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U.S. Africa Policy Since the Cold War

Strategic Insights, Volume VI, Issue 1 (January 2007)

by [Letitia Lawson](#)

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Introduction

During the Cold War, United States foreign policy toward Sub-Saharan Africa had little to do with Africa.^[1] As with other developing regions, African countries were first and foremost pawns in the great global chess game. Republican and Democratic Administrations alike supported American clients and sought to undermine Soviet ones. Economic and military assistance was directed to key allies, such as Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and anticommunist rebel organizations, such as Jonas Savimbi's UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) in Angola.^[2] Because the U.S. perceived few if any direct strategic or economic interests in Africa, engagement with the region was largely defined by Cold War logic from the late 1950s until the late 1980s, and remained relatively limited.^[3] As it became clear that the Cold War was winding down, Africa watchers began to ponder the future of U.S. relations with the continent. Idealists hoped that the United States would now be free to pursue policies that would address Africa's own problems, most of which were traced to the failure of economic development, authoritarian governance, and/or ongoing conflicts, while realists feared that Africa would become even more marginalized.^[4] In fact, U.S. Africa policy writ large passed rapidly through two quite different transitional phases, before settling in somewhere between them.

The New World Order

The first transitional period reflected the euphoria of the immediate post-Cold War moment, in which a "New World Order," including positive U.S. engagement with a continent in which it perceived few significant national interests, seemed possible. In this period, the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations pursued similar strategies of positive, pro-active engagement. In the area of conflict management, the U.S., Russia, Portugal, Cuba, and South Africa began working together in 1988 to mediate a negotiated settlement to the Angolan civil war, which each had previously contributed to perpetuating.^[5] Political reform took center stage in 1990, as the U.S., Britain and France each announced that future foreign assistance to Africa would be conditioned upon democratization.^[6] The U.S. made good on this vow in the following two years, cutting off assistance to long-time Cold War allies that resisted political liberalization (Zaire, Liberia and Sudan), and shifting resources to countries actively engaged in democratization (South Africa, Ethiopia, and Mozambique). The most visible monument to this euphoric moment was the 1992-1993 humanitarian intervention in Somalia.

On December 3, 1992, the U.N. Security Council, concluding that the situation in Somalia had become "intolerable," authorized the dispatch of military forces to ensure the distribution of humanitarian assistance in a land beset by widespread starvation and suffering, thus saving the country from a complete breakdown of law and order. For the United Nations, and especially for the United States, which had taken a leading role in urging the intervention, this decision was almost unprecedented. Not since the 1840s, when Britain, France, and the United States dispatched cruisers to the west coast of Africa in order to hunt down slave ships, had the world seen a major military operation devoid of any strategic or economic benefit. Events in Somalia give force to the idea that humanitarian intervention in certain specific situations is demanded by the traditions and values to which the United States stands committed.^[7]

This sentiment, widespread in December 1992 as U.S. Marines landed on the beaches of Mogadishu, evaporated in the wake of the October 1993 firefight that left 18 U.S. Rangers dead.

Retreat from Africa^[8]

The second transitional period in post-Cold War U.S. policy toward Africa began with the withdrawal from Somalia in early 1994. This was a period of disengagement driven by the "Somalia Syndrome." Reeling from the debacle in Somalia, and with the Rwandan genocide already unfolding, Clinton issued Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD 25), which sought to strictly limit future U.N. missions, and especially U.S. participation in them. It listed seven factors that American officials would consider before approving U.N. operations to be carried out by non-Americans, and six additional factors to be considered if U.S. forces were to participate. The turn away from the idealist vision of the immediate post-Cold War moment, which Bush called the "New World Order" and Clinton called "Assertive Multilateralism," could not have been more dramatic. The first two considerations in approving even U.N. operations that excluded U.S. participation were whether the operation would advance U.S. interests, and whether there was a clear threat to international peace and security.^[9] The disinterested humanitarian moment was over.

