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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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AN APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC CULTURE CONCEPTS IN U.S.-AFRICAN FOREIGN POLICY:  
MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING CAN YIELD MUTUAL INTERESTS

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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** An Application of Strategic Culture Concepts in U.S.-African Foreign Policy: Mutual Understanding Can Yield Mutual Interests

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**Thesis:** Currently, there is a dissonance between the American view of its global identity and the African interpretation of U.S. intentions. This difference in perspectives is aggravated by cultural ignorance and has been a major impediment to U.S.-African progress.

**Discussion:** Recent adaptations in policy indicate that Africa has become a U.S. national interest. Consequently, global speculation has ignited over interests in a continent that the U.S. has ignored for so long. A myriad of explanations for American interests in Africa have surfaced: to spread political freedom that will yield improvements in economic and social development; to fight terrorism and transnational threats abroad; and to capitalize on the economic potential of the oil and resource-rich region. Regardless of the motive, the U.S. adjustment in its foreign policy has been fraught with African apprehension and speculation. By analyzing the perspectives and perceptions of U.S. strategic culture, the notions of "American exceptionalism" versus "American exploitation" continually clash. The U.S. has historically wrestled with reconciling and communicating the divergent perceptions of America as either an ideological "city on the hill" or a selfish exploitive state. If not properly addressed, the current dissonance between the American views of its strategic cultural identity and African interpretation of U.S. strategic culture could lead to the failure of established foreign policy. African leaders have developed an attitude of indignation and skepticism regarding American intentions on the continent, based upon hundreds of years of political manipulation, social disregard, and resource/economic exploitation by Western states. American leaders must understand that Africa's historical relationships with Westerners have led to perilous situations, eliciting a justified cause for suspicion and antagonism.

**Conclusion:** A knowledge of strategic culture is vital to understand how states perceive themselves within the global community and how other states may view their strategic actions, based upon the historical pattern of their respective beliefs, values, and actions. Therefore, American leaders must be aware of global perceptions of U.S. strategic culture and increase their cultural understanding of Africa in order to develop mutual understanding and pursue mutual interests with African leaders.

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## *Preface*

I became interested in studying U.S.-African relations when I heard about the establishment of the newest geographic combatant command in Africa, AFRICOM. I was eager to learn about the national-strategic objectives and theater-strategic plans for an organization within a region to which I could potentially deploy. However, after my initial research, I was surprised to see that there was a great deal of global skepticism about the U.S. involvement in Africa, particularly from African leaders. I decided, then, to pursue a study that would help me understand the historical, political, and cultural relationships between the U.S. and African states, particularly in light of impending military involvement on the continent.

When I started this journey, I assumed that U.S. foreign policy in Africa was ineffective, given the negative reaction of the U.S. commitment to Africa. After extensive research on this topic and reviewing myriad official documents, as well as interviews, lectures, and other first hand sources, I found that U.S. foreign policy is actually of good design. Therein lays the problem: when we review U.S. foreign policy from a U.S. cultural lens, we evaluate ourselves from our perspective—with an American/Western mindset. When we look at ourselves in this manner, we only get one aspect, or one perspective, of ourselves and may miss perceptions held by others that could be detrimental to our foreign policy objectives.

Therefore, I decided to take a critical, introspective approach to evaluate the effectiveness of U.S.-African foreign policy. I sought to explore other perceptions of the U.S. global identity that help or hinder our legitimacy within the international community. I decided upon this approach hoping that it would give us a better understanding of how those we intend to help or influence receive, interpret, and respond to our intentions. This study is a critical analysis of who we (Americans) are and how our actions may be interpreted in Africa.

I would like to thank my MMS Advisor, Dr. Pauletta Otis, for her assistance, enthusiasm and encouragement in this project. Dr. Otis' breadth of knowledge in a litany of disciplines was especially invaluable in setting me on the right path to pursue this journey. Additionally, I want to acknowledge my Command and Staff College Faculty Advisors, LtCol Darrin Denny, Dr. Eric Shibuya, and Prof. Erin Simpson, for adding to my overall knowledge of political theory, foreign affairs, and operational doctrine throughout the year.

