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Reviewing the study of US policy towards Africa: from intellectual ‘backwater’ to theory construction

*Peter J Schraeder*

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**White Men Don’t Have Juju: An American Couple’s Adventure Through Africa**

Pam Ascanio  

**Beyond Safaris: A Guide to Building People-to-People Ties With Africa**

Kevin Danaher  

**Free at Last? US Policy Toward Africa and the End of the Cold War**

Michael Clough  

**US Economic Policy Toward Africa**

Jeffrey Herbst  

**High Noon in Southern Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighborhood**

Chester A Crocker  

**African Americans and US Policy Toward Africa 1850–1925: In Defense of Black Nationality**

Elliott P Skinner  

**An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J Bunche, 28 September 1937–1 January 1938**

Robert R Edgar, (ed)  

**Mobutu or Chaos? The United States and Zaire, 1960–1990**

Michael G Schatzberg  

**The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945–1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War**

Peter L Hahn  
Africanists generally agree that US Africa policies from the founding of the American Republic in 1789 to the end of the Cold War have been marked by indifference, at worst, and neglect, at best.1 Africa has been treated as a ‘backwater’ in official policymaking circles, compared to the time and resources allocated to other regions considered to be of greater concern. The lack of understanding 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 topics, such as apartheid in South Africa and famine in the Horn of Africa, receive regular press coverage and have somewhat improved the public’s awareness of African political and economic issues, the mention of Africa typically conjures up images of lush jungles and exotic animals. This image is reinforced by the nature of US media programming which, when it does focus on Africa, usually concentrates on the sensationalistic and often negative aspects of the continent.2 Even the traditional crisis-oriented stories that usually make it into the Western press are often blocked from airing. For example, despite the availability of excellent film footage documenting the emerging Ethiopian famine of 1983–85—an event which ultimately would receive significant press coverage and produce an outpouring of Western aid—editors initially refused to air the material because they ‘thought that there was no news in another African famine’.3

Even academics associated with the disciplines of history, political science and international studies have relegated the study of US foreign policy towards Africa to a low-level status.4 Instead, priority continues to be placed on producing scholarship that either focuses on traditional security concerns, such as the former Soviet Union and the nature of the Atlantic Alliance, or geographical regions of perceived greater importance, such as South-East Asia, Central America, and, more recently, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In short, Africa remains poorly understood by the policymaking establishment, the general public and academia.

The primary purpose of this essay is to assess what appears to be a growing scholarly interest in the study of US foreign policy towards Africa by offering a review of 13 books which were published in 1991 and 1992. However, this essay does not claim to offer a comprehensive review of all the books published during this period, nor does it seek to offer a comprehensive review of the literature published prior to 1991.5 The intention is rather to illuminate the contributions of these books to what can be described as four ‘generations’ of scholarship devoted to the study of continuity and change in US foreign policy toward Africa.

**First Generation: Travellers’ Accounts**

Newly trained social scientists have a tendency to downplay the relative importance of studies predating the arrival of the so-called ‘behavioural revolution’ in the aftermath of World War
II. Yet the cumulation of knowledge—the primary goal of researchers throughout the social sciences—inevitably derives from, and builds upon, the subjective and impressionistic writings of missionaries, traders, explorers, big game hunters, scientists, tourists and colonial administrators, who offered the first observations of the African continent’s relationships with various regions and countries in the world, including the United States. One of the most famous of these was former President Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), whose big-game safaris in East Africa in 1909–10 were colourfully described in African Game Trails: An Account of the African Wanderings of an American Hunter-Naturalist. As rightfully noted by one observer, Africanist scholars can ‘ill afford’ to ignore the significant reminiscences of travellers such as Roosevelt, which span over 400 years.6 Pam Ascanio, White Men Don’t Have Juju: An American Couple’s Adventure Through Africa (1991), serves as the latest addition to the first generation of travellers’ accounts. This book is a diary-like account of how the author and her husband Robb decided to quit their jobs, sell their house and belongings, and undertake a two-year trek across Africa during 1989–90 that led them through 22 countries and 28,000 continental miles. ‘As a career advisor in a community college, I encouraged students to pursue their dreams,’ explains Ascanio. ‘Robb, my husband, had been a social services supervisor in a Florida hospital … He was often touched by those whose dreams of “doing” were never realized because of an unexpected illness or accident’ (p xi). Although Ascanio (p xi) disavows the ‘great temptation’ to ‘hype’ their travels ‘into daring escapades replete with cauldrons of juju headshrinkers and tussles with the deadly green mamba snake,’ the enlarged print for the key word—‘juju’ (‘black magic’) —in the title underscores the desire of writers in this genre to attract the armchair traveller with images of exotic and mysterious Africa. The majority of the book, however, is devoted to describing such varied adventures as crossing the Sahara Desert by landrover, experiencing the city life of the major capitals of West Africa, the carnival atmosphere of taking an extended riverboat trip up the Congo River, and the fascination of trekking to Ujiji, Tanzania, the site where Henry Stanley, a young journalist with the New York Herald, met up in 1871 with the famous missionary explorer, David Livingstone.