The first test of the new policy would be the genocide in Rwanda, already ongoing when PDD was released on May 3. It was clear that the U.S. would not be involved, and U.S. officials did whatever they could to see that the U.N. did not initiate a response that might draw the U.S. in later. Requests from General Romeo Dallaire, commander of U.N. forces in Rwanda to monitor implementation of the Abuja Accords ending the war between the government and the Rwandan Patriot Front, for reinforcements to preempt the genocide had already been declined and when the genocide began all U.N. forces were immediately withdrawn. While intervention in Rwanda could be rejected on most of the factors set out in PDD 25, there was the problem of the obligation to act against genocide under the Geneva Conventions. As a result, Clinton Administration officials danced around "the g word," refusing to refer to the Rwandan genocide as such until it had taken its course, and the lives of 800,000 people.^[10] In the end, a very late U.N. approved intervention by France was the only response by the international community.^[11]

PDD 25 also called for subregional organizations to shoulder more of the peacekeeping burden, with U.N. Security Council endorsement, further distancing the U.S. from future engagement in general, and in Africa (where most U.N. peacekeepers are posted) in particular. The U.S. and U.N. were already supporting the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to resolve the Liberian conflict, having refused any direct involvement. U.S. direct support to the ECOWAS Monitoring Group's (ECOMOG) peacemaking operation averaged a miniscule \$15 million annually between 1991 and 1996, when a peace agreement finally began to be implemented.^[12] (For purposes of comparison, Nigeria, which shouldered the vast majority of the costs of the operation, spent about \$1 billion.^[13]) In the early years of the operation (1991-1993), when ECOMOG struggled to establish control over the conflict situation, the U.S. was the only significant external contributor.^[14] Despite the myriad difficulties associated with this operation, it could be spun as support for the view that the African continent could solve its own

problems without significant external support. In fact, conflict dynamics that soon would threaten the security of much of the West African subregion were incubating in the Liberian countryside, while ECOMOG remained largely confined to the capital Monrovia, and on its own.

Concerns about insecurity in Africa, and the threat of being drawn into dealing with conflicts in which it had no interests, also dampened U.S. support for democratization in this period. The roots of genocide in Rwanda were deep, but among the immediate precipitating factors was external pressure to democratize.[15] Political liberalization was associated with increased insecurity in several other countries in the mid-1990s, including in the Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, and Lesotho, but most disconcertingly in Rwanda's neighbor Burundi, which was itself on the brink of civil war, and perhaps genocide, after its first democratically elected President was assassinated in a coup attempt in October 1993, just four months after his election. When the democratic regime there was overturned in a successful coup in July 1996, which brought former President Major Pierre Buyoya back to power, the U.S. and other major powers supported the new government in the hope that Buyoya would be able to improve the security situation, even while East African countries attempted to impose sanctions against the non-democratic government. Elsewhere in Africa, political and military elites had by this time figured out how to "comply" with U.S. demands for elections without threatening their grip on power. As a result, the modal regime in Africa in the mid-1990s was 'electoral authoritarian.' [16] The United States' was particularly friendly with a group of Presidents it referred to as a "new generation of African leaders," all of whom were seriously engaged in rebuilding collapsed state institutions, while generally rejecting the relevance of multiparty democracy to their circumstances.[17] This policy of supporting stabilization over liberalization might have fared better had the new generation of African leaders not ended up at war with one another shortly thereafter.[18]

U.S. assistance to Africa had been declining since the late 1980s, largely as a result of the virtual elimination of Security Assistance and Economic Support Funds to former Cold War allies.[19] In 1995, Congress moved to restructure and significantly reduce U.S. foreign assistance programs. Many questioned the rationale for assisting Africa in the post-Cold War era, noting that three decades of aid had achieved little, either in terms of growth and democratization or promoting U.S. interests. Congressional supporters of aid to Africa rallied against the initiative and succeeded in preempting significant new cuts. Aid declined in 1996, but only marginally, as in previous years.[20]

African Solutions to African Problems

A third period of post-Cold War U.S.-Africa relations began with the adoption of the rhetoric of "African Solutions to African Problems" in the first year of Clinton's second term in office. This was far from a serious reengagement, indeed some called it "virtual engagement,"[21] but it did represent recognition that the U.S. could not afford complete disengagement from Africa. The lesson of Somalia, Rwanda, and Liberia taken together was that the U.S. could not engage directly, could not do nothing, and could not expect African forces to contain instability on their own. And so the search began for alternatives that would combine U.S. financial resources and African human resources for conflict resolution/peacekeeping, political reform, and economic development.

