The Clinton Administration and Africa

Assessing Rising Attention (and Expectations) During Its Last Two Years in Office

PETER J. SCHRAEDER

The renewed optimism that characterized the last two years of the Clinton Administration’s foreign policy towards Africa was captured in a speech that President Clinton gave in Gaborone, Botswana, on 29 March 1998, as part of his historic two-week presidential visit to the African continent, which also included stops in Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda. Clinton’s speech described Botswana as an exemplary model of democracy and economic development with a far-sighted and dynamic leadership, and suggested that democracy was making gains throughout the subregion, most notably in Namibia and South Africa. ‘We have seen the promise of a new Africa whose roots are deep here in your soil, for you have been an inspiration to all who cherish freedom’, proclaimed Clinton before more than 5,000 people at the Botswana State House in remarks designed to highlight Botswana’s special role as Africa’s oldest democracy. ‘Africa needs more Botswanas, and America is determined to support all those who would follow your lead’.

An important paradox embodied in Clinton’s speech is that rhetoric praising Botswana’s special role as a democratic model has historically led Botswanan policymakers to expect the further strengthening of US-Botswanan bilateral relations, expectations which were further enhanced by the end of the Cold War and the demise of apartheid in South Africa. The Cold War’s end, particularly, raised local expectations that the Clinton Administration would make the promotion of democracy and human rights the cornerstones of a reinvigorated US foreign policy towards the African continent, and in so doing recognize, build upon and reward Botswana’s special efforts in this realm, not to mention those of Namibia and South Africa, two other leading democracies within the southern African region. To the chagrin of numerous Botswanan policymakers, however, a significant gap has existed between the rhetoric and the reality of the US commitment to strong bilateral relations with Botswana. ‘We realize, of course, that Botswana is not the country of greatest importance to America, and that during the Cold War Americans were preoccupied with Communism’, explained one representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. ‘But the Cold War is now over, and democracy is supposedly one of your chief foreign policy goals, yet we are still not seeing the level of commitment to Botswana that would suggest that words are finally being matched by deeds.’ Another Botswanan diplomat was much more blunt: ‘We are always the model, but we are always neglected.’

The critiques of US foreign policy offered by Botswanan policymakers are echoed in varying degrees by their counterparts throughout Africa, not to mention Africanists in the US and the other northern industrialized democracies. Part of the reason for these critiques is that the Clinton Administration, like its Democratic Party predecessors (the Kennedy and Carter Administrations) and liberal counterparts in other northern industrialized democracies (especially the Labour Party in Great Britain and the Socialist Party in France), was both critical of the Africa policies of its Republican predecessors and vocal about the need for more enlightened US relations with the African continent. Such foreign policy pronouncements not surprisingly led to raised foreign policy expectations among Africanists that, more often
THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA

than not, remain unfulfilled (at least to the degree desired by proponents of change), ultimately fostering rising criticism among groups previously presumed to be each administration's closest domestic allies.5

An equally (if not more) important reason for criticism was the Clinton Administration's failure to craft a proactive set of policies that were both coherent and consistently applied—a foreign policy failing typical of US Africa policies regardless of whether one focuses on Democratic or Republican administrations. Policies instead remain highly reactive, particularly with respect to crises requiring humanitarian assistance', explains Korwa Adar, a Kenyan specialist in US foreign policy.6 In the case of Nigeria, for example, Adar argues that the Clinton Administration missed an important opportunity by its consistent refusal to impose comprehensive economic sanctions against the authoritarian regime of Sani Abacha, despite the fact that such sanctions were imposed against other countries in Africa. According to Adar, 'perhaps the lives of [Ken] Saro-Wiwa and other democracy and human rights activists would have been spared' if the Clinton Administration 'had sent the right signal' during the period of authoritarianism that followed the annulment of the 1993 Nigerian elections.7

The primary purpose of this essay is to assess the rising attention (and expectations) that characterized the Clinton Administration's policy towards Africa during its last two years in office. After setting out the institutional trends that foster continuity in US foreign policy towards Africa, an emphasis is placed on assessing the Clinton Administration's responses to four foreign policy challenges: grinding poverty and the lack of sustainable growth and development; the deleterious impacts of corruption and authoritarianism; the multiplication of conflicts in the post–Cold War era; and regional instability caused by a variety of transborder threats, such as Islamic revival movements and regional pariah states.

UNDERSTANDING THE INSTITUTIONAL TRENDS TOWARDS CONTINUITY

In many respects, continuity rather than change in US foreign policy towards Africa is the norm regardless of whether a Democrat or a Republican occupies the White House. The institutional trend towards continuity is effectively demonstrated by treating the US policymaking establishment as a series of three concentric circles: the inner White House circle that includes President Clinton and his principal foreign policy advisors, most notably National Security Advisor Sandy Berger; a second circle comprising the 'national security' bureaucracies of the executive branch, most notably the State Department, the Pentagon and the CIA, as well as increasingly important economically oriented bureaucracies, most notably the Department of Commerce; and an outer circle inclusive of the US Congress and an African affairs constituency, especially TransAfrica and other lobbying groups from the African American community, which has been an overwhelming supporter of Clinton Administration policies.

