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SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
A REGIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

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SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

A REGIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

THE CONTEXT

The history of Africa is of a continent colonized and deeply exploited by European powers. In the late 1940's, only four countries in Africa were independent: Egypt, Liberia, Ethiopia and South Africa. Africans pursued their goal of independence mainly after WWII. This did not come about early. The US did not intervene in African problems, considering the continent as essentially the preserve of the European colonial powers. This provided the Soviet Union with an opportunity to offer help for the nationalist movements and impose its presence. Africans attempted to use East-West competition for their own ends by looking for economic and military aid from these competing powers. The end of the Cold War pushed the continent further toward the periphery of US strategic interest. To promote their development and enhance their security, African states are now faced with economic, political and socio-cultural problems that hamper the advance to basic goals. Following is a brief discussion of the issues of failed economic development, natural and man-made disasters, methods of governance and their impact on the people of the sub-Saharan region.

Failed Economic Development Many of the world's poorest countries are found in sub-Saharan Africa. In some cases, this has remained true despite outside aid and conscientious attempts at economic reform. Persistent economic strife is not entirely due to ineptitude or policy failure. Concrete impediments and exogenous forces such as scarce resources, declining demand and decreased world prices for raw materials, contribute to the plight of this region. Africans, however, are responsible for the failure of their internal policies. Development of industry has been stressed at the expense of agricultural enhancement. Coupled with the resulting decline in food production, the problems associated with very high rates of population growth have been exacerbated.

Natural and Man-Made Disasters The arid climate in the Sahara and its margins causes starvation

in Niger, Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia. These phenomena have generated international humanitarian and disaster relief operations. On the other side, man-made disasters, either the direct or indirect results of international wars generated by ethnic hatred, disputes over boundaries delineated in the Colonial period, economic stagnation, or uncontrolled population growth, have often resulted in violence, repression, genocide and large refugee migrations. The US has joined disaster-relief operation in Somalia and Rwanda to address such disasters, to reestablish civilian control that provides citizens at least a minimum standard of human rights.

Autocracy versus Democracy Since independence, power in Africa has evolved around personalities. Where constitutions existed, they were sometimes ignored, changed, or set aside. Leaders have been unable to arbitrate with their own people and often have been intolerant of opposition parties. However, since the fall of the Warsaw Pact, two thirds of the countries in this region are experiencing a democratic transition. The US has helped in the areas of elections, establishment of legal systems, and the development of a civil society. Nevertheless, the installation of democratic institutions has often been met with significant difficulty.

US NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS

US national security interests for Sub-Saharan Africa are that the region be composed of politically stable nations so that problems in the future that *could* threaten national security are averted. The US also has an interest that the citizens of the region live in a manner that is consistent with US values. This derives from ethnic and historic ties with the region and the ideals and principles upon which the United States was founded. Specifically, these include health, security and some measure of individual liberty for the people of the region.

Beyond that, the US has no interests in sub-Saharan Africa that are related to national survival. No states in the region constitute a direct military threat, and the area is no longer a venue for the

conflict of ideologies that were manifest in the Cold War. Neither are there interests that are *vital* to the United States. Oil production and some mineral resources are of modest economic interest to the US. Other trade in the region is moderate and the continent provides no critical resources that are unavailable elsewhere.

THREATS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As stated above, this region is rife with overpopulation, low production of food, lack of industrial infrastructure, environmental problems such as soil erosion and deforestation, political corruption, epidemics, mass migration and ethnic tension. Yet, there are areas of hope. The end of the Cold War has resulted in cessation of superpower-surrogate conflict and has created opportunity for steady, measured national growth. Disillusionment with Communism has stimulated interest and activity in Western-style democracy and economic development. Yet, attempts to move in this direction have often been clumsy and ineffective. It may be that the blame for this should be shared, that it is not all due to African countries, but that some responsibility may lie in the West's attempt to foist democracy onto states too soon.

It has been three decades since the yoke of colonialism has been lifted from this region, yet US foreign policy for it since that time has been largely paternalistic. The West has often attempted to impose external solutions onto Africa by offering direct aid and dictating changes to forms of governance. Whether this is an artifact of colonialism, an attempt to control the destiny of other nations, or simply short-sighted policy is unclear. It *is* clear that it does not foster independence, national pride or long term solutions to regional problems.

