Guest Editor's Introduction:
Trends and Transformation in the Clinton Administration's Foreign Policy Toward Africa (1993–1999)

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President Clinton’s 11-day visit to the African continent in 1998 was intended by the White House to signal a turning point in U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. “In coming to Africa,” explained Clinton in an address to the Great Hall of Parliament in Capetown, South Africa, “my motive in part was to help the American people see the new Africa with new eyes, and to focus our own efforts on new policies suited to the new reality.” Clinton’s emphasis on the need for a new policy was meant to distinguish his administration’s approach from that of his Cold War, particularly Republican, predecessors—a guiding theme of the Clinton administration’s speeches. “Let me be clear,” explained Secretary of State Warren Christopher on May 21, 1993, in a speech before the 23rd African-American Institute Conference, “the Clinton Administration’s new relationship toward Africa will differ in important respects from the approach of the past 12 years.”

Less than one year later in official testimony before the Africa Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs George Moose underscored that the Cold War’s end had enabled the Clinton administration to “forge a productive new relationship with Africa” based on democratic ideals, conflict resolution, and economic growth and development. Perhaps the most poignant characterization of the Clinton administration’s intended break with the past was offered by Vice President Albert Gore at the 1994 White House Conference on Africa that brought together over 200 high-ranking administration officials and a variety of governmental and nongovernmental representatives involved in African affairs: “Decades from

now, when we look back on what we will [have] accomplished, let it be said that this was the generation that helped Africa achieve the peace and prosperity that has eluded it for so long.” The primary purpose of this introduction, as well as this special volume of Issue: A Journal of Opinion, is to address trends and transformation in the Clinton administration’s foreign policy toward Africa from 1993 to the present.

Rhetoric Versus Reality

The foreign policy pronouncements of the Clinton administration are not unlike those of their Democratic predecessors who also sought to underscore their “fresh thinking” when it came to Africa. President Jimmy Carter entered office on the campaign pledge of transcending his predecessors’ Cold War preoccupations with anticommunism and containment of the former Soviet Union, in favor of more positive goals, such as promoting human rights and basic human needs. Reminiscent of the vision advanced by the New Frontriersmen during the Kennedy administration, the Carter administration’s worldview understood the potent force of African nationalism and the need to focus on the internal as well as the external dimensions of conflict on the African continent. In rhetoric that would resonate just as strongly with Africanists during the 1990s as it did during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Senator (and later President) John F. Kennedy also derided what he perceived as Washington’s inability to come to grips with the rising tide of African nationalism, and underscored the necessity of embarking on a “bold and imaginative new program for the development of Africa.”

The Kennedy and Carter administrations nonetheless increasingly found themselves criticized by Africanists who argued that eloquent rhetoric of change did not match the reality of significant continuity with their Republican predecessors. During the Kennedy administration, Africanists criticized the chasm between Kennedy’s sharp rhetoric denouncing European colonialism and the ongoing reality of close military links with Portugal in order to maintain U.S. access to Portuguese-controlled military bases in the Azores. Africanists also criticized the growing chasm between Carter’s human rights rhetoric and the ongoing reality of continued close ties with authoritarian dictators, such as Mobutu Sese Seko of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kinshasa). In both cases, the initial appointment of foreign

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policy teams that, in turn, were more vocal about the need for more enlightened U.S. African policies, raised unfulfilled expectations among Africanists, and therefore led to rising criticisms among groups previously presumed to be each administration's closest allies.

This trend continued under the Clinton administration, most notably due to the president's initial proclivity to downplay the importance of foreign policy and instead focus primarily on U.S. domestic concerns. One of the earliest critiques of the Clinton White House (even among those within the administration) was that it was too concentrated on domestic affairs at the expense of legitimate foreign policy concerns. It was reported that when Clinton "ticked off what he viewed as the goals of his Administration for the first 100 days" at one of the first meetings of his major advisors at Camp David, the list included economic recovery, health care, welfare reform, political reform, and national service, but there was "not a single mention of a foreign-policy objective." It is not that Mr. Clinton is ignoring the myriad problems that confront the United States abroad," explained aides, who continue to emphasize that Clinton was elected twice on the basis of his domestic agenda ("It's the economy, stupid!"). But rather that he has "essentially delegated" policy to his senior foreign policy staff.9

