last 40 years and, therefore, the target (at least initially in the case of Eastern Europe) of a tremendous growth in economic assistance, African countries, even if they do adopt political reforms, are unlikely to receive greater amounts of aid from an increasingly declining aid budget. Moreover, the majority of U.S. ambassadors in Africa, as well as the Africa specialists within the national security bureaucracies, are usually less inclined to push for a link between political reforms and economic aid. These individuals not only wish to avoid offending valuable African clients but, also, realise that promises of further economic aid will most likely not materialise even if political reforms are adopted. It is for this reason, for example, that Cohen has simply emphasised the continued importance of 'sound economic policies' as the basis for non-aid-related economic initiatives, such as debt relief.  

CONCLUSION

The emergence of the post-cold war era thus entails both drawbacks and opportunities for Africa. In a positive sense, the decline in global confrontations suggests decreasing amounts of U.S. covert military intervention on the continent, as well as less economic and military aid for authoritarian clients who used the threat of Soviet expansionism to attract White House attention and support. Moreover, the possibilities are also good for U.S.–Soviet co-operation in resolving African conflicts. Indeed, even if the superpowers only adopt neutral stances, as opposed to more activist positions either in favour of co-operation or conflict, the stage will be set for African solutions to African problems. The downside of the declining East–West tensions, however, is that Africa risks sinking even lower in the consciousness of academics, policy-makers, and the general public. For better or for worse, the cold war succeeded in making Africa an integral part of U.S. containment policies, and elevated several countries to positions of pre-eminence at all levels in the policy-making establishment. Although existing bureaucratic missions will undoubtedly serve as important shields to the further deterioration of U.S. ties with the continent, declining levels of economic and military aid suggest an ongoing downward spiral in terms of Africa's importance relative to other regions of the world.