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CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

**SECURITY THREATS IN PERSPECTIVE:
UNDERSTANDING THE FAILURES OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN
AFRICA**

SUBMITTED TO
PROFESSOR JENNIFER TAW
AND
DEAN NICHOLAS WARNER

BY
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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the nature and major causes of American foreign policy in Africa since the end of the Cold War. Among these is a tendency to view African states, threats, and crises in terms of American strategic interests, not as events with independent relevance to American priorities. The post-9/11 fervor muddled many important distinctions about the relationship between African states, state power, and international terrorist groups. The United States acted too quickly, helping African states militarize without understanding the nature of the threat and the way in which a heavily militarized response would entrench rebel groups. Seeing Africa as tangential to the larger issue of terrorism led to policies that were ineffective and counterproductive. The success of future foreign policy towards Africa depends on careful consideration of the aims and motives of various actors and strong focus on good governance efforts.

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Introduction

The American foreign policy institution has historically paid little attention to Africa in comparison to other continents. Underneath sweeping rhetoric about advancing democracy and development, American foreign policy towards Africa has been sporadic, reactive, and unimaginative. Aside from a small cadre of Africa experts in the State Department, few individuals were concerned with developing a coordinated strategy or clear doctrine for long-term relations with African states. Because Africa was seen as neither threatening nor strategically important, military and civilian officials did not develop knowledge about individual leaders, domestic security concerns, or potential future threats. Political and intrastate conflicts in Africa typically have not posed a direct threat to the U.S., resulting in little need to formulate coherent policies towards the continent.

The failure to construct a cohesive policy in Africa is symptomatic of larger structural flaws in the formation of American foreign policy. These include a tendency towards vast oversimplification, indifference to issues until they rise to a level of crisis, and a preference for short term fixes over long term solutions.¹ Under these conditions, policymakers find themselves in a constant state of crisis management. The sense of immediacy and imminent danger drives action without long-term planning or strategizing, especially about how U.S. policies might be interpreted by outside actors. America's position as a global hegemon perpetuates this system, as it can exert power, either diplomatically or militarily, without having to involve itself in long term commitments.

Even though these characteristics are seen in U.S. foreign policy across the globe, several factors set Africa apart. The U.S. has had few economic interests in Africa, no colonial legacy aside from slavery, and African states have had almost no impact on the global balance of power. There is no strong African constituency in the United States to advocate for Africa or specific African countries. Instead relevant constituencies tend to be issue-based, typically focused on human rights and development issues that fail to gain much traction with foreign policy planners. American foreign policy towards Africa has been framed in relation to major geopolitical issues: countering Soviet influence, ensuring continued oil exports, and fighting terrorism. The U.S. has typically seen its military as the primary tool for addressing these concerns.

Being a hegemonic military power makes it possible for the United States to conduct its foreign policy without declaring a grand strategy or acting in coordination with strong allies. While this gives the U.S. flexibility, it can make policy decisions appear inconsistent and arbitrary. This position of power has also influenced the United States to view security threats as inherently militaristic in nature. That is, violence is caused by insecurity, security is rooted in state power, and a military response can resolve insecurity. That belief system saw the U.S. through the Cold War, but has proven ineffective and even inflammatory in fighting terrorism.

Today, several of America's policy priorities – access to oil, curbing the drug trade, and combating terrorism, for example – implicate Africa, but U.S. foreign policy has not caught up. Despite this increased importance, the American response to these issues has been a replay of old patterns of behavior. America's militarized approach to foreign policy combined with limited connections to the continent produced to a tendency

to see Africa purely in terms of American security interests, not as a continent with its own problems in need of a defined, long-term strategy. This view has manifested itself in three major ways: the prioritization of short-term stability over long-term planning, the failure to anticipate the behavior of individuals and groups with different interests than the U.S., and the assumption that bilateral partnerships are an effective way to advance security interests. All have significantly hindered the ability of the U.S. to successfully engage with African states, especially in regards to counterterrorism efforts. In short, U.S. foreign policy in Africa has failed because of action without planning and militarism without understanding.

During the Cold War, the United States intervened in Africa only as necessary to counter Soviet influence. While Africa was not as hotly contested as Latin America and Southeast Asia, both superpowers propped up African leaders. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Africa was again relegated to a position of moderate neglect and seen as unimportant to the strategic interests of the United States. For most of his presidency, George H.W. Bush made little effort to preserve or expand American interests on the continent before sending troops into Somalia in 1992. When this intervention resulted in the gruesome deaths of American military personnel, Congress demanded an immediate withdrawal. After extremely limited action in Rwanda in 1994, the United States refused to participate in other conflict intervention efforts, even in more strategically relevant situations such as the Liberian Civil War and the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The focus of U.S. officials shifted to peacekeeping in the Balkans and the Middle East, regions with concrete strategic importance. Through the mid-nineties, American engagement with Africa was almost entirely limited to bilateral relationships with Egypt

and South Africa. Aid to Africa was cut and the U.S. provided funding and training for initiatives to create security bodies on the African continent to minimize the need for foreign intervention.

While the 1998 bombings of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania drew attention to the presence of international terrorist groups in Africa, they did not drastically alter the level of American involvement in the region. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 catalyzed concern about non-state actors as security threats, but the United States continued to view international terrorism in terms of rogue states and military power. The prevalence of weak states and continued state failure in Somalia elicited concern about Islamic terrorist groups operating in and launching attacks from Africa. While the 9/11 attacks brought much needed attention to Africa, the policy response was riddled with misperceptions and reflected intransigent attitudes about bilateral cooperation, military strength, and Africa itself. Especially with regards to counterterrorism efforts, American foreign policy in Africa has been a return to Cold War tactics. Such tactics include bolstering the militaries of partner states to act as proxies and prioritizing security over democracy and human rights. It also reflects a broader misunderstanding of the nature of terrorism, specifically the dynamic between small domestic rebel groups and international terrorist networks. Thinking that failed states and ungoverned spaces could be easily exploited by terrorist networks and thus posed a significant threat to its security, the United States operated under the assumption that simply establishing and/or strengthening governments could resolve chronic insecurity. In Somalia, the attempt at state-building not only failed miserably and empowered extremist militants, but demonstrated a lack of understanding about the opportunities and

obstacles that ungoverned spaces and deeply divided communities pose to terrorist networks.

The War on Terror is not the only aspect of U.S. foreign policy in Africa that has come up short. Development aid programs, drug interdiction, and HIV/AIDS prevention all merit further scrutiny, but are not topical for this investigation. American foreign policy in Africa encompasses topics beyond terrorism and energy security, but they have been overshadowed by a heavily militarized foreign policy. On all fronts, successful policy towards Africa hinges on learning the right lessons from past failures. Now more than ever, the United States must increase and improve its level of interaction with African states. In the past, the cost of failure to policymakers and elected officials was low. Today, the increased strategic importance of Africa to a range of U.S. interests makes the cost of failure quite high.

Literature Review

J. Peter Pham has written extensively on security and American foreign policy in Africa. His work traces the path of U.S.-Africa relations, which have frequently been ignored in favor of other regions. In 2005, he wrote that “with the exception of a handful of experts . . . most foreign policy realists wrote the continent off as little more than a source of trouble, albeit one that could be safely ignored because it rarely if ever impinged on America’s strategic national interests.”² Referring to the continent as the “stepchild of U.S. foreign policy,” he depicted Africa policy as handled with “official attitudes and policies in Washington ranging from benign neglect at best to callous indifference at worst.”³ Pham articulated that the 9/11 terrorist attacks considerably

changed Africa's strategic significance to the United States. Foreign policy strategists saw failed states as a threat to national security because of their potential to serve as terrorist bases. In his work, Pham agrees with the more contemporary position that weak states are more dangerous to the U.S. than failed states because terrorists benefit from sufficient infrastructure combined with weak law enforcement. Additionally, the increasing economic importance of Africa at the beginning of the twenty-first century coincided with its increasing importance to the United States and its War on Terror, making the previous hands-off approach to Africa unviable. Pham also argues that U.S. economic policy towards Africa has characteristically centered on ineffective aid programs. In the future, he argues that "[the] United States should direct efforts toward strengthening the continent's democratization process, as well as the governmental capacity of individual states."⁴ Problems of weak territorial control and poor democratic governance are still the primary issues African states are confronting today.

In a 2000 paper, Chris Alden expanded upon Pham's arguments about the neglect of Africa in foreign policy. Alden wrote that the "relationship between the United States and Africa is one characterized in the main by indifference and neglect, punctuated by flurries of interest and action."⁵ In essence, American involvement in Africa is frequently driven by external factors, not a specific interest in the continent. During and since the Cold War, the United States has not established any clear doctrine or policy on Africa. Even though the U.S. became involved in Africa during the Clinton presidency, policy decisions were made on an ad hoc basis. Alden described the Clinton administration as floundering before ultimately deciding on democratic enlargement as an ideological pursuit.⁶ Though disjointed and feeble, "the collective initiatives coming out of the

Clinton Administration represent the first attempt the United States has ever made to put forward a comprehensive foreign policy” towards Africa.⁷ The programs and initiatives started during the Clinton presidency were half-hearted attempts at engagement, mostly focused on increasing trade, which achieved little because the private sector remained apprehensive about investing in Africa. Alden was pessimistic about the possibility of further involvement: “official declarations notwithstanding, all evidence suggests that the United States currently lacks the political conviction to engage Africa on terms that go much beyond the rhetoric of partnership.”⁸ Even since 9/11, the U.S. has shied away from policy doctrines and engineered long-term engagements around its own interests.