Although not constituting a travellers’ account in the traditional sense of the word, Kevin Danaher’s Beyond Safaris: A Guide to Building People-to-People Ties With Africa (1991), is designed to serve as a guide for those interested in travelling in, and facilitating links with, the African continent. Specifically, the volume offers the names, addresses, phone numbers and a brief description of numerous Africa-related organisations in the United States. Among those organisations listed are:

(1) Non-traditional aid givers who seek to eliminate the need for aid in the future;
(2) Groups sending American volunteers to work and study in Africa;
(3) Twinning/sistering partnerships with community institutions such as schools and local governments in Africa;
(4) Alternative tourism organisations that introduce travellers to the reality of Africa’s people rather than isolating them in overpriced hotels and tourist traps;
(5) Alternative trade groups that help African producers market their products in the industrial countries;
(6) Policy groups that seek to shift US corporate and government support from African elites to community organisations; and
(7) Human rights networks that can mobilise international pressure against antidemocratic governments (p 11).

In short, whereas classic travellers’ accounts seek to take their readers to Africa in the comfort of their own homes, Danaher’s book is designed to spark interest in travelling to individual African countries. ‘Whatever type of Africa work you’re interested in, there is probably an organization already set up to help you find that kind of work,’ explains Danaher. ‘We hope you will find some way to get involved and learn from Africa’ (p 10).

Second Generation: Descriptive Overviews and Diplomatic Histories

Whereas the first generation of literature simply deals with the general area of US relations with Africa, the second generation is specifically focused on US foreign policy, and is divided into three major types of works.
(1) **Substantive Overviews**

As represented by Michael Clough, *Free at Last? US Foreign Policy Toward Africa and the End of the Cold War* (1992), a slim though provocative monograph sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, the first type of the second generation of scholarship usually seeks to offer a broad, substantive overview of US Africa policies during the post-World War II era. These books also generally focus on the political-military aspects of the foreign policy relationship, the importance of the nation-state as the primary actor in this realm, and the involvement of Africa in the Cold War struggle between the US and the former Soviet Union.

Clough’s monograph is timely in that he offers the first analysis of the significance of the end of the Cold War for US foreign policy towards Africa, and argues for the abandonment of traditional, government-to-government diplomatic approaches in favour of building community-to-community links. Among the most creative of Clough’s recommendations are: (1) the establishment of ‘a clearinghouse and coordinating office in Washington to collect and disseminate information about African visitors, programs around the country dealing with Africa, and individuals and groups in the United States interested in establishing contacts in Africa,’ and (2) creating ‘a network of regional African societies in key cities around the country to stimulate local interest in Africa, host African visitors, and promote exchange visits between the United States and Africa’ (p 120).

The Council on Foreign Relations also sponsored a shorter monograph (86pp) by Jeffrey Herbst, *US Economic Policy Toward Africa* (1992), that examines the economic aspects of US foreign policy towards Africa. After summarising the evolution of US foreign assistance programmes in Africa, Herbst briefly summarises a host of issues that are confronting US policy makers in the post-Cold War era: how to refashion and evaluate foreign assistance programmes; the future of African economies and their growing debt burdens; and the proper role of the USA in simultaneously attempting to promote economic and political liberalisation on the African continent. Although Herbst, similar to many Africanists (including myself), argues that the US has a ‘clear interest’ in promoting economic and political reforms in Africa, it would have been useful to offer an analysis as to why this is so. Moreover, there is little discussion of trade issues and the role of nongovernmental community efforts in facilitating future economic links.