It is typically assumed by foreign observers that presidents and their inner circles will be the most influential and the most activist in terms of US foreign policy towards Africa. Unfortunately, a constant of the Cold War and its aftermath, including the period of the Clinton Administration, is that presidents traditionally have devoted less attention to Africa than to other regions of perceived greater concern, most notably Western Europe, Russia and the other countries that were once part of the former Soviet Union, and more recently the Middle East and South Asia. Neglect of Africa at the highest reaches of the US policymaking establishment is the direct result of a wide variety of factors: a president's typical lack of knowledge and therefore the absence of a deep-felt interest in a region that historically enjoyed few enduring political links with the US as compared with the former European colonial powers; a tendency to view Africa as the responsibility of those same European colonial powers, especially

A 89
THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA

France, whose leaders were often willing to take the lead in crisis situations; the impracticality of one person monitoring relations with over 180 countries worldwide, including 53 in Africa, and therefore the necessity of delegating responsibility for handling foreign policy for regions considered marginal to the White House; and, most important, the necessity of balancing domestic priorities with foreign affairs needs, especially during a first term in office in which the ultimate priority of all presidents is to assure re-election, with simple electoral logic clearly suggesting that Africa is not a priority for the vast majority of the voting public. It should therefore come as no surprise that Clinton's historic trips to the African continent in 1998 and 2000, which raised awareness of Africa within the US to levels previously unseen in the country's history, were undertaken during his second term in office. In this regard, although these trips raised the foreign policy bar as concerns Africa for subsequent administrations, the efforts of the Clinton White House must be assessed against the larger backdrop of the president's more activist approach during his second term towards all regions of the world, in which Africa still remained the region of least concern.

A second point to be made is that presidential attention to African issues will be sporadic at best, and usually prompted by the emergence of a crisis situation. During the Clinton Administration, for example, the lack of high-level coordination of the ongoing US intervention in Somalia, which was inherited by the Clinton White House, resulted in the continuation and expansion of what many Somali studies specialists considered to be an ill-conceived military operation from the start (famine was merely the 'symptom' of an underlying political problem that could not be resolved through military intervention). Especially egregious from a policymaking perspective was that the first high-level analysis of growing contradictions in US foreign policy towards Somalia occurred only after the deaths of 18 US soldiers in October 1993—approximately eight months after the Clinton Administration assumed office. To his credit, Clinton recognized the shortcomings of policy as it had evolved and quickly announced the impracticality of a military solution imposed from abroad, as well as the ultimate withdrawal of US 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 US Africa policies except when a crisis situation or domestic politics forces those policies to the top of the foreign policy agenda, continued to foster a variety of unevenly applied policies during the Clinton Administration's last two years in office.

The outer concentric circle of the policymaking process revolves around the US Congress (the Senate and the House of Representatives) and a variety of African affairs interest groups, such as the Congressional Black Caucus and other African American groups (for example, the African American Institute), and a wide array of lobbyists representing the interests of various African countries (the so-called 'K street crowd'). The Africa Subcommittee of the International Relations Subcommittee (House of Representatives) and the African Affairs Subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee (Senate) historically have served as the two most important congressional watchdogs of US foreign policy towards Africa. In the Cold War's aftermath, however, other congressional committees have become increasingly important in debates over issues such as the importance of aid versus trade, the proper US role in peacemaking and peacekeeping, and the normative goal of promoting democracy. Among the influential committees in the Senate (which have counterparts in the House) are the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, the International Finance Committee of the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee and the International Trade Committee of the Finance Committee.

A variety of constitutionally mandated prerogatives, including the confirmation of
THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA

presidential appointees, the convening of hearings, and the drafting of and voting on key legislation, suggests theoretically that Congress should play an important role in defining US foreign policy towards Africa. Like their White House counterparts, however, members of Congress historically have neglected Africa relative to other regions of perceived greater interest. Re-election pressures and time constraints imposed by terms of office (two years for representatives and six years for senators) force them to select and prioritize the domestic and international issues which will receive their attention. Since the primary objective of most members is to be re-elected, and since most US citizens know or care very little about the African continent, conventional wisdom suggests that it is politically unwise to incur the possibility of alienating their constituencies by focusing on Africa. It is precisely for this reason that chairing the Africa subcommittees has remained among the least desired congressional positions of authority within both houses of Congress, and therefore has been relegated to relatively junior representatives and senators.