Military Policy

In the face of a very real possibility in 1996 that Burundi would follow Rwanda over the brink, the Clinton Administration proposed the creation of an African Crisis Response Force (ACRF). The idea was to create a standing force of about 5000 African troops, trained by Western countries, which could be deployed rapidly for peacekeeping operations endorsed by the U.N.[22] Unveiled in October 1996, the proposal received a decidedly cool reaction from virtually all quarters. The plan seemed to represent an abdication of responsibility and a neo-imperial

impulse simultaneously. Britain and France, both of which had ongoing military training programs with a number of African countries, were disinclined to follow the American lead, especially in a region in which they had extensive involvement and the U.S. had little. Regional powers South Africa and Nigeria, which the Clinton Administration had hoped would take a leadership role in ACRF, made it clear that they had no interest.

By the end of the year ACRF was undergoing a fundamental redefinition, from which emerged the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI). The idea of a standing rapid deployment force was gone, and ACRI became a bilateral training program, designed to improve the capabilities of national forces to participate in peacekeeping activities. South Africa and Nigeria remained cool, but other countries agreed to accept the training and equipment, beginning with Malawi, Senegal, and Uganda. ACRI provided training and equipment exclusively for peacekeeping, not peacemaking. The U.S. was rightly concerned not to be perceived to be contributing, even inadvertently, to conflict. However, this cautious approach failed to mollify critics who were quick to point to cases where ACRI-provided equipment was being used against internal and external enemies,^[23] and left ACRI open to the more fundamental criticism that training for *peacekeeping* in a region where interventions would almost always need to be of the *peacemaking* type seriously limited ACRI's relevance.^[24] Others suggested that African militaries lack financing and logistics, not training, making any training program of limited usefulness.^[25]

In the transition from the Clinton to the George W. Bush administration, ACRI evolved into the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program, which concentrates on "training the trainer," delivering programs designed to address the specific needs of the recipient country, and training for peace enforcement as well as peacekeeping. Between 1997 and 2005, the U.S. spent \$121 million to train 10,000 troops from nine countries (Benin, Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, and Senegal). In 2005 ACOTA became a constituent part of the Bush administration's multilateral five-year Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) program, which, with the support of the G-8, aims to train 75,000 peacekeepers, mostly in Africa, and foster an international transportation and logistics support system for peacekeepers.^[26] Thus, the most serious criticisms of ACRI have now been addressed, U.S.-European cooperation has been consolidated, and South Africa and Nigeria have agreed to take part in GPOI training. Along the way, the idea of deploying newly trained peacekeepers as a unit has fallen by the wayside. The mission now is to maintain a steady flow of forces to support U.N., and to a lesser extent regional, peacekeeping operations. In its first year (FY2005) GPOI more than doubled the number of peacekeepers trained. The U.S. contribution to GPOI in FY05 was \$96.7 million, about two thirds of which went to Africa.^[27]

However, the State Department and Congress are still assessing the most fundamental issue: "Are international training efforts through GPOI and its predecessor programs having the desired effect?"^[28] African countries doubled their military contributions to U.N. peacekeeping between the end of 2000 and the end of 2004, and five of the top ten contributors had received training under ACRI/ACOTA.^[29] This is not very strong evidence, given that half of the contributors did not receive training, and there is no evidence as to whether those that did are outperforming those that did not, or even whether those that received the training were the ones deployed.