To his credit, President Clinton launched his administration by naming several individuals to his foreign policy team who ensured that Africa would "at least get a hearing in the White House."10 Among the most prominent of these appointments was National Security Council (NSC) Advisor Anthony Lake, a former Carter administration official who brought significant Africanist credentials to the office, including authorship of a doctoral dissertation and several other published works related to U.S. foreign policy toward Africa.11 Other high-ranking appointments suggested a more conservative approach to foreign policy, such as the appointments of Christopher and Moose at the U.S. State Department, since both men tended to preserve existing policies and eschew innovation. Indeed, the administration's initial foreign policy speeches suggested a Cold War-inspired preoccupation with managing the U.S. security relationship with Russia and the other newly independent republics of the former Soviet Union, followed (in order of importance) by a focus on Europe, Asia, and the Middle East; Latin America and Africa were left for last.12

The White House's tendency to devote the least amount of attention to Africa relative to all other regions of the world not only continued, but was strengthened by, the virtual overhaul of Clinton's foreign policy team during his second term that made Samuel Berger (Lake's former assistant) NSC advisor, Madeleine Albright secretary of state, and Susan Rice (former NSC African specialist) assistant secretary of state for African affairs. Although Rice has emerged as much more proactive than her predecessor, she nonetheless must contend with a senior foreign policy team that is little, if at all, interested in U.S. foreign policy toward Africa.

One of the harshest critiques of the gap between rhetoric and reality in the Clinton administration's foreign policy toward Africa was offered at the beginning of the White House Conference on Africa by Representative Donald Payne, a New Jersey Democrat and foreign policy spokesperson for the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). Payne claimed that no U.S. administration, including that of President Clinton—had ever focused on Africa, and that U.S. foreign policy toward Africa was in disarray.13 Although Payne's remarks were no doubt tinged by extreme displeasure with the White House's handling of conference preparations (many members of the CBC were invited literally only days before the conference was scheduled to begin), they nonetheless captured a growing sense among Africanists that the Clinton administration was following in the footsteps of its Democratic predecessors, and that the rhetoric of change increasingly was being laid bare by the reality of strong continuity with past policies. Even the media images of the first extended visit of a sitting U.S. president to the African continent have been insufficient to quell growing criticisms over the Clinton administration's true commitment to match words with deeds.

**Debacle in Somalia as Turning Point**

The most influential African event of the Clinton administration's first six years in office occurred in October 1993, when dozens of U.S. soldiers were killed or wounded in a fierce battle in Mogadishu, Somalia, as part of Operation Restore Hope, a humanitarian military mission initially launched by President George Bush after he was defeated in the 1992 presidential elections. Media-driven images of victorious Somali forces holding a U.S. helicopter pilot hostage and dragging the corpse of a U.S. soldier through the streets of Mogadishu unleashed a firestorm of domestic criticism and debate (see my article with Brian Endless in this issue). What became known as America's "debacle" in Somalia served as a crucial turning point in the Clinton administration's foreign policy toward Africa.

First, the White House renounced a campaign pledge that envisioned a significant expansion of U.S. efforts in multilateral peace-keeping through the creation of a United Nations (UN) rapid deployment force. The administration's new position was formalized in a presidential decision directive (PDD 25) outlining fairly restrictive conditions that had to be met before the United States would agree to any further UN-sponsored military operations regardless of whether U.S. troops took part. Among the most important conditions relevant to the U.S. experience in Somalia was the necessity of...
seeking the prior consent of all warring parties prior to the deployment of military forces. The simple message of PDD 25 was that the United States "cannot resolve the conflicts of the world but does not believe that the United Nations is capable of making and keeping peace, particularly when hostilities among parties still exist."14

The most important outcome of PDD 25, which in essence denied U.S. support for UN-sponsored military operations designed to militarily impose peace among warring parties, was an extremely cautious approach to other conflicts in Africa. In the case of Rwanda, for example, the Clinton administration was clearly wary of being drawn into a civil conflict that, according to a UN report issued in December 1994, had resulted in the deaths of between 500,000 and one million unarmed civilians. Fearful of being drawn into "another Somalia," the Clinton administration not only initially blocked the dispatch of 5,500 troops requested by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, but instructed administration spokespeople to avoid labeling the unfolding ethnic conflict as "genocide," lest such a label further inflame U.S. public sympathy and demand U.S. intervention, as was the case in Somalia.

The Clinton administration's unwillingness to support UN-sponsored peace-keeping missions has led to de facto support for African military solutions under the guise of "African solutions for African problems." It is precisely for this reason, argue critics of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa, that the Clinton administration originally proposed the creation of the African Crisis Response Force (ACRF), subsequently reformulated under the guise of the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI). Africans, not Americans, are to take the lead in resolving African conflicts—a regional dynamic that stands in sharp contrast to extensive White House attempts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East or the series of crises in the Balkans in Western Europe.