An important impact of congressional neglect of Africa is that even highly motivated chairpersons of the Africa subcommittees face an uphill task in pushing African issues to the forefront of congressional debate. Simply put, in the absence of crisis, partisan and ideological differences within Congress prevent activist groups from achieving congressionally mandated changes in US foreign policy towards Africa. And even during short-term crises when an issue may attract the attention of a significant number of members of Congress, control of the policymaking process naturally flows to the White House and the bureaucracies of the executive branch. In this regard, the resurgence of guerrilla activity in the eastern provinces of Congo-Kinshasa (the Democratic Republic of Congo; DRC) at the beginning of 1999, let alone the involvement of several foreign armies in this conflict (what some policymakers typically refer to as ‘Africa’s First World War’), failed to rise to the level of a policymaking crisis in the non-ideological context of the post–Cold War era—a far cry from the crisis atmosphere which prevailed in the 1960s when a guerrilla insurgency within the same region was perceived by US policymakers as threatening to install a pro-Soviet regime under the leadership of Patrice Lumumba.

The net result of White House and congressional neglect of Africa—a historical reality strengthened by the end of the Cold War—is that US foreign policy towards Africa, perhaps more so than that towards any other region of the world, essentially has been delegated to the high-level bureaucrats and political appointees within the bureaucracies of the executive branch. In order to fully understand continuity and change in that policy during the last two years of the Clinton Administration, one must therefore 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 CIA, as well as of their counterparts within the economic and cultural realms, most notably the Department of Commerce.

An important outcome of bureaucratic influence in the policymaking process is that, in the absence of active coordination of policy at the highest reaches of the US government (that is, the White House), US foreign policy towards each African country tends to become fragmented and interpreted differently, according to the established organizational missions of bureaucracies that were historically created to deal with different aspects of the foreign policy relationship. The primary mission of the State Department’s Bureau of African Affairs, for example, is the maintenance of smooth and stable relationships with all African governments. The emphasis is on quiet diplomacy and the negotiated resolution of any conflicts that may arise. In sharp contrast, the primary bureaucratic mission of the CIA’s Africa Division has traditionally been to carry the ideological battle against the former Soviet Union and Communism to the African continent in efforts that range from the cultivation of local
THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA

agents to the mounting of covert operations. Openly contemptuous of self-proclaimed Marxist and other ‘leftist’ regimes, liberation movements and, more recently, ‘radical’ Islamist regimes, the CIA prefers close liaison with the security services of European allies and friendly African regimes. In the case of the Pentagon, the primary bureaucratic mission of the Office for African Affairs (International Security Affairs) is to ensure continued access to strategically located bases and other facilities for responding to local crises and, most important, to military contingencies in Europe and the Middle East. Finally, the primary bureaucratic mission of the Africa Office within the Department of Commerce is to foster greater levels of US trade and investment throughout the African continent.

The self-interested nature of bureaucracies nonetheless propels their members to attempt to expand their 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 the role of their organization. The primary means of achieving this typically has been through the expansion of bureaucratically inspired activities associated with each of Africa’s 53 countries. These have included the State Department Africa Bureau’s pursuit of White House visits for African heads of state; the Pentagon’s interest in strengthening joint military manoeuvres with African militaries, most notably the expansion of a wide array of military assistance programmes with Nigeria; the CIA’s willingness to share intelligence findings with friendly African regimes, such as the Kagame regime of Rwanda; and the Commerce Department’s interest in securing new trade and investment accords with South Africa and other ‘big emerging markets’ serving as the centrepiece of US economic policy.

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 maintenance and/or gradual enhancement of relations that are difficult to reverse.

The process of incrementalism helps to explain the rarity of dramatic shifts in US foreign policy towards the vast majority of Africa’s 53 countries, even when a new administration with seemingly different beliefs than its predecessor takes power. The time constraints associated with relatively short terms of office for presidents and most members of Congress, coupled with the traditionally low level of attention paid by them to African issues, favours bureaucratic influence and therefore generally supports policies of maintaining the status quo. The impact of this bureaucratic reality was clearly demonstrated by the Clinton Administration’s early policy towards Angola. During the presidential campaign of 1992, candidate Clinton called for strong US support for whoever emerged victorious in the Angolan presidential elections to be held in September 1992. Yet when Savimbi rejected his initial defeat in these elections and returned the country to civil war, the newly elected Clinton Administration delayed recognizing the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) Government until 19 May 1994. The primary reason for the delay was the continuation of a failed pro-Savimbi policy advanced by one portion of the State Department that stood in sharp contrast to a growing recognition in other quarters of Savimbi’s unwillingness to accept anything short of total victory—if not in the electoral arena, then on the military battlefield. According to the latter interpretation, the proper policy response, which would have been warmly accepted by the Africanist community both in the US and abroad, should have been ‘prompt recognition’ of the Angolan Government immediately following the elections to leave no doubt in Savimbi’s mind that the US ‘fully supported the democratic process’.