Recent deployments by the African Union (AU) in Sudan, and ECOWAS in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia suggest that with sufficient external financial and logistical support these organizations can make an important contribution to peacekeeping, but only as junior partners in international coalitions for the foreseeable future. In Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, ECOWAS was willing and able to deploy quickly and effectively (once adequate financial and logistical support was guaranteed by the France and the United States, respectively), but needed reinforcement in short order. The AU effort in Sudan, making use of some of the continent's most capable armed forces, had more difficulty getting forces to Darfur in a timely manner, but once there performed well initially, within the constraints imposed by an inadequate mandate. Within a short period of time, however, it became clear that this operation would also need to be taken over by the U.N. as AU resources

were quickly exhausted. As of the end of 2006, the UN has failed to get approval from the government of Sudan for a chapter VI intervention, or from the U.N. Security Council for a chapter VII intervention, leaving the AU force desperately trying to hold on, as violence spills into neighboring countries.

The Bush administration has taken the lead in the UN operation in Liberia, and has publicly supported a chapter VII intervention to stop what it calls "genocide" in Darfur. Policy in these two cases indicates some recovery from the Somalia Syndrome, but also demonstrates its continuing influence. The United States was under extreme international pressure to intervene as rebel forces began encircling Monrovia in the summer of 2003. Former colonial powers Britain and France were already engaged in UN peacekeeping operations in neighboring Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, respectively, and the stability of those countries was threatened by the intensifying war in Liberia.

The Bush administration eventually agreed to support a ceasefire, but only if and after President Charles Taylor resigned and left the country, and only if ECOWAS provided an initial stabilization force. Following the Bush Administration's lead, Nigerian President Olesegun Obasanjo agreed to deploy 1500 Nigerian troops, constituted as the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL), but only if and after financial and logistical support had been guaranteed by the U.S. Both conditions were met relatively quickly, and the U.N. authorized a multinational force for Liberia on August 1.

As Taylor took off from Monrovia for exile in Nigeria on August 11, U.S. war ships, prepositioned off the Liberian coast, moved close enough to be visible on the horizon from Monrovia. Joint Task Force Liberia included three ships and 5000 service members. However, only 200 Marines actually went ashore, and then only for a ten-day show of support to the ECOMIL force (August 14 to 24). The U.N. Security Council established the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) on September 19, and authority was transferred from ECOMIL to UNMIL on October 1, with 3500 ECOMIL forces "rehabbed" as the initial element in an approved force of 15,000.

This was a very cautious return to African peacekeeping for the U.S. military, but one that nevertheless achieved its immediate goal of establishing a sustainable cease-fire, which in turn led to internationally supervised elections in October 2005, and a U.N. post-conflict reconstruction program in which the U.S. remains the lead country. The U.S. government allocated \$1.15 billion to reconstruction efforts in Liberia between FY2004 and FY2006.^[30] It is important to remember that the U.S. has a "special" relationship with Liberia historically, and would be very unlikely to commit this level of resources to any other country. Furthermore, the sustainability of the peace and stability in Liberia is far from guaranteed, and a failure here would constitute strike two in U.S. engagement with African peacekeeping.

If Liberia demonstrates the application of lessons learned from Somalia, Sudan demonstrates lessons learned from Rwanda. The conflict in Darfur began in April 2003 when two allied rebel movements attacked a military installation in the region. Within months, local "Arab" janjaweed militia forces were systematically expelling "African" farmers from their land, killing, raping, and burning villages as they went. Within a year, scores of thousands (conservatively) were dead and millions displaced. In February 2004, the Institute for the Study of Genocide issued an action alert alleging "genocide," and in June, the Committee on Conscience of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum followed suit.^[31] On July 22 both Houses of the U.S. Congress unanimously passed Concurrent Resolutions (S.Con.Res. 133 and H.Con.Res. 467), declaring that genocide was taking place in Darfur.^[32] Secretary of State Colin Powell announced that he was unsure about whether the situation in Darfur amounted to genocide, but would go to Sudan and see for himself. Upon his return in September, he testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he concurred: genocide was indeed under way in Sudan. Powell went on to say that as a contracting party to the Geneva Convention, the U.S. would demand that the United Nations initiate a full investigation.^[33]

Beyond these initiatives, U.S. policy remained the same: diplomatic support for AU efforts to facilitate a negotiated settlement to the conflict, which began in early 2004, diplomatic and financial support (in the amount of \$150 million in its first two years) for the African Mission in Sudan (AMIS), which deployed in August 2004, and more recently stepped up pressure on the U.N. to deploy "a credible and effective international force."^[34] In short, the U.S. has largely avoided the criticism that followed from Rwanda, without being seriously engaged in taking direction action under the Geneva Convention. This position has been facilitated by the willingness of China and Russia to veto stronger U.N. action in the Security Council.