(2) **Diplomatic Accounts**

Diplomatic accounts written by former ‘players’ within the policy-making establishment constitute another type of the second generation of scholarship. The primary benefit of works within this genre, such as Chester A Crocker’s *High Noon in Southern Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighborhood* (1992), is their ability to offer valuable insights into the foreign-policy-making process. Writing from the vantage point of someone who served as the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under the Reagan administration, Crocker offers a well-written historical analysis of the blueprint that he largely designed for securing peace in Southern Africa, most notably in terms of facilitating the process that led to independence for Namibia as Africa’s newest multiparty and multiracial democracy.

Although one may disagree with Crocker’s approach to regional peace making (the hotly debated diplomacy known as ‘constructive engagement’ that irritated detractors on both the right and the left), or criticise his interpretation of why diplomacy succeeded (for example, he downplays the importance of the end of the Cold War and, in the case of South Africa, the imposition of economic sanctions), those interested in foreign policy will find his accounts of bureaucratic infighting and turf battles between the various branches of government both enlightening and intriguing. In addition to criticising liberal members of Congress for promoting comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa that were passed in 1986, Crocker details policy disputes with the far-right conservative wing of the Reagan administration, most notably in the personage of William J Casey, Director of Central Intelligence, who constantly sought to undercut State Department initiatives with back-door diplomacy and an overzealousness for covert action. Even President Reagan is not beyond reproach. Crocker asserts that Reagan’s tendency to periodically ad lib overly positive statements concerning South Africa into his public statements.
seriously undercut carefully planned diplomatic strategies, and therefore ‘epitomized the insensitivity that would be the hallmark of his [Reagan’s] sporadic personal involvement on South Africa in the years to come’ (p 81). Although this will not constitute the final word on US diplomacy in Southern Africa during the 1980s, one can only hope that other Africa specialists within the policy-making establishment will follow Crocker’s lead and provide similar analyses in the future.

Two other books that are related to the diplomatic accounts genre document the role of African Americans in the policymaking process. Writing from the perspective of an African American who served as the US ambassador to Burkina Faso under the Johnson administration, Elliott P Skinner, in African Americans and US Policy Toward Africa 1850–1924: In Defense of Black Nationality (1992), seeks to ‘disprove the charge that, unlike many other ethnic groups in the United States that attempt to influence American policy to help their embattled homelands, African Americans have done little or nothing to aid the continent of their ancestors’ (p ix). Skinner assesses the ‘formal’ and ‘symbolic’ methods that African Americans have employed from 1850 to 1924 to influence US involvement in such varied events as the Berlin Conference of 1884–85 and the Versailles peace negotiations that ended World War II.

In a related volume edited by Robert R Edgar, An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J Bunche 28 September 1937–1 January 1938 (1992), the reader is introduced to the edited notes of one of the most renowned African Americans to have visited South Africa. The recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950 for his involvement as a United Nations mediator in the Middle East, Bunche offers tremendous insight into how one African American perceived South African society during the 1930s. The book is especially useful in terms of detailing Bunch’s impressions as a participant observer in important historical milestones in South African history, such as the Silver Anniversary meeting of the African National Congress in Bloemfontein in December 1937.

(3) Non-theoretical Case Studies

Individual case studies centring on one time period, one African country, or one US administration constitute a third genre within the second generation of scholarship. For example, Madeleine G Kalb made use of the State Department’s extensive cable traffic with Zaire to document US intervention in that country from 1960 to 1964.7 Expanding beyond simply one time period, Anthony Lake, former Director of Policy Planning at the State Department under the Carter administration and current National Security Adviser under the Clinton administration, documented the evolution of US policy towards Southern Rhodesia during the post-World War II period.8 And Richard H Mahoney, the son of a Kennedy-era diplomat posted in Africa, made use of documents from the Kennedy White House to assess the nature and effectiveness of that administration’s Africa policies.9

Three recently published books clearly follow the case study approach. Michael G Schatzberg’s Mobutu or Chaos? The United States and Zaire, 1960–1990 (1991), offers a critical analysis of the evolution of US foreign policy towards Zaire and its autocratic leader, Mobutu Sese Seko. Schatzberg demonstrates how US policies have been driven by a Cold War-induced consensus throughout the policy-making establishment (particularly the executive branch) that ‘chaos’—meaning territorial disintegration, regional instability and ultimately communist (and other forms of ‘radical’) expansion into Central Africa—is the likely alternative to Mobutu’s continued hold over power.