During the Clinton Administration’s last two years in office, however, the constel-
proclaimed 'radical' [European bureaucratic affairs] is to respond to and the recognised need for investment in national security, the primary concern of the European Council meetings with Commerce South Africa and, in the process of country, the importance of US economic interests. New oil discoveries in Angola have ensured a dramatic increase in oil production to nearly 2.5m barrels of oil per day by 2015 (more than Kuwait's current production). It is estimated that this expansion will require $40-60bn in private investments, and that the companies getting in on the ground floor will realize outstanding profit margins. Most important, the US currently imports nearly 7% of its daily oil needs from Angola—a figure that is expected to double by 2004. In short, a bureaucratically inspired consensus around Angola's economic importance ensured the emergence of a new policy that was embraced by the Clinton White House.

The Defense Department's approach to security in southern Africa during the last two years of the Clinton Administration further highlights the importance of bureaucracies in the day-to-day fashioning of policy. From the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to the Office of International Security Affairs (the State Department of the Pentagon), the military establishment agrees that southern Africa is marginal at best to US security concerns in the post-Cold War era, and therefore military commitments should be minimal at best in an era of declining military resources. As a result, US bilateral military aid to the southern African region represented a paltry 1% of all US bilateral aid provided to the region from 1965 to 1996, and reached its peak during the 1985-89 period when the combined yearly average for all countries was $4.6bn. Although a focus on bilateral (that is, government-to-government) military aid obviously masks significant Defense Department involvement in the US-funded paramilitary war in Angola during the 1970s and the 1980s, as well as earlier support for Portuguese counterinsurgency campaigns in their colonies prior to 1974, it nonetheless captures the bureaucratic mindset of Defense Department officials that extensive, long-term US military commitments in southern Africa should be avoided.

However, one area of military cooperation consistently supported by the Defense Department in Southern Africa and all other regions of the African continent is the training of local military officers in the US under the auspices of the International Military Education and Training (IMET) programme. The following amounts were budgeted in 2000 for the southern African region: Angola ($100,000); Botswana ($450,000); Lesotho ($25,000); Malawi ($335,000); Mozambique ($180,000); Namibia ($175,000); South Africa ($800,000); Swaziland ($75,000); Zambia ($150,000); and Zimbabwe ($300,000). Whereas at first glance these amounts appear insignificant, the cumulative impact of this programme over time in some cases has been extraordinary. In the case of Botswana, for example, US Embassy personnel are extremely proud of the fact that 85% of the Botswanan officer corps have received military training in the US, and have returned to Botswana presumably more inclined to be sympathetic to US interests within the southern African region.

The IMET programme, which constituted the centrepiece of the extremely small
THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA

US military aid programmes throughout Africa during the 1990s, is indicative of an approach that emphasizes the cultivation of personal ties between the officers of the host country and their American counterparts. 'In a continent that for three decades was plagued by military coups d'état and the establishment of military based regimes, as well as the ongoing influential role of militaries in transitions to democracy in the post–Cold War era', explained Lieutenant Colonel James Oliver Smaugh, Chief of the Office of Defense Cooperation at the US Embassy in Gaborone, 'it seems only logical that we seek to ensure close ties with the military leaders of tomorrow'. Although Smaugh emphasizes that the most important goal of the IMET programme is to create an officer corps respectful of civilian control over the military, and therefore capable of strengthening the democratization process throughout Africa, it is clear that the promotion of a cohort of pro-US military officers presumably sensitive to US foreign policy interests constitutes the true essence of US military activities.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN KEY FOREIGN REALMS

Every newly elected administration attempts to set a new tone in US foreign policy towards Africa by underscoring what it will do differently than its predecessors, especially when the change in office is the result of partisan rivalry, as when the Clinton Administration entered office after 12 years of Republican control of the White House (1981–93). To be sure, there do exist important differences in how Democratic and Republican administrations assess and understand the nature of political-military and socioeconomic changes on the African continent. Those who have a tendency to focus on the internal dimensions or origins of change can be conceptually referred to as regionalists. For these policymakers, typically prominent in Democratic administrations, domestic instability and conflict are primarily due to the internal shortcomings of any given regime. Any solution, therefore, must focus on the reform of that regime, including support for the protection of human rights, the promotion of socioeconomic development and the adoption of democratic practices, often in conjunction with regional and international organizations, most notably the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations.

In sharp contrast, those who have a tendency to focus on the international dimensions or origins of change can be conceptually referred to as globalists. For these policymakers, typically prominent in Republican administrations, international influences are often at the heart of rising domestic instability and conflict. The proper solution, according to the globalists, is the containment of these foreign threats, as was the case with the US policy of containment of Communism during the Cold War era. In addition to emphasizing the importance of strategic cooperation with threatened countries, these individuals are typically wary of US involvement in international organizations, most notably the United Nations.

