Foreign Policy Restructuring
How Governments Respond to Global Change

Edited by
Jerel A. Rosati
Joe D. Hagan
Martin W. Sampson III

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Bureaucratic Incrementalism, Crisis, and Change in U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Africa

Peter J. Schraeder

Peter Schraeder offers a theoretical framework which demonstrates how the nature of events—ranging from routine to crisis and extended crisis situations—affects the policymaking process and its implications for change in the context of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. Under routine situations foreign policy is guided at the bureaucratic level where foreign policy continuity and incrementalism tend to prevail. When a crisis situation develops the president and his circle of advisors are more likely to assert control over policymaking thus increasing the likelihood of foreign policy change and restructuring. During an extended crisis situation domestic politics tend to become a vital part of the policymaking process in which Congress, acting either independently or as a result of public pressure, removes the initiative from the executive branch and takes the lead in formulating potentially new policies. The power of Schraeder's conceptual framework is that each of the three policymaking patterns is based on both external and internal sources of foreign policy with different implications for stability and change. Although developed in the context of U.S. interventionism in Africa, the conceptual framework can improve an understanding of foreign policy restructuring in other countries as well.

Peter Schraeder is assistant professor of political science at Loyola University of Chicago. He received a Ph.D. in international studies from the University of South Carolina in 1990 and a B.A. in international studies and French from Bradley University in 1982, as well as a Diplôme Annuel from the Sorbonne in 1982. His research interests center on international relations theories and comparative foreign policy analysis, especially as both fields apply to Africa. He is the author of United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis, and Change, and editor of Intervention into the 1990s: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Third World. His work has also appeared in African Affairs, African Studies Review, Journal of Modern African Studies, Middle East Journal, Northeast African Studies, Third World Quarterly, and TransAfrica Forum. He has lectured and carried out research throughout Africa, and is currently writing a book on the comparative politics of Africa.
The purpose of this study is to offer a theoretical framework for understanding foreign policy continuity and change by focusing on U.S. policies toward Africa during the post-World War II period. In order to achieve such an understanding, one must build bridges between the fields of international relations and foreign policy. Specifically, this chapter demonstrates that the nature of events on the African continent historically has affected the operation of the U.S. policymaking process, and therefore the substance of U.S. African policies. Bilateral relationships with various 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 U.S. policymaking process, one can gain a clearer understanding of the nature of foreign policy stability and dynamism.¹

Continuing confusion over the nature of constancy and innovation in U.S. foreign policy toward Africa is at least partially the result of three trends within the scholarly literature focusing on this topic (see Schraeder 1993 for a more extensive analysis of this theme). First, the vast majority of works constitute substantive overviews lacking a clear theoretical basis (see, e.g., Bowles 1956; Emerson 1967; Arkhurst 1975; Jackson 1984; Rothberg 1988; Clough 1992). Although certainly valuable for documenting the substance of policy, the lack of theoretical rigor and conceptualization within these works inhibits the ability to generalize about patterns and regularities. Most important, these types of studies often lend themselves to contradictory conclusions which tend to cloud rather than clarify the continuities and shifts in U.S. foreign policy. A second trend is the tendency of scholars to center on one time period (see, e.g., Kalb 1982), one case study (see, e.g., Lake 1976), or one administration (see, e.g., Mahoney 1983) in attempting to explain U.S. African policies. Despite the valuable contributions of studies such as these, their limited scope hinders the generalizability of their conclusions to other time periods, case studies, and presidential administrations.

A final, and perhaps most important, trend is the tendency of scholars to center on one particular theory which they feel is most useful in explaining stability and change, subsequently creating isolated "islands of theory" which neglect other possible approaches (see, e.g., Arsenault 1972; Marcum 1972; Rodney 1982; Ogene 1983; Love 1985; Wallerstein 1986; Jordan 1987; Kolko 1988; Lefebvre 1991; Gibbs 1991). The primary problem associated with this type of theoretical approach is that the origins, formulations, implementations, and outcomes of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa are extremely complex and do not lend themselves to monocausal explanations. In short, there is a lack of synthesis of theory and a need for multicausal models incorporating the dynamic interplay between various factors of theoretical relevance. This lack of building bridges 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 restructuring in U.S. foreign policy over time.
This chapter offers a conceptual framework for explaining stability and dynamism in U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. A critical aspect of this framework is that the United States is not a monolithic actor that "speaks with one voice." Rather, Washington's foreign policy landscape is comprised of numerous centers of power which have the ability to simultaneously pull U.S. foreign policy in many directions. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of U.S. foreign policy regarding Africa requires an approach that focuses on three policymaking patterns centered around the national security bureaucracies, presidents and their closest advisors, and the larger arena of domestic politics.

The nature of the situation confronting U.S. policymakers is particularly important in considering whether bureaucratic politics, presidential politics, or domestic politics is likely to predominate. Furthermore, each of the three policymaking patterns has differing implications for the likelihood of foreign policy continuity and change. First, more routine (i.e., noncrisis) situations lead to a policymaking process marked by bureaucratic politics and foreign policy continuity. When the situation shifts from routine to crisis, however, policy often captures the attention of presidents and their immediate circle of foreign policy advisors, providing a possibility for foreign policy reevaluation and change. Finally, under a situation of extended crisis, domestic politics become a factor as Congress asserts itself within the policymaking process and offers the possibility of overturning even staunchly defended executive branch policies. Together, the dynamic movement between each of these three policymaking patterns accounts for constancy and innovation in U.S. African policies. Greater comprehension of these patterns in the U.S. foreign policy process should allow for a broader understanding of foreign policy continuity and dynamism in general.

The remainder of the chapter is divided into four sections. The first three sections describe the three policymaking patterns—bureaucratic politics, presidential politics, and domestic politics—that have characterized the evolution of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. The final section offers a summary, placing these three policymaking patterns in perspective for better understanding stability and change in foreign policy.

**Routine Situations and Bureaucratic Politics**

In routine situations marked by the absence of crisis, the tendency has been for the president to relegate the day-to-day responsibility for overseeing U.S.-African relations to the national security bureaucracies which comprise the executive branch. These bureaucracies, which primarily focus on the politico-military aspects of foreign policy relationships, include the State Department, the Defense Department, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as well as their specialized agencies devoted specifically to Africa.
Bureaucratic Influence Within the Policymaking Process

Three factors contribute to bureaucratic influence within the policymaking process: the low level of attention typically paid to African issues by the president; the executive's traditional assumption that, due to their historical colonial heritage, the European allies should assume primary responsibility for Western interests in Africa; and, at least prior to the end of the cold war, the East-West dimension of a particular situation.