Lastly, I would like to offer a special acknowledgment to my family. I am tremendously grateful to my wife, Matrice, not only for her patience with me during this assignment, but also for reviewing, editing, and debating the paper with me—multiple times. I want to also recognize my children, Aliah, Elijah, and Nilah, for their understanding and encouragement during this research project. Everyone in my family is now much more aware of this foreign affairs issue, especially since we have “discussed” my topic around the dinner table for the past several months. My children are probably as well prepared for the oral defense of this paper as I am.

Overall, researching and writing this MMS paper has been an enlightening experience for me and has allowed me to appreciate the complexities of a perilous world. After this year of study, I hope to return to the operating forces as a more informed and effective Marine officer and national security professional.

## INTRODUCTION

Some are inclined to write Africa off as hopeless. Others see Africa as a special case to which the principles of economics do not apply. I reject such views. It is our approach that has failed. Africa has not. We need to bear in mind that Afro-pessimism is widespread in the world outside. We must overcome pessimists.  
- Boutros Boutros-Ghali, UN Secretary-General - December 1992<sup>1</sup>

Recent adaptations in political rhetoric and foreign policy indicate that Africa has become of national interest to the United States (U.S.). Consequently, global speculation has ignited over interests in a continent that the U.S. has ignored for so long. National security and foreign affairs pundits provide myriad explanations for this sudden return to the continent. Some believe the U.S. intends to pursue the ideological premise of spreading political freedom that will eventually yield improvements in economic and social development.<sup>2</sup> Others take a more pragmatic approach towards the change in interest, noting that U.S. engagement in Africa is a strategic move to fight terrorism and transnational threats abroad.<sup>3</sup> Yet, others look at the economic potential of the oil and resource-rich region as the motive behind American attention.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of the primary motivator, the positive adjustment of U.S. foreign policy in Africa, ironically, has been fraught with African apprehension and speculation.

Currently, there is a dissonance between the American view of its global identity and the African interpretation of U.S. intentions. This difference in perspective is aggravated by cultural ignorance and has been a major impediment to U.S.-African progress. The focus of this paper is to analyze U.S.-African relations through the lens of strategic cultural awareness to facilitate the development, implementation, and evaluation of effective foreign policy objectives.

This study commences with an assessment of theories surrounding the field of strategic culture studies, while identifying the importance, significance and relevance of cultural awareness in today's strategic environment. Additionally, this paper identifies the key components of strategic culture, utilizes a cognitive model for understanding and evaluating



strategic culture, and then presents the U.S. strategic culture with respect to this model.

Subsequently, an analysis of the perception of U.S. strategic culture from an African perspective is provided. Finally, this study concludes with a proposed approach to developing effective U.S. foreign policy intentions with states in the African region.

Consistent with the belief of former United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, previous attempts by the international community to help Africa have failed. As Africa continues to wallow in its political, economic, and social mire, this paper proposes that the U.S.'s approach towards Africa has failed because American leaders do not understand Africa and its problems. The international community has failed to understand how beliefs, values, and experiences have formed the way that Africans think about and respond to the world. This paper seeks to highlight the importance of developing an understanding of the internal beliefs and external influences that comprise strategic culture.

Through this study, readers will develop an appreciation for the necessity to understand the impact of strategic culture concepts on foreign policy objectives, specifically relating to U.S.-African foreign relations. The principal methodology of this paper is a critical analysis of the variables that comprise the U.S. strategic culture to establish American and African perspectives of U.S. strategic cultural identity. Knowledge of the differences in perspectives will highlight current fault lines and potential pitfalls with U.S.-African foreign policy objectives.

### STRATEGIC CULTURE

It is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle. – Sun Tzu<sup>5</sup>

Historically, political and military strategists have identified the need to understand the intangible factors present during war and throughout the preceding diplomatic relations required to avoid war. Both Clausewitz and Sun Tzu openly addressed the moral factors of war; the

former defining war as a violent clash between two wills,<sup>6</sup> while the latter emphasized the importance of knowing the motivations of one's enemy.<sup>7</sup> Both strategists agreed that a nation should be aware of the factors that will drive it to war, as well as those factors that motivate his enemy to wage war. To know one's self, posits Sun Tzu, requires critical self-evaluation of one's strengths and weaknesses.<sup>8</sup> To know your enemy, on the other hand, requires cultural intelligence that will lead to an understanding of the intellectual and moral context within which the enemy makes decisions. In short, knowing one's self necessitates understanding one's personal motivations, while knowing one's enemy facilitates understanding his motivations.<sup>9</sup>