The Clinton Administration, especially during its last two years in office, pursued a regionalist approach with significant globalist undertones, as demonstrated by the administration’s response to four sets of African foreign policy challenges: (1) grinding poverty and the lack of sustainable growth and development; (2) the deleterious impacts of corruption and authoritarianism; (3) the multiplication of internal civil conflicts in the post–Cold War era; and (4) regional instability caused by a variety of transborder threats, such as Islamic revivalist movements and regional pariah states.

As concerns the first foreign policy challenge, reducing poverty and promoting growth and development, the Clinton Administration’s approach revolved around strengthening the process of economic liberalization, in which trade and foreign investment gradually replace foreign aid as the preferred economic tools of US statecraft. Especially during the last two years of the Clinton Administration, the predilection
of conservative Republican members of Congress to oppose foreign aid, combined with Africa's low priority compared to regions of greater perceived interest at the level of the White House, reinforced a post–Cold War trend of reducing US foreign aid commitments to the African continent. According to Donald Rothchild, US aid to Africa (inclusive of development assistance, economic support funds, food aid and foreign disaster relief) fell from a peak level of $1.93bn in 1992 to $933m in 2000, a 52% decrease in overall aid.16

The regionalization of foreign policy initiatives emerged as a logical outgrowth of a declining foreign aid budget. In an attempt to do 'more with less' in Southern Africa, for example, the Clinton Administration moved the now defunct Southern Africa Regional Programme (SAREP) from its original headquarters in Harare, Zimbabwe, to Gaborone, Botswana, and renamed it the Initiative for Southern Africa (ISA). SAREP was originally conceived as a vehicle for supporting cross-national development projects of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), a regional organization designed to enhance cooperation among the Front-Line States (FLS) and reduce their economic dependence on the apartheid regime of South Africa. With the end of apartheid, the ISA was presented as the cornerstone of US support for the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the regional successor to SADCC which includes South Africa in its membership and is headquartered in Gaborone. According to Brian Atwood, former director of USAID, the ISA reflects the US vision of 'the promise and potential of the Southern Africa region upon the transition to democracy in South Africa, the end of the conflicts in Mozambique and Angola, and the movement towards more open economies and political systems throughout the region'.17

The primary logic behind the creation of the ISA as the coordinator of US activities in the SADC region was to avoid the obvious duplication of activities (and costs) that would accompany the funding of major US initiatives in each of these countries, a factor which is especially relevant now that the US has terminated bilateral development aid programmes in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. The ISA's specific connection to SADC was also consistent with an emerging US tendency to rely upon regional African organizations to take the lead in a variety of economic, political and even military sectors, as witnessed by the Clinton administration's support for SADC to take the lead in military intervention in Lesotho after the breakdown of civil order after the elections of 1998. Unfortunately, the ISA and its predecessor, SAREP, remain confronted by the same budgetary logic leading to decreased levels of US bilateral aid to individual southern African countries. Whereas funding for what in essence constitutes one ongoing organization increased from roughly $50m in 1994 to a peak of $85.5m in 1995, funding had declined to $32.4m in 1996 with a request for only $24.8m in 2000.18

A noteworthy aspect of the ISA's short history to date was the decision to move the headquarters of what was originally known as SAREP from Harare to Gaborone. Personnel in the Zimbabwean Ministry of Foreign Affairs were predictably unhappy with this decision, and their Botswanan counterparts not surprisingly expressed praise for it.19 The official reason for the ISA's relocation was that Gaborone is the headquarters for SADC, and therefore should be the site of the principal US liaison office for regional cooperation. A more important, unspoken reason for the shift, however, was the desire to counter the perception by the Botswanan policymaking elite of declining US interest relative to other countries within the region, especially in light of declining aid levels, the closure of the bilateral US Agency for International Development (USAID) office, and the termination of all bilateral development aid to Botswana. Although no US official admitted a need to 'compensate' Botswana for past 'losses', Wendy A. Stickel, deputy director of USAID's Regional Centre for Southern Africa,
which administers the ISA, nonetheless explained the decision to locate the ISA in Gaborone as part of a desire to 'send a strong signal' to the Botswanan policymaking establishment that they have played an 'exemplary role' within the region.