Low Level of Attention Paid to African Issues. "The President," John F. Kennedy noted, "is rightly described as a man of extraordinary powers" (Sorensen 1963). Standing at the apex of an immense bureaucratic machinery, the president as commander-in-chief, head-of-state, chief diplomat, and chief administrator embodies substantial powers allowing the White House to set the agenda for others within the foreign policy establishment. "Yet it is also true," Kennedy continued, "that he must wield those powers under extraordinary limitations" (Sorensen 1963). Among these are the impracticality of one person monitoring relations with over 150 countries (including over fifty in Africa) and the time constraints imposed by the elected term of office (four to eight years). In addition, the president must contend with a Congress that has a separate and often different foreign policy agenda, an uncooperative bureaucracy, and lagging levels of general public support. Newly elected presidents therefore must balance the urge to completely reorient the goals, priorities, and substance of foreign policy with a recognition of the time constraints involved. In a process that inevitably has led to neglect of Africa, presidents have been forced by necessity to select those countries, geographical regions, and functional issues which receive priority attention by their administrations. Indeed, although contacts between the United States and Africa have expanded in both quantity and quality during the post–World War II period, presidents from Harry S Truman to George Bush traditionally have been less interested in, and subsequently devoted less attention to, Africa relative to other regions of the world. It is highly likely that this trend will continue under the Clinton administration, most notably due to President Clinton's desire to downplay the importance of foreign policy and instead focus primarily on U.S. economic concerns.

Assumption of European Responsibility. Africa's enduring relationship with Europe is a second element that reinforces the president's tendency to allow U.S. policies toward Africa to be heavily influenced by the national security bureaucracies. All presidents (although in varying degrees) traditionally have looked upon Africa as a special area under the influence and responsibility of the former European colonial powers. Therefore, they generally have deferred to European sensitivities and maintained a low profile during routine periods when one of these countries has taken the lead on a particular foreign policy issue. This European component was best summarized in 1968 by George Ball, under secretary of state under Kennedy. Ball (1968, 240) noted that the United States recognized Africa as a "special European responsibility" just as Euro-
pean nations recognized "our particular responsibility in Latin America," although these spheres of influence increasingly have been broached by both sides from the 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s, there is no disputing the fact that the White House continues to look to its European allies—especially France, Britain, and, to a lesser degree, Italy, Belgium, and Portugal—to take the lead in their former colonial territories.

**East-West Dimension of the Situation.** The East-West dimension is the final, and perhaps most important, element that historically has influenced presidential attention to African issues. Since 1947 when George F. Kennan formulated the doctrine of containment and the Soviet Union and communism became the central concerns of U.S. strategic thinking, policymakers have tended to view Africa from an East-West perspective. Although there were variations in the assessment of the Soviet threat and the utility of containment as originally conceived, all presidents from Truman to Bush (at least prior to the decline of communism and the fragmentation of the Soviet Union in 1991) have sought to limit Soviet influence on the African continent (Ohaegbulam 1988). The result was increased presidential attention to African issues when the former Soviet Union and its allies became significantly involved on the continent. Yet when the East-West element was lacking, there existed a high probability that the president would remain distant and uninvolved in African issues. The day-to-day responsibility of overseeing policy was left in the hands of the national security bureaucracies. As it became readily apparent in 1991 that the cold war had come to an end, African scholars and policymakers increasingly began to worry that this state of affairs would result in the decline of already low levels of presidential interest in the African continent (and thus reinforce the influence of the national security bureaucracies in the policymaking process). For example, citing the traditional Swahili proverb, "When the elephants [superpowers] fight, the grass [Africa] suffers," one Africanist noted that, "When the elephants make love, the grass suffers just as much."24

**Bureaucracies and Organizational Missions in Africa**

The net result of bureaucratic influence within the policymaking process is that U.S. African policies become fragmented, interpreted differently according to the established organizational missions of each bureaucracy (Halperin 1974). Each bureaucracy historically was created to deal with a particular aspect of the foreign policy relationship. Subsequently, each fosters an institutional culture that both supports its mission and socializes individuals into working toward the attainment of its particular goals. Although other important sources of bureaucratic behavior, such as the substantive views and personal ambitions of individual bureaucrats, can influence bureaucratic positions, the critical theme of this section is that members of a bureaucracy often become the advocates of their agencies and tend to interpret national security according to their agency's role and mission in the foreign policy establishment.

The State Department was the first national security bureaucracy within the
executive branch to recognize the importance of Africa through the creation in 1958 of a separate Bureau of African Affairs. Generally recognized as the lead agency as concerns U.S. African policies, the African Bureau is headed by an assistant secretary of state for African Affairs who, in turn, is supported by a senior deputy assistant secretary, three deputy assistant secretaries, as well as a host of regional offices staffed by country directors and desk officers who monitor day-to-day developments within sub-Saharan Africa. The primary mission of the African Bureau is the maintenance of smooth and stable political relationships with all African governments. The emphasis is on quiet diplomacy and negotiated resolution of any conflicts that may arise. Career Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) within the bureau are usually more willing than other members of the executive branch to develop U.S. policies that are in alignment with African aspirations. Consequently, they are also more sensitive to the importance that African leaders attach to regional political associations, such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU). These same officers, when addressing the nature of conflict within a particular African country, also tend to balance the traditional impulse to attach blame to external powers—whether a communist Soviet Union during the cold war era or a “radical” Islamic fundamentalist Iran of the 1990s—with a well-grounded understanding of the conflict’s internal cultural, economic, historical, and political roots.

The CIA was the second among the national security bureaucracies to recognize the importance of Africa through the creation in 1960 of a separate African Division within the Deputy Directorate of Operations (DDO). The DDO represents the “operations” side of the CIA responsible for mounting covert actions throughout the globe. Even though it was created during roughly the same period as the State Department’s African Bureau, the African Division’s official mission and outlook from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1990s was radically different: to carry the ideological battle against the Soviet Union and communism to the African continent, in efforts that ranged from the cultivation of local agents to the mounting of covert operations. Subsequently, African aspirations and the internal causes of conflict on the continent historically have been downplayed by DDO officers. These officers usually have had the greatest tendency within the executive branch to view Africa as a strategic battleground and attribute instability in a particular African country to externally motivated aggression. Openly contemptuous of self-proclaimed Marxist regimes, “leftist” leaders and liberation movements, and, more recently, “radical” activists (such as Libya’s Muammar Qadhafi) and religious movements (such as Islamic fundamentalism), the CIA prefers close liaison with the security services of the European allies and friendly African regimes.

The Defense Department—most notably its policy office of International Security Affairs (ISA)—has been the relative latecomer among the national security bureaucracies in recognizing the importance of Africa (see, e.g., Volman 1984). The ISA waited until 1982 before appointing a deputy assistant secretary of defense to head the newly created Office of African Affairs. Leaning toward the globalist vision of the CIA, the Office for African Affairs
tends to downplay local African concerns in favor of the continent's strategic position within the international military balance, focusing on paramount U.S. interests in Europe, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union. Moreover, the domestic nature of an African regime is not perceived as an impediment to military cooperation as long as that regime is pro-Western in nature. The primary mission of the Office of African Affairs is the coordination and facilitation of two major military objectives on the African continent: maintaining stable, pro-Western governments through the transfer of military equipment and the training of local forces in its usage; and ensuring continued access to training facilities and strategically located bases for responding to local crises and, most important, military contingencies in Europe or the Middle East. Subsequently, military objectives are carried out by the three major military services—the Navy, Air Force, and Army—each of which has its own particular bureaucratic mission on the African continent.11

Other portions of the bureaucracy, of course, deal with the nonpolitico-military aspects of U.S. African policies. The U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) seeks economic development in select African countries through a variety of projects and programs.12 The Departments of Commerce and Treasury, with their emphasis on strengthening and expanding the U.S. economy, perceive their roles as creating inroads for U.S. trade and investment on the continent. Finally, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) promotes greater U.S.-African cultural understanding through such activities as exchange programs and goodwill missions.13 Although each of these bureaucracies obviously plays an important role in U.S. policies toward Africa, the emphasis in this chapter is on the politico-military or "national security" aspects of African policies, and thus focuses primarily on the previously described national security bureaucracies.