The awareness of a nation's motivations can be obtained by studying its "strategic culture" – those moral factors that influence and impact strategic-level decisions. Within the context of this paper, strategic culture will be defined as the experiences, beliefs, and values that manifest themselves as societal organizations, norms, practices, and behaviors that characterize a particular group of people, typically identified within a political boundary or common geographic region.<sup>10</sup> It is imperative that a state have awareness of its own strategic culture and how its own political actions are perceived in the global community in order to develop an effective global strategy. It is equally as important for a state to understand the strategic culture of other global actors so that it comprehends the reasons that decisions are made within the strategic environment.

Accordingly, an understanding of strategic culture is essential. Strategic culture theorists identify a common set of inter-related variables as significant in defining and understanding strategic culture. These variables will be used to develop and analyze a strategic culture model for this paper: identity, territory, authority, economics, norms, and manifestations.<sup>11</sup>

## U.S. STRATEGIC CULTURE

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. –That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. – Declaration of Independence

As the predominant world power, it is imperative that the U.S. become aware of its own strategic culture and understand the value, effectiveness, and perceptions of its actions within the global community. This section seeks to address the principle question: how does America perceive itself and what are the various global perceptions of the American strategic culture. As Colin Gray submits, the U.S. will perform better and will be more consistently successful, if it takes a deep look in the strategic mirror without distortion.<sup>12</sup> Using the strategic culture model identified in Appendix A, a critical analysis of each aspect of U.S. strategic culture follows.

### Identity

A state's cultural *identity* consists of how a state views itself, how others view that state, and how those views influence the state's perceived and assumed global roles. Perhaps the predominant viewpoint that shapes the U.S. worldview is the notion of American exceptionalism. American exceptionalism, as described by political scientists and scholars, is the pervasive attitude that America, as a unique country politically and socially, is special and distinct from other countries, regimes, and kingdoms. As the proverbial "city upon a hill" America assumed the moral obligation to carry liberty and democracy to the world. This belief maintains that the obligation is of divine assignment, conferring upon America the tacit approval to move freely throughout the world, sharing good will with all who will receive it. This notion was born out of the experiences of America's uniqueness, as well as the social and political ideals that it upholds. American policymakers are often shaped by this idea, believing that the U.S. has a special role to play and is adequately equipped to address global issues.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, critics who seek an alternative perspective to the “exceptional” role that America plays in the global community choose to believe a counter theory – American exploitation. Political critics and scholars have documented opposing views to the altruistic American fairytale of exceptionalism. They describe an America for which every event in its history has been characterized by an elite agenda coupled with a propaganda cover story. Critics illustrate an America where policy is set that seeks only to obtain its national interests, utilizing ideological rhetoric as justification.<sup>14</sup>

Neither the notion of American exceptionalism nor American exploitation are new ideas, but have persisted since the beginning of U.S. history. A review of American history reveals that these contending views have equally contributed to shaping the perspectives of the American cultural identity. Consequently, today, the U.S. continues to wrestle with its two identities; that of the world’s exceptional protector or as its exploitive imperialist.

### Territory

The physical location of a state’s *territory* greatly influences a state’s relationship with other states, and ultimately affects its fate or fortune within the larger global community. Such is the case with the U.S. The Americas were first discovered by the Western world during the European Age of Exploration and Discovery in the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. This age was characterized by the romantic notion that brave, seagoing men would set sail for the New World, battling against nature and contesting against one another to discover unfounded lands in the name of their respective monarchs. The name “New World” implied that something was novel, unique, and even special about this far-off land. Thus, the original North American settlements, which gave birth to the original colonies of the U.S., were born out of this mystique, romanticism, and uniqueness. Thousands of miles away from its European cousins, the United

States of America was a nation sculpted out of something that never existed before—in a sense, the U.S. represented a genesis of new thoughts, ideals, and way of life.