While the United States is militarily stronger than any other country and uses this power in pursuit of its interests, it is not sheltered from interference in its actions by other states and non-state actors. Stephen M. Walt sees this as a challenge of restraint and foresight. The U.S. has disproportionately more power than the states it interacts with, but does not act with awareness of this power disparity. In *Taming American Power*, Walt writes that “[although] the United States is far and away the most powerful country in the world . . . other states have many options for dealing with U.S. power. Most of these strategies do not seek to alter the global balance of power (at least not anytime soon), and they do not threaten the U.S. ability to achieve its foreign-policy goals, and thus its ability to fashion a more desirable homeland directly. But they do affect America’s world.”⁹ He calls for greater wisdom in American engagement and anticipation of its reception. Terrorist groups will certainly construe American power to their advantage, but even states that view American primacy favorably may have differing interests and objectives.¹⁰ The mostly clear Cold War dichotomy between allies

and enemies has given way to a world in which “[many] states see U.S. power as a positive force in the world and are primarily interested in ensuring that it is used in ways that advance their own particular interests.”¹¹ The 9/11 attacks demonstrated that America’s primacy would not always protect it from external threats.¹² Walt continues, “any attempt to devise an effective foreign policy for the United States must take into account the strategies of both friends and foes. Once we understand how other states are trying to tame American power, it becomes easier to devise a foreign policy that will minimize opposition and maximize global support.”¹³ Decentralization of the foreign policy bureaucracy and secrecy in the conduct of some aspects of foreign policy compound these problems by making it difficult for the U.S. to discern consequences from actions.¹⁴

Barry Posen identifies many of the same shortcomings as Walt. In his article “The Struggle Against Terrorism,” he argues that American foreign policy since the Cold War has suffered from a mismatch between costs and benefits. Even though the United States is immensely powerful, “it has often acted against the interests of others in pursuit of modest gains” in some instances and in others declined to take action even when costs were moderate. Posen is clear that foreign policy has not always failed, but is characterized by “a record of indiscipline in which calculations of short-term domestic political gains or losses often dominated decision-making.”¹⁵ He writes that “[the] post-Cold War world of easy preeminence, controlled low-cost wars, budgetary plenty, and choices avoided is over.”¹⁶ The rise of terrorism to the top of foreign policy priorities demands change in how the United States interacts with strong and weak states alike.

American foreign policy since 9/11 has focused heavily on dealing with weak and

failed states, and understanding the nature of the threat posed by those states. The story of American engagement with Africa is ultimately about how weak states interact with a strong state and attempt to benefit from that interaction. It is also a story of the United States trying to advance its interests on a tumultuous continent amidst a severe lack of understanding about how security threats affect Africa and how Africans perceive American action. Today, Africa is more relevant to the United States than ever before. Some of the biggest strategic issues the U.S. faces – terrorism and energy security - are playing out across African states. Al Qaeda has expanded its reach in the Maghreb, exploiting weak borders and destabilizing already divided states. Weak maritime security, especially in the Gulf of Guinea, allows for the transportation of illegal weapons, drugs, and stolen oil, along with piracy, illegal fishing, and human trafficking. While these issues matter greatly to both the United States and African countries, the lack of historical involvement with Africa has severely hampered the ability to confront them. The United States continues to view each of these issues through the lens of its own security concerns, paying little attention to how each generates instability and affects the lives of African people. The specific policies engineered to confront these issues are meant to be short-term and assume that African governments share American views on what the problems are and how best to solve them. None of these issues show signs of abating, casting immediacy on the need for an overhaul of strategy towards Africa.

CHAPTER 1: The Cold War, Somalia, and Rwanda

For most of the Cold War, American involvement in Africa waxed and waned depending on the perception of the Soviet influence there. U.S. officials saw Africa in purely geopolitical terms, intervening in Angola's civil war solely because the Soviet Union and Cuba supported one of the warring factions. In his analysis of Africa policy during the Cold War, Michael Clough notes that from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties, U.S. officials were particularly concerned with countering any Soviet influence in the Horn of Africa.¹⁷ To this end, "U.S. officials overlooked and often excused repression, injustice, corruption, and economic mismanagement in such African countries as Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Zaire that were willing to oppose Moscow."¹⁸ American interests in the Gulf of Aden made Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan strategically important locations for the movement of troops and supplies to that region. Aid to those countries, as well as military aid to Africa as a whole, spiked between 1982 and 1986.¹⁹ During the Cold War, the U.S. heavily monitored pro-Soviet movements and leaders and maintained intelligence operations in Africa, especially South Africa and Nigeria.²⁰

After the Cold War, both the United States and Soviet Union greatly reduced their presence in sub-Saharan Africa. The loss of outside support made client regimes extremely vulnerable to coups by warlords, military leaders, and paramilitary groups. Many of the regimes that received support from either the United States or the Soviet Union quickly found themselves without the resources to quell opposition. Soon after the end of the Cold War, several client leaders were overthrown in quick succession, including Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiri in 1989, Liberian President Samuel Doe and

Chadian President Hissène Habré in late 1990 and Somali President Siad Barre in early 1991. The Bush administration reacted passively to each of these events.²¹ Despite its significant support for Liberian President Samuel Doe during the Cold War, the U.S. chose not to intervene when he was ousted and the country descended into a long and violent civil war. It also refused to take part in peacekeeping efforts in either Liberia or Sierra Leone, leaving these efforts to the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and the U.N. This inaction can be attributed to the primacy of geopolitical thinking. Without the threat of Soviet incursion, the U.S. saw little value in protecting former client regimes from being overthrown.

Somalia

The end of the Cold War altered the global balance of power and gave United States an opportunity to redefine its strategy towards Africa. Speeches by Bush and later President Clinton reveal that they viewed the fall of the Soviet Union as proof that democracy had won and that the United States should work to increase democracy in the world.²² The first demonstration of post-Cold War Africa policy occurred in 1992, when President George H.W. Bush sent American forces into Somalia under Operation Restore Hope to provide humanitarian relief in conjunction with a U.N. mission. Even though the U.S. military mission is generally considered a success, the Somalia case demonstrates that the rebalancing of global power in favor of the United States did not alter its strategic view of Africa. The limitations of the American intervention in Somalia forced policy makers to realize that democratic enlargement was much easier said than done, especially in Africa. While the U.S. mission is considered a success, the coalition efforts under

UNOSOM I and II were plagued by a lack of overarching strategy, ineffective cooperation between coalition members, and militants with better weapons and tactics than anticipated. American pessimism about Africa, especially about conducting interventions there, was further cemented by the perceived failure of the UNOSOM I and UNOSOM II missions.

The experience in Somalia demonstrates the failure to anticipate the response of local actors to American action. The U.S. did not expect violent opposition to U.S. military presence because the initial mission was to distribute humanitarian aid. It misunderstood that food aid would become another resource over which warlords could fight and that the warlords themselves were instrumental in orchestrating and perpetuating the famine. Because the U.S. had viewed Somalia in terms of its usefulness as a client state, it failed to grasp the history and depth of clan divisions and the impossibility of a short-term solution.

The After Action Report (AAR) written and published by the U.S. Army illuminated these shortcomings. After action reports are reflective analytical documents meant to codify learning within the armed forces by studying the successes and failures of a specific military operation. In the case of Somalia, the AAR stated that various national contingents working under UNOSOM II needed time to build trust and establish working relationships, but U.S. forces were under domestic pressure to conduct the mission within a short timeframe. Public diplomacy and public affairs campaigns were inadequate; the report argued that the U.S. forces would have benefitted from more experience, planning, and resources in this area.²³ Inattention to the attitudes of Somalis towards the American presence indicates that the U.S. viewed the situation through a

narrow lens. The coalition attempted a very complex operation without an adequate understanding of the challenges ahead and the timeframe and equipment necessary to handle them. The difficulty of the task itself was compounded by an overall lack of strategic planning and later by disagreements between the U.S. and U.N. over strategic objectives.

The unsuccessful attempt to capture Mohamed Farah Aideed and ensuing battle of October 3-4, 1993 was pivotal for U.S. involvement in Somalia. American soldiers were well trained and prepared for their mission, but did not anticipate that Somali militants would be as plentiful and well-armed. Chaotic fighting resulted in the deaths of eighteen American soldiers and effectively ended all offensive operations in the country. Immediately after the raids, President Clinton found himself under pressure from Congress to withdraw the troops. He wrote in his memoir that “there was no support in Congress for a larger military role in Somalia, as I learned in a White House meeting with several members; most of them demanded an immediate withdrawal of our forces.”²⁴ Clinton persisted and the last American forces left Somalia in March 1994.

The After Action Report by no means recommended a termination of cooperation with the U.N., but rather a re-evaluation of how the U.S. should best contribute to future interventions. It recommended that in the future, the U.S. push harder for clearly defined intervention mandates and strategies. The report argued that interventions are best conducted by a single country or alliance of countries and that the U.N. Secretary General should focus its attention on gathering support and coordinating various U.N. agencies while avoiding involvement with the intervention itself.²⁵ Instead of heeding this advice, the U.S. developed a deep skepticism of U.N. peacekeeping abilities and did not actively

participate in future U.N. missions. It ultimately viewed peacekeeping in Africa as unrelated to its national security interests.

The After Action Report itself revealed a clear and forward-looking perspective on the future of American military engagement. It predicted outright that the U.S. armed forces would continue to be involved in operations other than war, and should be trained to conduct them. It also recognized that the existence of failed states “appears not to be a phenomenon but a trend for the near future. The United States in its world leadership role may not be able or willing to avoid participation in operations that attempt to prevent, contain, or resolve similar conflicts.”²⁶ Despite criticizing the U.N. and the other coalition forces, American military leaders understood that they would face similar conditions again, and that the U.N. would continue to be active in future humanitarian crises. More importantly, the report showed a grasp of the challenges of urban guerrilla combat, and the realization that the United States would almost certainly fight similar battles in the future.