The U.S. response to ethnic strife in Burundi in 1972 provides an excellent example illustrating how bureaucratic influence within the policymaking process often yields a foreign policy outcome resulting from established organizational missions.14 Through the spring and summer of 1972, nearly 250,000 members of Burundi's Hutu ethnic group were killed by the ruling minority Tutsi regime of Colonel Michel Micombero. For reasons to be explained below, President Richard M. Nixon and National Security Adviser Henry A. Kissinger remained largely uninvolved in this issue, allowing policy to be formulated and implemented by the State Department's African Bureau. The two officials recognized as responsible for the policy were Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs David D. Newsom and Country Director for Central African Affairs Herman J. Cohen (who later served as assistant secretary of state for African Affairs under the Bush administration).

The U.S. response to the internal crisis is revealing both for what the African Bureau did and did not do. In accordance with standard operating procedures, quiet diplomatic efforts were initiated to enlist the support of Burundi's regional neighbors and the OAU to press the Micombero regime to stop the killings. However, it soon became apparent to the African Bureau that the vast majority
of African countries—their political problem of how to deal with their respective minority populations—were opposed to this policy. Moreover, it was feared that further actions would run the risk of damaging relations with Burundi and other countries on the continent. Thus, policymakers chose a course of inaction. Indeed, despite the fact that the United States imported nearly 75 percent of Burundi’s primary export of coffee, potentially viable options, such as economic sanctions, were dismissed. The African Bureau even suggested that Washington refrain from publicly denouncing the Micombero regime, although such inaction clearly would have been in direct opposition to both international human rights conventions and the frequently invoked U.S. commitment to human rights. The reason behind the decision, according to a group of specialists inclusive of former State Department personnel, was simple: “For a bureaucracy which conceived its day-to-day job as the maintenance of untroubled relations with African governments, an independent American response to the Burundi killings threatened that mission.” Noted an official of the African Bureau in the aftermath of the killings, “If we’d involved ourselves in this, we’d be creamed by every country in Africa for butting into an African state’s internal affairs. We don’t have an interest in Burundi that justified taking that kind of flack” (Brown, Freeman, and Miller 1972, 12).

Bureaucracies and Maintenance of the Status Quo

The African Bureau’s tendency to rely on established ways of thinking in formulating policy toward Burundi underscores an important aspect of bureaucratic cultures. This tendency—a fundamental resistance to change or predilection toward maintenance of an established status quo—long has been recognized by both policy analysts and practitioners alike. Among the most important factors contributing to bureaucratic conservatism are the security in following established standard operating procedures, as well as the realization that undue risk-taking may permanently damage one’s career by effectively blocking any upward mobility through the ranks (see Allison 1971; Steinbruner 1974; O’Neal 1982). The net result, according to Halperin (1974, 99), a respected scholar on bureaucratic politics and foreign policy, is that the “majority of bureaucrats prefer to maintain the status quo, and only a small group is, at any one time, advocating change.” Subsequently, members of a bureaucracy—especially its head—will often put up a fierce fight rather than submit to changes that they perceive as infringing on their turf or threatening the integrity of their organization’s bureaucratic mission (see Smith 1988).

The importance of entrenched bureaucratic missions in contributing to the maintenance of status quo policies is demonstrated by the fierce bureaucratic struggle waged during the first two years of the Kennedy administration over how to respond to Portugal’s colonial policies in Africa, most notably Angola. Prior to 1961, the U.S. government consistently supported Portugal’s assertion that the administration of its colonies was an internal affair, subsequently
voting against (or at least abstaining) when the issue of self-determination was brought before the United Nations. Speaking with one voice, the various bureaucracies placed Portugal’s membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance and the 1951 joint U.S.-Portugal defense treaty, allowing U.S. access to highly valued military facilities on the Azores Islands, above the demands of African nationalists. However, in the aftermath of Kennedy’s inauguration in 1961, this policy changed. Appealing to Kennedy’s personal commitment to support the independence aims of African nationalist movements, two political appointees, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs G. Mennen Williams and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai A. Stevenson, outmaneuvered the Europeanist elements within the bureaucracy and succeeded in altering the once cozy U.S.-Portuguese ties. Restrictions were placed on Portugal’s practice of diverting U.S.-supplied NATO weaponry to counterinsurgency efforts in Africa; the CIA and other portions of the government were directed to open up contacts with nationalist elements in Angola; and, perhaps most significant, the United States for the first time cast a vote at the United Nations in favor of a resolution calling upon Portugal to make progress toward independence for Angola (see Mahoney 1983, 189–90, 195–97, 204–6).

This shift in policy, although denounced by proponents of the former status quo, did not galvanize opposition within the executive branch until significant bureaucratic missions were threatened or called into question. In a statement which caused particular concern in the Defense Department, Portuguese President Antonio de Oliveira Salazar threatened to refuse renewal of the 1951 agreement allowing U.S. access to the Azores military base—due to expire at the end of 1962—unless interference in Portugal’s African policies was terminated. The Defense Department, led by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), strongly argued that the Azores base was indispensable to security concerns in Europe and the Middle East, and therefore should not be compromised in the pursuit of currying favor with African nationalists. These military rationales were reinforced by political arguments underscoring the importance of maintaining the integrity of the Atlantic Alliance. For example, Dean Acheson (1969, 187), the vocal secretary of state under Truman, argued that continued U.S. interference not only risked access to the Azores base, but inevitably would lead to greater instability in Portuguese Africa and even revolution in Portugal itself. The pro-Portuguese sentiments of both the military and political groups ultimately were supported by Secretary of State Dean Rusk and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy. The net result of this debate was a gradual return in late 1962 to the policy favoring Portuguese interests, and thus a reversal of Stevenson’s and Williams’ shortlived policy of closer alignment with African nationalist concerns (Schlesinger 1967, 536–37).

**Bureaucratic Incrementalism**

The inherently conservative nature of bureaucracies prompts their members to resist change. In turn, the self-interested nature of these organizations propels their members to attempt to expand their organization's realm of
influence within the policymaking establishment. Since, as was noted earlier, members of a bureaucracy tend to identify national security in terms of their agency's mission in the foreign policy establishment, it follows that these same members will seek to widen their organization's role. The primary means of achieving a greater role is through greater amounts of economic and military aid and the expansion of activities within the host country. Efforts to achieve a greater organizational role through closer ties are also evident in the African Bureau's pursuit of White House visits for African heads-of-state, the Defense Department's interest in joint military maneuvers with African militaries, and the CIA's willingness to share intelligence findings with friendly African leaders. Regardless of the particular strategy pursued in strengthening ties with a particular African country, the term "incrementalism" best captures the resulting process of change: 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.

