AFRICA in the New International Order

Rethinking State Sovereignty and Regional Security

EDITED BY

Edmond J. Keller & Donald Rothchild
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Removing the Shackles?
U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Africa
After the End of the Cold War

Peter J. Schraeder

Every few years it has been a ritual exercise for Africanists to ponder continuity and change in U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. The time frame of analysis is usually the post–World War II era, with 1958—the year marking official recognition of Africa through the creation of the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of African Affairs—serving as a convenient starting point.

A fairly consistent conclusion of these analyses is that U.S. policies toward Africa were marked by continuity rather than change during the Cold War era. For example, in 1983 at a presidential address to the annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Crawford Young underscored the policy’s “essential continuity.” Although he carefully added that “noteworthy fluctuations” have occurred, he nonetheless concluded that “these variations have been above all of style, tone, and the subtler chemistry of policy articulation, and not its underlying substance.”

In 1988, another scholar concurred, noting that U.S. foreign policy toward Africa during the Cold War era “has demonstrated remarkable coherence and regularity despite the differences between Republican and Democratic administrations and the tenure of nine different Assistant Secretaries of State for African Affairs.”

With the end of the Cold War, however, scholars and policy analysts looked forward to the possibility of long-awaited and much desired changes in the United States’ African policies. Michael Clough, senior fellow for Africa at the Council on Foreign Relations, captured the optimism of Africanists by arguing that the U.S. was “free at last” of the conceptual and ideological “shackles” of the Cold War era and therefore should create a new relationship with the African continent. Indeed, the end of the Cold
War rendered obsolete a formerly interventionist policy built upon the twin themes of anticommunism and containment, especially after Washington's primary perceived adversary—the former Soviet Union—had followed in the footsteps of other great empires throughout history, fragmenting into a host of smaller, independent, and noncommunist countries.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to assess the evolution of U.S. policies now that the shackles of the Cold War have been removed. I will first briefly describe U.S. images of Africa and the essence of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa during the Cold War era.

Africa as a Foreign Policy Backwater

The earliest recorded incident of North America's involvement with Africa took place in 1619, when a Dutch ship sold twenty Africans into slavery in the British North American colonies. From this inauspicious beginning, the colonies eventually became part of a worldwide slave-trading network, the legacy of which nearly four centuries later would be more than 30 million citizens—roughly 12 percent of the U.S. population—claiming an African-American heritage.

Despite historical and cultural ties between the U.S. and the African continent, there exists no consensus within the policymaking establishment over Africa's importance. The African-American lobby TransAfrica and the Congressional Black Caucus are quick to emphasize the importance of the ethnic link. Other members of Congress underscore the humanitarian or moral imperatives that link the United States to Africa; of particular concern are Western efforts to alleviate chronic drought and famine. The U.S. Department of Commerce, noting the potential market of nearly 600 million people for U.S. goods and services, as well as significant levels of U.S. oil and mineral imports from West Africa and southern Africa, respectively, underscores the economic links of the relationship. The Department of State focuses on political linkages—most notably the weight of more than fifty votes within the UN and the importance of the Organization of African Unity. The U.S. Department of Defense naturally focuses on military linkages, including Africa's geographical proximity to strategic "chokepoints" such as the Strait of Bab el Mandeb in the Horn of Africa and the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa.

Despite these linkages, Africans generally agree that the United States' African policies have been marked by indifference, at worst, and neglect, at best. Africa has been treated as a backwater in official policymaking circles in terms of the time and resources allocated to it. A spirited exchange between Senator Jesse Helms and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan illustrates the gap of knowledge about Africa among some elected officials. The debate concerned an amendment put forth by Helms, who, concerned with perceived communist advances in Africa (most notably the presence of Soviet military advisers in Mozambique and Cuban troops in Angola), sought a ban on aid to any African country hosting foreign troops on its soil.

But, Mr. Moynihan said, what of Chad, which is "fending off the Red armed hordes" with the help of the French? And what of Djibouti, which is doing the same? Mr. Helms was puzzled. Djibouti? Where is this Djibouti? Mr. Moynihan sprang to his feet, strode to the wall of the hearing room, clamped atop a chair and referred to a big map. He pointed to the Horn of Africa. "Communists to the left." [Ethiopia] he said, gesturing broadly. Another gesture: "Communists to the right" [Somalia]. A stab of the finger on the map: "Djibouti—right in the middle." Mr. Helms appeared enlightened, even chastened. The amendment was defeated.