The perspective in the After Action Report was not shared by American foreign policy officials in the subsequent years. American leaders, both military and civilian, lost any confidence that U.N. coalitions could conduct effective interventions. The failure of the U.N. to act as a unifying actor and the chaotic result of a humanitarian mission were principal factors in the decision by the Clinton administration not to pursue a similar policy of intervention in Rwanda shortly thereafter.

Both the military and the foreign policy establishment learned from Somalia, but the two differ significantly in what lessons were learned and how that learning was adapted to future circumstances. Eight years before the United States invaded

Afghanistan, military leaders were already considering how best to prepare the armed forces for the cognitive dissonance involved in an operation that demands both combat and humanitarian work. The military was mostly able to internalize the lessons and incorporate them into future operations. Broader lessons from Somalia were much more difficult to incorporate into the worldview of policymakers. Changes to soldier training can be made with relative ease, while understanding the perspective of the impoverished population of a clan-based society towards foreign intervention is much more complicated. As such, the foreign policy establishment was much slower to adapt and took Somalia as evidence that conflicts in Africa were too complicated and dangerous to be resolved by outside forces.

Rwanda

The American experience in Somalia was quickly followed up by another opportunity to intervene in Africa. Shortly after the last U.S. forces left Somalia in March 1994, violence broke out in Rwanda. The response by the United States was marked by several predispositions and assumptions about the situation, including unwillingness to join another U.N. peacekeeping force. As the country was of no strategic interest to the United States, military intervention in another complex African conflict was almost instantly out of the question. Instead, Rwanda revealed an over-reliance on diplomacy in the face of disaster and a desire to negotiate power-sharing agreements even in situations where such agreements were untenable and the violence had spun out of control. As seen in Rwanda, in the face of violence actors are much more likely to defect than to comply with negotiated agreements.

Officials within the State Department had been paying attention to the political situation in Rwanda for several years. The Bureau of African Affairs sent its Deputy Assistant Secretary and Central Africa Office Director to meet with Rwandan President Habyarimana in late March of 1994, shortly before his death on April 6, 1994. They had tried to negotiate a power-sharing agreement between the Hutus and Tutsis, unwittingly working with the same government officials who were involved in planning and orchestrating the genocide. According to Samantha Power's account in *A Problem from Hell: American in the Age of Genocide*, bias on the part of those American officials was a contributing factor to the lack of response to the violence. She explains that "[those] in the U.S. government who knew Rwanda best viewed the escalating violence with a diplomatic prejudice that left them both institutionally oriented toward the Rwandan government and reluctant to do anything to disrupt the peace process."²⁷ U.S. officials who were well-informed about Rwanda understood its history and expected a certain amount of ethnic violence, so they were less inclined to act upon receiving the initial reports. This analysis of events is corroborated by declassified State Department documents on Rwanda from 1993 and 1994.

Despite the quantity of intelligence available, the officials who pushed for military intervention in Rwanda did not have enough political pull because Rwanda was not directly relevant to American security interests. In the spectrum of foreign affairs, "African specialists had the least clout of all regional specialists and the smallest chance of affecting policy outcomes."²⁸ The State Department had professed the policy goals of "conflict resolution and democratization" and insisted that a U.N. intervention would "[nullify] the U.S. investment in resolution of the Rwandan civil war, including more

than one year of diplomatic effort.”²⁹ Despite the misgivings of a few low-level bureaucrats, officials were unwilling to change the approach in light of new developments. A review of government reports shows that officials were very aware of events on the ground, but never seriously considered sending in forces to stop the fighting, either independently or as part of the U.N. mission.

The refusal to intervene is consistent with trends of foreign policy in Africa. Rwanda held no national security or economic interest for the U.S., and so military intervention was never seriously considered. In that particular situation, bolstering a proxy force was not a legitimate option because the U.S. lacked a willing or appropriate ally in the region. With few other options on the table, the American diplomats attempted to negotiate a power-sharing solution with Rwandan government officials. State Department memos show that bureaucrats also recognized that no peacekeepers whatsoever would mean the conflict would continue to demand high expenditures on humanitarian aid. At that time, the United States had already pledged to provide \$34 million in aid for the displaced. In July 1994, President Clinton sent troops to Zaire to assist in refugee camps. Fewer than 2,400 U.S. soldiers were deployed to help distribute aid under Operation Support Hope. They were not an interventionary force; their mandate was to provide transportation and logistical support to other forces and distribute humanitarian aid in refugee camps. Almost all forces were stationed in Zaire, Burundi, Kenya, and Uganda, with very few actually inside Rwanda. Because Congress had stipulated that they be removed by October 1, the operation lasted less than two months. After Somalia, Congress had learned to be more demanding and to exercise more control over interventions. The intervention in Somalia made U.S. politicians, officials, and

military leaders extremely unwilling to place American military forces in hostile situations, especially in a country that lacked strong links to national interests. Somalia had been a Cold War ally and held geopolitical relevance to American interests in the Gulf. Rwanda was neither a former client state nor geopolitically relevant, and there were no indications that the administration would pay politically or otherwise for inaction in Rwanda.

Violence in Rwanda also occurred simultaneously with crises in Haiti and Bosnia that were more relevant to American national interests. In his memoir, Bill Clinton explained that his administration was “so preoccupied with Bosnia, with the memory of Somalia just six months old, and with opposition in Congress to military deployments in faraway places not vital to our national interests that neither I nor anyone on my foreign policy team adequately focused on sending troops to stop the slaughter.”³⁰ The mission to deliver humanitarian aid was completed in its outlined timeframe, with little manpower committed and no American casualties.

Somalia and Rwanda exemplify some of the typical problems seen in contemporary U.S. foreign policy on Africa. The United States attempted short-term solutions for long-standing conflicts and when those attempts failed to produce quick results, condemned intervention in Africa as hopeless. Somalia can be viewed as a failed experiment with multilateralism, after which the United States returned to old habits of bilateralism. Today, engagement with African states is largely based on bilateral military cooperation, with few resources devoted to public affairs and diplomacy. The ethnic nature of the violence in Rwanda helped cement what is commonly referred to as Somalia Syndrome. Aidan Hehir defines the term as the belief that “interventions in Africa are

doomed to fail, given the endemic hatreds and violent opposition towards external interference prevalent in the region.”³¹ That is, African conflicts are too large to be fixed by peacekeepers or peace enforcers, stem from old ethnic tensions, and Africans themselves do not wish for the involvement of outside actors. Somalia Syndrome was the entrenchment of pre-existing trends: policy inflexibility, dependency on military solutions, and a deep skepticism about the ability to resolve conflict in Africa. This perspective ultimately hindered the ability of the United States to pursue its interests in Africa, especially in the post-9/11 world.

In lieu of directly cooperating with the U.N. on peacekeeping efforts in Africa, the United States created several initiatives meant to enhance African security capacities. Among these were the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), the Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capabilities Program (EIPC), and the African Regional Peacekeeping Program (ARP).³² There was also cooperation with the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) including a partnership program between National Guard forces and African states. The goal of these initiatives was to produce forces capable of intervening in humanitarian crises, thus reducing the need for American military presence. The United States still viewed conflict in Africa as a military problem, and therefore looked to training initiatives a low-cost solution. Despite rhetorical commitment to development and democracy, these programs were designed to minimize future demands for U.S. humanitarian aid and military involvement. Africa had little bearing on America’s larger strategic goals and therefore the United States opted to minimize its commitments as much as possible.

CHAPTER 2: The 1998 bombings and 9/11

For the rest of the nineties, American engagement in Africa declined precipitously. Efforts were redirected to regions that were seen as under the U.S. security umbrella. In 1995, the Department of Defense published in its *Security Strategy on Sub-Saharan Africa* report that “ultimately we see very little traditional strategic interest in Africa.”³³ While the Clinton administration maintained lofty rhetoric and conducted an official visit to Rwanda in 1998, actual involvement in Africa was minimal.³⁴ Foreign aid to Africa also declined; the U.S. had once provided one fifth of the total worldwide aid to sub-Saharan Africa, but by 2000 it had fallen to only 10 percent as funding for USAID programs was cut.³⁵ The aid that remained was mostly allocated to pro-American governments in order to support their continued stability. While aid expanded under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the program was not as successful in rewarding good governance as its architects intended.

Signed into law in 2000, AGOA was designed to increase two-way trade between the United States and African partners, giving preferential trade agreements to states that fit criteria of good governance and movement towards an open economy.³⁶ American leaders meant for these programs to foster democratic development, but African leaders were more interested in strengthening state institutions while retaining their hold on power. Letitia Lawson of the Navy Postgraduate School described this system as strengthening friendships “with a group of presidents 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.”³⁷ Economic incentive packages were intended to reward democratizing

governments while withholding benefits from states that resisted democratic reform. Because these states were few and far between, AGOA accepted countries that did not meet its standards. Lawson continued, “[the] political conditionalities placed on economic assistance in the early 1990s remained 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).”³⁸ Under U.S. pressure, political and military ruling elites held elections to comply with eligibility standards for trade incentive programs. Lawson referred to these regimes as ‘electoral authoritarian,’ as their elections were meant to generate legitimacy without actually creating space for opposition in the political arena.³⁹ Unfortunately, the United States gave little consideration how African leaders might manipulate economic incentives to benefit themselves and not their citizens. By and large, attempts to convince African leaders to pursue democratic reforms fell on deaf ears. In an attempt to help African state develop in a mutually beneficial way, the U.S. profoundly misunderstood the motives and incentives of African leaders.