The process of incrementalism helps explain why significant shifts in the majority of U.S. African policies are rare even when a new administration with seemingly different beliefs than its predecessor takes power. As noted earlier, the time constraints of a four-year term of office, coupled with the traditionally low level of attention paid to African issues by the president, favors bureaucratic influence, and therefore generally supports status quo policies. Perhaps the most significant barrier to change, however, is that the numerous activities of the bureaucracy simply do not fall under the realm of presidential action. As Rusk commented during the transition from the Johnson to the Nixon administrations, "A transition is not so earth-shaking. Of the thousand or so cables that go out of here every day, I see only five or six and the President only one or two. Those who send out the other 994 cables will still be here." Adopting a train metaphor to clarify his thoughts, Rusk noted that a transition "is a little bit like changing engineers on a train going steadily down the track. The new engineer has some switches he can make choices about—but 4,500 intergovernmental agreements don't change" (Halperin 1974, 292). Although somewhat exaggerating the importance of bureaucracies during presidential transitions, Rusk's train metaphor is correct in one key respect. It suggests that established bureaucratic missions greatly increase the possibility that U.S. African policies will continue to chug along established tracks until some event (such as a crisis or an extended crisis situation) attracts the attention of the White House or other domestic actors and provides the basis for a reassessment. In the absence of crisis, White House attention usually is focused elsewhere, as established policies continue to be maintained and strengthened by the bureaucratic freight train.

Crisis Situations and the High Politics of White House Involvement

The president plays a potentially pivotal role in reorienting U.S. policies toward Africa regardless of the nature of events on the African continent. If a bureaucratic rift during a routine or noncrisis period cannot be decided at the
level of the secretary of state or the secretary of defense, for example, the issue may be pushed to the level of the White House for resolution by the president. Similarly, general policy reviews, especially at the beginning of a new administration, as well as the internal processes that lead to the drafting and subsequent interpretation of presidential speeches, also offer unique opportunities for the president to take a more active stance. However, although presidents periodically become involved in policy regardless of the nature of events on the African continent, Africa’s low standing relative to other regions of the world ensures that such involvement is very rare and episodic. Rather, the likelihood of presidential involvement only significantly increases during so-called periods of “crisis” on the African continent. Specifically, when the context of the situation confronting policymakers changes from routine to crisis, what may have been a formerly obscure African country often becomes the focus of the president and White House staff (see Rosati 1981). If an African issue is perceived to be of importance by the White House, the African affairs bureaucracies are likely to lose control of policy as the president asserts executive control over the policymaking process.

Crisis and Presidential Attention to U.S. African Policies

The unfolding of a crisis situation—defined as an intense politico-military conflict either within or between one or more African countries—usually serves as the triggering mechanism for sustained presidential attention to African issues. It is the foreign dimension of an African conflict, however, which constitutes the critical aspect of whether that conflict becomes a crisis in the eyes of the president. Specifically, crisis situations, at least prior to the end of the cold war in the early 1990s, generally evolved due to White House perceptions of the involvement of two key sets of foreign actors: Washington’s European allies and the former Soviet Union and other “radical powers,” particularly Cuba and East Germany.

Crisis and the Role of European Powers

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

The initial U.S. response to the 1967 to 1970 Nigerian civil war provides an excellent illustration of White House sensitivity to European preferences in a crisis situation (see Stremlau 1977; Ogene 1983). After a year of spiraling ethnic violence, the Ibo-dominated province of Eastern Nigeria seceded from Nigeria
and proclaimed itself the Republic of Biafra on 30 May 1967. Nearly two months later, the Nigerian federal government launched a military attack to end the secession by force, signaling the start of a bloody civil war. While Britain, the Soviet Union, and the majority of African countries supported the Nigerian federal government, France, Portugal, South Africa, and four other African countries provided economic and military support to Biafra. Despite Nigeria’s significance in the Western camp as Africa’s most populous country, a major producer of oil, and one of the continent’s most avid supporters of a capitalist path of development, the United States embargoed the sale of arms to both sides in the conflict and maintained a low profile. Characteristic White House sensitivity to British policy preferences was one of the major reasons for remaining peripheral to the conflict. The United States kept out of the conflict despite pro-federal sympathies in the Johnson administration (and later pro-Biafran sympathies in the Nixon administration), as well as repeated requests by the Nigerian government to purchase armaments. “It had been suggested by the British government that Britain should supply all the arms needed by Nigeria since Nigeria was a British sphere of influence,” notes F. Chidozie Ogene (1983, 84), a former member of the Nigerian Diplomatic Service. “The U.S., according to the British proposal, should not supply arms [but] was required to give full support for the British position in Nigeria.”

In sharp contrast, when there is a politico-military power “vacuum” on the continent—historically due to the inability or refusal of a weakened and withdrawing colonial power to maintain order—the tendency has been for the White House to take a much more active role in the situation, sometimes transforming U.S. foreign policy toward the African country in question. For example, prior to 1974, Angola remained a low priority for the White House, with presidents from Truman to Nixon ultimately deferring to Portugal’s efforts to maintain colonial rule over its colonies in Africa (Marcum 1972). U.S. policy continued to be dominated by traditional political and military arguments over the need to maintain access to military bases in the Portuguese-controlled Azores Islands. Yet a military coup d’etat on 25 April 1974, overthrowing the Portuguese regime of Marcello Caetano, set off warning bells in Washington (Danaher 1985, 109). The coup was carried out by a group of young military officers determined to end failing, and increasingly costly, counterinsurgency efforts in Africa by granting independence to Portugal’s colonies—all of which were confronted by guerrilla insurrections supported by the Soviet bloc. The power vacuum and the potential for instability created by the voluntary withdrawal of Portuguese colonial rule ensured that Central Africa, and particularly Angola, would become top priorities of the White House.

Crisis and the Role of the Former Soviet Union and Other “Radical” Powers

The former Soviet Union’s involvement in a crisis situation on the African continent constituted perhaps the most important factor in determining the level of presidential involvement in the policymaking process concerning U.S.
policies toward Africa during the cold war era. In those crisis situations in which an East-West dimension was lacking or somehow neutralized, the White House would generally avoid involvement in the conflict, resulting in foreign policy continuity so that incrementalism prevailed. Returning to the example of ethnic strife in Burundi in 1972, it has been documented that the Nixon White House, although aware of the situation, left the formulation and implementation of the U.S. policy response to the African specialists in the State Department’s African Bureau, almost certainly because the massacres in a region of little strategic concern lacked any hint of communist involvement (see Brown, Freeman, and Miller 1972).

White House inaction in Burundi starkly contrasts with the marked degree of attention focused on Angola after the 1974 Portuguese coup d’état. One of the primary differences between the two cases was that the Soviet Union and Cuba were the major backers of Agostinho Neto’s Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)—the other two guerrilla groups vying for power were Holden Roberto’s National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), backed by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Zaire, and Jonas Savimbi’s National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), backed by the PRC and South Africa. Ignoring the advice of those in several State Department bureaus who argued against assisting any of the guerrilla factions seeking control, Ford, at the urging of Kissinger and the CIA, decided to covertly intervene on the side of the FNLA.16 According to John Stockwell (1978, 41), the CIA chief of the Angola Task Force who managed the covert operation to assist the FNLA, Soviet involvement on the side of the MPLA was the primary factor guiding White House policy: “Kissinger saw the Angolan conflict solely in terms of global politics and was determined that the Soviets should not be permitted to make a move in any remote part of the world without being confronted militarily by the United States.” In short, the crucial element driving U.S. involvement in the civil war was not identification with the aims of a particular guerrilla group or even an interest in Angola. Rather, the fact that the Soviet Union aligned itself with one of the guerrilla factions was the deciding factor in turning the Angolan conflict into a crisis, and therefore providing the impetus for U.S. support for the FNLA and UNITA.