Peter L Hahn, The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945–1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War (1991), similarly offers a Cold War-oriented analysis of US foreign policy towards Egypt and the ‘radical’ nationalist regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Hahn illuminates how a policy-making conflict between the ‘strategic’ demands associated with containment of the former Soviet Union and the ‘political’ objective of recognising Egyptian national aspirations so as to promote regional stability ultimately was resolved in favour of the former.

Also centring on the Cold War era, Robert B Shepard, Nigeria, Africa, and the United States From Kennedy to Reagan (1991), describes how two basic mindsets—the ‘vital interests’ view generally adhered to by Republican administrations and the ‘liberal–internationalist’ view generally adhered to by Democratic administrations—have largely influenced US foreign policy towards Nigeria and its various military and civilian regimes from 1960 to 1989. In all three of these books,
special emphasis is placed on describing the impact of policy disputes (most notably among the bureaucracies of the executive branch) in contributing to continuity and change in US Africa policies.

Finally, Martin Staniland, *American Intellectuals and African Nationalists, 1955–1970* (1991), is an empirical, albeit non-theoretical, book that serves as something of a bridge between the second and third generations of scholarship. Staniland performs an invaluable service by demonstrating how US intellectuals fostered a variety of simplistic (and often false) impressions about Africa during the height of the Cold War. Specifically, Staniland offers an illuminating analysis of articles published in ‘public opinion’ journals from 1955 to 1970, and demonstrates how these writings and their authors can be grouped into four major categories—liberalism, radicalism, African Americans and conservatives. Staniland is thorough in his explanation of the different assumptions, values and political preoccupations that both undergird each of these perspectives and provide the basis for debate among their adherents over the preferred course of US foreign policy towards individual African countries (most notably Ghana, Zaire, and Nigeria). While clearly beneficial in terms of outlining the parameters of debate among US intellectuals, the book unfortunately does not make (nor professes to make) a link between these four schools of thought and their actual impact on US foreign policy towards Africa.

When examined as a group, the three types of books—substantive overviews, diplomatic accounts and case studies—that comprise the second generation of scholarship suffer from two common shortcomings, especially in terms of our ability to understand continuity and change in US foreign policy towards Africa. The first major shortcoming is that these books lack a clear theoretical basis. Although certainly valuable for documenting the substance of US Africa policies, the lack of theoretical rigour and conceptualisation decreases our ability to generalise about patterns and regularities. Most importantly, these types of studies often lend themselves to contradictory conclusions which tend to cloud rather than clarify the continuities and changes in policy.

The second major shortcoming revolves around the tendency of scholars within this generation to provide an intensive analysis of one case study. Although such works often provide a wealth of valuable data for the case in question, their concentration on one time period (such as the Nasser era in Egypt), one case study (such as Nigeria), or one US administration (such as the Kennedy White House) limits the generalisation of their conclusions to other time periods, case studies and presidential administrations.

**Third Generation: Theoretical Analyses**

The defining characteristic of the third generation of scholarship is the tendency of scholars to centre on one particular theory which they feel is most useful in explaining continuity and change. This genre of scholarship is important to the intellectual advancement of the subfield of US foreign policy towards Africa, in that the testing of individual theories provides an important basis for generalisations that go beyond individual time periods, case studies and presidential administrations.