1998 and 2001 Terrorist Attacks

The 1998 bombings of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania altered the focus on terrorism and militancy in Africa, but did little to raise Africa overall to a higher strategic priority. After the attacks, the United States conducted air strikes on a pharmaceutical factory outside of Khartoum, Sudan, that was suspected of producing materials for chemical weapons.⁴⁰ The United States also increased counterterrorism cooperation with Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Uganda. In retrospect, it is tempting to

say that the United States underestimated the threat of al Qaeda between 1998 and 2001. In a 2006 interview with Fox News, Bill Clinton stated that he wanted to take action against Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan after the embassy attacks and bombing of the *U.S.S. Cole*, but faced resistance from the CIA and FBI.⁴¹ He also pointed to criticism from Congressional Republicans who accused him of wasting time and resources searching for bin Laden in the last year of his presidency. Even though terrorism was considered a security threat, the United States did not integrate the problem of state weakness in Africa into its conceptual view of terrorism until after 9/11.⁴²

The 9/11 terrorist attacks changed the way Africa was viewed strategically. Whereas previously domestic conflicts and civil wars in Africa could safely be ignored or categorized as low priority, the U.S. was now concerned about violence, instability, and ungoverned spaces being exploited by Islamic extremists. Africa quickly rose from unimportance to a key front for the War on Terror. As might be expected, 2002 was a pivotal year for American involvement in Africa. That year, the Congressional Research Service published a report on terrorism in Africa citing press reports that “Al-Qaeda’s activities have expanded to a number of African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Eritrea.”⁴³ The attacks drew attention to the potential for weak states to become terrorism hubs and reinvigorated concerns about state sponsorship of terrorism. Weak states that lacked the ability to enforce laws and control their borders could inadvertently become bases for terrorist groups. The 2002 *National Security Strategy* shows that 9/11 changed the administration’s perspective on failing states: “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.”⁴⁴ Connecting weak governance to terrorism was not new to American foreign

policy; 9/11 simply drew attention to processes that had been occurring for some time. Robert Dorff of the Strategic Studies Institute argues that much was known about the link between failed states and transnational terrorism before 2001, but “that knowledge was not completely or effectively integrated into official policy or practice prior to 9/11.”⁴⁵ Policy makers saw state failure in Africa as a mostly humanitarian problem that was tangential to U.S. interests.

While 9/11 changed America’s security outlook, it did not change the general strategy for dealing with security threats. The U.S. response to 9/11 in Africa strongly mirrors tactics used during the Cold War to prevent the spread of communism, such as the use of bilateral military support. Programs in Africa saw massive funding increases as the U.S. spent millions on development, security, and counterterrorism initiatives. Unfortunately, this funding was not accompanied by a thorough understanding of security threats in Africa or a long-term vision for cooperative efforts.

Foreign aid to Africa tripled in the wake of 9/11, but continued to reflect a view of African security strictly in terms of American interests. The United States greatly increased aid to countries that were willing to join the fight against terrorism, including Kenya, Ethiopia, and Nigeria.⁴⁶ This policy closely mirrored the Cold War strategy of supporting allies to achieve larger geopolitical goals. Instead of seeing Africa through the lens of Soviet incursion, the United States viewed Africa as essential to winning the War on Terror. In an article discussing Africa policy during the Bush and Obama administrations, Nicolas Van de Walle argues that connecting development to security generated political support in the U.S. for this foreign aid, “which grew from \$2.5 billion in fiscal year 2000, to \$7.5 billion in 2007.”⁴⁷ The following year, “five sub-Saharan

African states were among the 15 leading recipients of U.S. foreign aid . . . By comparison, only Ethiopia had been in this select group ten years earlier.”⁴⁸ Some of this aid was still devoted to humanitarian and development purposes, reflecting the belief that terrorism gained strength and support from impoverished and undeveloped countries. The Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) was established in 2004 to administer development aid to countries that agreed to implement certain reforms.⁴⁹ In essence, the program picked the low-hanging fruit by targeting the countries that were already performing well.⁵⁰ The MCA was also not isolated to African countries and was not intended to help states with significant structural problems achieve democratic reform. For the most part, aid programs introduced in the years following 9/11 focused on helping governments fight transnational crime and prevent attacks by international terrorist groups.

In response to fears of growing terrorism in East Africa, President Bush announced in 2003 that \$100 million would be spent on counterterrorism measures in the Horn of Africa in the subsequent 15 months. Of those, half was earmarked to “support coastal and border security programs administered by the U.S. Department of Defense, [and] \$10 million will be spent on the Kenyan Anti-Terror Police Unit.”⁵¹ The U.S. strongly encouraged African countries to pass new anti-terrorism and financial crimes laws. This encouragement came alongside preferential trade agreements and \$15 billion in funding for HIV/AIDS prevention programs.⁵² Foreign assistance to Africa was heavily militarized, even when it did not directly relate to military or security issues. Aid initiatives that were previously under the control of the Africa Bureau or USAID were swept up by the Department of Defense. Elizabeth Schmidt writes that “the human

security and human rights agenda of USAID was eclipsed by the counterterrorism program of the Defense Department.”⁵³ Even though Africa policy was now largely directed by one government agency, relationships with African states remained highly irregular. Van de Walle writes that “individual African countries have typically built very different relationships with the U.S., around the policies of specific agencies, and without an overarching logic.”⁵⁴ 9/11 reinforced the need to have allies among African states, but these alliances did not come under a broad strategic plan for engagement in Africa.

Post-9/11 Africa policy included the overhaul of several existing security programs. The African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) was replaced by the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program (ACOTA).⁵⁵ Whereas ACRI was intended to prepare African forces for humanitarian work, its reformulation into ACOTA signaled a transition towards offensive military operations and “contingency planning.” African troops were trained on light infantry and small unit tactics, and outfitted with rifles, machine guns, and mortars.⁵⁶ Instead of training African soldiers as peacekeepers, the United States aimed to train them as counterterrorism units. In 2002, the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) was established and based in Djibouti, “with the objective of deterring and countering threats in Somalia, Kenya, and Yemen,”⁵⁷ Today, Camp Lemonier in Djibouti is still the only permanent U.S. military base in Africa.

The Pan Sahel Initiative was also established in 2002 “to coordinate and enhance border control against terrorist movement and arms and drug trafficking, which were believed to thrive in the Sahel’s large ‘ungoverned’ spaces.”⁵⁸ In 2005, the program was expanded to the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI). \$500 million was

promised for the TSCTI, but “despite the impressive-looking budgets . . . actual funding is sporadic, heavily dependent upon supplemental appropriations and more responsive to immediate crises than longer-term capacity building.”⁵⁹ These programs were meant to be short term endeavors, building military capacity in only a few years. This reflects the strong desire for quick interventions, but expecting African partner states to vastly improve their security forces in a short time period was unrealistic. ACOTA and other such partnerships did not aim to build strong military institutions, but simply equipped African soldiers to fight terrorists.

The effects of 9/11 should not be overestimated. The attacks certainly inspired action and altered the prioritization of security threats, but did not cause monumental changes in the way those threats were approached. In their examination of the War on Terror, Robert Patman and Andreas Reitzig explain that “while the Bush administration expanded its definition of what constituted a threat after 9/11, it relied largely on the machinery of the existing American national security state to meet these new strategic ends.”⁶⁰ Even though failed states and ungoverned spaces were considered a major threat to American security, the United States began its War on Terror in Africa by returning to familiar friends and tactics, returning to the Cold War strategy of propping up less-than-democratic regimes that were willing to support its efforts.

CHAPTER 3: Picking Bad Friends

America's policy response to 9/11 was not effective in creating dependable or competent partners in the War on Terror. The United States essentially purchased cooperation on counterterrorism with aid, military training and assistance, and preferential trade agreements. This strategy follows trends in U.S.-Africa policy in that it prioritized the short-term actions to further U.S. interests without developing a long-term plan for counterterrorism operations or a development strategy that encompassed African interests. Aid increases provided a large incentive for poor African states to cooperate with the United States on fighting terrorism but ultimately set the stage for democratic backsliding. Strengthening bilateral relationships with African states without considering their own motivations and incentives made fighting terrorism in Africa more difficult. Long-standing ruling elites had no reason to enact democratic reforms that could destabilize the existing power structure, but many incentives to engage with the United States on military cooperation efforts.

U.S. political and economic interests have chiefly determined which countries receive aid from the United States, with little consideration of governmental legitimacy, democratic institutions, or human rights record. This observation is not limited to Africa, but played out again with regards to African states during this time. The sense of immediacy brought on by the 9/11 attacks drove the creation of short term policies without careful planning or vetting of potential counterterrorism partners. As such, many African recipients of aid meant to improve or support counterterrorism efforts were far less than democratic. The United States did not anticipate how the leadership of those

states would respond to drastic increases in the quantity of aid and easy access to weapons and military training. A report by the Council on Foreign Relations illuminates the problems with this approach:

“Counterterror initiatives are frequently undertaken with inadequate consideration of whether these operations will build durable partnerships and create true capacities within partner governments, as well as how they might have an impact on civil liberties, democratic governance, and popular perceptions of U.S. intentions. Also, initiatives fail to consider how to mitigate the risk that host governments will be tempted to use the relationship that develops from an emerging security alliance with the United States as an excuse for egregious misrule.”⁶¹

As they did in the Cold War, African leaders used the resources gained from counterterrorism cooperation to eliminate domestic opposition and quell rebellions. The increased flow of aid created an incentive for African states to oversell the threat of terrorism within their borders. Elizabeth Schmidt writes that “repressive regimes played up the international terrorist threat as a means of obtaining American funds and military assistance - just as their predecessors exaggerated the communist menace during the Cold War.”⁶² This co-opting by African leaders made distinguishing domestic rebel groups from terrorist groups that could threaten the United States an extremely difficult task. A wide range of civil conflicts and insurgencies were swept under the umbrella of international terrorism.