The decline of the cold war, however, does not mean that African conflicts will cease to attract the attention of the White House. Indeed, although the end of the cold war offers tremendous opportunities—particularly the possibility of replacing superpower confrontation with a greater sensitivity to a host of development problems in Africa—it has also ushered in an altered international system replete with familiar problems such as rising ethno-religious conflict and economic nationalism. Additionally, there are also a variety of more recent but equally threatening problems: nuclear proliferation, chemical weapons production, and the spread of international drug cartels. Most important, there appears to be a growing perception at the highest levels of the U.S. policymaking establishment that Islamic fundamentalism is a threat to U.S. interests on the African continent.17 Many officials privately note, for example, that the
The process of bureaucratic incrementalism suggests that, in the absence of crisis, many of the African policies of a previous administration are likely to continue even though they may differ from a new administration's "worldview." An administration's worldview, simply put, constitutes the perceptions of the nature of the world held by the president and the president's closest foreign policy advisors (usually the secretary of state and the national security advisor) which subsequently form the basis of their foreign policy initiatives (see Rosati 1987). The reason behind this discrepancy between beliefs and behavior is the traditionally low level of interest accorded to African issues by the White House. Thus, despite the inauguration of an administration with widely varying beliefs than its predecessor, policies often continue along established lines.

Indeed, Africa's lower priority relative to other regions of the world perhaps makes U.S. policies toward it more susceptible to the influence of domestic political considerations in White House policymaking which can also result in policy deviating from strongly held administration beliefs. For example, as already noted, despite Kennedy's strong anticolonial beliefs, his administration largely failed to move beyond rhetoric in the case of Portuguese-ruled Africa. Although it was argued that established bureaucratic missions played the major role in ultimately ensuring policy continuity, domestic political considerations also influenced Kennedy's decision in favor of the pro-Portuguese forces within the administration. Kennedy allegedly feared that a rift in the NATO alliance (threatened by Portuguese leaders if the United States continued to interfere in its colonial affairs) would alienate security-minded Republicans in the Senate, and thus doom any chances of Senate ratification of a much desired U.S.-Soviet test ban treaty (Marcum 1972, 10). According to Arthur M. Schlesinger (1967, 536-37), Kennedy also was looking ahead to the 1964 presidential elections, and "had to take into account the possibility that the loss of the Azores, on top of a test ban, might open the way to a Republican attack on the administration for alleged neglect of vital national interests."
Yet bureaucratic factors and domestic influences are considerably less of a factor when crisis situations prompt the White House to critically examine and review—often for the first time—the nature and goals of U.S. policy toward a particular African country. In addition, crisis situations also serve as natural opportunities for the president to shape public opinion, and to make the parochial policies of individual bureaucracies more consistent with each other, as well as with that administration’s worldview (see Oneal 1982, 42). During the cold war, the most important element of any administration’s worldview—from which all other assumptions were derived—was the collective perception of the Soviet Union and its ability to create instability in the Third World.

A notable example of the importance of an administration’s worldview in contributing to a particular policy outcome during a crisis situation is the illustration of U.S. intervention in the 1975 Angolan civil war. In March 1975 policymakers faced a crucial turning point in Angola when the FNLA attacked the MPLA and a latent power struggle erupted into an escalating civil war among the three competing guerrilla factions. The politico-military vacuum created by Portugal’s abrupt withdrawal from the region, as well as Washington’s perception of the Soviet Union’s willingness to profit from the situation (it sent nearly one hundred tons of arms to the MPLA from March to July), prompted the White House to pursue greater involvement in the crisis. Although receiving final approval from President Ford, Kissinger is recognized as the key architect of the interventionist response.

Conflict had arisen among the national security bureaucracies, primarily between the CIA, which pushed for increases in aid to the FNLA (as well as for the initiation of aid to UNITA), and the State Department, especially the African Bureau, which argued against aiding any of the guerrilla factions. Although secretary of state at the time, Kissinger dismissed the opinions of the State Department and leaned instead toward the CIA’s policy of providing greater amounts of covert aid to the FNLA (and, shortly thereafter, to UNITA). An important element of defeating the MPLA on the battlefield was U.S. reliance on funneling significant amounts of aid through both South Africa and Zaire, as well as tacit support for these two countries to introduce their regular forces onto the Angolan battlefield. The net result was a significant change in policy as the White House became heavily involved in the civil war.

The critical aspect of this case is that the dramatic change in policy was the result of Kissinger’s worldview as shared by Ford. The primary component of this worldview was a perception of the Soviet Union as a traditional great power with which the United States could negotiate. “We have sought—and with some successes—to build more constructive relations with the USSR,” Kissinger (1976, 311–33) noted in testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Africa, “to reduce tensions in areas where our vital interests impinge on one another; to avoid destabilizing confrontations in peripheral areas of the globe—such as Angola.” However, constructive relations depended on Kissinger’s perception of the need to maintain and regulate the existing balance of power between the two superpowers in Africa. According to Kissinger (1976,
174–82), this was upset by the arrival of Soviet-backed Cuban troops to assist the MPLA regime: “Let there be no mistake about it—the culprits in the tragedy that is now unfolding in Angola are the Soviet Union and its client state Cuba.” Kissinger’s concern, however, was not for Angola, which was described as of “modest direct strategic interest,” but rather was tied to greater East-West issues of global stability and U.S. credibility. “If the United States is seen to emasculate itself in the face of massive, unprecedented Soviet and Cuban intervention,” explained Kissinger (1976, 174–82), “what will be the perception of leaders around the world as they make decisions concerning their future security?” Most important, by denigrating the internal aspects of the conflict in favor of its East-West dimension, U.S. intervention became justified, if not necessary, to contain perceived Soviet expansionism. In accordance with the Nixon Doctrine and the constraints imposed by the Vietnam War on direct military involvement in the Third World, the proper means of intervention was indirect military support of regional proxies (such as the FNLA in Angola) as aided by local client states (such as South Africa and Zaire).

Extended Crisis Situations and Domestic Politics

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

Congressional Involvement in the Policymaking Process

Congress historically has played a limited role in the realm of foreign policy, particularly with respect to Africa (Rosati 1984). Reelection pressures and time constraints imposed by elected terms of office (two years for representatives and six years for senators) force members of Congress to select and prioritize those domestic and international issues which will receive their attention. Since the primary objective of most members is to be reelected, and since most citizens (read “voting constituents”) know or care very little about the African continent, conventional wisdom suggests that it is politically smart to avoid potentially alienating their constituencies by pursuing unpopular issues (Danaher 1985, 49). The rationale for such a perspective, as presented in its most cynical form: “If my constituents don’t care about Africa, why should I?”