Economic Policy

Although the rhetoric of "African Solutions to African Problems" is generally applied specifically to conflict resolution and peacekeeping issues, it captures the thrust of U.S. political and economic policies in Africa in this period as well. It should not be understood to mean that Africans should be free to choose among potential solutions to their problems, but rather that Africans should shoulder more of the responsibility of implementing solutions that American officials tend to see as universal. This is well illustrated by the U.S. Agency for International Development's Bureau for Africa Vision Statement:

The African Bureau will set the standard of excellence in fostering successful African-led development. Our mission is to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life throughout the region so that Africans and Africa can achieve their full potential. In so doing, we will draw on the American values of democracy and social and economic freedom.^[35]

The political conditionalities placed on economic assistance in the early 1990s remain in place, and quiet exceptions continue to be made for special friends (most notably Rwanda, which got a wink and a nod in response to elections in 2003 that made a mockery of democratic practice). However, as in the conflict and peacekeeping realm, the U.S. has attempted to shift more of the responsibility for political reform to Africans in the last decade. Evidence from the early 1990s suggested that the conditionality stick could be relatively effective in encouraging the adoption of democratic procedures, but was much less effective in facilitating the emergence of substantive democracy in a region where the social, economic, and institutional supports for democracy are weak to nonexistent. In response, U.S. democracy support programs have increasingly emphasized strengthening civil society in order to empower local democracy advocates to demand good governance and increased accountability for themselves.

More recently, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) signed by President Clinton in 1997, and the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), established by President Bush in 2003, have become the centerpieces of political and economic policies in Africa. AGOA provides preferential access to the U.S. market for democratic countries in Africa, and MCA provides economic assistance to impoverished democracies anywhere in the world. Under AGOA, the President designates countries as AGOA eligible if they have established or "are making progress toward establishing" market-based economies, the rule of law and political pluralism, the elimination of trade and investment barriers, the protection of intellectual property, efforts to combat corruption, policies to reduce poverty, increasing availability of health care and educational opportunities, protection of human rights and worker rights, and the elimination of certain child labor practices.^[36] Both Presidents Bush and Clinton designated most African countries as AGOA eligible, including some of the most egregious violators of the principles on the eligibility list. For example, in 2006 Guinea is AGOA eligible despite being rated "not free" by Freedom House, and ranking as the most corrupt country in Africa in Transparency International's global corruption indices.^[37] Recognizing the political pressures involved in presidential certification of eligibility, the MCA makes a more serious effort to target resources to democratic regimes by determining eligibility based on 16 quantitative indicators, which measure the same qualities set out in the AGOA eligibility list.^[38] As a result, in 2006 37 African countries were AGOA eligible, but only 11 were MCA eligible.

As economic policy instruments, and therefore as political policy instruments, AGOA and MCA leave much to be desired. AGOA is the institutional embodiment of the "trade not aid" rhetoric of the mid- to late-1990s, in which American and African leaders, most notably Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, agreed that increased access to the American market would facilitate economic growth and development in Africa more effectively than had decades of foreign assistance. However, the provisions of AGOA included multiple protections for American producers who might be harmed, even marginally, by competition from Africa. Although the Office of the United States Trade Representative has perennially celebrated the success of AGOA since its implementation in 2000, the reality provides little if any cause for celebration. Oil exports have always accounted for the majority of African exports to the U.S. under AGOA. While the U.S. has a clear interest in increasing its market share in African oil exports, the oil sector is unlikely to drive more broad based economic growth and development in Africa. As a result, much attention has been given to the boost in textile exports from Africa to the U.S. under AGOA, precisely because textiles were a critical niche market for Asian countries at the earliest stages of their economic transformations. However, with the expiration of textile quotas under the Multi Fiber Agreement at the beginning of 2005, Chinese exports swamped the American market and imports from Africa declined precipitously. With other non-oil sectors declining even more significantly between 2004 and 2005, oil came to account for 92% of African AGOA exports to the U.S. in 2005.^[39]