The decision to move the ISA—which had significant implications for US relations with Botswana and Zimbabwe—was not surprisingly made by USAID Director Atwood after a period of internal bureaucratic debate. Whereas proponents of maintaining the centre in Harare underscored the need to reward Zimbabwe's historic contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle, they simply did not carry the same bureaucratic clout as proponents of Botswana who could point to that country's historic commitment to multiparty democracy and free-market enterprise—especially in the emerging post-Cold War/post-apartheid environment. As explained by Peter Benedict, director of USAID in Harare, the transition to democracy in South Africa in 1994 meant that Zimbabwe's perceived shortcomings, most notably the maintenance of an increasingly corrupt and authoritarian single-party regime, could no longer be downplayed in bureaucratic debates over allocating scarce resources. This perception was strengthened throughout the State Department and the other bureaucracies of the US executive branch at the beginning of 2000 as a result of the Mugabe regime's manipulation of racial (white-black) tensions to deflect rising internal dissension with an increasingly authoritarian and economically bankrupt regime.

Trade-oriented policies remained the primary focal point of economic strategy during the last two years of the Clinton Administration. The centerpiece of this economic strategy was congressional legislation—the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)—designed to enhance US-African trade. Although sharply criticized by African leaders, such as former President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, as well as influential members of the US-African affairs constituency, most notably the Congressional Black Caucus, a compromise bill was passed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate in 2000. Towards this end, senior administration officials increasingly agreed that foreign policy should serve as the facilitator of US private enterprise throughout the African continent. According to what was often referred to as the 'big emerging markets' strategy, regional economic leaders—most notably South Africa in southern Africa—were to be courted by US policymakers and private business. The administration's focus on trade not surprisingly contributed to the intensification of economic competition between the US and the other northern industrialized democracies as they increasingly competed for economic influence and markets throughout Africa. This economic competition became especially pronounced in US-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 American and other Western companies constituted an important threat to their domaine réservé (privileged realm).

The Clinton Administration was effusive concerning the Owens-Corning decision to locate their pipe subsidiary in Botswana. According to senior administration officials, the creation of the Owens-Corning plant in Gaborone constituted an example of 'true partnership' between an American company and the Botswana Development Corporation, which would be financially lucrative for both countries—most notably due to the fact that Owens-Corning received a Botswanan Government contract worth approximately $75m to fabricate all the pipe necessary for the completion of the North-South Carrier Project. Other examples of high-profile deals brokered by the Clinton Administration included the decision of Barden International (a US firm headquartered in Detroit, Michigan) to open in March 1998 a multimillion dollar, right-hand drive GM vehicle conversion plant in Windhoek, Namibia (the largest US investment in Namibia during the decade of the 1990s); the expansion of an existing, US-firm operated oilfield (Block Zero) in the Cabinda province of Angola (expected
THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA

to yield billions in revenue); and the signing of a wide array of bilateral investment
treaties, such as the December 1998 treaty with Mozambique.22

The renewal of US trade ties with South Africa—perceived in Washington as the
most advanced and the most lucrative economy on the African continent—served
as the focal point of the Clinton Administration’s business initiatives in the southern
African region. An important regional dimension of US foreign policy was to ensure
that South Africa’s economy was closely ‘knitted’ to those of the other Southern
African Development Community (SADC) countries, thereby enhancing the rise
of a regional market that would be more attractive to US investors and capable of
absorbing greater levels of US exports.23 ‘The economic logic behind such an
approach, especially if we focus on the case of Botswana, is obvious’, explained Steven
M. Lauterbach, public affairs officer at the US Embassy in Gaborone. ‘A market of
only 1.4 million people cannot expect by itself to be a target of US trade and invest-
ment—the Botswanans and other members of SADC must realize that their economic
futures are tied to that of South Africa, and that US businesses will be more likely to
invest in a regional market offering more lucrative profits for US businesses’.24 The
Owens-Corning project is a perfect case in point. Although based in Gaborone, this
subsidiary is taking advantage of economies of scale throughout the SADC region.
As a result, contracts were signed to provide pipeline to the Hartley Platinum Mine
and the Pungwe Water Scheme in Zimbabwe, and to the Namibian Department of
Water Affairs for a variety of national projects.

An analysis of trade statistics clearly demonstrates why South Africa played such
an important role in US economic calculations during the last two years of the Clinton
Administration. After the easing in 1991 of the economic sanctions associated with the
1986 Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, US exports to South Africa had increased
dramatically, including a 25% increase in 1995, and were expected to continue at
such a pace throughout the first decade of the new millennium.25 Indeed, the 1995
figure for US exports to South Africa—$2.75bn—represented 51% of all US exports
($5.4bn) to the African continent. The only other countries in southern Africa even
to approach such trade levels were Angola and Zimbabwe, which absorbed $159m
(2.9%) and $122m (2.3%), respectively, of US exports during the same period. In
sharp contrast, Botswana absorbed approximately one-half of 1% ($29.5m) of US
exports to the region, with only Lesotho, Swaziland and Malawi maintaining smaller
bilateral trade relationships with the US.26