Although Moynihan correctly identified the foreign troops stationed in Africa, his analysis of the situation was not without error. The "Red armed hordes" that the French were credited with stopping in Chad were, in reality, Libyan troops under the leadership of Muammar Qaddafi. Furthermore, his designation of Somalia as a communist country was outdated. By 1987, Somali leader Mohammed Siad Barre had broken his country's alliance with the former Soviet Union and had largely abandoned Marxism in favor of a U.S. alliance and an export-oriented capitalist path of development.

The lack of substantive knowledge of Africa is especially acute at the level of the mass public, which maintains what can be called a National Geographic image of the continent. Although some topics, such as racial politics and the transition to democracy in South Africa, receive regular press coverage and have somewhat improved the public's awareness, the mention of Africa typically conjures up stereotypical images of lush jungles and wild animals, poverty and famine, corruption and "tribal" warfare, and rampant sexuality leading to the explosion of AIDS.

This image is reinforced by the nature of U.S. media programming and the safari tradition of U.S. journalism. Media programming, when it does focus on Africa, usually concentrates on the sensationalist and often negative aspects of the continent. Unless field reporters can produce a "hard" news story that can attract attention back home—such as interviews with U.S. Marines detailing the hardships of being deployed in Somalia during the 1992 Christmas season as part of Operation Restore Hope—editors interested in what will sell make it difficult to place a feature story in the press. Even the traditional crisis-oriented stories that usually make it onto Western television are often blocked from airing: For example, despite the availability of excellent film footage documenting the emerging Ethiopian famine of 1983–1985, editors initially refused to televise the
material because they “thought that there was no news in another African famine.”

The safari tradition of U.S. journalism (i.e., sending generalists to Africa on short-term assignments) reinforces the checkered view the public has about the continent. Helen Kitchen, a former journalist and respected Africanist, notes that although much of the reporting by U.S. newspaper and wire correspondents is informed and conscientious, follow-up is inconsistent. She laments that what one still gets from the U.S. media is “discontinuous segments of the day-to-day history of Africa.” For example, the dearth of newspaper reports on Somalia less than six months after the withdrawal of U.S. troops (as opposed to extensive daily coverage while U.S. troops were present) might lead the average reader to assume that the conflict has been resolved and the Somali people are being fed.

Even the scholarly community has focused an inadequate amount of attention on the United States’ African policies. The study of Africa within the three disciplines perhaps best suited to ensuring a well-informed foreign policy—history, political science, and international studies—has been relegated to a low-level status. Scholars within these disciplines historically have given academic priority to studies that focus on traditional U.S. security concerns, such as East-West relations and the nature of the Atlantic Alliance, or geographical regions of perceived greater importance, such as Southeast Asia, Central America, and, more recently, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Although advances have been made, the fact that Africa remains poorly understood by the policymaking establishment, the general public, and the media, and the academic community translates into a poor base for formulating effective foreign policy. Disagreement within the U.S. policymaking establishment over how to respond to the invasion of Zaire by exiles based in neighboring Angola prompted former British prime minister James Callaghan to remark: “There seem to be a number of Christopher Columbuses setting out from the United States to discover Africa for the first time. It’s been there a long time.”

Unfortunately, the United States has had to “rediscover” Africa at several junctures during the post–World War II era. U.S. policymakers have tended to ignore the African continent until some sort of politico-military crisis grabs their attention. One undesirable outcome of such an approach is that policy often becomes driven by events, as opposed to the more desirable outcome of events being shaped by policy. Perhaps the greatest danger in such a strategy is that poor understanding can foster poorly devised policies that ultimately are destined to fail. As the United States prepares to enter the twenty-first century, it will become increasingly important to shed its Christopher Columbus image and formulate effective policies that are proactive rather than reactive.

Discovering Africa Through the Prism of the Cold War

As the nationalist urges of independence movements swept the countries of Africa during the 1950s, marking the beginning of the end of European colonialism, two politicians of widely divergent perspectives emphasized the necessity of rethinking U.S. foreign policy toward the continent. “For too many years,” Vice President Richard M. Nixon noted in 1957 after returning from a twenty-two-day tour of the African continent, “Africa in the minds of many Americans has been regarded as a remote and mysterious continent which was the special province of big game hunters, explorers and motion picture makers.” Recognizing the importance of an emerging Africa in the international scene—especially within the context of the East-West struggle—Nixon recommended that President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorize the creation of a separate Bureau of African Affairs within the State Department, an idea that reached fruition in 1958.