The Millennium Challenge Account is also a response to the ineffectiveness of traditional foreign assistance programs, as well as the institutional embodiment of the shift in "the Washington consensus" away from structural adjustment toward poverty reduction and recipient country 'ownership.' The MCA has been well received in principle, but was slow to begin actually committing funds, and partly as a result is currently funded well below initial stated intentions.^[40] Eligible countries are encouraged to take ownership of their development agendas, identify problems and propose solutions, which the U.S. will then consider funding. At the end of 2006 25 countries were eligible for MCA funding, of which 11 were African, and MCA had actually signed Compacts with 9 countries, including four in Africa (Madagascar, Cape Verde, Benin, and Ghana). The amounts committed were in line with traditional levels of assistance, and the programs funded all reflected the new Washington consensus.^[41] Overall, U.S. non-emergency economic assistance to Africa remains extremely meager—18 cents per capita according to Sachs' calculations for 2003.^[42]

The U.S. and Africa Post-9/11: Awakening or Deja Vu?

Longer-term U.S. engagement with Africa is likely to be defined in terms of the perceived increase in U.S. interests in the region as a result of international terrorism, increased dependence on African oil, and the dramatic engagement of China with the continent in recent years. Although the September 2002 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) asserts that "America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones," the implications of this for Africa appear relatively modest.^[43] With respect to the threat of international terrorism, the NSS pledges to work with European allies to "help strengthen Africa's fragile states, help build indigenous capability to secure porous borders, and help build up the law enforcement and intelligence infrastructure to deny havens for terrorists."^[44]

In practice, this policy has taken two distinct forms: the deployment of the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in December 2002, and the Pan-Sahel Initiative/Trans-Sahel Counter Terrorism Initiative, which also began in late 2002. CJTF-HOA, staffed by about 1500 troops, has the mission of "detecting, disrupting and ultimately defeating transnational terrorist groups operating in the region—denying safe havens, external support and material assistance for transnational terrorism in the region."^[45] Initially, it was driven by concerns that terrorists fleeing from Afghanistan would be attracted to the 'vast ungoverned spaces' of the Horn of Africa. When such a mass influx failed to materialize, and the local terrorist threat proved to be relatively limited, CJTF-HOA began giving greater emphasis to its role in preventing terrorism by providing humanitarian assistance and waging a hearts and minds campaign. Its web page characterizes

its current activities as working "to prevent conflict, promote regional stability, and protect Coalition interests in east Africa and Yemen through humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, consequence management, civil action programs to include medical and veterinary care, school and medical clinic construction, water development projects."[\[46\]](#)

The Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) was a more indirect effort to boost the border defense capabilities of countries to the West of the Horn: Chad, Niger, Mali, and Mauritania. With a tiny budget of \$8.4 million, it trained at least one rapid reaction force of about 150 soldiers in each of the four countries in 2003 and 2004. Clearly the budget of PSI was too small for it to have much of an impact on the recipient countries, but the Administration was sufficiently satisfied with the program to create an expanded follow on Trans-Sahel Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI). Under the TSCTI, the program expanded to include Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia (in addition to the original four countries) and gave more emphasis to regional cooperation. The budget for TSCTI was initially proposed to be \$100 million a year for five years, but it is funded at the level of \$16.75 in FY07, its first year of budgeted funding.

The resources devoted to both efforts are far below what would be required to achieve the stated goals of strengthening states in general, and their policing and intelligence capabilities in particular. Furthermore, the fact that these state/border strengthening initiatives stretch across the continent, essentially tracing the boundary between Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, which is much more integrated with the Middle East, suggests that the underlying goal is to insulate Africa from threats to U.S. interests emanating from elsewhere, rather than to engage Africa itself. Beyond this specific counterterrorism strategy, the NSS sets out three interlocking strategies for Africa: giving "focused attention" to anchor states such as South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and Ethiopia, coordinating with European allies and international institutions for constructive conflict mediation and peace operations, and strengthening Africa's capable reforming states and sub-regional organizations as the primary means of addressing transnational threats, which adds up essentially to more 'African solutions to African problems.'[\[47\]](#)