Two recently published books stand out as exemplars of theoretically informed research. David N Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money, and US Policy in the Congo Crisis* (1991), presents an economically based analysis to explain US intervention in Zaire during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. After outlining the assumptions and shortcomings of six models—national character, pluralism, instrumental Marxism, structural Marxism, statism and bureaucratic politics—adopted by scholars to analyse US intervention in Africa and other regions of the Third World, Gibbs presents a ‘business conflict model’ to explain US intervention in Zaire. According to this model, cleavages within the international business community cause competition between the capitalist countries in Africa, and intranational business cleavages within individual capitalist countries foster policy debates over the proper course of foreign policy initiatives. In each case, the business community is described as exerting a critical influence on the foreign policies of their respective governments. For example, since the Eisenhower administration ‘was close to [US] investors who were linked to Belgian companies,’ the White House ‘was thus predisposed to favor the Belgian interests’. In contrast, since the
Kennedy administration ‘was linked to investors who sought to replace the Belgians,’ this economic relationship ‘predisposed Kennedy to oppose the Belgian position’ (p 3).

An illuminating aspect of Gibbs’ analysis is an attempt to describe policymaking disputes as being generated by competing economic interests. ‘One business faction may dominate the Congress, while another may control the executive,’ explains Gibbs. ‘Business conflict would then generate conflict between the legislative and executive branches.’ However, Gibbs is careful to note that the outcome of such conflicts is ‘contingent and varies from case to case,’ and that other, more traditional types of analysis, such as those which focus on the importance of ideological factors associated with the Cold War, can complement the economic model. Yet there is no question that such cases constitute exceptions. ‘As a general rule,’ explains Gibbs, ‘we would expect that the corporations with the best prior connections to government officials and which expend the most time, money, skill, and effort in the influence process will prevail’ (p 32).

This book is impressive in terms of the research compiled to test the validity of the business conflict model. In addition to reviewing the vast secondary literature and the wealth of papers and documents contained in a variety of archives, Gibbs also sought the declassification of nearly 2000 pages of documents from the State Department through the Freedom of Information Act, and interviewed over 30 policymakers who were involved in the formulation of US policy at the time. The book is at its weakest, however, in the concluding chapter in which Gibbs attempts to make the case for applying the business conflict model to other cases of US intervention in Africa. For example, how does the business conflict model explain the Reagan administration’s decision—despite the vehement protests of the US oil industry which has significant investments within the country—to renew US paramilitary aid to Jonas Savimbi’s guerrilla forces in Angola during the mid-1980s?

Jeffrey A Lefebvre, Arms for the Horn: US Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1953–1991 (1991), similarly provides an impressive piece of theoretically informed scholarship that offers the best analysis to date of US foreign policy towards the Horn of Africa. The primary purpose of the book is to clarify the ways influence is wielded in ‘great power supplier–small power recipient’ relationships, by focusing on the evolution of US arms transfer policies to Ethiopia and Somalia from the 1950s to the beginning of the 1990s. Adopting what he terms a ‘supplier–recipient bargaining model’, Lefebvre analyses 10 case studies of arms transfer policies—six for Ethiopia from 1953 to 1977, and four for Somalia from 1977 to 1990—and the ways the United States, Ethiopia and Somalia adopted two general sets of bargaining strategies based on ‘the manipulation of weakness’ and ‘the threat of defection’ to achieve their national security interests.

In addition to carrying out dozens of interviews with important figures who were involved in the formulation of US policies, such as Richard Moose, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under the Carter administration, Lefebvre (like Gibbs) makes extensive use of government documents and publications, as well as the vast amount of available secondary literature. The book is also comprehensive in the sense that it treats Ethiopia and Somalia as interlocking case studies (other works within the field usually focus on either Ethiopia or Somalia), and describes the evolution of US policies from their beginnings in the 1950s through 1991—a tremendously important year in which the Ethiopian dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974–91) and the Somali dictatorship of Mohammed Siad Barre (1969–91) were overthrown by guerrilla insurrections. Especially intriguing for Horn of Africa specialists is Lefebvre’s careful attention to describing US policies within the context of Middle Eastern politics, particularly the evolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict. However, the analysis is at its weakest when describing the evolution of the most recent events in the Horn of Africa (such as the US role in events surrounding the overthrow of the Siad and Mengistu regimes in 1991) which is treated in an 11-page conclusion.