Also speaking out in 1957, Senator John F. Kennedy derided what he perceived as Washington’s inability to come to grips with the question of colonialism and the growing forces of nationalism in Africa. Kennedy later warned that the “only real question is whether these new nations [of Africa] will look West or East—to Moscow or Washington—for sympathy, help, and guidance in their effort to recapitulate, in a few decades, the entire history of modern Europe and America.” In order to blunt what he perceived as the steady decline of U.S. prestige in Africa at the expense of growing Soviet influence, Kennedy concluded that “we must embark on a bold and imaginative new program for the development of Africa.”

Despite their partisan rivalries, both Nixon and Kennedy shared Cold War beliefs that stressed the necessity of enlisting Africa in the United States’ quest to halt the spread of communism and contain Soviet expansionism. Most important, these beliefs were shared in varying degrees by all U.S. presidents from the 1950s to the end of the 1980s and served as the basis for a variety of interventionist episodes in Africa during the Cold War era. These episodes ranged from offers of economic and military aid to leaders of anticomunist client states, such as Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia; the imposition of economic sanctions against radical leaders backed by the Soviet Union, such as Egypt’s Gamal Abdul Nasser; Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)—sponsored covert action campaigns, including the successful assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the radical nationalist prime minister of Zaire; the funding of paramilitary guerrilla insurgencies, such as the U.S. assistance to the guerrilla forces of Jonas Savimbi to overthrow a self-proclaimed Marxist regime in Angola; and, finally, the direct application of U.S. military force, including Lyndon B. Johnson’s decision to send U.S. combat troops to Zaire.
Two themes aptly illustrate how U.S. policymakers perceived Africa's role in the various strategies of containment that were initially outlined by the Truman administration. First, rather than viewing African countries as important in their own right, U.S. policymakers saw them as a means for preventing the further advances of Soviet communism; therefore, U.S. relationships with African regimes evolved according to their relative importance within an East-West framework. For example, the United States courted Haile Selassie from the 1940s to the 1970s because of Ethiopia's strategic location and its partnership in a global telecommunications surveillance network directed against the Soviet Union.\(^9\) When the security relationship between the United States and Ethiopia shattered during the 1970s, the United States turned to Siad Barre primarily because access to bases in Somalia could enhance the U.S. military capability to counter any Soviet threats to Middle Eastern oil fields.\(^9\) Similarly, Washington policymakers viewed Mobutu Sese Seko and a host of African governments positively because Zaire and South Africa possessed strategic resources and could also serve as bulwarks against communism.\(^2\) In each of these cases, an overriding preoccupation with anticommunism led Washington to overlook the authoritarian excesses of these regimes in favor of their willingness to support U.S. containment policies in Africa.

The second major outcome of Washington's containment policies in Africa was the emergence of the continent as a battlefield for proxy wars as both the United States and the Soviet Union became involved in regional conflicts. In almost every case, regional conflict was exacerbated by one superpower's reaction to the other's involvement in a particular crisis situation. Indeed, Soviet involvement, as well as its mere threat, was enough to capture White House attention and usually provoke an escalation of the conflict. In the case of Zaire, the political instability of the early independence years, coupled with only relatively limited amounts of Soviet involvement, was enough to warrant authorized covert assassination attempts and two military operations involving limited amounts of U.S. troops and transport aircraft.\(^2\) During the 1975–1976 Angolan civil war, Soviet-Cuban involvement led to a tacit alliance between the United States, South Africa, and Zaire in which Washington supported the direct involvement of Zairian and, more onerous for most African countries, South African troops.\(^2\) In these and other cases, local conflicts having little to do with the ideological concerns of communism or capitalism threatened to become East-West flashpoints in the face of growing U.S.-Soviet involvement.

The Cold War foundations of the United States' African policies were dramatically called into question by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the overthrow of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and the fragmentation of the Soviet Union. Although the Russian Republic pledged to seek further cooperation with the United States in a variety of realms—including the resolution of regional conflicts in Africa—the fragmentation of the former Soviet Union signaled a significant shift in the international balance of power. As U.S.-Russian cooperation continues to replace the former antagonistic relationship, Washington's Cold War–driven policies have changed and will continue to change in all the regions of the world, including Africa.