Just as the founding of the nation and the establishment of its original territory was laden with exceptionalist ideals, so too was its westward expansion. Though the western expansion of the U.S. territory was acquired either by purchase (Louisiana) or by conquest (Mexican Southwest), the belief in Manifest Destiny catalyzed Americans to venture to the uncharted ends of the continent securing a coast-to-coast protectorate. This attitude of uniqueness (exceptionalism) yielded to iniquity (exploitation) as those lands were settled by extremely violent measures. Almost the entire west was settled by the ethnic cleansing of Native American Indians, perpetrated by U.S. soldiers acting on government orders to remove the natives from their land, either by imprisoning them on reservations or killing them.<sup>15</sup> Though the expansion of American territory was exceptional (not just in terms of achievement, but also in terms of security), the expansion of the nation through the exploitation of a people is a dark spot on the collective American psyche that is not easily ignored.

That the U.S. was allowed to experience national growth virtually unimpeded by external international forces is exceptional in itself. Since 1815, the U.S. has not had to fight a war on its own soil and has not faced the serious threat of invasion, which has allowed the unhindered maturity and development of the country. With the physical borders of the continental American territory (the 48 contiguous states) defined by vast oceans on both flanks and friendly nations to the north and south, the U.S. is in an ideal location. Unlike its European cousins, and other nations on continents congested with disputing empires, the U.S. was insulated from feudal wars fought over land. Additionally, the purchase (Alaska) and annexation (Hawaii) of external provinces and territories (Puerto Rico and Guam) was key, not only in providing advanced bases

from which to protect the homeland, but they were also critical in allowing the U.S. to gain convenient access to other regions of the world.

The alternate perspective to the positive perception of American territorial expansion suggests that the U.S. has historically exploited native peoples for national gain. Critics claim that American history reveals a consistent pattern of expansion into another territory, occupation of that territory, and subjugation of the native people who resist occupation. America's pattern of imperialism in its overseas territories (including Cuba and the Philippines) reflects the creation of American safe haven investment zones from which to draw resources, trade goods, and base military forces. Additionally, critics allege that the U.S. successfully subverted revolution in its "colonies;" ironically asserting that the nation that espoused democracy from its inception suppresses and subverts democratic values elsewhere by undermining self-sufficient economies and political structures that are unfriendly or unopened to the U.S.<sup>16</sup>

#### Authority

*Authority*, as a strategic culture factor, includes the correlation between the political values and organization of a state, which influence the decision-making leadership and actions of that state. Therefore, in this section, the ideological establishment and authoritative construct of the U.S. government is assessed and explored in an effort to better understand American perspectives and global perceptions of U.S. politics. Paramount to this discussion is an analysis of the foundational documents, the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, which reflect both the attitudes and methods of American politics.

The Declaration of Independence was a pivotal document written to announce the independence of the colonies and establishment of a new sovereign state. Additionally, it was a petition justifying to the international community that the colonies sought independence. The

document established the fundamental beliefs of liberty and equality as national imperatives.

From the opening sentences of the Declaration, the authors establish the opinion that it is a matter of Natural Law, or divine authority, that people should seek political freedom.

Additionally, the infamous preamble plainly describes the ideas and ideals of the new nation, including the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as well as the right of revolution.<sup>17</sup> The Declaration was also revolutionary in establishing the notion that governments rule at the consent of the governed; and that all people, regardless of social, economic, or political status should have equal say into how a government should rule the people. These pivotal, foundational issues would shape American political thought and incite debate for decades to come.

Where the Declaration of Independence established the foundational beliefs of the U.S., the Constitution laid forth the political design of the U.S. government. It was within the Constitution that the founding fathers developed the masterful design of a democratic republic, instituting the foundational principle of a government run by the consent of the governed. However, several groups were without representation at the Constitutional Convention: those without property, slaves, indentured servants, native Indians and women. Thus the Constitution did not fully reflect the interests of the disenfranchised.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the rights of American citizens would be debated for several decades after the ratification of the Constitution. It was over 140 years before women were granted the right to vote (1920). Additionally, the litany of legislative acts necessary to grant Blacks fair and equal treatment in America required nearly two centuries of debate. Despite the ratification of the Thirteenth (abolition of slavery) and Fifteenth (voting rights) Amendments, Black Americans would not be able to actualize their citizenship for years to come. Due to Jim Crow laws, institutional racism, and segregation, Blacks did not

obtain full rights, freedoms, and protected privileges until Civil Rights Acts were passed from 1957-1968, nearly 200 years after the nation was born. The idealist would submit that these amendments to the Constitution show the progressive nature of America, able to adjust its laws when unpopular behaviors and attitudes change. However the exploitation theorist may argue that those constitutional changes were due to political pressures and not an altruistic spirit, reinforcing the belief that the U.S. has demonstrated a willingness to exploit the poor, disenfranchised, and despondent for the purposes of maintaining economic or social advantage.