In keeping with a trend evident throughout the discipline of political science during the 1980s and the 1990s, both volumes share a ‘rational-choice’ perspective which, as explained by Gibbs, assumes that ‘politicians and business people act rationally to further their respective self-interests,’ and that ‘such rational behavior influences the conduct of foreign policy’ (p 33). However, the assumption of rationality poses a potential problem for both works. For example, Lefebvre explains in his book that suppliers and recipients are rational actors who seek to ‘maximize benefits and minimize costs’ (p 5). Indeed, the issue of rationality is crucial to his discussion of the bargaining model as applied to US relations with Ethiopia and Somalia. However, this characterisation is often at odds with much of the evidence presented throughout the book which
seems to imply that US policies in the Horn of Africa are often anything but rational, resulting instead from such potentially irrational processes as parochial institutional operating procedures and infighting between the various bureaucracies of the executive branch. In short, both scholars need to assess more extensively the implications of rational-choice theory at all stages of the foreign policy process, including formulation and implementation, as well as outcomes.

Apart from these relatively minor criticisms, both books fall prey to a more significant problem indicative of the vast majority of works within what has been described here as the third generation of scholarship. The tendency to focus on one theoretical approach to explain continuity and change inadvertently leads to the creation of ‘islands of theory’ in which each approach is usually examined in isolation from other approaches. For example, some scholars have emphasised the importance of crisis situations and, more specifically, the conditions under which local crises between and within African countries escalate and become internationalised through the involvement of either the US or the former Soviet Union. Critics of this approach argue that undue attention to what usually amounts merely to a snapshot of a much larger relationship can overlook consequential changes that may creep into that relationship during routine periods. Still others disagree over the level of analysis. While some claim that one must centre on the role of the capitalist world-economy and the inherently expansive nature of capitalism, others insist that one must instead centre on the individual beliefs held by the decision-maker or the role of bureaucratically inspired interests as the driving forces behind US policy. Disagreements even arise over how much emphasis should be placed on various actors within the foreign policy establishment. Should one centre on the role of the President, Congress, bureaucracies, private interest groups or grass-roots organisations such as the antiapartheid movement?

The primary problem associated with centring on one particular theoretical approach is that the origins, formulation, implementation and outcomes of US Africa policies are extremely complex and do not lend themselves to monocausal explanations. While centring on one theoretical model (such as the business conflict model) may help explain one aspect of US foreign policy towards Africa (such as US intervention in Zaire during the 1960s), it may be useless in analysing another case study (such as why the US imposed sanctions against South Africa in 1986), or even another action during a different time period of the same case study (such as why the Carter administration adopted such a low-key response to the so-called ‘Shaba I’ invasion of Zaire in 1977). In short, there is a lack of synthesis of theory and the need for multicausal models incorporating the dynamic interplay between various factors of theoretical relevance. This lack of bridge building between disparate islands of theory has impeded the rigorous and systematic portrayal of the dynamics of change, or factors and processes that influence continuity and change in US foreign policy towards Africa over time.

**Toward a Fourth Generation? The Need for Multicausal Theoretical Frameworks**

In a forthcoming book, *United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis and Change* (January 1994), I offer one attempt at constructing a multicausal theoretical framework that explains continuity and change in US foreign policy towards Africa during the post-World War II era. The framework is applied in comparative fashion to three case studies of US foreign policy towards Africa: Zaire, Ethiopia–Somalia (as one), and South Africa. The time-frame of analysis ranges from the end of World War II to the inauguration of President Clinton on 20 January 1993. The framework is dynamic in the sense that it demonstrates how different theoretical constructs become applicable at different points in time. Four sets of variables within the US domestic and international arenas are considered to be of greatest importance in understanding foreign policy continuity and change.

**Nature of the US Policy-making Process**

A critical assumption of the book is that although scholars often speak of a ‘United States’ foreign policy towards Africa, one must remember that the USA is not a monolithic actor that speaks with one voice. Rather, Washington’s foreign policy landscape is comprised of numerous centres of power which have the ability to simultaneously pull policy in many different directions. One can
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(and should) find legitimate differences of opinion and intense rivalries for control of US Africa policies. For example, these rivalries not only come into play between the executive and congressional branches of government, as one would expect, but also within a particular branch (such as between the Department of State and the Pentagon), as well as within individual bureaucracies (such as between the State Department’s bureaus of African Affairs and European Affairs). The significance of this theme is that US foreign policy towards Africa will differ depending on which policy-making process is dominant: bureaucratic politics, presidential (White House) politics or domestic politics.