Aside from the concern with terrorism, Africa's oil has become an increasing attraction to the United States. In May 2001 the Cheney report warned that the U.S. would grow increasingly dependent upon foreign oil in the years to come and recommended that as a matter of policy the Bush Administration work to increase production and export of oil from regions other than the Middle East, noting that Latin America and West Africa were likely to be the fastest growing sources of future U.S. oil imports.[\[48\]](#) Africa supplies about 15% of U.S. oil imports, but with African production growing at twice the global rate, it could be supplying the U.S. with as much energy as the Middle East within a decade.[\[49\]](#) Three months later, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Walter Kansteiner declared that African oil "has become a national strategic interest."[\[50\]](#) " This statement is particularly noteworthy in that it uses the language of the Carter Doctrine in the Middle East, in which President Carter went on to declare that the U.S. would intervene by any means necessary to protect its national interest in Middle Eastern oil. In April 2002, Donald Norland, former U.S. Ambassador to Chad told a Congressional subcommittee: "It's been reliably reported that, for the first time, the two concepts—'Africa' and 'U.S. national security'—have been used in the same sentence in Pentagon documents."[\[51\]](#) Having declared African oil to be of strategic interest to the United States, the Bush Administration has not taken the second step to actually apply the Carter Doctrine to Africa. This has left U.S. policy open to criticism from both sides. The Council on Foreign Relations Task Force on U.S. policy in Africa has criticized it for failing "to make a geopolitical shift to pay sufficient attention to West Africa's energy rich Gulf of Guinea,"[\[52\]](#) while others see a neo-imperial push unfolding in the sub-region.[\[53\]](#)

Conclusion: Future Directions

The most significant challenge to U.S. policy in Africa in the coming years may be China. The immediate topic of most strategic discussions regarding China and Africa is oil competition.

"Twenty years ago, China was East Asia's largest oil exporter. Now it is the world's second-largest importer; last year, it alone accounted for 31 percent of global growth in oil demand."^[54] Just as the U.S. is recognizing the importance of African oil to its interests, China is actively seeking to expand its own market share. But China's economic (and thus political) engagement of Africa since the turn of the century goes far beyond the hunt for energy. China's overall trade with Africa doubled from 2002 to 2003, and then doubled again between 2003 and 2005. This 400% growth in three years comes atop 700% growth in the decade of the 1990s, and there is no end in sight. China is now Africa's third largest trading partner, behind the U.S. and France, and ahead of former colonial power Britain.^[55]

Chinese foreign direct investment in Africa has grown equally dramatically from about \$50 million annually between the mid 1990s and 2002, to \$100 million in 2003 and \$430 million in 2004.^[56] This budding economic relationship is supported by the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, established by China in 2000 to bring Chinese and African leaders together every three years, much as the France-Africa summit had done throughout the postcolonial period. China comes to Africa as "the largest developing country in the world ... [s]haring similar historical experience" and committed to establishing "a new type of strategic partnership with Africa which features political equality and mutual trust."^[57] In other words, China maintains a policy of strict noninterference in the internal affairs of its African partners, and seeks mutually beneficial engagement, not humanitarian paternalism. Thus Chinese engagement in Africa threatens to substantially reduce the leverage of the U.S. and its Western allies, and thereby undermine the political and economic reform agendas the West has been pushing in Africa for two decades. More than this, however, successful economic engagement by China could open a huge new market for trade and investment, which it would be in position to dominate. The political implications of an economically emerging Africa in close alliance with China are disconcerting in the U.S. policy circles.^[58] China's engagement in Africa may soon challenge the longstanding American perception that 'there is no there there,' and encourage serious, interest-driven U.S. engagement with Africa for the first time in history.