Moreover, Islamist extremists behaved opportunistically in Africa, exploiting pre-existing discontent with corrupt governance to their advantage and establishing alliances of opportunity with rebel groups.⁶³ In his book on humanitarian intervention, Aidan Hehir argues that in pursuing the War on Terror, “the West supported a number of

undemocratic regimes, overlooking their repressive domestic policies to secure their support against al-Qaeda and Islamic fundamentalism more generally.”⁶⁴ Stephen Emerson agrees that the threat of terrorism has been exploited as a “convenient way for some African governments to stifle political dissent and freedoms. Some of America’s strongest allies in the war on terror - Egypt, Ethiopia, and Mauritania - also have some of the spottiest human rights and civil liberties records.”⁶⁵ Mauritania’s 2008 military coup was overshadowed by promises from the new leadership to defend the country from terrorist threats.⁶⁶ This threat manipulation casts the United States as the backer of governments that crack down on legitimate opposition and fail to respect human rights.

The inability to anticipate these types of responses, from both enemies and allies, has led to misinterpretation and threatens the broader objectives of American engagement. Emerson continues, “[in] its zeal to highlight the global nature of the terrorist threat facing African governments, the United States may be indirectly sending a message that it is acceptable to suppress civil liberties and political opposition in the name of promoting domestic stability and countering international terrorism.”⁶⁷ Explicit support of repressive governments gives credence to terrorist groups that portray themselves as fighting for justice against corrupt and abusive regimes.

Sudan

Sudan is a prime example of the influence of counterterrorism objectives on relations with African states. A Cold War client funded largely to counter Soviet-funded Libya, the U.S. designated Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1993. Even though the government in Khartoum had expelled Osama bin Laden in 1996, it was still suspected of

having ties to al Qaeda.⁶⁸ By 1998, it was isolated and deep in debt. President Omar al-Bashir gradually capitulated and cooperated with American counter-terror efforts in order to have the sanctions against Sudan lifted.⁶⁹ The 9/11 attacks greatly increased counterterrorism cooperation, but the U.S. refused to lift sanctions as a result of the government-sponsored violence against citizens in Darfur and southern Sudan. The expansion of counterterrorism efforts in Africa coincided with the eruption of violence in Sudan's Darfur region, perpetrated by state-backed militants. In a paper analyzing the rhetoric of U.S. officials on the matter, Eric Heinze argues that "[given] the high priority placed on terrorism in Washington, it is no surprise that a forceful response to 'genocide' in Darfur would have to be weighed against the increasing need to befriend regimes like the one in Khartoum for purposes of anti-terrorism, despite its miserable human rights record."⁷⁰ Sanctions and condemnation were effectively the only response of the U.S. to the Darfur crisis, while it maintained counterterrorism cooperation. The ultimate focus on the larger objective of counterterrorism prompted the Bush administration to chastise the Sudanese government without changing its policy.

Unlike Rwanda, the violence in Darfur drew the attention of Congress, the Congressional Black Caucus, and evangelicals who were concerned by the persecution of black Christians. In July of 2004, Congress passed a non-binding resolution calling the violence in Darfur genocide.⁷¹ Fifty-two Senators sent a letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell "urging an increase in assistance to Darfur, targeted sanctions, a travel ban, freezing of assets, and a U.N. resolution calling for robust monitoring and peacekeeping."⁷² This pressure did not stir the Department of Defense, which "revealed that they had no plans to deploy U.S. forces to Darfur any time soon, not even to support

the delivery of humanitarian relief.”⁷³ Given the concurrent troop commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq and the importance of retaining counterterrorism support from Khartoum, cries for humanitarian intervention predictably fell on deaf ears.

The response to the Darfur crisis fell in line with previous American actions towards Africa in that the broad concerns about international terrorism superseded the state-backed perpetration of violence against civilians.

Failing to understand that Sudanese officials had very different motives, American officials pursued diplomacy in hopes of stabilizing the country. The U.S. had previously been involved with Sudan’s North-South conflict, attempting to negotiate a peace agreement between the Khartoum government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA). As in Rwanda, a preference for negotiated political solutions outweighed the desire to intervene to stop human rights abuses. The Bush administration was unwilling to risk wasting three years of diplomatic talks on the North-South split over the violence in Darfur.⁷⁴ Making harsh demands on the Sudanese government could have resulted in balking by Sudanese officials, which was not desirable in light of the fact that diplomatic relations had recently been resumed in 2000.⁷⁵ Whereas the Clinton administration feared that public attention towards Rwanda and the labeling of events there as genocide would compel it to act, the Bush administration saw no such obligation. Following the trend of support for African-led conflict interventions, the Bush administration advocated for intervention in Darfur to be led by the African Union.

American foreign policy in Sudan has not achieved its goals of stability or weakening terrorists in the region. Today Sudan is still listed as a state sponsor of terrorism, although the State Department calls it a “cooperative counterterrorism

partner.”⁷⁶ Despite its efforts, the United States has established neither a stable ally in Sudan nor peace between Sudan and now independent South Sudan. Diplomatic talks and billions in aid have not transformed Sudan into a legitimate state with strong civil and political rights. South Sudan achieved formal independence in 2011, only to collapse into fighting between political factions in 2013.⁷⁷ The same guerrilla fighters and rebel leaders that were once backed by the United States failed to reframe themselves as politicians and were unable to consolidate enough power to run the country. The prioritization of short-term solutions and the failure to consider alternative motives led to the failure of American diplomatic efforts to resolve the North-South split peacefully. American policy was focused on stopping the fighting and American officials discounted the political factions that existed in South Sudan. After negotiations had ceased, there was no mechanism to maintain peace.

Sudan is only one example of the failure to anticipate the response of African leadership to the War on Terror. Other notable American allies include Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, and Uganda. Ethiopia’s ruling party came under fire after winning the last election with 99.6 percent of the vote. A 2011 *Foreign Policy* article stated that the government also cracked down on journalists and media outlets that are critical of its policies, used aid from the United States to stifle domestic opposition, and used food aid to gain political support.⁷⁸ The country receives over \$550 million in aid from the United States each year. In 2011, both the *BBC* and the *Washington Post* published articles alleging that the United States maintains a drone base there to fly missions over neighboring Somalia. Equatorial Guinea has been ruled by President Teodoro Obiang since 1979. Freedom House has given the country the lowest ranking on freedom, civil

liberties and political rights, noting that the country's oil wealth has gone almost exclusively to a small circle of elites.⁷⁹ Uganda, another major recipient of U.S. aid, has shown consistent progress on economic growth and stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni came to power in a military coup in 1986 and abolished term limits in 2006 in order to run again. He is vehemently opposed to LGBT rights, has used his position to accrue enormous wealth, and is accused of supporting rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁸⁰ Engagement with these countries is often based, at least rhetorically, on pushing leaders for democratic reforms. The progress of these reforms is minimal at best, as the leaders who have enriched themselves with natural resource rents have little reason to promote fair elections or political opposition.

Viewed narrowly, supporting these leaders contributes to short-term stability. In the long term, this approach fails to consider local perceptions of U.S. power and the ways in which local insurgencies and international terrorist groups exploit those perceptions.⁸¹ In discussing the side effects of this approach, Walt writes that "America's image in the world is also shaped by the behavior of its allies and clients. When a pro-U.S. dictatorship represses its own people . . . its actions will also hurt America's standing among the local population."⁸² In short, support for authoritarian regimes drives local resentment, making it easier for terrorist organizations to establish footholds and alliances in those areas. The United States was unable to predict this outcome because it viewed terrorism as an enemy that could be defeated with conventional military means. Security interests have long eclipsed human rights and good governance in U.S. priorities, and working with authoritarian regimes had produced few negative

consequences in the past.

Thomas Carothers identifies the problems of using democracy promotion as part of the overall counterterrorism strategy. Attempts by the United States to negotiate between security and democracy sometimes occur at the interdepartmental level. Foreign officials receive contradictory messages as the State Department pushes for human rights and democracy, while the Defense Department concerns itself with establishing access to military resources and security cooperation, not domestic politics. According to Carothers, foreign leaders “sometimes assume that friendly words from the Pentagon mean they can ignore other messages they are receiving. Ensuring a consistent U.S. front on democracy and human rights, therefore, is a prerequisite for a coherent approach.”⁸³ Carothers sees this overlapping rhetoric as “wrapping security goals in the language of democracy promotion and then confusing democracy promotion with the search for particular political outcomes that enhance those security goals.”⁸⁴ Democracy promotion is an empty concept if its only purpose is to produce “political outcomes favorable to U.S. interests.”⁸⁵ Resolving this conflation will require more sustained engagement and pressure. Carothers recommends relaxing the praise on friendly but autocratic regimes and harshly criticizing those who take advantage of U.S. engagement.

After 9/11, the United States was much more interested in fighting the War on Terror in Africa than addressing the underlying problems of insecurity and poor governance rampant among African states. It was particularly willing to overlook corruption and human rights abuses in the pursuit of counterterrorism cooperation. It drastically increased the amount of aid flowing to African states without a coherent overarching strategy for improving their security forces. As a result, the United States

was effective in attracting allies, but ineffective at building a security umbrella in Africa. Terrorism in Africa was a new challenge, but it was confronted using the same tools. More than showing a lack of ingenuity, the failure to adapt to changing circumstances helped terrorist groups gain a foothold in the continent.