The desire for career advancement also contributes to the benign neglect of Africa. For example, due to their limited financial and staff resources, the
African subcommittees of both the House and the Senate usually are the least valued posts among those aspiring to the foreign relations committees of either house of Congress. Thus, even those members who are appointed to the African subcommittees generally attempt to use their post as a "launching pad" for more prestigious appointments, such as those relating to Europe or Japan. Charles C. Diggs (Democrat from Michigan), former chairperson of the House Subcommittee on Africa, placed this state of affairs in perspective: "As soon as somebody on the Foreign Relations Committee becomes eligible for a subcommittee, that person is usually given Africa." Yet, "as soon as they can get off of the Africa Subcommittee," Diggs continued, "they do get off of it and move on to something else."21

The twin concerns of political survival and career advancement have fostered congressional apathy about Africa, which is ultimately reinforced by the already limited constitutional role of Congress in framing U.S. foreign policies in general. This limited congressional influence on U.S. policies toward Africa during noncrisis periods occurs in four realms.

First is the confirmation of presidential appointees. In one of its most basic but important legislative roles, Congress confirms numerous presidential appointees who will carry out executive branch policies in Africa. Among these appointments are the assistant secretary of state for African Affairs and designated ambassadors for individual African countries. Although congressional approval for Africa-related presidential appointees rarely has been denied, this power has occasionally been used by individual senators on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to temporarily frustrate executive branch policy.22

A second realm of congressional involvement includes the conducting of hearings, the sponsorship of trips and fact-finding missions to the African continent, and the convening of meetings with visiting African dignitaries and heads-of-state. The conducting of hearings on African issues, which increased dramatically in the late 1970s and early 1980s, is especially important. Able to request testimony by those within the administration responsible for U.S. African policies, hearings serve to broaden congressional awareness and understanding of executive branch policies, as well as provide the basis for policy debate.

A third significant component of congressional power is its constitutionally mandated roles to authorize and appropriate all military and economic aid requested by the executive branch (Lancaster 1984, 1988). Traditionally, Congress and the executive branch usually are less willing to do battle with each other over aid priorities in Africa as opposed to other regions of greater concern. In addition, the combination of executive branch priorities and the traditional congressional reflex to cut foreign assistance levels consistently has led to Africa receiving the least amount of aid relative to the other regions of the world.23 Indeed, due to Africa’s low status in the eyes of most policymakers, aid levels to the continent are especially hard hit during times of tight budgetary
restrictions, such as in the aftermath of congressional passage of the 1986 Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit reduction act.

Finally, Congress can also affect U.S. African policies by passing legislation on issues of particular importance. Although legislative efforts theoretically offer an almost unlimited avenue for Congress to assert its influence within the policymaking process, in order to be successful, these efforts must transcend the innumerable partisan and ideological splits both within and between the two houses of Congress. Historically, these differences have limited the ability of Congress during noncrisis periods to pass legislation either independent of, or counter to, established executive branch policies toward Africa. As Stephen R. Weissman, former staff director of the House Subcommittee on Africa, is quick to point out, the executive branch enjoys several "natural advantages" in the realm of foreign policy. Among these are its veto power, superior organizational capacity, and political clout with congress members and interest groups, especially those affiliated with the White House (Weissman and Carson 1981, 134). The executive branch's natural advantage is further enhanced by the large degree of apathy among the majority of congresspersons concerning Africa.

Interest Groups and the Public

Domestic influence in the policymaking process comes from both interest groups and the general public. Traditionally, interest groups have attempted to articulate their constituents' points of view through elected representatives in Congress. The potential for influencing congressional behavior is especially great in that Congress as a body is largely reactive to events in Africa and, most important, the majority of members exhibit a low level of interest in issues relating to the continent. In this regard, an apathetic Congress is potentially highly responsive to organized and articulate interest groups. Even more important, this responsiveness increases when those interests are shared by constituents in an elected official's congressional district.

As Congress increasingly has involved itself in matters of foreign policy from the mid-1970s onward, the potential for interest groups to make their voices heard in the formulation of policy has also grown (Ornstein 1984). Among the numerous types of African affairs interest groups which have sought to influence the substance of U.S. African policies are academic organizations, such as the African Studies Association; nonprofit organizations, such as the New York-based Rainbow Lobby (a citizen's group dedicated to civil and human rights); relief organizations, such as the Mennonite Central Committee; foreign lobbyists, such as Fenton Communications, a Washington-based company which has served as an agent of the Angolan government; private institutions, such as the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundations, each of which actively has been involved in funding a variety of African-related programs; private corporations, such as Foote Mineral and its active lobbying in pursuit of the repeal of sanctions against Southern Rhodesia in 1972; and, finally,
human rights organizations, such as the London-based Africa Watch organization.

An equally important aspect of domestic politics is the nature of public opinion. In general, the public remains largely unaware and disinterested in U.S. African policies, embodying what is best described as a "National Geographic" image of the African continent. Rather than being aware of the intricacies of African domestic and international policies, the public instead holds stereotypical images of lush jungles, exotic animals, and drought and famine. These images are reinforced by a popular press which highlights the negative and sensationalist aspects of African politics, as well as the "safari tradition" of U.S. journalism: sending generalists to Africa on short-term assignments as opposed to those willing to make a long-term commitment to becoming authorities on Africa (Roberts 1971; Segal 1976; Harrison and Palmer 1986; Fitzgerald 1989; Kitchen 1990).

Although there are many interest groups and portions of the general public along the political spectrum which have attempted to influence U.S. African policies, one of particular importance is the thirty million African Americans who comprise roughly 12 percent of the electorate. Yet although practitioners from all points of the ideological spectrum agree that, as a group, African Americans are a logical lobby for African interests (see Lake 1976, 285; Crocker 1981, 155-56), their voice historically has been very weak and non-influential, especially when compared to the influence purportedly wielded by other ethnic groups in support of their homelands (such as Jewish Americans regarding U.S. foreign policy toward Israel). One of the primary reasons for this lack of influence has been the absence of an organized policy constituency capable of effectively working within the U.S. policymaking establishment (see Challenor 1981; Walters 1987).24

The creation and evolution during the 1970s and 1980s of two political organizations—the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and TransAfrica—are indicative of efforts among African-American elites to increase the leverage of their racial group within the foreign policy establishment. The CBC was formed in 1971 by thirteen African-American members of the House of Representatives who were determined to make the issue of the domestic plight of African Americans and U.S. African policies a greater concern within Congress as a whole. Yet at the time, most members were lacking in seniority (and, therefore, power) in the House and, perhaps of greater significance, were willing to leave issues concerning Africa largely in the hands of CBC Chairperson Diggs (who was also the chairperson of the House Subcommittee on Africa). Only after Diggs left the Congress in the late 1970s did more members assume greater responsibility for African issues.25 Most important, by the beginning of 1993 the membership of the CBC had tripled in number to thirty-nine members, and its membership throughout the 1980s and the 1990s had steadily risen in seniority and power. Not only did Democratic Caucus Chairperson William H. Gray III (Democrat from Pennsylvania) assume the office of Majority Whip (one of the most powerful positions in the House) in 1989, and Ronald V.
Dellums (Democrat from California) acquire the prestigious position of chairperson of the House Armed Services Committee in 1993, but as of 1993 two other full House committees and thirteen subcommittees were also chaired by CBC members. As Bob Brauer, special counsel to Dellums, once proudly noted: "The power of the CBC is disproportionate to its numbers. We now have a significant constituency in the House." Despite such glowing reports, CBC members are quick to note that their primary responsibility will continue to be the domestic plight of African Americans.