**Trends in U.S. Policy in the Post-Cold War Era**

Although they do not constitute an exhaustive list, eight trends capture the evolving nature of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa in the post–Cold War era. A first trend is the reinforcement of the historical tendency among U.S. policymakers to treat Africa as a back-burner issue. Although many Africans are quick to note the tremendous negative impact of the Cold War on Africa, ironically, this struggle did lead to greater U.S. attention to the continent. In fact, African leaders were often able to use U.S.-Soviet competition as a bargaining tool to obtain substantial increases in economic and military aid. However, as political changes in the former Eastern bloc began to dominate the agenda of the U.S. policymaking establishment, African diplomats and scholars correctly discerned the downgrading of African issues. As succinctly noted by Michael Clough, this has resulted in a de facto policy of “cynical disengagement” in which policymakers are guided by three principles: (1) “Do not spend much money [on Africa] unless Congress makes you”; (2) “Do not let African issues complicate policy toward other, more important parts of the world”; and (3) “Do not take stands that might create political controversies in the United States.”\(^2\)

A second trend has been budget cutbacks in U.S. government offices related to Africa and growing pressures to trim already reduced levels of economic and military aid. Budgetary cutbacks are an outgrowth of the perception among U.S. officials that the continent is less important in the post–Cold War era and are reinforced by popular pressures to trim the budget deficit and enhance spending for domestic social programs. For example, in order to staff growing numbers of consulates and embassies in Eastern Europe and the newly independent republics of the former Soviet Union, the State Department trimmed approximately seventy positions from its Bureau of African Affairs and closed consulates and embassies in Cameroon, the Comoro Islands, Kenya, and Nigeria.\(^2\) The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) similarly cut a variety of programs and staff positions related to Africa and reportedly only the “11th-hour intervention” of the Congressional Black Caucus prevented the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives from
merging its subcommittees on African and Latin American affairs.26 Even the CIA announced in June 1994 that it planned to close fifteen stations in Africa and withdraw dozens of case officers. "We have never been in Africa to report on Africa," explained one CIA official. "We went into Africa as part of the covert activity of the Cold War, to recruit [as spies] Soviet, Chinese, Eastern European and sometimes North Korean officials under circumstances that were easier to operate under than in their home countries."27

The amount of U.S. assistance given to Africa from fiscal year (FY) 1985 (just prior to the passage of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Deficit Reduction Act) to FY 1994 (the last budget prepared by the Bush administration) offers a revealing barometer of changing U.S. interests in Africa.28 During this period, U.S. military assistance (minus the roughly $2 billion given annually to Egypt) declined from $279.2 million to $3.8 million. Other forms of security assistance, such as Economic Support Funds, similarly dropped from $452.8 million to $15 million. The majority of Africanists are quick to note, however, that reductions in these forms of assistance are not necessarily a bad thing, especially when one notes that development assistance increased from $1.14 billion in FY 1985 to $1.34 billion in FY 1994. Although this increase should be applauded, the tabulation of overall aid flows suggests Africa's growing marginalization within the policymaking establishment in the post–Cold War era. Whereas Africa received roughly 10.3 percent ($1.87 billion) of an overall budget of $18.13 billion in FY 1985, this figure had declined to 7.6 percent ($1.36 billion) of an overall budget of $17.99 billion in FY 1994.

The first foreign assistance budget request completely prepared by the Clinton administration (FY 1995) reflects how aid to Africa will be affected by a Democratic administration determined to slash the deficit and focus on the U.S. economy "like a laser beam."29 Because the administration has restructured aid according to four new general categories—sustainable development ($990.4 million), humanitarian assistance ($68.3 million), building democracy ($23.8 million), and promoting peace ($0.5 million)—the figures are not directly comparable with earlier statistical summaries. Still, two major conclusions can be drawn: First, the Clinton administration is continuing to emphasize development as opposed to military/security-related forms of assistance. Second, the marginalization of Africa is continuing in terms of both the gross amount ($1.08 billion) and the percentage (6.03) of targeted aid from an overall foreign assistance budget of $17.94 billion. This trend intensified in spring 1995 as the new Republican-controlled Congress implemented a campaign pledge to further cut foreign assistance programs, particularly those within the development category managed by USAID.

A third trend of the post–Cold War era is the reinforcement of Washington's tendency to relegate responsibility for overseeing its African policies to those national security bureaucracies that make up the executive branch: the State Department, the Defense Department, and the CIA, as well as their specialized agencies devoted specifically to Africa. Of all regions in the world, Africa has traditionally attracted the least interest and attention from the United States. This trend has continued under the Clinton administration, most notably because of the president's desire to downplay foreign policy and instead focus primarily on U.S. domestic concerns.30 As a result, U.S. policies toward Africa are increasingly subject in the post–Cold War era to the influence of bureaucrats within the national security bureaucracies.