What are the consequences for balancing divergent perceptions of U.S. authority on the understanding of the U.S. strategic identity? To answer this question, one must reconcile the discord between the rhetorical definitions of the American ideals of *liberty* and *equality* as written in the foundational documents and their practical definitions as actualized in early America. The dissonance between rhetoric and practice suggests that either the Founding Fathers did not intend for these “universal” principles to apply to all people regardless of their race, gender, or background; or that political expediency prevented them from following their personal principles. The answer is in the debate itself. Expressly because American actions historically have been inconsistent with its message and professed beliefs, others are left to speculate of true American intentions.

### Economics

The cultural factors that are affected by the *economic* organization, production, and distribution of wealth within a nation are also critical to understanding the strategic culture of a country. The U.S. encourages and institutes the principles of capitalism and a free-market system. As a result, with richly abundant natural resources, a maturely developed infrastructure, and a high productivity rate, today the U.S. boasts the largest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in



the world. The majority of the U.S. economy is catalyzed by the private sector, with just over 12% of the economy supported by the government. With low unemployment and poverty rates, Americans enjoy a lifestyle generally well above the majority of their international counterparts.

Economists believe that America's economic health is due primarily to the implementation of a capitalistic system and the encouragement of an attitude of economic freedom. They propose that the national provision for a free market system encourages every citizen to pursue and build wealth however they wish. Given the economic and social freedom in America, citizens are free to pursue whatever economic goals they have, including owning their own companies, and being in control of their own wealth. Furthermore, when private enterprises do well, the national economy does well; therefore, everyone down to the lowest employee does well. American economic values support ingenuity, competition, and inspire progress, which, economists believe, is good for the nation overall.

Conversely, another perspective regarding American economic values is that they, originally, were the ideas of the wealthy elite and implied commercial freedom from British interference in colonial economic development.<sup>19</sup> This re-establishes the argument that America and its economic, political, and social systems were crafted by and exist in favor of the wealthy elites. Critics, therefore, challenge the "myth" that national economic progress is about improving the lives of all Americans. Instead, they submit that national economic development is not pursued to provide general prosperity, but to facilitate growth of the elite wealthy hordes.<sup>20</sup>

Incidentally, despite the great economic health described beforehand, the U.S. experiences the greatest income inequality among developed nations, with the richest 10% of the adult population possessing nearly 70% of the nation's overall wealth.<sup>21</sup> As the income gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" continues to widen, the rich get richer and the poor get

poorer. This disparity in the American economic system speaks volumes about the dissonance between the nation's ideological beliefs and its actual practices—exceptionalism vs. exploitation.

### Norms

The facet of strategic culture that describes the accepted and expected modes of behavior within a society is its *norms*. Norms are typically affected by the political, social, and religious values commonly experienced within a state. Since Americans derive from such wide and varied backgrounds, extending from the nation's earliest settlers to its most recent immigrants, it is challenging to distinguish one specific set of norms for the national culture as a whole.

However, there are four predominant themes that are consistent with the national American identity: (1) government by consent of the governed; (2) the concept of freedom for all; (3) Judeo-Christian values; and (4) the American Melting Pot (pluralism).

The theme that government arises from the consent of the governed was first introduced nationally through the Declaration of Independence, but was radicalized and widely publicized in Thomas Paine's essay *Common Sense*. In this essay, written in common style for all to read and understand, Paine created the notion that government exists for, derives its authority from, and, therefore, must be accountable to the governed.<sup>22</sup> This enduring theme pervades the American mindset even today as citizens are openly critical of government leaders, holding them accountable in a widely public fashion.

The concept of political, social, and economic freedom is a principle theme relevant to American strategic culture. Again, a dispute remains over the definition and scope of the term freedom: for wealthy elites, the term implies commercial freedom from outside interferences in economic development; whereas for the populace, the ideas imply personal freedom and popular democratic sovereignty.<sup>23</sup> The problem with the disparity between these two meanings,

however, is that it has created a foundation of political hypocrisy which has fractured the integrity of democracy.<sup>24</sup> This continues to feed the juxtaposed views of the American, strategic cultural identity.