The Clinton Administration’s solution to a second foreign policy challenge—redu-
cing the deleterious impacts of corruption and authoritarianism—has been to offer
both diplomatic and financial support for the process of democratization. Entering
office at a time when 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 Africa policies. A variety of observ-
ers warmly noted that the concept of democracy was one of the ‘common threads’
linking Clinton’s campaign speeches during the presidential elections. The Clinton
Administration even went as far to codify US support for the democratization pro-
cess into an official doctrine—the ‘policy of enlargement’—intended to replace the
outmoded strategy of containment. Towards this end, the Clinton Administration
clearly made democratization an important aspect of policy pronouncements con-
cerning Africa, and several cases, such as US support for South Africa’s transition to
a post-apartheid democratic system, indicate that this rhetoric was transformed into
viable policies.

US policymakers generally agree that democracy is best served by fostering a
regularized political process that has as its basis the holding of free and fair elections,
as well as the nurturing of effective state institutions, most notably an independent
THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA

legislature and judiciary and a civilian-controlled military. One result of this approach is that US policymakers are often prone to portray even significantly flawed election results, especially in countries closely allied to the United States, as nonetheless constituting ‘important starting points’ in the transition to democracy, which can be improved in later rounds of more democratic elections. It is precisely for this reason that critics have often criticized US democracy promotion as placing too much faith in the election process, as well as favouring a ‘top-down’ approach to democratization that is too elite-centred.

Equally important, democracy promotion rhetoric has not always conformed with actual policies. The cornerstone of administration policy was a permutation of the ‘Mobutu or chaos’ thesis that dominated State Department, Pentagon and CIA thinking from the 1960s through the 1980s. 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. The Mobutu or chaos thesis suggested the necessity for a strong (but not necessarily democratic) leader if the region was to avoid socioeconomic and political-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’. With the experiences of Somalia and Rwanda still etched in their minds, the Africa specialists in the national security bureaucracies 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’.

The potential contradictions in the Clinton Administration’s support for democratization were demonstrated by a comparison of Clinton’s first (1998) presidential trip to Africa with that of a 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—remain 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 US priorities in Africa. Six of the seven countries—Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Congo-Kinshasa, Angola and Zimbabwe—remained ruled by leaders who seized power by the barrel of the gun rather than by democratic elections. According to critics, the message sent by the Albright visit was that the Clinton Administration’s true priority was the cultivation of strategically located, pro-US regimes capable of maintaining stability where civil wars and ethnic conflicts once raged.

The often contradictory nature of the Clinton Administration’s support for democratization in Africa was clearly demonstrated by the State Department’s budget request to the US Congress for the funding of all US foreign operations (that is, diplomacy) in 2000. At the beginning of each budget request for individual countries, a priority is typically placed on one of three major sets of objectives: promotion and strengthening of democracy; promotion of US trade and investment; and humanitarian concerns. In the case of Mozambique, the budget request underscored the overriding importance of humanitarian concerns over democracy promotion, emphasizing the necessity of first and foremost responding to natural disasters—an acceptable priority for most Africanists. In the case of Botswana, emphasis was placed on strengthening democratic practices in that historically democratic country. However, in the case of Angola, a country still beset by internal civil war, an emphasis was first and foremost placed on
THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA

promoting US trade and investment, followed by the strengthening of democracy. The inherent potential problem with this last case, similar to the problem with US policy during the Cold War era, is that when the strategic objective of maintaining access to Angolan oil clashes with the normative goal of democracy promotion, oil access will presumably win out over democracy. In short, proponents of a clear-cut policy in favour of democracy promotion decried the Clinton Administration's selective application of this standard, especially in countries deemed of overriding economic importance to the United States.

The Clinton Administration's approach to dealing with a third foreign policy challenge—stemming Africa's multiplying civil conflicts in the post–Cold War era—has been to limit White House exposure by curtailing US involvement in United Nations-sponsored interventions and stressing a brand of conflict resolution that de facto embraces the theme, 'African solutions for African problems'. The turning point in the post–Cold War era occurred when dozens of US soldiers were killed or wounded in a fierce battle in Mogadishu, Somalia, during Operation Restore Hope, a humanitarian military mission initially launched by President Bush (senior) after he was defeated in the 1992 presidential elections. Media-driven images of victorious Somali forces holding a US helicopter pilot hostage and dragging the corpse of a US soldier through the streets of Mogadishu unleashed a firestorm of domestic criticism and debate. What became known as America's 'debacle' in Somalia served as a crucial turning point in the Clinton Administration's foreign policy towards Africa.

First, the White House renounced a campaign pledge that envisioned a significant expansion of US efforts in multilateral peacekeeping through the creation of a United Nations rapid deployment force. The administration's new position, formalized in a presidential decision directive (PDD 25) which in essence denied US 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 execution of between five hundred thousand and a 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 spokespersons to avoid labelling the unfolding ethnic conflict as 'genocide', lest such a label further inflame American public sympathy and demand American intervention as in Somalia.