Whereas the CBC is constantly organizing support within the House of Representatives, the strategy of TransAfrica—a political lobby for a broad range of issues concerning Africa and the Caribbean—is to organize and mobilize the African-American electorate. This strategy specifically focuses on those congressional districts where African Americans are found in great numbers. "There must be as many as 100 congressional districts across the country in which we can make a significant difference in the voting patterns of congressional members," notes Randall Robinson, executive director of TransAfrica. "Our efforts are focused on those people in those districts" (Hughes 1980, 9). The commitment to forge this political lobby emerged from a Black Leadership Conference convened by CBC members Diggs and Andrew Young in September 1976 in opposition to the Ford administration's policies in southern Africa. Incorporated as a political lobby in July 1977, TransAfrica boasts over fifteen thousand members located in fifteen chapters throughout the country as of 1993.

Although the CBC and TransAfrica constitute a powerful lobbying apparatus potentially able to mobilize a growing African-American electoral voice, the fact remains that they rarely have the power to significantly alter U.S. policies toward Africa during routine periods. Like both the House and Senate subcommittees on Africa, members of the CBC and TransAfrica face an uphill battle in any attempt to persuade the largely uninterested majority of congresspersons that changes are in order. Part of a "critical mass" of individuals that coalesced during the late 1970s, these two groups are nonetheless regularly concerned about Africa and can be counted on to make their voices heard in Congress.

For example, when conservative elements in Congress attempted to repeal sanctions against Southern Rhodesia in 1979 (after the Carter administration had been successful in convincing Congress to reinstate them in 1977), the CBC and TransAfrica, along with other liberal elements within the House of Representatives, were successful in defeating the pro-repeal forces (Weissman and Carson 1981). In this sense, the CBC and TransAfrica have an important "watchdog" role to play in defending established policies which they perceive as beneficial to U.S. interests in Africa.

Extended Crisis and Domestic Politics

The combination of congressional and popular neglect of African issues relative to the more extensive and consistent involvement of the executive branch, and particularly the national security bureaucracies, has two conclu-
sive results. First, a relatively disinterested Congress, in the absence of crisis, generally will not support the efforts of small groups within that body, or among the general public, to significantly alter existing U.S. African policies. Second, even during short-term crises when an issue may attract the attention of a significant number of congresspersons, as well as the involvement of a variety of interest groups and portions of the general public, control of the policymaking process naturally flows to the president and the bureaucracies of the executive branch. A typical aspect of such situations is that presidents generally are able to rally public and congressional support for their administrations' foreign policy objective (Holloway 1985, 90).

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

The potentially significant role that domestic politics can play in affecting U.S. intervention in the African continent during extended crisis situations is clearly portrayed by congressional passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 (see Baker 1989). In the face of the extended crisis in South Africa and the refusal of the Reagan administration to act, TransAfrica, as part of a larger antiapartheid movement, spearheaded a protest drive beginning in 1984 that eventually mobilized such popular domestic pressure for change that Congress two years later adopted sanctions over the veto of President Reagan. On 29 September 1986 the House voted 317–83 to override the president's veto. Four days later, the Senate followed suit by a margin of 78–21, providing the Reagan administration with one of its greatest foreign policy defeats. The reasons for this dramatic setback in administration policy were basically fourfold. First, the rising electoral strength of African Americans was translated into increasingly effective political organizations—such as TransAfrica and the CBC—capable of bringing pressure to bear on Congress (Baker 1989). In the South, for example, the numbers of African-American registered voters had doubled from less than two million in 1968 to nearly four million in 1988. Similarly, the numbers of African Americans holding key political offices at the federal, state, and local levels had quadrupled from roughly 1,500 in 1970 to over 6,000 in 1985.
Second, some Republican leaders were becoming increasingly concerned with the issue of race in U.S. foreign policy, a factor which contributed to divisiveness within the Republican Party in 1986 so crucial to the passage of sanctions legislation in the Republican-controlled Senate (Baker 1989). In 1984, for example, thirty-five Republicans sent a letter to Bernadus G. Fourie, the South African Ambassador to the United States, warning that they would support sanctions against South Africa unless meaningful steps were taken to begin the dismantling of apartheid. The authors of this letter belonged to the Conservative Opportunity Society (COS), a group of young Republicans who recognized the growing political influence of African Americans and wanted to channel that influence into support for the Republican Party. Since the issue of sanctions against South Africa by 1986 had become a litmus test of where members of Congress stood on the issues of racial equality and civil rights, a vote for sanctions was the most visible way to dramatically signal the new commitment of the COS.

A third reason was the steady growth of grass roots antiapartheid organizations (see Love 1985). National leadership for hundreds of such groups was provided by the American Committee on Africa (ACOA) and its Washington counterpart, the Washington Committee on Africa (WCOA); the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR); and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). “Since the 1970s, these groups had made slow but steady gains,” explains Pauline H. Baker (1989, 31), a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a noted specialist on U.S. foreign policy toward South Africa. “However, their impact increased significantly after 1984 as the public became more aware of the issue through extensive media coverage of the South African crisis.” For example, by mid-1985, twenty state governments and twenty-three cities had either passed or were considering various forms of divestment legislation. Indeed, by 1986, nineteen state governments, sixty-eight cities and counties, and 131 colleges and universities had adopted various types of restrictions that affected nearly $220 billion of institutional assets related to pension and endowment funds. In addition to seeking divestment and disinvestment at the local and state levels, these groups provided invaluable organizational support when the sanctions movement became a national phenomenon in 1986. Specifically, these groups became part of a national network that was able to cooperate with liberal allies within Congress, particularly the House Subcommittee on Africa, to seek passage of antiapartheid legislation. The efforts of these groups ranged from the collection of data crucial to congressional hearings to the provision of expert witnesses and the coordination of massive letter-writing campaigns to wavering congresspersons.

The most important factor contributing to passage of the 1986 sanctions legislation was the unfolding of what became perceived among the U.S. public as an extended crisis situation in South Africa. In the early stages of the crisis, Reagan was able to hold the line on initial sanctions legislation in 1985 by issuing an executive order. The short-lived success of this tactical move—the
defeat of the 1985 legislation—demonstrated how, even during short-term crises when an issue attracted the attention of a significant number of congresspersons, initial control of the policymaking process naturally flowed to the president and the bureaucracies of the executive branch. However, as the violence in South Africa continued to intensify night after night on all the major television networks, U.S.-South African relations increasingly became more and more a domestic political issue for an electorate increasingly prone to equate protests in South Africa with the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s. Specifically, rising popular demands for the U.S. government to “do something” to stop the unfolding tragedy in South Africa galvanized the antiapartheid activities of African-American lobbying groups, Republican splinter groups, and grass-roots antiapartheid organizations. These groups, in turn, placed increasing pressure on vote-conscious congresspersons who recognized the popular political backlash that would accompany defeat of some sort of sanctions package. In hearings devoted to the question of sanctions against South Africa, Wolpe dramatized the crucial relationship between events in South Africa and the policymaking process. “Why are we so concerned with the passage [of sanctions legislation] at this point?” rhetorically demanded Wolpe. “The reason, very simply, because of the dramatic—very dramatic, I want to underscore that—deterioration of developments in South Africa” (U.S. House 1986, 246). The fact that these developments obviously were linked to the politicization of the issue of apartheid within U.S. domestic politics was underscored by Republican leader Robert Dole. “Let’s face it,” explained Dole in 1986, “there’s a lot of politics involved . . . this has now become a civil rights issue” (Baker 1986).

