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**SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:
ADRIFT IN A SEA OF MISERY
DEFINING U.S. NATIONAL STRATEGY**

CORE COURSE 5604 ESSAY

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**SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:
ADRIFT IN A SEA OF MISERY
DEFINING U.S. NATIONAL STRATEGY**

U.S. Interests in Africa

According to the National Security Strategy for Africa published in 1995 by DOD's Office of International Security Affairs, "the [Clinton] Administration is committed to maintaining a leading role in Africa despite the lack of vital [U S] interests " But, the United States does have major interests in Africa As an "island nation," the United States is dependent on global economic and military ties ¹ Indeed, "Africa poses one of our greatest challenges and opportunities to enlarge the community of market democracies" and protect and maintain our long-term interests worldwide ² In fact, the United States' primary interests in the African region center around political stability and economic growth for each individual nation The U S would like to see democracy and economic prosperity come to Africa Democracy and free markets would stabilize the region, improve the lives of Africans, and create markets for U S goods and services After all, there is a potential market of over 600 million consumers in Africa In addition, U S exports to Africa total \$5.5 billion annually, more than the total U S exports to the former Soviet Union U S exports are also growing at a rate of 15 percent per year, while there is an additional \$10 billion U S investment poised to go into Africa's oil sector ³

Another major U S interest is the care, feeding, and medical provision for the growing African population throughout the region Humanitarian concerns have attracted much attention from the

¹Alberto R. Coll, "America As the Grand Facilitator," *Foreign Policy*, no. 87 (Summer 1992) 59

²The White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, D C : US Government Printing Office, 1996), 43

³Remarks by Assistant Secretary of State for Africa George Moose at ICAF, Ft. McNair, Washington, D C , 11 December 1996

news media and many international groups who volunteer their time and money for the burgeoning African poor people. Furthermore, opinion polls consistently show the American people want a humane foreign policy.⁴ But while important changes and developments have been made in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years, overlapping rivalries and the side effects of demographic growth have threatened our interests within Africa.

Threats to U.S. Interests

Africa is in crisis. Blessed with the highest human fertility rates of all the world regions, Africa also has the less enviable status of being the world leader in mortality. Africa's average crude death rate is 16 per 1,000, compared to the world average of 11. Furthermore, Africa's population growth in 1993 was about 2.9 percent per year. In other words, Africa's population will double by 2017. Africa is also experiencing the most rapid population growth rates of all the world's regions, having made much less progress than other regions in transiting from high to low birth and death rates.⁵

Unfortunately, one characteristic feature of African populations, arising from the prevailing birth and death rates, is their youthfulness. On the average, about 45 percent of the total population of Africa is under the age of 15.⁶ This is further compounded by the fact that of the global total HIV-infected individuals worldwide, 63 percent are Africans. Among the world's infected female population, at least 81 percent reside in Africa, while approximately 52 percent of the world's HIV-infected males are Africans. Dennis C. Weeks, a consultant to the United States Agency for International Development, states it quite clearly: "How can one begin to discuss the

⁴ Remarks by Assistant Secretary of State for Africa George Moose, 11 December 1996

⁵ Sean Moroney, ed., *Handbooks to the Modern World - Africa, Volume II* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1991), 969-970, 978

⁶ Moroney, 981

broad implications of HIV infections and AIDS for the poorest continent on earth, where average annual government health-care expenditures are about \$2 for each man, woman, and child”⁷

Last but not least, Africa’s rapid population expansion has far outstripped the local farmer’s capacity to grow food. In 1960 Africa was self-sufficient in food, but by the mid-1980s one-third of the population was dependent upon food imports. Furthermore, despite wide discrepancies in estimates, it is agreed that African states host the largest refugee population in the world. In fact, nearly one percent of the total population of the continent are refugees. But while Africans have a long tradition of receiving refugees, at a certain point, hospitality becomes a function of resource availability. The increased demand on already scarce resources, such as fertile land, health care, food, and even water for both people and livestock, has led to tensions between local and refugee populations.⁸

Against this background of steady misery, the political upheavals in Africa during the last few years cannot be surprising. Indeed, Africa seems to be continually beset by war. But, the serious civil and regional wars in progress are primarily the result of the creation of colonial states, followed by rapid decolonialization without consideration of the ethnic and nationalist conflicts that would follow. Unfortunately, one of the cardinal tenets of African diplomacy is that colonial boundaries, however haphazardly drawn, are sacrosanct. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted this as an important principle in 1963, and retains it. Furthermore, given the rivalry for always scarce resources in cash and capital, ruling nationalists are rapidly being forced, as much by the inherited situation as by self-interest, into the politics of factionalism, which has taken the form of regional rivalries.⁹

⁷ Dennis C. Weeks, “The AIDS Pandemic in Africa,” *Current History*, no. 565 (May 1992): 208.

⁸ Moroney, 988, 999, 1006.

⁹ Moroney, 677, 693.

In Togo, scores of people were killed in 1992 as government forces loyal to the leader of the Kabiye ethnic group battled opposition forces, including those from the rival Ewe. In South Africa, over 3,000 were also killed in 1992 in clashes between Zulus and rival black groups. Furthermore, in Zaire, thousands of people have died in the last few years in a civil war between forces opposing and loyal to President Mobutu Sese Seko¹⁰

Opportunities for U.S. Policy in Africa

Where does this lead us today? Already Africa has witnessed increased U.S. involvement during the 1990s. Now that the Cold War is over, U.S. interests can shift from countering Soviet moves to promoting democratic and free market movements without the security constraints that often tied U.S. hands in the past. Indeed, since 1990, the U.S. has supported several major rescue-evacuations, conducted airlift relief operations, participated in joint training exercises, provided medical aid, and dispatched special forces teams to instruct local armies and secure food for local refugees¹¹

In fact, in the first year and a half of this decade, the U.S. supported three rescue operations spanning the width of Central Africa. In August 1990, Liberia was engulfed by civil war. The U.S. Embassy in Monrovia was besieged by rebel forces. Saved from likely death by U.S. forces were 330 Americans and 2,360 other foreign nationals. In January 1991, amidst the Persian Gulf build-up, 282 foreign nationals and 51 Americans were evacuated from the U.S. Embassy at Mogadishu in Somalia when open warfare waged by feuding warlords posed a direct threat to

¹⁰ "Ethnic Conflicts Worldwide," *Current History*, no. 573 (April 1993) 167-168

¹¹ "Nation Building in the African Arena," *Veterans of Foreign Wars*, no. 6 (February 1993) 25

American lives In September 1991, over 1,000 Americans and other foreign nationals were safely evacuated from Zaire ¹²

But U S involvement is not just restricted to rescue-evacuations In Operation PROVIDE TRANSITION, the United States helped transport demobilized Angolan troops from August through October 1992 In January 1992, the U S participated in one of the largest U S exercises in sub-Saharan Africa During a 10-day series of activities, U S forces engaged in joint mock battles, parachute drops, and maneuvers with the Botswana Defense Force ¹³ On another level, U S forces carried out extensive security assignments in four African countries, including a “nation-building” effort in the West African nation of Senegal in 1991 ¹⁴

However, the U S should “ be very wary about using military force to restore law and order in the many strife-torn African countries” in the future ¹⁵ Indeed, the American public tends to oppose conflicts in which the U S has little or no strategic interest involved, and American lives are at risk As such, the U S needs to support peacekeeping operations organized by the United Nations and various regional African organizations

An active United Nations presence in scores of trouble spots in Africa has become more possible since the end of the Cold War because the United States and the Soviet Union no longer veto proposals backed by the other In fact, with the Cold War over, the United Nations has assumed a greater burden and responsibility for maintaining peace and stability around the world

¹² Ibid , 25, 29

¹³ Ibid , 25

¹⁴ Ibid , 25

¹⁵ Ariel Cohen and others, “Making the World Safe for America,” in *Restoring American Leadership A US Foreign and Defense Policy Blueprint*, eds Kim R. Holmes and Thomas G. Moore (Washington, D C The Heritage Foundation, 1996), 99

But, most observers agree the United Nations' current capabilities and methods are inadequate for the wide range of conflicts and security challenges expected in Africa in the years to come¹⁶

While the U S supports traditional U N peacekeeping operations in Africa, the U S should avoid using the military to settle ethnic civil wars in Africa

Indeed, to confront the growing ethnic conflicts within the region, the United States and the U N should continue to explore the establishment of an all-African contingent for peace operations. According to William D Bajusz and Kevin P O'Prey, "a stand-by force of African military units ready to respond to peace operations and humanitarian disasters on the continent is the logical extension of several developments

One is the United Nations' and the international community's increasing emphasis on regional solutions for regional problems. An all-African force could become an important institutional mechanism for fostering greater regional integration and conflict resolution.

Second, an important by-product of an international effort to train and equip an all-African force would be an improvement in the professionalism of participating militaries, thereby building greater respect for civilian control and stable democracies.

Finally, an all-African force would potentially limit the extent to which Western militaries must become involved on the ground in Africa, while still providing a capability for effective crisis response."¹⁷

However, several countries are making significant progress towards democracy and market reforms including Botswana, Ghana and to some extent South Africa. These countries should be rewarded with development aid and economic training. But, the U S must be careful how we proceed to help these nations. Foreign aid has historically not made much difference in Africa. It has sometimes delayed reform and has sometimes been irrelevant. Aid works best when it is limited in time, and is part of an overall market-driven growth strategy. Aid has become a way of

¹⁶ Michael T Klare, "The New Challenges to Global Security," *Current History*, no 573 (April 1993) 161

¹⁷ William D Bajusz and Kevin P O'Prey, "An All-African Peace Force: An Immediate Option or Long-Term Goal for the Region?," *Strategic Forum*, no 86 (October 1996) 1-2

life for many of the African countries and major institutions such as the World Bank have rarely orchestrated any form of a growth strategy. Before the U S increases our aid to Africa we should listen to the advice of Jeffrey Sachs.

Aid should be much more selective. It should go only to those countries taking strong measures to promote market-based, export-led growth. Second, aid should be limited in duration. It can help reform-minded governments pay their bills during the initial period of reform, it cannot substitute for exports or growth in the longer term. A pre-announced sliding scale of aid - generous at the start, declining later - would concentrate the minds of African policy makers wonderfully.¹⁸

President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps in the early 1960s so that America's youth could be productive and engaged ambassadors for the United States and the West throughout the world to demonstrate that democracy, freedom, and human rights make a difference in the quality of life that all people can attain. Africa as a region benefited much from these hardworking idealists especially in the agricultural area where farmers were taught better techniques to make the land produce more. Many other non-governmental organizations have similar goals even today.

What Africa needs now is people who know how to develop the infrastructure of the country - transportation, communications, and information. These countries need dedicated experts who know how to market the products and exports that Africa can produce. They need people who know how to get these products to the coast efficiently so they can be traded around the world. As stated earlier, they must involve the African people so that the education and initiative becomes innate - so that ownership of the ideas and techniques belong to the country and the people that develop them. They need to feel empowered to control their own destiny.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Sachs, "Growth in Africa", *The Economist* (29 June 1997) 21

Future Policy Recommendations

From the perspective of the United States, and to safeguard U S interests in Africa, we must encourage African states to pursue free market economic policies. In addition, we must ensure African states promote individual human rights and freedom of expression without fear of retribution from the national government. This will not only increase economic growth, but also reduce individual suffering. We must gradually reduce, and wherever possible, eliminate the foreign aid that has so severely undermined economic development and prosperity in Africa. However, aid is still crucial to ease the suffering as a result of natural disasters.

Our policy should begin with key states, such as South Africa, and highlight their success as we encourage other states to follow suit. Indeed, South Africa needs to be rewarded for its recent departure from apartheid. Furthermore, we need to encourage South Africa to continue to maintain a stable, free-market democracy. We also need to encourage private companies to invest in Africa to employ Africa's growing labor force.

The U S should avoid sending military forces to settle ethnic civil wars in Africa. We should suggest the United Nations, in its traditional role of peacekeeping, continue its role, but supported by the West for airlift, transportation, communications, and intelligence. More importantly, the U S should support the OAU and its peacekeeping capabilities. We need to promote and support an all-African peace force, for in the end, only Africa can ensure its stability.