Interests and Beliefs of those Actors Achieving Influence within the Policy-making Process

Once we have identified those actors who have achieved preeminence within the policy-making process, one must look to their interests and beliefs to explain continuity and change in foreign policy. Special emphasis is placed on certain actors at three major levels of the policy-making process. When speaking of the process of bureaucratic politics, emphasis is placed on the established organisational missions of those ‘national security’ bureaucracies that comprise the executive branch. The relevant foreign policy actors at this level are the State Department, the Pentagon, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as well as each bureaucracy’s separate bureaus devoted specifically to Africa. When discussing the role of presidential politics and the influence of the White House in the policy-making process, the analysis centres on the different worldviews of Presidents and their most trusted foreign policy advisers—usually the Secretary of State and the National Security Adviser. Finally, when examining the role of domestic politics within the policymaking process, the analysis focuses on the actions taken by the Africa subcommittees of the Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as by the Congressional Black Caucus and private interest groups, such as TransAfrica. An important determining factor at this level of the policy-making process is the evolving nature of US public opinion, as well as the political interests of individual members of Congress.

Context of the Situation on the African Continent that Confronts US Policy-makers

The crucial dilemma when seeking to understand continuity and change, however, is determining under what circumstances these different portions of the policy-making establishment assume control over the policy-making process, and therefore have an impact on foreign policy outcomes. In order to achieve such an understanding, one must build bridges between the international and domestic policy arenas. Specifically, the primary thesis of the book is that the nature of events on the African continent—ranging from ‘routine’ to ‘crisis’ and ‘extended crisis’ situations—historically has affected the operation of the US policy-making process, and therefore the substance of US Africa policies. Bilateral relationships with various African regimes have not remained static, but instead have evolved as different portions of the foreign policy establishment have asserted their influence within the policymaking process at different points in time. Thus, by focusing on the interplay between the nature of events on the African continent and the operation of the policy-making process, one can gain a clearer understanding of continuity and change in US foreign policy towards Africa.

Levels of External Involvement in the Situation

The final variable for understanding continuity and change is the level of external involvement in a particular situation. Most notably, this external involvement has been wielded by the former European colonial powers and (during the Cold War era) the former Soviet Union and its allies (most notably Cuba, the former East Germany and the other countries of Eastern Europe). In general, US policymakers have historically looked upon Africa as a special responsibility of the former colonial powers, and therefore have expressed little concern over their involvement on the continent. However, the former Soviet Union and its allies were perceived during the Cold War as potentially destabilising actors whose influence, ideally, was to be kept to a minimum.
According to the evidence derived from the comparative case study analysis, continuity and change in US foreign policy towards Africa can be depicted according to three general patterns.

(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, US 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 and the evolution of bureaucratic politics. Specifically, policies during routine periods tend to be driven by the established organisational missions of the national security bureaucracies comprising the executive branch. The net result of bureaucratic pre-eminence in the policy-making process during routine periods is a policy outcome best described as bureaucratic incrementalism: once a foreign policy relationship is established with an African country, the self-interested nature of bureaucracies often contributes to the gradual enhancement of relations with that country. As a result, existing policy serves as the best predictor of future policy. In short, US foreign policy towards an African country is highly unlikely to change during routine situations in which bureaucratic influence prevails.

(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 African affairs bureaucracies will lose control of policy as Presidents and their most trusted foreign policy advisers assert White House control over the policymaking process. As a result, crisis situations serve as important ‘windows of change’ in US Africa policies. Depending on the worldview of the administration in power when the crisis occurs, the net result of presidential involvement is an uncertain policy outcome in which the possibility for change in US foreign policy is extremely high. In this regard, presidential involvement usually establishes a new bureaucratic point of departure for when the crisis subsides and policy, once again, falls under the realm of the national security bureaucracies.

The most important determinants of whether a situation took on a crisis atmosphere—at least before the decline of the Cold War at the beginning of the 1990s—historically have been the nature of European involvement, as well as that of the former Soviet Union and its allies. In conflicts lacking an East–West dimension (such as the 1964 border conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia), policy review rarely reached the level of the President and, even if it did, responsibility for its management ultimately remained in the hands of the Africa specialists within the national security bureaucracies. Even when Soviet involvement was perceived in Washington as a potentially destabilising factor (e.g. during the 1967–70 Nigerian civil war), the active involvement of a European power (in this case the UK) reinforced continued bureaucratic control of the policy-making process.