The Clinton Administration's reluctance to become involved in United Nations-sponsored military interventions in Africa was also reflective of growing concerns, especially among Republicans in the US Congress, about the general role of the US in the United Nations. As noted by Daniel P. Volman, a specialist in the congressional role in US foreign policy towards Africa, Republican members of Congress effectively drew on 'public concern about the role of the United States in the United Nations . . . to bolster their demands for cuts in US financial support for the international body and for the curtailment of UN peace-keeping activities in Africa and other parts of the world' 30. It is precisely this global mindset which allowed Senator Jesse Helms (Republican-North Carolina), the former chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to hold back US funding for the UN until that body finally agreed to reduce the US contributions to the overall UN budget (from 25% to 22%) and the UN peacekeeping budget (from 30% to 27%), with significant implications for UN activities in Africa.

The White House's hesitancy in supporting United Nations-sponsored peacekeep-
THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA

ing missions has led to de facto support for African military solutions under the guise of 'African solutions for African problems'. It was precisely for this reason, argued critics of US foreign policy towards Africa, that the Clinton Administration originally proposed the creation of an African Crisis Response Force (ACRF), subsequently reformulated as the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI). Africans, not Americans, were to take the lead in resolving African conflicts—a regional dynamic that stood in sharp contrast to extensive White House attempts at resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East and the series of crises in the Balkans in Western Europe.

The US debacle in Somalia also significantly affected the Clinton Administration's approach to conflict resolution. Entering office at a time when internal civil conflicts were multiplying throughout the African continent, the Clinton Administration had been expected to formulate and adopt a comprehensive policy of conflict resolution that went beyond the sporadic interventions of its predecessors. However, the newly elected 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, US 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 was also derivative of the US experience in Somalia, but underscored that the massive costs associated with Operation Restore Hope could have been avoided by earlier, preventive action. 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.

The Clinton Administration's approach to a fourth foreign policy challenge—alleviating regional instability caused by a variety of transborder threats, such as Islamic revivalist movements and regional pariah states—has increasingly relied on cultivating ties with strategically placed African powers. The Clinton Administration's approach in this regard was to seek the favour of what was often referred to as the 'new bloc' of African leaders, including Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea, Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Paul Kagame of Rwanda, who control battle-hardened guerrilla armies and who are committed to militarily reordering African international relations. Apart from the fact that they controlled the reins of power, these regimes were supported by the Clinton Administration due to their ability to maintain stability and their commitment to creating 'responsive and accountable' but not necessarily democratic governments.

Critics of the Clinton Administration's policy, which emphasized the importance of maintaining stability over the normative goal of promoting democracy, argue that its shortcomings were clearly demonstrated by the emergence of interstate conflicts between the members of this new bloc, including the border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the military clashes between Uganda and Rwanda in Congo-Kinshasa. According to these critics, the primary problem with the Clinton Administration's approach was to rely on personalized links with leaders who for whatever reason held the upper hand at any given moment, regardless of the true power of their countries—as in the case of Rwanda's undue influence over its much larger neighbour, Congo-Kinshasa. A more effective long-term approach, according to this argument, is to focus on true regional powers, such as Nigeria and South Africa, that combine both the economic and the military capabilities (not to mention the political intention) to ensure stability within their given regions.

A 100
THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND AFRICA

CONCLUSION

Several concluding points capture the essence of the last two years of the Clinton Administration's foreign policy towards Africa. First, two presidential visits to the African continent (1998 and 2000) heralded rising US interest in Africa, and set a standard by which all future administrations will be judged. The Clinton Administration also further enhanced the role of trade and investment as the most important component of US-Africa relations. Although US policy towards some countries (for example, Sudan) continued to exhibit a Cold War mindset (containment of the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism), economics increasingly emerged at the forefront of the US diplomatic agenda in all regions of the world, including Africa. This economically based agenda, which was exemplified by congressional passage of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, was also indicative of the Clinton Administration's increased reluctance to directly involve either US troops or prestige in the resolution of African conflicts. It is precisely for this reason that US political-military strategic thinking has increasingly emphasized the need for African countries to take the lead in resolving conflicts on the African continent. This mindset was firmly embedded in Clinton Administration thinking after the US debacle in Somalia in 1993.

NOTES


2. Interview, Gaborone, Botswana, 1996.

3. Interview, Gaborone, Botswana, 1996.


7. Ibid.


10. Ibid., 3.

11. Ibid.
era, see James Chipasula and Alifeyo Chilivumbo, eds., South Africa's Dilemmas in the Post-Apartheid Era (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993).
26. Figures provided by the US Department of Commerce.
29. Personal interview.