The most important outcome of this bureaucratic influence within the policymaking process is that U.S. policies on Africa have become fragmented, interpreted differently according to the established organizational missions of each bureaucracy. The primary mission of the State Department's Bureau of African Affairs, for example, is the maintenance of smooth and stable relationships with all African governments. The emphasis is on quiet diplomacy and the negotiated resolution of any conflicts that may arise. In sharp contrast, the primary mission of the CIA's Africa Division has traditionally been to carry the ideological battle against the former Soviet Union and communism to the African continent. Openly contemptuous of self-proclaimed Marxist and other "leftist" regimes, liberation movements, and, more recently, "radical" activists (such as Libya's Muammar Qaddafi) and political movements (such as Islamic fundamentalism), the CIA prefers close liaison with the security services of European allies and friendly African regimes. As for the Pentagon, the primary mission of the Office for African Affairs (International Security Affairs) is to ensure continued access to strategically located bases and other facilities for responding to local crises and, most important, military contingencies in Europe or the Middle East.

The U.S. response to the escalating civil war in Liberia demonstrates the importance of the national security bureaucracies in shaping its policies toward Africa in the post–Cold War era.31 Unlike its direct handling of more hard-line military operations in Panama and Kuwait—both of which were initially opposed by the State Department's Bureaus of Latin American Affairs and Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, respectively—the White House deferred to the Africa bureau's desire to remain relatively neutral in the civil war and seek the negotiated departure of Liberian dictator Samuel Doe.32 Conscious of African concerns over unilateral superpower intervention on the African continent, the bureau managed to gain White House approval to seek the negotiated departure of President Doe.
and, failing that, support of a multilateral occupation force led by Nigeria and solely made up African troops. Although the White House ultimately did send in the U.S. Marines, their actions were solely limited to ensuring the safe departure of approximately 1,100 U.S. civilians and diplomatic personnel residing in the country. At no point did U.S. forces seek to militarily determine the outcome of fighting between government forces and guerrilla factions vying for control.

A fourth trend in the post–Cold War era is growing U.S. concern—particularly within the Department of Defense—over threats posed by “low-intensity conflict” (LIC) and “radical” African leaders. LIC is defined as encompassing the lower end of the “spectrum of violence” and therefore includes the following categories of operations: counterinsurgency (aid to an allied government to defeat a guerrilla insurgency); proinsurgency (aid designed to foster a guerrilla insurgency against a foreign government); peacetime contingency operations (such as short-term rescue missions); terrorism counteraction; antidrug operations; pacification or control of ethnic groups; humanitarian assistance; and military civic action.32

Two fundamental assumptions lie at the heart of this rising strategic consensus within the policymaking establishment: (1) “Vital U.S. interests are threatened by radical and revolutionary violence” in Africa and other regions of the Third World; and (2) the U.S. “must be prepared to use military force” to protect these interests.33 “Tribal wars and instability [in Africa] do not bode well for us,” explained one U.S. official in justification for contingency planning against LIC groups in Africa. “Africa’s a huge piece of land that we, as a world power, must fly around, sail around, traverse,” he continued. “It’s not as strategically important as Japan, NATO, Europe—but it’s there.”34

Various portions of the U.S. policymaking establishment are also increasingly concerned with the potential threat posed by what they perceive as radical African leaders. As demonstrated by U.S. attempts to assassinate Patrice Lumumba during the early 1960s and the Reagan administration’s attacks against Qaddafi during the 1980s, the perceived threats posed by radical African leaders have attracted the attention of the highest levels of the U.S. policymaking establishment. Opposition to these leaders during the Cold War era was most often based on the belief that they contributed to the political designs of the Soviet Union. During the 1990s, U.S. hostility toward these leaders has been based on their acceptance of such ideologies and movements as Islamic fundamentalism and their ability to destabilize U.S. allies and clients and in general stymie U.S. regional policies. This concern was most forcefully laid out in an article written by Tony Lake, national security adviser to the Clinton administration, in which he addresses the necessity of counteracting “backlash” states within the international system.35

In the case of Somalia and Operation Restore Hope, for example, both the Bush and Clinton administrations demonized General Mohamed Farah Aidid as one of the chief stumbling blocks to the country’s pacification and the creation of an enduring political settlement.36 This characterization, reinforced by press accounts of Aidid’s “barbaric” and “ruthless” nature, ultimately led to a series of shortsighted military policies designed to isolate and defeat his portion of a clan militia army known as the United Somali Congress (USC). Not only did such an approach create a false impression of Aidid’s military strength (he controls only portions of southern Mogadishu and parts of central Somalia), but it was based on the false assumption that stability and order would be restored once he was captured and his USC force defeated.

The reality of the ongoing conflict in Somalia is that Aidid is only one of several militia leaders who control various portions of the country and that there are many other “Aidids” who could potentially assume the mantle of leadership and pursue similar policies if he were either captured or killed. According to some Somali specialists, the key to success in Somalia would not be the military isolation of Aidid but a diplomatic initiative that would bring Aidid and all other militia leaders into the process.37 Unfortunately, this approach was adopted by the Clinton administration only after dozens of U.S. soldiers were either killed or wounded and the body of one soldier was dragged through the streets of Mogadishu following an unsuccessful raid on Aidid’s headquarters in October 1993.

A fifth trend in the post–Cold War era is a growing perception within the policymaking establishment that Islamic fundamentalism is a threat to U.S. interests on the African continent.38 Many officials note that the decline of the former Soviet Union and communism has created a power vacuum on the African continent that potentially could be filled by what they perceive as “radical” forms of Islamic fundamentalism, particularly the Shia variant espoused by Iran. This view was confirmed by a leaked National Security Review of U.S. policy toward Africa for the 1990s, which indicated that Islamic governments and movements, particularly those sponsored by Iran, Libya, and the Sudan, posed a direct threat to U.S. interests in Africa.39 This perception is not new; rather, it is the result of the United States’ growing preoccupation with Islamic leaders and movements since the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the 444-day hostage crisis that followed.40

The United States’ perception of Islamic fundamentalism is clearly demonstrated by its foreign policy toward the Bashir regime of the Sudan.41 A close ally of the United States during the 1980s, Sudanese president Ja’afar Nimeiri was overthrown in a 1986 military coup d’état, an event leading to the intensification of a guerrilla war led by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, and another successful military coup led by General
Omar Hassan Bashir in 1989. Sudan earned the denunciation of the Bush and the Clinton administrations for two reasons: First, State Department officials express concern over the fact that the Bashir regime is buttressed by the National Islamic Front, an extremely well organized and vocal fundamentalist group led by Hassan Turabi. Of even greater concern to U.S. policymakers is Bashir’s strict enforcement of shari’a (Islamic law) and, most important, his apparent decision to allow Iranian-sponsored bases that CIA analysts claim are designed to train Islamic militants for “terrorist” actions throughout Africa. “By January 1992, U.S. officials were telling reporters that Sudan might become a base for exporting Islamic revolution across Africa,” explains Raymond W. Copson, a researcher for the Foreign Affairs National Defense Division of the Congressional Research Service, “although some nongovernment specialists doubted that troubled Sudan would prove very useful to the fundamentalist cause over the long term.”

In a sense, the anticommunist logic of containment of the Soviet Union during the Cold War era may be in the process of being replaced by an anti-Islamic variant focused specifically on the fundamentalist regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. “Like the Red Menace of the Cold War era,” explains Leon T. Hadar, a vocal critic of those who perceive Islam as a threat to U.S. foreign policy, “the Green Peril—green being the color of Islam—is described as a cancer spreading around the globe, undermining the legitimacy of Western values and threatening the national security of the United States.” An important component of this trend is that African regimes have sought to manipulate the threat of Islamic fundamentalism in order to obtain greater levels of U.S. foreign assistance and attention.

A sixth trend of the post–Cold War era has been growing U.S. diplomatic involvement in the resolution of regional conflicts in Africa. An early example of what such diplomacy could yield was demonstrated by the 1988 U.S.-brokered accords that offered South Africa’s withdrawal from Namibia and independence for that country in exchange for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola—a country that served as a proxy East-West battlefield in the 1970s and 1980s. On March 21, 1990, Namibia achieved independence under the leadership of African nationalist Sam Nujoma as a multiracial, multiparty democracy on the African continent. Two important ingredients that facilitated the resolution of this long-standing regional conflict were Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker’s tireless efforts to make the United States a peace broker in the negotiating process and the former Soviet Union’s willingness to pressure its Angolan and Cuban allies to accept a negotiated settlement. Both of these factors—which built upon the willingness of regional African participants to seek a negotiated settlement—obviously were by-products of a decline in Cold War tensions in the late 1980s.