Another argument for greater self-reliance in the region is that there exists a lack of US funds for foreign assistance. Money available in the US budget for aid to Africa has steadily declined and is now to the level of inconsequentiality. Given the present economic climate in the United States,

reversal of this trend is very unlikely

There is some cause to expect success in the ability of the region to move toward greater independence. African nations, such as Nigeria, have been regular contributors to multinational peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, the last several years have seen the formation of African organizations for economic development and cooperation. Finally, the mere survival of states in Sub-Saharan Africa despite population explosion accompanied by reduced or static food production attests to the incredible resilience of these states.

For the US, this region provides an opportunity for leadership in the post-Cold War era. The United States holds itself to be a nation which stands on the principles of individual liberty, human rights and democracy. For these claims to be seen as credible, it may be that the US is compelled to take steps to promote its values in the region or forfeit its role as global leader.

REGIONAL FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Consistent with its national security interests for Sub-Saharan Africa, the United States has three general foreign policy objectives: promoting values, enhancing political stability, and maintaining access to important minerals and resources. Each of these general objectives will now be discussed in further detail.

Promoting Values Democratic ideals have come to permeate American thought, often unconsciously. Although Americans are proud of their country's affluence and feel justified in defending it as a legitimate national interest, these feelings are not based in a sense of moral superiority or divine right. Americans therefore feel a responsibility to alleviate suffering where possible. Thus, the first component of promotion of values, or value-based interests for the region is *stopping suffering from disease, starvation and natural disasters*. Great strides have been made in Africa in the last few decades, but disease, pestilence and starvation are still abundant. Although elimination of suffering is not a realistic goal, it is important for the nation to do what is reasonably

possible in the region. The second value is manifested in *promoting peace in the region*. Where disputes arise in the region that escalate, or threaten to escalate, into armed conflict, the United States must take steps necessary to make peace or keep the peace, if needed. The third value to be promoted in the area is *democracy*. This is related to individual freedom and human rights. This objective also has implications for the next general objective of enhancing stability.

Enhancing Political Stability. As with the values addressed above, this general area has obvious benefits for those in the region. Stable governments are often associated with political viability and prosperity. Of benefit to the US is the lessening of global tensions and reduction in the likelihood that a national security threat to the United States will someday arise. There are four components to this general objective: the first is *encouraging national development*. The US should foster the development of sound national governments in the region. This involves establishing governmental legitimacy and responsible stewardship of the country, its people and its resources. The sub-Saharan region has a history of governments run by avaricious dictators who are either ignorant or indifferent to creating a strong, healthy state. The next component of this general objective is *encouraging economic development and trade*. This objective has elements in common with national development. Economic health is essential to national viability. Embedded in this objective are establishment of a national legal system, opening up borders for trade, creation of usable labor force that is educated and trainable, to name a few. The third component to the objective of enhancing regional stability should be *promoting democracy*. It is important to emphasize that this needs to begin at the lowest local level, such as towns and villages. Earlier attempts at democratization in the region have failed either due to the lack of a “grass roots” level of understanding and support, or because the sudden imposition of a new, open form of government unleashed rivalries and conflict. Additionally, students of democratization, such as Callaghy and Ravenhill, have observed that there is perhaps a correlation between authoritarian rule and the ability of a government to conduct major economic

restructuring *Facilitating infrastructure building* is the fourth component of enhancing political stability. By infrastructure is meant those basic physical systems that make commerce and intercourse possible, such as transportation systems (roads, bridges, rails and airports), power generation, communication systems, hospitals, water supplies and sanitation systems.

Maintaining Access to Minerals. Several Sub-Saharan countries, particularly those in south-central Africa, have large oil reserves. Although they do not presently constitute a major source of oil to the United States, access to any significant deposit of oil is an important concern for the US. It is therefore important that the US maintain trade agreements that allow access at competitive prices.

REGIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

This section will address the projected means by which the US national security objectives for Sub-Saharan Africa will be accomplished. Depending upon the source cited, there are some 42 to 49 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. As defined in either source, this region is simply too large for the United States to implement a substantive foreign policy for each country. Therefore, this strategy targets eight states in the region as objects of its foreign policy. These states, as they develop, will become "economic engines" that will ultimately benefit the region as a whole.

Three criteria were used to select target states. The first criterion was to choose states that show a plausible return on investment, that is, countries that have demonstrated economic growth and an improvement in standards of living. Second, at least one of the states should be a major oil producer in the region. The third criterion was geographical dispersion. In order to distribute the gains accruing from this policy throughout the region, states selected were in the South (Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe), East Africa (Kenya), and West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Gabon and Congo). In addition, none of these states are currently engaged in major political disputes, either internally with ethnic, religious or political factions, or externally with their neighbors. It is therefore assumed

that the local security interest, that is, the national security interests from *their* perspective, is the well-being of the state and its citizens and is thus consistent with the objectives listed above

Promote Values To the extent possible, the United States will assist in the amelioration of suffering from disease, starvation and natural disasters wherever they occur. Recognizing that this may not always be possible and that hard choices must sometimes be made, priority will be placed on assisting targeted countries. International organizations, such as the United Nations, will be mobilized and, with the support of the US, bring aid where needed. In addition, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are organized to address these disasters and may be facilitated in their mission by the US. These organizations will serve as a resource multiplier for the US in accomplishment of its foreign policy objectives. Promote democracy at an early and fundamental stage is a critical component of accomplishing this objective. Particular attention must be given to establish democratic organizations at the lowest level of government. This can be achieved through bilateral diplomacy as part of negotiation package for economic development. International financial institutions in the United States, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the Import Export Bank may be utilized at lower cost to the US. An asset of the US Government that may be applied to this mission is the Peace Corps. Peacekeeping operations, where they are required, should be conducted with the United Nations through its affiliated regional organizations. Mass migration of refugees of military conflict has become a significant problem in the region. Therefore, as in disaster relief, it is anticipated that US support will be provided through the UN wherever it is needed in the region, however, requirements for peace operations in the targeted countries will be sponsored in the United Nations by the US, if necessary, to ensure that relief is provided to those states. The history of foreign military involvement in the region teaches that direct military operations by non-African forces should be avoided. Therefore, where US military resources are used in this context, they should be restricted to services such as engineering, logistics, and health support.

Enhance Regional Stability Unlike the application of means to accomplishment of the objective discussed above, strategies to enhance regional stability will be focused to a very great extent only on the targeted nations. The first component of this objective, national development, will be accomplished through diplomacy, primarily the bilateral agreements that offer financial incentives, with the support of the IMF and World Bank. The US can also offer consultation and training in establishing a viable national government, such as development of a national treasury and institutions of government for the accomplishment of political goals. Related to this is establishment of economic, trade and infrastructure development. This area will focus on securing the national government's position so that control over development of local economy can be maintained. As stated previously, this may not always involve a democratically elected official. It is essential, however, that the government be one that has legitimacy within the country. Through diplomacy, the US may offer the use of consultants and US resources to assist in negotiation of trade agreements that will have permanent and positive impact on development of infrastructure, training and economy that will serve to build the state and avoid naked exploitation of state's resources.

The ultimate goal, after national viability is established, is to create free, democratic states in the region. This must remain a long term goal, but one that can be achieved only after appropriate conditions for its survival have been developed. Over time, as the tradition of democratic governance at the local level is developed, as populace becomes more educated, and as trade works to liberalize society, evolution toward democratic national governments in the region can be achieved. The pace of democratization cannot be prescribed in advance. It must be maintained as an ultimate goal along which other measures taken in targeted countries are seen as steps in a path towards full democracy. Finally, access to minerals will be facilitated by improved relations with targeted countries. This will be formalized in negotiated agreements with the targeted states in exchange for assistance provided.

CONCLUSION

It is in the national character to desire immediate solutions to all suffering. This summary of a strategy for the US in Sub-Saharan Africa recognizes national interests but also acknowledges limits to resources available for their accomplishment. Benefits accrued in the region from this strategy will not be immediately forthcoming, but by proceeding at a measured and careful pace, the United States can be assured that they will serve for the long term.