The U.S. overestimated the effectiveness of bilateral partnerships, failing to consider that many African leaders lack strong mandates in their countries, face substantial domestic opposition, and do not exert control over the entirety of their territory. Engagement with weak and failed states requires especially advanced background knowledge, patience, and deft maneuvering. Bilateral cooperation is much less effective when the partner state does not have control over all of its territory. Examples of this include states like Nigeria and Mali which are sympathetic to American efforts, but lack control over their northern regions and have not effectively integrated their Muslim populations into their political systems.

Mali

Current American strategy risks further entrenching rebel supporters and creating an insurgent-led rebellion against a U.S.-supported government. This has already happened in Mali, where the upheaval was further complicated by the presence of weapons brought from Libya after the U.S.-supported ouster of Muammar Gaddafi. Mali highlights the danger of pumping money and resources into another country's security forces without sufficient oversight. Training foreign countries militaries comes with the risk of being unable to control the later actions of military leaders. This occurred in Mali when "[in] 2007-2008, U.S. Army Special Forces assisted the Malian government with

combat support as it fought against a Tuareg insurgency that had emerged from local grievances, while American-trained troops in Niger engaged in atrocities against Tuareg civilians.”⁸⁶ The 2012 military coup against Mali’s government was led by an American-trained army captain and quickly exploited by al Qaeda allies in the region who endorsed the coup. The Tuareg insurgency was an isolated domestic issue until the U.S. started supporting the Malian army, which led the rebels to ally with al Qaeda in hopes of balancing against the government.

The United States has tried to create strong governments to increase stability and inhibit international terrorist groups, but struggles when those governments lack legitimacy with all the factions and tribes, and occasionally collapse because of these divisions. To fix this problem, the United States must stop letting theories of terrorism get in the way of paying attention to where and how terrorists operate. Terrorism is a strategy that groups use to achieve their objectives, and most terrorist groups do not intend to conduct attacks against American targets. Instead of viewing terrorism as a vast global conspiracy, the United States must consider the role of local grievances in fomenting domestic terrorist groups. This does not mean the U.S. should expand the War on Terror to include domestic terrorist groups, but rather that it should carefully reevaluate how its involvement in Africa has altered the dynamics of power and popular support there.

CHAPTER 4: Fighting the War on Terror in Africa

Since 9/11, the rhetoric of counterterrorism has pointed to poverty and lack of education as creating the swamp in which terrorism can grow, and draining the metaphorical swamp must be done to prevent another attack. The narrative of Islamist

extremism is that terrorism and jihadist ideology will spread wherever an international group can operate. Their base can be a state that sponsors terrorism, a state that is too weak to prevent it, or a territory that is not directly under any state control. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice espoused this theory in 2001 when she said: “Much of Africa has become a veritable incubator for the foot soldiers of terrorism. Its poor, young, disaffected, unhealthy, undereducated populations often have no stake in government, no faith in the future, and harbor an easily exploitable discontent with the status quo.... These are the swamps we must drain. And we must do so for the cold, hard reason that to do otherwise, we are going to place our national security at further and more permanent risk.”⁸⁷ This statement overlooks crucial details about where terrorist groups originate, the backgrounds of their founders, and the external sources from which they receive support. Such a worldview reflects a profound misunderstanding of terrorism, especially as it has manifested in Africa. Instead of seeing Africa in terms of the Cold War balancing, it was now seen in terms of a global war on terror. Neither conceptualization gave much consideration to Africa itself, which led to the conflation of international terrorist groups with rebel groups, militias, and domestic terrorist groups specific to Africa.

Because both the Bush and Obama administrations have more or less subscribed to this understanding of terrorism, they have focused heavily on large international terrorist networks. This led to the false assumption that domestic groups that declared an affiliation with al Qaeda had the same intentions and reach. Instead, they were “pre-existing rebel groups [that] have gained an edge by affiliating with terrorist networks. Across African countries with substantial Muslim populations . . . Islamist ideology has

had only limited impact among most African Muslims, and even in countries with extremist Islamist governments or insurgent groups (such as Algeria, Sudan, and Somalia), the focus has been on local issues rather than global conflict.”⁸⁸ Despite being largely unrelated to international terrorist networks, domestic terrorist groups have either been ignored or swept into the same category by the United States.

As such, counterterrorism engagement with Africa has revealed a deep divide in how each party views the issue: the United States is concerned about international terrorism while most African states are far more concerned with incidents of domestic terrorism. As J. Peter Pham writes, “that the U.S. has a different understanding of the definition of ‘terrorism’ than many members of the African Union becomes evident when many incidents in Africa go unreported in official, semi-official, or other American documentation.”⁸⁹ The *Patterns of Global Terrorism Report* from 2003 “identified 190 terrorist attacks worldwide, only four of which were located in Africa. Ignored were the literally thousands of terrorist acts perpetrated against civilian targets by sub-state actors in Congo, Liberia, Sudan, and Uganda.”⁹⁰ While sub-state groups and international terrorist organizations originate for different reasons, international terrorist groups have made convenient alliances with domestic groups in Africa. These alliances empower domestic terrorist groups and provide international networks with local partners, safe basing locations, and financial opportunities for smuggling and kidnapping. Even states that cooperate on counterterrorism initiatives with the United States struggle to discover and disrupt this process. Because it views Africa in the context of the broader issue of global terrorism, the United States has a very loose grasp on this dynamic.

In line with its focus on international terrorism, the U.S. prefers to focus on al

Qaeda and its offshoots, ignoring many of the rebel groups that terrorize African citizens. For example, Uganda is a counterterrorism partner of the United States, which has provided training for Ugandan soldiers.⁹¹ However, the U.S. has done little to help the government fight the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) or prevent it from spreading to neighboring countries. The LRA is responsible for more than twice as many fatalities as Nigeria's Boko Haram, but attracts less attention because it does not espouse Islamist ideologies or operate in a region with connections to energy security.⁹² Even though the rebels wreak havoc in central Africa and the U.S. considers it a terrorist group, it has given little more than humanitarian aid to those affected. A similar dynamic is occurring in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the high incidence of terrorism is overlooked because it is not Islamist in nature. The fact that domestic (now regional) rebel groups continue to be low priority despite the heavy rhetoric about the importance of security in Africa is demonstrative of the overwhelming fixation on international terrorism and the continued view of Africa in terms of American priorities.

Engagement with African states since 9/11 has centered on using bilateral relationships with a heavy emphasis on building military capacities. Several scholars who study U.S.-Africa relations during this period agree this approach resulted in a strategic mismatch. Robert Patman and Andreas Reitzig argue that the "focus on global primacy and the declaration of a war against terrorism implied that the challenge of terrorism was essentially a military problem to be dealt with through state-on-state actions" but that "such a state centric approach did not align well with the requirements of countering a transnational terrorist organization."⁹³ Stephen Emerson agrees and identifies "a strategic mismatch between Washington's stated long-term goal of advancing peace and stability

in Africa and a traditional security approach that relies too heavily on the American military - a state of affairs that may simply fan the flames of international terrorism.”⁹⁴ Bilateral military relationships do not take into account the larger problems of good governance and allow African leaders to portray security threats in a way that favors them. They also direct resources away from diplomacy and strengthening economic relationships which could further both African and American interests.

By focusing solely on international terrorism, the U.S. has passed up potentially valuable opportunities for engagement and overlooked conflicts which have continuing impacts for African security. Nicolas Van de Walle argues that the lack of American intervention in “[the] civil wars in the DRC, the collapse and civil war in Somalia, the civil war in Côte d’Ivoire, the Darfur debacle, the crisis in Zimbabwe – to mention only the region’s most prominent conflicts - all would suggest the limits of American power in the region.”⁹⁵ In 2003, rebel groups controlled roughly 60 percent of Liberia’s territory and it was an al Qaeda stronghold in West Africa.⁹⁶ Despite the long history of U.S.-Liberia relations, including support for despotic leader Charles Taylor, the United States took no substantive action. President Bush sent 2,000 Marines off-shore as standby support for the West African force, but only allowed them to conduct evacuation operations.⁹⁷ Calling on the United Nations and ECOWAS to stop the fighting and provide assistance, the Bush administration opted to define the crisis in narrow humanitarian terms.⁹⁸ Bush faced the same problem as Clinton during the Rwandan genocide: simultaneous crises with varying strategic relevance. At this time, the United States was deeply entrenched in Afghanistan and had recently invaded Iraq, leaving few resources and little desire to take military action in Liberia. Intervening in conflicts in

Africa is rarely in the interests of the United States, but the vast disconnect between espoused values and actions makes Africans cynical about American intentions.

The U.S. muddled the delineation between al Qaeda in Africa and the plethora of Islamic groups that existed in Africa for entirely different reasons, some of which claim ties or allegiance to al Qaeda for practical purposes. The U.S. became very concerned with Islamic groups, despite the fact that they were very diverse in both origin and intent. Groups that had formed around local grievances, not around opposition to the United States or the West, were designated foreign terrorist organizations.⁹⁹ In her book on foreign intervention in Africa, Elizabeth Schmidt writes that “[the] vast majority of conflicts and insurgencies had local roots and little, if any, connection to international terrorist organizations. Many of the target groups blended religious fanaticism with illegal ventures such as drug and weapons trafficking, providing livelihoods to people with few alternatives.”¹⁰⁰ Daniel Volman and William Minter concur: “Insurgencies along the Sahara-Sahel divide, in Mali, Niger, and Chad, reflect ethnic and regional realities rather than extensions of global terrorism.”¹⁰¹ By supporting the governments of those states as part of its broader counterterrorism strategy, the United States alienated local populations by ignoring the often legitimate grievances that spurred such insurgencies. In fact, increased state military capacity created an incentive for local rebels and insurgencies to establish ties with international terrorist groups in hopes of gaining the resources to fight state forces.