An increasingly criticized implication of this military trend has been the Clinton administration's tacit support for military solutions imposed by African regional powers. For example, the Clinton administration quietly supported Rwanda's military efforts to install a pro-U.S. government in Congo-Kinshasa under the leadership of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, and is also supporting the efforts of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Rwanda to undermine what is perceived in Washington as a radical Islamic fundamentalist regime in the Sudan. Indeed, the Clinton administration has embraced the so-called new bloc of African leaders—Isias Afwerki of Eritrea, Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, and Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda—who control battle-hardened guerrilla armies and who are committed to militarily recoding African international relations. Apart from the fact that they control the reins of power, these regimes are supported by the Clinton administration due to their ability to maintain stability and their commitment to the creation of "responsible and accountable" governments. An important dilemma associated with such a policy, however, is that an undue focus on the importance of maintaining stability may in fact run counter to the long-term goal of promoting democracy.

The U.S. debacle in Somalia also significantly affected the Clinton administration's approach to conflict resolution. Entering office at a period in which internal civil conflicts were multiplying throughout the African continent, the administration was expected to formulate and to adopt a comprehensive policy of conflict resolution that went beyond the sporadic interventions of its predecessors. However, the newly elected Clinton administration was initially split between two currents of thinking in terms of conflict resolution in Africa. The first emphasized the classic belief that African issues would unnecessarily distract the president and potentially plunge the White House into unwanted domestic political controversies. According to this viewpoint, U.S. involvement, even in terms of conflict resolution, should be restricted in order to avoid entanglement in "future Somalias." A second, more activist point of view also was derivative of the U.S. experience in Somalia, but underscored that the massive costs associated with Operation Restore Hope could have been avoided by earlier, preventive action. "The choice is not between intervening or not intervening," explained one policymaker in the Clinton White House. "It is between getting involved early and doing it at a cheaper cost, or being forced to intervene in a massive, more costly way later."15 As witnessed by the Clinton White House's cautious approach to the initial stages of the Rwandan conflict, the events of October 1993 in Somalia clearly strengthened the position of those warning against the White House getting too closely involved in "intractable" conflicts in Africa.

Bureaucratic Dominance of the Policymaking Process

An important outcome of the White House's inattention to Africa is the enhanced importance of executive branch bureaucracies in the formulation and implementation of U.S. foreign policies toward Africa. Simply put, in order to best understand continuity and change in the Clinton administration's foreign policy toward Africa, one must focus on the policies and interactions of the African affairs bureaus of the traditional national security bureaucracies, such as the State Department, the Pentagon, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as well as their counterparts within the increasingly important economic realm, most notably the Department of Commerce. The net result of what can be referred to as bureaucratic dominance of the policymaking process is that U.S. African policies become fragmented, interpreted
differently according to the established organizational missions of each bureaucracy that historically has been created to deal with a particular aspect of the foreign policy relationship.

In the case of Somalia, for example, the lack of high-level coordination by the Clinton White House resulted in the continuation and expansion of what many Somali studies specialists considered an ill-conceived military operation from the start (i.e., famine was merely the "symptom" of an underlying political problem that could not be resolved through military intervention). Equally important, the White House’s disinterest led to the reinforcement of an already fragmented policy in which different portions of the national security bureaucracies were pursuing different, often contradictory, goals. While the State Department was emphasizing the need for political reconstruction and negotiated outcomes among all the various clan militia groups, the Pentagon was carrying out military operations designed to militarily defeat and capture militia leader Mohammed Farah Aidid. Simply put, the emphasis on political reconstruction was at worse more rhetoric than reality, and at best contradicted by an exclusionary military approach favored by military officials in the field.16

The first high-level analysis of growing contradictions in U.S. foreign policy toward Somalia nonetheless occurred only after the deaths of 18 U.S. soldiers in October 1993—approximately eight months after the Clinton administration assumed office. To his credit, Clinton recognized the shortcomings of U.S. foreign policy as it had evolved and quickly announced the impracticality of a military solution imposed from abroad, as well as the ultimate withdrawal of U.S. troops. However, the structural problem inherent in the Clinton administration’s foreign policy apparatus—that is, the lack of high-level attention and coordination of U.S. African policies except when a crisis or domestic politics forces those policies to the top of the foreign policy agenda—continues to foster a variety of unevenly applied policies.