The case of Namibia is not unique; rather, it is indicative of how the United States and the other great powers can work together as “facilitators” of resolving regional conflict in Africa. As outlined by Donald Rothchild, there were at least nine forms of U.S. diplomatic involvement in conflict resolution in Africa during the post–Cold War era:

- conflict prevention (the assemblage of information, measures of reconciliation, and pressure for human rights and democratization);
- behind-the-scenes support for the mediation of disputes by African third-party actors;
- the backing of a regional actor;
- assistance for an extraregional actor;
- the promotion of an international organization’s initiative;
- pressure on local actors to negotiate;
- humanitarian intervention and diplomatic facilitation;
- the organization of a regime transition; and
- direct third-party mediation between internal parties.

However, an important constraint on U.S. efforts at resolving regional conflict is the historical neglect of Africa by the White House. In order to be successful, U.S. efforts ideally require the interest and support for activist measures at the highest levels of the policymaking establishment. Indeed, resolving issues such as the ongoing civil wars in Liberia, Somalia, and Sudan will be extremely difficult even if the Clinton administration makes peace in these countries its number-one priority. Unfortunately, the highest levels of the U.S. policymaking establishment remain primarily concerned with Western and Eastern Europe, the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union, and flash points in other parts of the Third World.

A seventh trend of the post–Cold War era is the promotion of multiparty democracy as a precondition for the improvement of economic and political relations with Washington. The downfall of single-party regimes throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union—the intellectual heartland of single-party rule—raised important questions concerning the viability of this model in Africa. Most important, just as political democratization became a precondition for dramatically expanding levels of U.S. aid to the former Eastern bloc countries, this concept has filtered through the other regional bureaus of the State Department, including the Africa bureau. In fact, the Clinton administration codified U.S. support for the democratization process into an official doctrine—the so-called policy of enlargement—intended to replace the now-outmoded strategy of containment.

The Clinton administration’s policy of enlargement and its predecessor under the Bush administration have contributed to positive developments on
the African continent. In the case of Nigeria, for example, it has been argued that intense diplomatic pressures on the part of the Clinton administration and the European Union were critical in preventing the Nigerian military regime from canceling presidential elections that were ultimately held on June 12, 1993. Although the military regime ultimately annulled the results of those elections, leading to a major transitional crisis, the stance of the United States was much appreciated by the Nigerian population and emboldened proponents of democracy to maintain their campaign of disobedience.

Among the other concrete positive outcomes of U.S. democratization policies include the funding of a variety of U.S.-based democratization institutes that have sent observer teams to facilitate multiparty elections; the provision of foreign assistance to fledgling democracies to consolidate newly created democratic institutions, most notably independent judiciaries and legislatures; and the promotion of short-term visits by groups of Africans to the United States and U.S. citizens to Africa to strengthen links between elements of civil society in both regions.

Despite these positive outcomes, two important contradictions confront policymakers. The first is related to the decline in U.S. foreign aid to the African continent. African countries, even if they do adopt political reforms, are unlikely to receive greater amounts of resources from a shrinking foreign aid budget. Although democratization can be rewarded in a variety of other ways (e.g., preferential trading privileges), levels of foreign assistance nonetheless remain the yardstick by which African leaders judge the commitment of the industrialized North to their democratic rhetoric.

A second and more serious contradiction is the growing perception of the Islamic fundamentalist threat. Specifically, a tension has always existed between Washington’s often-stated preference for democracy in Africa and perceived national security interests. For example, during the Cold War era, when the ideal of democracy clashed with the national security objective of containing communism on the African continent, containment often prevailed at the expense of democracy. A succession of U.S. administrations were willing to downplay the internal shortcomings of a variety of U.S. allies on the African continent in favor of their strong support for U.S. policies of anticomunism and containment.

Although expectations were initially high among U.S. policy analysts and academics that Washington could focus on the normative goal of promoting democracy and human rights in the emerging post–Cold War international system, the U.S. response to events in Algeria in 1991 seems to indicate that containment of Islamic fundamentalism is at least one security objective that overrides the preference for democratization. In sharp contrast to U.S. denunciations of authoritarianism in other regions of Africa, the Bush administration remained silent when the Algerian army

annulled the first multiparty elections in Algeria since independence and assumed control of the country in a military coup d’état. The reason for silence was not that U.S. officials firmly believed the Algerian generals were guarantors of democracy but rather that an Islamic fundamentalist party, the Islamic Salvation Front—which, among other campaign promises, had called for the strict enforcement of shari’a—was on the verge of taking power through the ballot box. In this regard, the Clinton administration has adopted the view that whereas “radicalism must be combated by all means” in northeast Africa (especially in Egypt), areas outside of this zone (for example, northwest Africa) are of less strategic importance due to their distance from major petroleum sources, and therefore U.S. involvement against fundamentalist movements there can be minimized. It is for this reason, for example, that the Clinton administration, much to the consternation of French diplomats, has emphasized the necessity to seek a negotiated settlement for the Algerian civil war—even if this entails the eventual recognition of an Islamist, albeit democratically elected, regime.