This foundation has been largely overlooked in American foreign policy since 9/11. Instead of viewing terrorist attacks as responses to imbalances of power, poor governance, and ethnic or religious discrimination, “the American security establishment

has tended to view them as part of a vast, monolithic global conspiracy.”¹⁰² In their analysis of counterinsurgency as a strategy, Robert Berschinski and David Kilcullen warn that “‘aggregating’ disparate local insurgencies into an all-encompassing vision of global terrorism in fact facilitates al-Qaeda’s efforts to woo such groups.”¹⁰³ While focusing solely on the global nature of terrorism and the ability for terrorist groups to strike outside of their territory, the United States has ignored the nature of domestic terrorism in Africa and its impact on state security.

Even before 9/11, foreign policy institutions were predominately concerned with international terrorist groups. The State Department’s 1996 *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report reveals that although terrorism in Africa and elsewhere was a major concern before the 1998 embassy bombings, only international terrorism was relevant to the United States.¹⁰⁴ The report acknowledges that domestic terrorist attacks occur, but includes no information about instances and casualties. Instead, it discusses Osama Bin Laden, Libya, Sudan, Kenya, and only the deaths of victims of other nationalities. Little has changed between then and now. Very few domestic terrorist attacks in Africa are mentioned in U.S. government documents, even though they are a major security concern for African states.

With good reason, Africans view domestic terrorism as a larger threat to their safety than amorphous international terrorist networks. The Global Terrorism Database created by the University of Maryland found that there were 3,467 incidents of terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa between 2000 and 2012.¹⁰⁵ The most common attack methods were armed assaults, bombings/explosions, and kidnapping hostages while the most common targets were government, military, or police targets, followed by private citizens

and property. One of the reasons terrorist attacks in Africa do not garner much attention in general is because they are not responsible for many deaths. Over half (51.5%) of these terrorist attacks resulted in 1-10 fatalities, while 34.4% had zero fatalities.¹⁰⁶ While the predominance of rudimentary bombs and firearms in terrorist attacks indicates that militants are not getting a hold of more advanced weapons, the sheer quantity of small arms moving freely through the African continent is cause for concern. The United States has not taken any steps to reduce small arms proliferation in Africa and has stood in opposition to U.N. efforts to do so.¹⁰⁷ The destructing of property in places where many people already live in poverty is a major obstruction to economic development. Attacks on private property do not help terrorist groups garner favor with local populations, which find themselves stuck between victimization by rebel groups and civil rights abuses by state governments. Meanwhile, the United States conducts counterterrorism in a manner that alienates those populations, militarizes African states, and counteracts its own long-term interests.

Somalia Revisited

In thinking of failed states and ungoverned spaces as a dire security threat, the U.S. has misunderstood that failed states present both opportunities and challenges to terrorist groups. For al Qaeda, the challenges of operating in Somalia have mostly outweighed the opportunities. Somalia provides an excellent case study to demonstrate the complexity of Africa as a platform for terrorist activity, and how a lack of anticipation

ⁱ Unsuccessful attacks were removed from the data before these percentages were calculated. These observations are also true of terrorism worldwide. According to the State Department's 2011 data, out of 10,283 terrorist attacks, only 4,502 killed at least one person, and only 193 killed more than ten.

and perspective can harm U.S. interests. American officials believed that al Qaeda would move to Somalia when it was pushed out of Afghanistan, and as a result tried to prop up Somalia's weak Transitional Federal Government (TFG).¹⁰⁸ Instead of bringing stability to Somalia, the attempt to establish a government made al Shabaab stronger as it was able to unite opposing clans to fight TFG forces. In a 2009 *Foreign Affairs* article, Bronwyn Bruton argued that doing less in Somalia would be more effective. She argues that the efforts to establish the TFG, along with the U.S. backed invasion by Ethiopia in 2006 to prevent it from falling, worsened infighting and made al Shabaab more powerful.¹⁰⁹ When Ethiopian troops pulled out in 2009, Somalia was no more stable than before their incursion.

Today, engagement in Somalia would be difficult since it lacks reliable partners there and most Somalis strongly oppose U.S. involvement. Furthermore, al Qaeda's presence in Somalia was not as pervasive as anticipated in the early years after 9/11. This was a benchmark in the understanding of international terrorism, as "U.S. intelligence analysts have argued that Somalia is fundamentally inhospitable to foreign jihadist groups. Al Qaeda is now a more sophisticated and dangerous creature, but its current foothold in Somalia appears to be largely the product of the West's latest interference."¹¹⁰ Instead of building a strong Somali state, American efforts polarized the population and empowered extremist Islamist groups. A 2009 article by Daniel Volman and William Minter agreed, calling Somalia "a textbook case of the negative results of "aggregating" local threats into an undifferentiated concept of global terrorism."¹¹¹ While al Qaeda can and does operate safe houses and transport weapons across the country, Somalia has not been as friendly and hospitable to al Qaeda as the failed state theory suggests. In fact,

Somalia has presented obstacles to al Qaeda's operations. Bruton cites xenophobia and the strict clan-based social structure as obstacles to the penetration of jihadist ideology.¹¹² Despite the success of Islamists who wish to impose sharia law, Somalia's population is not particularly supportive of jihadist agendas. To operate in Somalia, al Qaeda operatives have to deal with unreliable transportation, demands for bribes, being attacked in transit, and poor infrastructure.

Even though al Shabaab has declared links to al Qaeda, that relationship has little impact on daily life in Somalia. For a short period, the lack of effective governance gave the U.S. flexibility to launch attacks with drones and Special Forces teams without obtaining the prior clearance that has made such strikes problematic in Pakistan. In a 2011 interview, the appointed prime minister of Somalia said that while he approved of drone strikes against al Shabaab, he expected to be consulted on them.¹¹³ Nonetheless, these types of operations draw the ire of Somalis, who are already resentful of outside intervention. Drones bring better technology to bear on an old problem: defaulting to militarism as the solution to security threats while ignoring the negative sentiment it tends to produce.

Strategies based in fighting Islamist extremists have not gained traction with the other security issues African states face. There exists a need to differentiate between international terrorist organizations and criminal syndicates, though terrorist organizations often finance themselves with the same types of illegal activity, such as hijacking, kidnapping for ransom, and smuggling weapons or drugs. While both threaten Africa's security, the United States has focused most on the aspects of terrorism that least impact the daily lives of Africans. Even if these efforts are successful in preventing a

major terrorist attack on the United States, they do nothing to prevent domestic attacks in African countries or to promote local stability.

CHAPTER 5: Africa Policy Today

AFRICOM's establishment in 2007 allowed for the expansion of military cooperation in Africa that defines contemporary policy. The U.S. currently has significant military activity taking place in Africa, most of it in cooperation with national armed forces. National army units receive training, equipment, advice, and technical support from the U.S. military. These cooperative programs exist concurrently with more aggressive operations including the use of Special Forces, drone surveillance, and drone strikes on targets linked to terrorist groups. The United States uses its superior technological capabilities for decapitation strikes, such as a drone strike in Somalia in October 2013 that reportedly killed al Shabaab's top explosives expert.¹¹⁴ That same month, Navy SEALs aborted a raid on a safehouse on the coast of Somalia upon encountering heavy resistance. Even when the capture or killing of a leader is successful, decapitation as a strategy has not proven effective in fighting terrorist groups. Catching the target may be disorienting for his subordinates, but they recover and survive without him. These types of strikes are emblematic of how policy is conducted in Africa as a whole: in short bursts, with little consideration of the situation on the ground or what role decapitation should play in the overall counterterrorism scheme.

The current approach is falling short of winning over hearts and minds, in part because it lacks informed oversight. Schmidt writes that "Washington's failure to

understand the complex situation on the ground and its pursuit of short-term counterterrorism objectives over long-term human development goals embroiled American personnel in local conflicts that intensified anti-American feelings.”¹¹⁵ Capacity building efforts also risk starting an arms race between African states; purchases of multipurpose fighter jets and air defense systems by Angola, Uganda, and Sudan bomber suggest this process may already be under way.¹¹⁶ By helping countries confront domestic threats, the U.S. risks helping African states balance against each other. Improving the military capacities of African states makes it more likely that they will use those militaries, and there is no guarantee that they will be used in ways the United States finds favorable.

When conflict does occur, as in South Sudan and the Central African Republic, the U.S. does not use the military to try to force change on the ground. Rather, it plays to its strengths and helps African national forces by transporting soldiers, supplies, and equipment. This strategy prevents defined, public commitments and keeps American forces from becoming embroiled in crises. It also fails to reflect an understanding of the reasons terrorist groups are able to gain followers, entrenches anti-American sentiment, and does not push allies towards good governance.

Energy security and piracy

Capacity building is closely related to the protection of oil resources. Since the early nineties, the U.S. has offered Africa a plethora of economic development initiatives and trade packages. In general, these programs have wound up half-hearted, underfunded, and unsuccessful at attracting foreign direct investment. Like AGOA, most have

focused on oil above all other natural resources and almost entirely ignored the importance of agriculture to many African economies.¹¹⁷ Growing American dependence on oil extraction in West Africa pre-dates the War on Terror. As conflict in the Middle East threatened the U.S.'s supplies of oil, it reoriented towards West Africa for oil extraction.¹¹⁸ Increasing the amount of oil the United States imports from Africa would benefit both in the long run if the oil wealth was distributed throughout oil-producing countries, but like most natural resource production it has created rentier states, not liberal democracies. If Nigeria is a harbinger of things to come, oil is likely to deepen economic inequality, not resolve it. Letitia Lawson writes, "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."¹¹⁹ Protecting oil shipments from theft does not address this larger problem of inequality and instability. Oil revenues complicate efforts to establish good governance by increasing the payoff of corruption and rent seeking behavior.