However, the combination of Soviet involvement and European withdrawal (e.g. during the Angolan civil war of 1974–75) effectively turned African conflicts into African crises at the level of the White House, and subsequently led to presidential involvement in the policy-making process. Crisis situations not only prompt the White House critically to examine and review—often for the first time—the nature and purposes of US foreign policy towards a particular African country, they also serve to make the parochial policies of individual bureaucracies more consistent with each other, as well as with the worldview of the administration.

(3) Extended crisis situations and domestic influence within the policymaking process. The reaction of Congress to events in Africa has generally followed three patterns, each of which has different implications for understanding the evolution of US Africa policies. First, because of its historic neglect of Africa, an uninterested Congress, in the absence of some sort of extended crisis situation, is generally not successful in significantly altering US foreign policy towards individual African countries. Policies in routine situations therefore continue to reflect established bureaucratic routines. Second, even during short-term crises when an issue attracts the attention of a significant number of members of Congress, control of the policymaking process naturally flows to the President and the bureaucracies of the executive branch. A typical aspect of this process 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 the possibility that more groups and individuals outside the executive branch will become involved in the policy process as debate spills over into the public domain. This spill-over effect 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 executive branch and takes the lead in formulating policy. This is particularly the case when an issue becomes the focus of an extended media campaign. Although the possibility for change in US Africa policies under such situations is significant, congressional ability to influence events nonetheless dramatically decreases in the absence of an extended crisis, as traditional partisan and ideological rivalries prevent the Senate and the House of Representatives from taking unified action.

The key to this framework is that one must look upon the evolution of a foreign policy relationship as constituting a continuum in which periods of bureaucratic influence are briefly interrupted by episodes of presidential and domestic involvement during crisis and extended crisis situations. During each of these periods, different policy processes are shaped by different policy determinants—bureaucratic politics and organizational missions, presidential politics and administration worldviews, and domestic politics and public opinion—such that reliance on one body of theory (e.g. that related to bureaucratic politics) inevitably yields unsatisfactory results. In short, in order to better understand continuity and change in US foreign policy towards Africa, the scholarly community increasingly needs to focus on fashioning and testing multicausal theoretical frameworks.

**Conclusion**

As witnessed by this review of 13 books published during 1991 and 1992, the study of US foreign policy towards Africa appears to be gaining an increased amount of attention within the academic community. The nature of this scholarship ranges from current-day travellers’ accounts to theoretically informed case studies, and can be divided into four generations of scholarship. Indeed, the study of US foreign policy towards Africa has evolved from being an intellectual ‘backwater’ to a regional subfield marked by greater theory construction and testing. Yet it remains to be seen whether the end of the Cold War will inspire a greater degree of scholarship devoted to Africa now that the primary focus of study—the former Soviet Union—has fragmented into a host of independent and non-communist regimes, or if this turning point in history will lead to Africa’s further marginalisation within academia as scholars and policy-makers dismiss the continent as increasingly unimportant within the post-Cold War international system.

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3. Ibid.  


Latin American Church and Politics

W E Hewitt

Politics and the Catholic Church in Nicaragua
John M Kirk

Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism
Daniel H Levine

Kingdoms Come: Religion and Politics in Brazil
Rowan Ireland

Since the early 1970s, the study of religion and politics in the Third World has become a growth industry. This is especially true of research on Latin America, where the postwar Catholic Church’s active support of change-oriented popular movements—mandated by its now famous ‘preferential option for the poor’—has generated intense interest within a wide array of disciplines.

Within social science especially, a number of important studies in Latin American religion and politics have emerged over the years. Collectively, these reflect a variety of analytical tendencies. The works to be examined here represent what are perhaps the two most noteworthy of these, one firmly established in the literature and the other relatively new. The first approach, adopted by John Kirk in his Politics and the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, is largely concerned with the dynamics of religious structures (churches), and their resultant ability to exercise influence in the political sphere—either directly or indirectly through their membership. The second, which instructs Daniel Levine’s Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism, and Rowan Ireland’s Kingdoms Come: