

Adoption of a U.S. Interventionist Policy in Africa: Fighting a Pre-emptive Vice Reactive War on Terror

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"Adoption of a U.S. Interventionist Policy in Africa: Fighting a Pre-emptive Vice Reactive War on Terror"

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"When we reviewed the evidence, we concluded - I concluded - that genocide has been committed in Darfur and that the government of Sudan and the Janjaweed bear responsibility and that genocide may still be occurring."¹

Colin Powell
Secretary of State
9 Sep 04

"When there's a catastrophe coming, people don't react until they are counting the dead."²

Simon Salimini
World Food Program

¹ Simon Robinson, "The Tragedy of Sudan," *Time*, 4 October 2004, 56.

² Eric Reeves, "Sudan's Reign of Terror," *Amnesty Now*, Summer 2004, 16.

Since 11 September 2001, the United States (U.S.) and its allies have been fighting primarily a reactive war on terror. The war in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) in particular is the most well-known example of this strategy. The war in Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom) is also another example of reactive strategy when viewed in the entirety of U.S. foreign policy. Some would argue otherwise, but the fact that the former regime habitually curtailed United Nations (U.N.) sanctions and continued to be a state sponsor of terror since the end of the Gulf War substantiates reactive vice pre-emptive. Because of the intelligence shortfalls of the 1990s, which failed to detect the severity of the radical Islamic threat of al-Qaeda, the United States had no other choice but to strike targets of greatest opportunity (i.e. Afghanistan and Iraq). Knowing now how costly it is to conduct a reactive war on terror, the United States should do everything in its power to prevent geopolitical conditions conducive to supporting Islamic terrorist organizations. The African continent is one such region where favorable conditions continue to persist for terrorist exploitation. Largely forgotten on the international scene, several nations and their governments have been continually ignored. This allows for conditions to persist that

may lead to eventual safe havens for terrorists. The Sudan is the greatest case in point, which was the safe haven for Usama Bin Laden (UBL) less than ten years ago. Consequently, the United States must adopt an interventionist policy in the Sudan to eradicate conditions that may be exploited by terrorists in the future.

Present U.S. African Policy

Protection of resources vital to its national security has long been the basis for the United States' foreign policy. However, the end of the Cold War signaled a rapid decrease of America's interest in Africa. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Africa no longer appeared to possess any significant economic value to the United States.³ Throughout the 1990s, America based its African policy entirely on empty rhetoric. This became abundantly clear in 1994 when the United States turned a blind eye to the genocide occurring in Rwanda.

Richard Holbrooke, former United States ambassador to the United Nations, at the genocide memorial site in Rwanda stated, "The lesson of each genocide is the same: The killing really takes off only after the murderers see that the world, and especially the United States, is not going to care or react."⁴ Howard French further observed, "This [Rwanda] was Central

³Howard W. French, *Africa: A Continent Self-Destructs* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 40.

⁴Never Again! The Shame of Hollow Regrets, International Customwire, 9 Apr 2004.

Africa, after all, a region where life had always been regarded as cheap, not Bosnia or Kosovo, places where European lives and interests were at stake."⁵ French was referring to the absolute lack of international intervention of the Rwandan genocide.

As a member of the United Nations' (U.N.) Security Council the United States can often influence the extent to which the U.N. involves itself in international disputes. However, while the argument that the U.N., not the U.S., should shoulder the burden of Africa's problems has validity it should not be the overriding factor determining U.S. involvement. A strong precedent for independent U.S. intervention already exists in Iraq. The U.S. made clear that the removal of Saddam Hussein was vital to U.S. national security, and that the U.S. would intervene with or without the approval of the U.N. Security Council. The U.S. needs to take the same position and, if necessary, include a military presence to stabilize and democratize certain nations on the African continent.

Dissenters would argue that this is not a role of the U.S. military. Contrary to this belief, peacekeeping (a vital component in nation building), indeed, is a mission essential task of the U.S. military.

Sudan

⁵French, 126.

Perhaps nowhere in Africa is the importance of creating and maintaining a viable democracy greater than in the sub-Saharan nation of the Sudan (refer to Figure 1). The recent affiliation this nation has had with Al Qaeda can not be ignored. UBL found a safe haven here for several years until 1994 when pressure from the United States and Saudi Arabia forced Sudan to expel him.⁶ Up to that point, UBL had used the Sudan for terrorist activities. The attempted attack on U.S. forces in Yemen in 1992 and the attacks on U.S. forces in Somalia in 1993 were both influenced heavily by UBL and led to his eventual expulsion.⁷

⁶David Johnson, "Who Is Osama bin Laden?," *infoplease*, 29 January 2005, <<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/osamabinladen.html>> (29 January 2005), Anti-U.S. Attacks.

⁷Johnson, Anti-U.S. Attacks.



Figure 1⁸

Today, the Sudan continues to be a nation embroiled in international controversy. The conditions that terrorist leaders often use to advance their agendas, such as civil war and poverty, are widespread in this nation. The Sudan is currently experiencing two civil wars. The first conflict, which witnessed the signing of a peace accord in early January

⁸ *rightsmaps*, <<http://www.rightsmaps.com/html/sudmap1.html>> (30 January 2005).

2005, had been Africa's longest running conflict.⁹ It pitted the northern Muslims against the mostly animist and Christian south.¹⁰

This north-south conflict, however, has no relationship to the Darfur conflict still occurring today, which involves Arab and non-Arab Muslims (both of whom are Arab speaking black Africans). Ignited in early 2003, this second civil war has garnered the majority of the headlines because of the sheer extent of the atrocities. The Arab government of Sudan has consistently been accused of waging a war against the non-Arab population of the Darfur region. They have accomplished this primarily through financially and militarily supporting an ethnically Arab militia known as the Janjaweed.¹¹ The vast majority of the atrocities have been committed by the Janjaweed. These atrocities, most notably genocide, have led to a true humanitarian disaster greater than anything the world is experiencing today.¹² Razed villages throughout Darfur have led to tens of thousands of displaced non-Arabs living in numerous refugee camps along the Sudan-Chad border. Both hunger and disease are rampant within the camps stemming from the lack of aid from non-governmental organizations (NGO). These NGOs have

⁹ Glen Kessler, "Powell Sidesteps Question About Sudan Genocide," *Washington Post*, 9 January 2005, sec A.

¹⁰ Kessler, sec A.

¹¹ Robinson, 56.

¹² Robinson, 56.

had to back out of the Sudan because of security concerns caused by the unchecked Janjaweed. Despite the progress in ending the north-south conflict, the matter of the Darfur conflict is far from being resolved.

Thus the conditions for terrorist exploitation continue to exist, most notably a Muslim government that has shown little in the way of cooperating with the international community in resolving the human atrocities occurring within its borders. If not given the proper attention, the Sudanese government may become the focus of Arab militants once again. In addition, the non-Arab Sudanese who continue to be subjected to a dictatorship, which the West has shown minimal interest beyond its empty rhetoric, may be targeted as well. The U.S. runs the risk of this disregarded Muslim populace being influenced by terrorist cells searching for new individuals lacking a purpose in life. By actively intervening both diplomatically and if necessary militarily (i.e. peacekeeping) the U.S. can build a more stable and democratic Sudan. Thus the U.S. demonstrates to the Muslim world that we are serious in promoting freedom and fighting terrorism before it has a chance to gain a foothold. By assisting in the development of a stable and free society the factors for which terrorism feeds from are greatly limited. A democratic "Muslim Africa" is certainly in the interest of U.S. national security.

Conclusion

With the United States military already spread thin throughout the world, the adoption of an interventionist policy in Africa involving U.S. troops will be difficult to sell. Coupled with growing budget demands, the needed resources are becoming ever more scarce. However, the African continent has long been a haven for Islamic extremism and can no longer be ignored. The United States must actively support democracy on the African continent with substantial financial assistance, such as debt forgiveness. Democratic hopefuls need to be supported and worked with closely in order to create a plan that is truly African.¹³ The U.S. must ensure the foundation for democracy exists. However, Africans themselves must be given the freedom to make it distinctly African. Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni views this strategy in a similar light as his comments indicate: he states, “. . . the Euro-American architects of the old postcolonial order were welcome to work with Africa . . . but on Africa’s terms . . .” The time has arrived in which the U.S. must focus greater attention to certain regions of Africa as a future investment in the global war on terror.

¹³ Schwab, *Africa: A Continent Self-Destructs*, 159.

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