The eighth and final trend of the post–Cold War era is Washington’s gradual abandonment of ideologically based policies in favor of the pursuit of economic self-interest. This general tendency has heightened economic and political competition between the United States and other Western powers, most notable of which is the rising French-U.S. conflict within the financially important telecommunications and petroleum industries in Francophone Africa. There seems to be a contradiction, however, between official government actions and increasing support for the private sector. For example, when the Republican majority in the U.S. Congress slashed already reduced levels of foreign assistance in spring 1995 based on its perception of Africa’s strategic and economic unimportance, Herman Cohen, assistant secretary of state for African affairs under the Bush administration, was presiding over a conference in Libreville, Gabon, designed to strengthen U.S.-African trade and investment. Despite their hesitation to provide the African continent with financial assistance, few members of Congress would disagree with Cohen’s primary themes: (1) The U.S. can no longer afford to accept France’s determination to maintain its privileged chasse gardée (“private hunting ground”) within the economic realm; and (2) foreign policy should serve as the facilitator of U.S. private enterprise in all regions of the world, including Africa.

Removal of the Shackles?

The removal of the Cold War shackles from U.S. foreign policy has important implications for the creation of a new African political order. In a positive sense, the decline of the Cold War suggests decreasing amounts of
U.S. covert and military intervention on the African continent, as well as less military assistance for authoritarian clients who used the threat of Soviet expansionism to attract White House attention and support. The promotion of democracy may become the centerpiece of U.S. policy, and the possibilities are good for continued cooperation among the great powers in facilitating resolution of regional conflicts. Even if the United States and other major powers of the world adopt neutral stances, the stage may be set for African solutions to African problems, and therefore the creation of a new African political order based on African interests and aspirations. However, U.S. policymakers must resist the urge to replace one set of shackles (anticommunism) with yet another (anti-Islamic fundamentalism). Most important, they must resist the temptation to become complacent in the post-Cold War era and should actively seek to promote sustainable development and democratization on the African continent. Well-fed peoples who share in the fruits of their political systems will pose no threat to the United States; instead, they will provide markets and political allies that can only strengthen the U.S. position in the world.

Notes


12. However, recent publishing trends suggest that Africa is potentially gaining an increased amount of attention within the academic community. See Peter J. Schraeder, “Reviewing the Study of U.S. Policy Towards Africa: From Intellectual ‘Backwater’ to Theory Construction,” Third World Quarterly 14.4 (1993), pp. 775-785.


29. Figures for FY 1995 were provided by USAID, Bureau for Legislative Affairs.
30. Even under President Jimmy Carter—recognized by Africanists as pursuing one of the most enlightened policies toward the continent during the post-World War II period—Africa ranked last in terms of foreign policy attention. Despite the fact that Africa accounted for 10.9 percent of the Carter administration’s foreign policy actions in 1977, this figure still trailed all other regions of the world (the second to lowest region was the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, with 14.6 percent) and in fact decreased in importance by nearly 50 percent 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: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 123, 130, 139, and 147.


37. See, for example, Ken Menkhau and Terrence Lyons, “What Are the Lessons to Be Learned from Somalia?” *CSIS Africa Notes*, no. 144 (January 1993).


40. Among the other events that have heightened concerns among policymakers that Islamic leaders and movements may pose grave threats to U.S. security interests are the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marines barracks in Lebanon, which resulted in the deaths of 241 Marines; Libya’s interventions in neighboring territories during the 1980s; terrorist attacks by radical Muslim groups against foreigners living in Egypt and Algeria; the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York by Islamic militants; Arab support for the Muslim forces fighting in Bosnia; and Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990, an event that resulted in the military involvement of over 400,000 U.S. military personnel in a war against Iraq at the beginning of 1991.

41. For a good overview of U.S. policy toward Sudan, see U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa, and Select Com-