Patterns and Process in Perspective

In order to fully understand continuity and change in U.S. intervention in Africa during the post–World War II period and, more specifically, why the United States has strengthened or weakened security relationships with individual African regimes over time, the nature of events on the African continent should be understood. It is this nature which, historically, has affected the operation of the policymaking process, and therefore the substance of U.S. interventionism in Africa. Although the often “messy” politics of foreign policy formulation and implementation are inherently fuzzy and blurred, the evolution of U.S. relations with a particular African regime can be traced according to the three major patterns (see table 6.1).

1. Routine Situations and Bureaucratic Influence Within the Policymaking Process. Due to the historic neglect of African issues by both the White House and Congress, U.S. African policies—perhaps more so than those directed toward any other region of the world—are best explained by focusing on the level of the bureaucracies and the evolution of bureaucratic politics. Specifically, policies during routine periods tend to be driven by the established organizational missions of the national security bureaucracies comprising the executive
Table 6.1.  Pattern and Process in U.S. Intervention in Africa

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branch, including the State Department, the Defense Department, and the CIA, as well as their specialized offices devoted to Africa. The net result of bureaucratic preeminence within the policymaking process is an incrementalist foreign policy outcome in which the potential for change in interventionist practices is extremely limited. In fact, the best predictor for future policy is current policy.

2. Crisis Situations and Presidential Influence Within the Policymaking Process.  When the situation on the African continent changes from routine to crisis, the likelihood increases that the African affairs bureaucracies will lose control of policy as presidents and their most senior advisors assert their control over the policymaking process. The most important determinants of whether a situation took on a crisis atmosphere—at least prior to the end of the cold war—historically have been the nature of European involvement, as well as that of the former Soviet Union and its allies. Crisis situations not only prompt the White House to critically examine and review—often for the first time—the nature and purposes of policy toward a particular African country, but also serve to make the parochial policies of individual bureaucracies more consistent with each other, as well as with that administration’s worldview. The net result of presidential involvement in the policymaking process is an uncertain policy outcome in which the possibility for change in interventionist practices is extremely high.

3. Extended Crisis Situations and Domestic Influence Within the Policymaking Process.  Finally, the longer that a crisis situation continues to confront policymakers, the greater is the possibility that more groups and individuals outside of the executive branch will become involved in the policy process as debate spills over into the public domain. This spill-over effect has the potential of leading to a situation marked by domestic politics in which Congress, acting either independently or as a result of public pressure, takes the initiative away from the executive branch and asserts its influence within the policymaking process.
Although the possibility for change in policy under such situations is significant, congressional ability to influence events dramatically decreases in the absence of crisis as traditional partisan and ideological rivalries stand in the way of unified action by both houses of Congress.

Together these three patterns capture the dynamic nature of the foreign policymaking process and provide one with the framework for analyzing the evolution of U.S. foreign policy in the context of Africa. Indeed, U.S. relations with various African regimes do not remain static over time, but instead evolve as different portions of the foreign policy establishment assert their influence within the policymaking process at different points in time. These three patterns, of course, are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the concept of influence infers that, at any given point in time, one particular portion of the U.S. foreign policy establishment is the primary or “dominant” force within the policymaking process (see Rosati 1981). Such patterns not only prevail for U.S. security policy toward Africa, but can serve as the basis for a general understanding of the politics of foreign policy continuity and change.

One can, therefore, conceive of U.S. intervention as a kind of continuum in which periods of bureaucratic influence are briefly interrupted by episodes of presidential and domestic involvement during crisis and extended crisis situations. Yet even if change and restructuring occur in a given relationship due to presidential or domestic politics, once the crisis situation subsides, policy again usually falls under the realm of the national security bureaucracies and the process of routine and incrementalism again prevails, albeit in an altered form.

Notes

1. This chapter derives from a larger body of research on U.S. foreign policy toward Africa for a forthcoming volume (Schraeder 1994), United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis and Change. A more extensive presentation of the initial results of this research can be found in Schraeder (1991).

2. The concept of bureaucratic influence was inspired by the theoretical work of Rosati (1981) which centered on the similar concept of “bureaucratic dominance.”

3. Even under President Jimmy Carter—recognized as pursuing one of the most enlightened African policies during the post-World War II period—Africa ranked last in terms of foreign policy attention. Whereas Africa accounted for nearly 11 percent of the Carter administration’s foreign policy behavior in 1977, the continent still trailed all other regions of the world and in fact decreased in importance by nearly 50 percent over the next three years. For figures, see Rosati (1987, 123, 130, 139, 147).


5. African issues previously were handled by the State Department’s Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs, which itself was preceded by the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs.
6. Events within northern Africa are monitored by the State Department’s Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs.

7. The African Bureau, however, is but one of many regionally and functionally organized bureaus at the State Department which periodically become involved in African issues. Other bureaus, although generally in agreement over the necessity to pursue diplomatic options, have missions which can conflict with those pursued by the Bureau of African Affairs. For example, the Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs is naturally more concerned with European sensitivities when African issues arise, and thus serves to reinforce the executive branch’s tendency to defer to European, as opposed to African, sensitivities.

8. African issues previously were divided between the Agency’s European and Middle Eastern Divisions. For a useful critical anthology of CIA activities in Africa, see Ray, Schaap, Van Meter, and Wolf (1979).

9. Not to be confused with the Deputy Directorate of Intelligence (DDI) and its African-related Office of African and Latin American Analysis, or that portion of the CIA committed to providing the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) and the executive with up-to-date summaries and analyses of gathered intelligence.

10. African issues were handled prior to 1982 by the deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Near East, Africa, and South Asia. For an overview of growing Defense Department interest in Africa, see Volman (1984).

11. The U.S. Marines are also involved in a very minor way on the African continent. Marine Security Detachments (MSDs) of varying (but limited) sizes guard U.S. Embassies.


13. For an overview of USIA’s role in Africa, see Culverson (1989).


15. For an overview of the concept of crisis, see Brecher, Wilkenfeld, and Moser (1988); Hermann (1969); and James, Brecher, and Hoffman (1988). The definition for this concept was derived from Bender, Coleman, and Sklar (1985).

16. For a succinct analysis of this topic, from which the discussion throughout the remainder of this article is based, see Bender (1981). See also Davis (1978) and Hyland (1987).


20. Confidential interview.


22. For example, Senator Helms attempted to derail the Reagan administration’s policy of constructive engagement by delaying Crocker’s confirmation for a period of six months.

23. In fiscal year 1991, for example, Africa received only roughly 6.5 percent of all U.S. economic and military bilateral aid.

24. “Blacks as blacks may identify with Africa,” noted Martin Weil (1974) in a
prescient article in 1974, "but it is only as Americans that they can change U.S. foreign policy in Africa." If African Americans ever "gain leverage," he continued, "it will be those black politicians who are most successful within the system who will do so—those who can command the respect of their black constituents and reassure white America at the same time." See also Plummer (1989) and Walters (1987).


26. Ibid.

27. The terminology is that of Stephen R. Weissman, former staff director of the House Subcommittee on Africa. Interview on 17 May 1989.