Africa has always been marginal to U.S. interests and policies in the world. However, U.S. Africa relations may be approaching a critical juncture. U.S. policy could evolve toward engaging Africa on its own terms for mutual benefit, or it could settle back into the Cold War mold, treating Africa as a humanitarian ward of the international community and so many pawns in global geopolitical struggles. History, even very recent history, suggests that the latter is the far more likely course. Heady rhetoric about the role of Africa in the war on terrorism has amounted to very little actual change in the U.S. approach to Africa over the last five years. The excitement generated by the possibility of using African oil to reduce dependence on less politically reliable sources, is driven not least by the fact that much of Africa's oil reserve lies offshore, where it can be exploited with minimal involvement in what happens on land. And the China challenge might well be met as the Soviet challenge was, with renewed efforts to carve out a sphere of influence as an end in itself. The currents of history and bureaucratic inertia will continue to push in this direction. Only sustained and energetic leadership at the highest levels can overcome the drift and steer a new course.

About the Author

Letitia Lawson is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School, where she has been teaching African studies since 1996. Her courses include African Government and Politics, African History and Cultures, Government and Security in West Africa, and Government and Security in the Horn of Africa. She also teaches courses in Comparative Politics and Research Methodology.

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5. Donald Rothchild, *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1997), 120-145. This settlement later collapsed when Jonas Savimbi rejected the outcome of the first round of United Nations supervised presidential elections and returned the country to war.
6. Letitia Lawson, "External Democracy Promotion in Africa: Another False Start?" *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 37, 1 (March 1999), 1-30.
7. Guenter Lewy, "The Case for Humanitarian Intervention," *Orbis* 37, 4, Fall 1993, 621.
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9. The factors for UN operations that would not include U.S. participation are (1) the operation advances U.S. interests and has multilateral support; (2) there is a threat to international peace and security; (3) objectives are clear; (4) a ceasefire is in place for a chapter VI intervention, or there is a significant threat to international peace and security for a chapter VII intervention; (5) adequate means are available, including forces, financing and an appropriate mandate; (6) the political, economic, and humanitarian consequences of inaction are considered unacceptable; and (7) duration is clear and tied to realistic criteria for ending operations. Additional factors to be considered if the operation would include U.S. participation are (8) the operation advances U.S. interests and risks to U.S. personnel are considered acceptable; (9) personnel, funds, and other resources are available; (10) U.S. participation is necessary for the operation's success; (11) the role of U.S. forces is tied to clear objectives and the endpoint can be identified; (12) domestic and congressional support exists or can be marshaled; and (13) command and control arrangements are acceptable. If U.S. forces were likely to engage in combat, U.S. officials would consider three final factors: (14) whether a determination to commit sufficient forces exists; (15) whether a plan to achieve objectives exists; and (16) whether a commitment to reassess and adjust the size, composition and disposition of U.S. forces as necessary to achieve objectives exists.

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16. Larry Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, 2 (April 2002), 30. Consolidating Diamond's two democratic categories (liberal and electoral) and his two electoral authoritarian categories (competitive and hegemonic), he classifies seven African regimes as authoritarian, fourteen as democratic, and twenty-one as the hybrid electoral authoritarian in 2001. Six others were considered "ambiguous."

17. The new generation included Presidents Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea, Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, and Paul Kagame of Rwanda. Joseph Kabila of Zaire/DRC was later added to the list, apparently for no reason other than the fact that he was a protégé of Museveni and Kagame. Meles Zenawi is a partial exception to the anti-democratic generalization. While democratic procedures have been significantly flawed in Ethiopia, Ethiopia has held regular multiparty elections since 1995.

18. Isaias Afwerki and Meles Zenawi had been close allies for many years, as leaders of neighboring rebel movements. However, Ethiopia and Eritrea engaged in a deadly border war in 1998-2000, and have remained in a state of cold war since. Similarly, Yoweri Museveni and Paul Kagame were long-time allies, with Kagame fighting as a general in Museveni's rebel army before participating in the rebel invasion of his country of origin, Rwanda. Uganda and Rwanda cooperated in invading Zaire in 1996, initially in response to legitimate security issues on the other side of the border, and later fought each other on DRC territory briefly.

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34. See "[President Bush Discusses Sudan with Special Envoy and Makes Remarks on North Korea](#)," The Oval Office, October 31, 2006.
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