The more Africa increases oil and gas production, the more piracy, instability, and conflict will affect the global economy. Angola, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, and Chad are among the countries where oil production has greatly increased in recent years and is set to keep growing. Former Assistant Secretary of Energy for International Affairs David L. Goldwyn argues that "[these] dramatic changes in the global energy market have occurred in a period when U.S. influence in the region has diminished [relative to other states], accompanied by erosion in the U.S. ability to promote good governance, conflict resolution, and environmental standards and reduce corruption."¹²⁰ Even though the development of energy resources is linked to regional instability, the United States

has not voiced any coherent policy on energy security. Engagement with the region's top energy suppliers has grown since 2001, but Goldwyn argues there is "no policy mechanism structure for the United States to engage Africa's leading or emerging energy producers in a systematic way." The more dependent the United States is on oil exports from Africa, the more it needs a coherent policy for energy security interests.

Oil piracy has shifted from the Gulf of Aden to the Gulf of Guinea, in part because of successful naval efforts to deter and apprehend pirates. Oil tankers have been hijacked by pirates that demand ransoms for hostages and/or siphon off the oil to sell on the black market.¹²¹ Improvement in the maritime security capacities of Nigeria has simply pushed pirates to base their operations in other East African states, which lack adequate law enforcement resources. Since East African states lack well-equipped basic military and police resources, naval forces are far out of reach. The lack of security is so profound that pirates typically have better weapons and tactics at their disposal than the security forces attempting to confront them.

American policy on oil security is similar to its counterterrorism policy in that it includes funding and military involvement, but falls short in strategic vision. The U.S. has committed \$35 million to help local forces fight piracy and conducts short-term training exercises with the armed forces of East African states.¹²² Goldwyn cites a relative lack of engagement on energy issues, especially between 2001 and 2008 when counterterrorism was by far the top priority.¹²³ The Africa Bureau found itself in a constant state of crisis management, and devoted diplomatic resources to Sudan, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Meanwhile, "Nigeria's crisis in the Delta, despite implications for financing crime, spreading violence to neighboring countries, and

destabilizing Nigeria's democracy, did not make the cut for top priority."¹²⁴ During the Bush administration, "[no] one at the White House had the mandate to pull together a strategy for preventative diplomacy in a place like Angola or conflict management in the Niger Delta, much less to consider the potential impact of conflict driven disruption . . . on U.S. economic interests."¹²⁵ Foreign policy officials did not see energy security as linked to political and economic development, and therefore failed to engage African states on their own terms.

In June 2013, the Obama administration announced Power Africa, a program meant to improve transparency and good governance in the management of oil and gas resources. The program aims to increase access to electricity in Sub-Saharan Africa, mostly by helping African governments attract private sector investment.¹²⁶ It combines funding from USAID, the U.S. Import-Export Bank, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation with efforts of private corporations to improve host-government capacities. Like many previous economic programs for Africa, its success is largely dependent on foreign direct investment. Improving the management of oil resources is a valuable endeavor, but is only one of many areas in which African states need reform.

Were Africa seen outside of its relevance to terrorism and oil security, the United States would be able to construct a foreign policy focused on priorities that impact both African and U.S. interests. Good governance is the most important objective for future foreign policy in Africa. Elections and elected legislators are necessary, but are not the only requirements for progress on democratization. Democratic reform must focus on the rule of law, constitutional protections, and safety for journalists and opposition politicians. Another important goal is economic growth beyond oil production. It is

extremely important that oil and other natural resource development benefit the all parts of African society, not just a small circle of wealthy elites. Additionally, economic programs that include the agricultural sector and help African farmers become more competitive would propel broad-based growth, but would likely be hampered by a powerful U.S. agricultural lobby that would vehemently oppose lowering tariffs. On the security front, reducing the quantity of small arms in Africa could yield large improvements in human security. Many domestic terrorist attacks are committed with small arms and arms nonproliferation already has support in Africa.¹²⁷ Again, this issue faces a significant domestic obstacle as gun control in the United States is controversial and politics are swayed by powerful lobbies.

Recommendations for Future Policy:

1. Weak states do pose a threat, but more to themselves and their neighbors than to the United States. Attacks on police stations and government buildings with improvised explosive devices pose very little direct threat to the United States, and are not a substantial cause of death for Africans. However, they discredit the state, maintain instability, and threaten legitimate security infrastructure. In encouraging states to improve their own security measures, the United States must actively differentiate between international terrorist groups, militant domestic opposition, and criminal syndicates who are involved for financial opportunities, not out of ideological allegiance. It should neither attempt to fight domestic terrorist groups nor continue to bolster the militaries of states whose governmental flaws contribute to the power of such groups.

2. “Special relationships” are counter-productive in the long term. Supporting a repressive, undemocratic government can have serious consequences, especially when it violates human rights under the guise of counterterrorism. Plying dictators with aid maintains tenuous stability, but does not convince them to democratize and frustrates long term U.S. goals. Supporting undemocratic leaders in the pursuit of stability ensures that instability will follow their eventual demise, which has occurred in Egypt, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Today, none of those countries have established democratic governments or consolidated enough power to be effective in countering terrorism within their borders. Engagement must focus heavily on the pillars of good governance: rule of law, constitutional protections, reducing corruption, and holding legitimate elections.

3. Aid is not neutral, and the United States is not the only state disbursing it. In conflict situations, humanitarian aid can become another resource over which groups can fight. Whether development or military, aid conveys a judgment about the recipient state which might not be shared by its citizens, neighboring states, or opposition parties. The United States must give careful consideration to how each of those actors will view and respond to that aid. Engagement with Africa includes communicating with other countries that are investing and engaging in the continent. If the United States cannot match the financial commitments of major investors like China, it must be prepared to work in conjunction with its development organizations. It is unlikely that China will abandon its stated policy of noninterference, but an attempt to engage with Africa on good governance in Africa is highly necessary for future stability.

4. Militarizing African states carries its own set of risks, especially when combined with democracy promotion. Improving military resources without pushing for transparency and accountability within partner governments makes democratic backsliding imminent. Robert Dorff argues that promoting democracy is in the security interests of the U.S., but has to be done carefully. Good governance is crucial for security, but the United States must avoid attempting overly simplistic solutions for democratizing. Dorff writes that “[too] often we seemed to believe that intra-state conflict could be halted and peace restored through a rather simplistic combination of military force followed by institution building, usually in the form of holding elections.”¹²⁸ Especially in states fraught with ethnic divisions, changing the leadership structure does not ensure long term stability. He cautions against a policy of “stopping the fighting, holding elections, declaring victory, and coming home.”¹²⁹ Focusing on states and their leaders leads to the belief that getting rid of authoritarian leaders can solve the problem. He suggests embracing the need for long-term solutions and better cooperation between those in charge of development assistance and security.

CONCLUSION

Fighting terrorism in Africa is undoubtedly a daunting task, but it is all the more challenging when conducted through short-term programs without an overarching plan. As evidenced by the failure of training programs in Mali, capacity building works best when the partner state already has developed infrastructure and enough legitimacy to exert its power effectively. Military cooperation in Africa must not help autocratic rulers

deepen their roots. Bolstering armed forces does not yield self-sustaining, responsible governments; careful consideration of U.S. goals and the methods used to achieve them is crucial for future foreign policy. A series of African leaders were deposed shortly after the Cold War ended, in part because of the loss of external support. If and when clientelism associated with the War on Terror comes to a close, similar bouts of instability can be expected.

Change in foreign policy on Africa will be slow to come, if for no other reason than it requires coordination between USAID, the Department of Defense, and the Central Intelligence Agency. In a policy landscape where short term actions regularly compromise long term goals, it is unlikely that the depth of engagement with African states will be commensurate with their importance to U.S. strategic interests in the near future.

The transition from putting American troops on the ground in Somalia to security cooperation with African soldiers today is rooted in more than a desire to minimize American troop commitments in Africa. It is evidence of an inability to see Africa as independently relevant to America interests. Africa is strategically important to the United States, but that importance has not been incorporated into its worldview. Future policy in Africa must be rooted in an understanding of terrorism as “a political strategy that achieves success by attacking the stronger opponent’s resolve and by encouraging sympathizers to rally to the terrorists’ banner.”¹³⁰ Future success must be rooted in understanding terrorism as a political phenomenon, not a religious or ideological one. The degree to which both domestic and international terrorism succeed in Africa is highly determined by good governance and the development of competent security institutions.

Until that conceptual understanding is brought into military operations and strategic planning, building the military capacity of partner states in Africa will continue to be counterproductive. In Africa as in the Middle East, creating space for legitimate political opposition is essential for preventing terrorism from gaining strength. Merely encouraging elections or pushing for reforms is insufficient.

Efforts to support democratization in Africa have been based on the American political model, holding elections and divided government as the pillars of a democracy. Inside and outside of Africa, American-led efforts to promote liberal democracy in countries with deep ethnic and religious tensions have been widely unsuccessful. States like South Sudan need far more than improved American engagement in order to pull themselves out of perpetual conflict. In such cases, policymakers may have to simply settle for actions that do not exacerbate insecurity.

To this end, the United States must confront the risks of an aid-based foreign policy. Aid can be critical for humanitarian crises, but sustained aid can also increase corruption and discourage recipient states from establishing a system for revenue collection. As rational actors, African leadership and wealthy African elites will not support American policies that could endanger their hold on power or means of generating wealth, even if they appear to agree on the outset. Engagement does not fulfill its purpose if governments continue to violate human rights or use violent paramilitaries as proxies. In order to succeed, policies and partnerships must remain tightly focused on decreasing violence and improving governance.

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