Uneven Support for Democratization

Entering office at a period in which democratization movements were multiplying throughout the African continent, the Clinton administration was expected by Africanists to make democratization one of the critical elements of its African policies. A variety of observers warmly noted that "democracy" was one of the "common threads" linking Clinton’s campaign speeches during the presidential elections, and strongly greeted his statement in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, campaign stop that "we should encourage and nurture the stirring for democratic reform that is surfacing all across Africa from the birth of an independent Namibia to the pressure for democratic reforms in Kenya."17 The Clinton administration even went as far as to codify U.S. support for the democratization process into an official doctrine—the "policy of enlargement"—intended to replace the outmoded strategy of containment.18 Toward this end, the Clinton administration clearly has made democratization an integral aspect of policy pronouncements concerning Africa, and several cases, such as U.S. support for South Africa’s transition to a postapartheid democratic system, indicate that this rhetoric is being transformed into viable policies.

As demonstrated by current Clinton administration policy toward Congo-Kinshasa, however, democratization rhetoric does not always conform with actual policies. The cornerstone of administration policy is a permutation of the "Mobutu or chaos" thesis that dominated the thinking of the State Department, the Pentagon, and the CIA from the 1960s through the 1980s.19 This bureaucratically inspired consensus embodied the firm belief that "chaos"—meaning territorial disintegration, regional instability, and ultimately, communist expansion into the heart of Africa—was the only alternative to Mobutu’s continued hold on power. At the beginning of 1999, the Mobutu or chaos thesis suggests the necessity for a strong (but not necessarily democratic) leader if the region is to avoid socioeconomic and politico-military chaos. "Regardless of the fact that we are no longer faced with a communist threat," explained a member of the State Department’s Africa Bureau, "the destabilization of Zaire [Congo-Kinshasa]—which borders nine other African countries—could have a tremendously negative impact on regional stability."20 With the experiences of Somalia and Rwanda still etched in their minds, the Africa specialists of the national security bureaucracies have successfully argued for the need to tread softly as, according to another member of the State Department’s Africa Bureau, the situation in Congo-Kinshasa "could easily turn into a Somalia and a Rwanda rolled into one, although this time in one of Africa’s largest and most populous nations."21

It is particularly striking to hear members of the State Department’s Africa Bureau argue that, like his predecessor at the beginning of the 1990s, Kabila is both "part of the problem and part of the solution" to resolving the crisis in the Great Lakes region. Once again returning to current manifestations of the chaos thesis, there is a tendency for U.S. diplomatic personnel to argue against pushing Kabila too hard or too fast for fear that U.S. efforts will intensify an already chaotic politico-military situation. Indeed, as is the case with U.S. support for other members of the “new bloc” of African leaders, initial U.S. support for the Kabila regime placed a heavy premium on his promise to create a “responsive and accountable” (but not necessarily democratic) government capable of restoring order and ensuring the territorial integrity of the nation. In this regard, U.S. policy toward Congo-Kinshasa continues to emphasize (in the following order): stability, territorial integrity, and the cessation of transborder...
threats, even if the successful achievement of all three comes at the short-term expense of democracy.

The inherent contradictions in the Clinton administration's support for democratization are nicely demonstrated by a comparison of Clinton's presidential trip to Africa with that of an earlier trip by Secretary of State Albright in December 1997. Clinton's itinerary was purposely whittled down to emphasize his administration's commitment to democratization throughout the African continent. Indeed, four of the six countries visited—Botswana, Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa—are among the leading democracies on the African continent. If one focuses on the countries visited by Albright, however, a very different and undemocratic picture emerges of U.S. priorities in Africa. Six of the seven countries—Angola, Congo-Kinshasa, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe—are ruled by leaders who seized power by the barrel of the gun rather than by democratic elections. According to critics, the message sent by Albright's visit was that the Clinton administration's true priority is the cultivation of strategically located, pro-U.S. regimes capable of maintaining stability where civil wars and ethnic conflicts once raged.

**Trade Not Aid**

The Clinton administration has reinforced a post-Cold War trend of deemphasizing foreign aid in favor of promoting trade and investment as the preferred economic components of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. U.S. foreign aid to Africa has steadily decreased from a peak of $1.8 billion in 1985 to approximately $800 million in 1998. To its credit, the Clinton administration in 1996 unveiled the first formal U.S. trade policy for aggressively pursuing new economic markets throughout Africa. The centerpiece of this economic strategy is congressional legislation—the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act—designed to enhance U.S.-African trade. The legislation has been passed in the U.S. House of Representatives but continues to languish in the U.S. Senate. Sharply criticized by African leaders, such as South Africa's President Nelson Mandela, as well as influential members of the U.S. African affairs constituency, most notably the CBC, the act is unlikely to pass Congress in its current form.

The formal announcement of the Clinton administration's trade policy was preceded by a series of highly publicized speeches rejecting Washington's past support for Europe's privileged economic role in its former colonies in favor of a more aggressive approach to promoting U.S. trade and investment. "The African market is open to everyone," explained former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen in a 1995 speech in Libreville, Gabon. "We must accept free and fair competition, equality between all actors." Toward this end, senior administration officials increasingly agree that foreign policy should serve as the facilitator of U.S. private enterprise throughout the African continent.

An important outgrowth of the Clinton administration's aggressive trade policy is the intensification of economic conflict between the United States and the other northern industrialized democracies as they compete for economic influence and markets throughout Africa. This economic competition has become especially pronounced in terms of U.S.-French relations, most notably in the highly lucrative petroleum, telecommunications, and transport industries in francophone Africa. In the eyes of French policymakers, the penetration of U.S. and other Western companies constitutes "at best an intrusion" and "at worst an aggression" into France's perceived domaine réserve (privileged realm) throughout francophone Africa. The seriousness with which this issue is treated at the highest levels of the French policymaking establishment was demonstrated by the public admission of Minister of Cooperation Michel Roussin that a series of meetings had been held on how best to "defend" French interests, including those within the economic realm, against those of the United States.  

This more aggressive business policy is especially highlighted by the Clinton administration's willingness to participate in a variety of high-profile regional events, such as the African/African-American Summit. Originally conceived by the Reverend Leon Sullivan, author of the 1977 code of conduct—the "Sullivan principles"—for U.S. firms operating in South Africa, as a vehicle for strengthening cultural ties between African Americans and Africans, the summit has evolved into a burgeoning forum for encouraging trade and investment between the United States and Africa. The inaugural summit was held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 1991, followed by summits in Libreville, Gabon (1993), Dakar, Senegal (1995), and Harare, Zimbabwe (1997). The Harare meeting was attended by more than 3,000 participants, including African heads of state from Botswana, Ethiopia, Senegal, Swaziland, and Uganda, as well as notable African American politicians, such as two-time presidential candidate Reverend Jesse Jackson, David Dinkins, Marion Barry, and Coretta Scott King. The official U.S. government delegation was led by Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater, and was joined by Jack Kemp. The trade and investment exhibition of the summit was dedicated to the memory of Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, who took initiative in building U.S.-African relations before he died in a plane crash in Bosnia in 1995. The next summit was held May 15–22, 1999, in Accra, Ghana.

An important aspect of burgeoning U.S. trade policies in Africa is the willingness of local U.S. ambassadors to serve as advocates for business—in essence, mirroring the activities of their European, particularly French, counterparts and constituting a return to the pre-Cold War era when U.S. diplomatic
missions made the promotion of economic linkages a foreign policy priority. For example, in the case of Botswana, former U.S. Ambassador Howard F. Jeeter was recognized as a very effective advocate of the Clinton administration's trade priorities in Southern Africa. According to Michael A. Weaver, manager of plant operations for a pipe-making subsidiary of Owens-Corning that opened in Gaborone in 1994, Jeeter and the more aggressive policy of the Department of Commerce contributed in no small part to his company's decision to locate in Gaborone. "In the past, the U.S. government was not as willing to serve as an advocate for business, and as a result Americans were here [Botswana] in name only, at least as concerns trade and investment," explained Weaver. "This definitely has changed under the Clinton administration—they most notably aided us by helping to keep the local playing field level from the often unfair economic practices of our competitors, and working with and facilitating our access to key government officials interested in what we could bring to Botswana."23

Conclusion

Most Africanists would agree that the hallmark of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa historically has been indifference at worst and neglect at best. The Clinton administration is truly unique in this regard in that, for the first time, a sitting president has made an extended presidential visit to the African continent. However, the Clinton administration, with less than two years remaining in its second term of office, has a foreign policy record toward Africa that remains characterized by a nonengaged president whose administration, despite good intentions, initially placed foreign policy on the back burner (with Africa still occupying the smallest flame), supported cuts in financial assistance to Africa, is more cautious concerning U.S. involvement in multilateral military operations, has been more reactive than proactive in terms of conflict resolution, and at best has a mixed record in terms of promoting democratization. Like its Democratic predecessors who also raised expectations beyond the intentions and or abilities of their administrations to meet them, the Clinton administration has found itself criticized for not matching words with deeds.

Notes

1. Press statement of March 26, 1998, provided by the White House.
7. See Peter J. Schraeder, United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis, and Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 87–98.
9. Ibid.
16. See, e.g., Ken Menkhansh and Terrence Lyons, "What Are the Lessons to Be Learned From Somalia?" CSIS Africa Notes, no. 144 (January 1993).
17. Cason and Martin, "Clinton and Africa," p. 3.
18. See Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," Address delivered at the School of Advanced Interna-
tional Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C., September 21, 1993.


21. Confidential interview.