Regarding religious norms, the U.S. Constitution clearly offers all citizens the freedom of religion; however, most would also submit that the U.S. was founded upon and holds firm to what is considered Judeo-Christian value system, which describes America as a God-fearing nation that seeks justice against evil. Phrases such as “In God We Trust,” “One nation under God,” and “God Bless America” not only establish a foundational belief in a higher being, but add to the presumptuous master narrative that God favors America. Ironically, even as many of the first settlers in America sought refuge in the New World to escape religious persecution in Europe, they set out to proselytize the Native Americans – to the peril of the native inhabitants.<sup>25</sup> As American influence extended abroad, Christian missionaries sent to other parts of the world demanded that a choice be made by their converts, depicting Christianity as a de-masculinizing and un-inclusive religion that threatened other beliefs.<sup>26</sup> The image of a God-fearing nation, crusading for righteousness is a part of the American cultural identity.

The story of the U.S. as an American Melting Pot is the idealized concept that colonization and immigration has provided a mixture of diverse races, ethnicities, and nationalities that all peacefully coexist within American borders. Cynics will argue that the counter perception to the ideology of the Melting Pot image is that immigration is encouraged to maintain the economic caste system of cheap labor in America. American rhetoric encourages immigrants to settle in the U.S., not to obtain the American dream, but to round out the working class. The ideological cover story of “welcoming the huddled masses” meets the reality that

most immigrants will comprise the constantly renewed pool of exploitable cheap labor for the chance to take part of the American dream.<sup>27</sup>

### Manifestations

Cultural *manifestations* are concrete displays of a state's actions and behaviors that result from a state's beliefs, often demonstrated through language, traditions, and policies. Two specific, yet diametrically opposed behaviors characterize the perception of how American culture is articulated globally; the U.S. is characterized as both a peaceful and martial culture. Coupled with both of these perceptions are the views that the U.S. is inclusionary in its ideals and rhetoric, but exclusionary in its practices.

As a peaceful culture, Americans are proud that the country has granted a significant amount of relief aid to disadvantaged nations, and boasts that it contributes more than most developed nations in the world. Represented by an army of U.S. government (USG) agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the U.S. spends nearly 13 billion dollars on the economic development, education, medical relief, and humanitarian aid of other nations throughout the world.<sup>28</sup> International criticism of the U.S., however, is that the percentage of aid distributed by the U.S. is not proportional to its GDP (the U.S. has historically been last among developed nations), and that the aid is distributed, not necessarily to the areas with the most need, but to nations that are within America's sphere of influence.<sup>29</sup>

The U.S. is also characterized as a nation where the war culture is central to its spirit. Pundits posit that the U.S. was born out of a war it initiated, achieved its growth through periodic warfare, and attained global dominance through the violent, yet successful prosecution of the art.<sup>30</sup> Highlighted is the belief that a common script unfolds to incite the American war machine each time: an incident is portrayed as an outrage against America; the populace rallies to the

common defense with characteristic ferocity and self-righteousness; the outrage incident is used to launch a planned military campaign, which triggers the in-built American war spirit and channels wrath toward the enemy.<sup>31</sup> Regardless of how this scenario plays out, Americans originally seek to develop a coalition of the willing, but insist that the coalition conduct military operations in the context of American world view and pursue American objectives.

### Analysis

As the analysis of U.S. strategic culture concludes, the major point of emphasis for this discussion is that the U.S. has historically wrestled with reconciling and communicating the divergent perceptions of America as either an ideological “city on the hill” or a selfish exploitive state. In capturing the perspectives and perceptions of U.S. strategic culture, the notions of American exceptionalism versus American exploitation continue to clash. American exceptionalism assumes that the U.S. is morally, culturally, and economically equipped to offer a model to the world and willing to provide assistance to achieve that model whenever called upon. Modern interpretations of exceptionalism support the promotion of American values globally through the implementation of the nation’s full spectrum of power.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, if America accepts its identity of exceptionalism, then it must also bear the responsibility of preserving its ideals globally. Conversely, the notion of American exploitation presumes that the U.S. engages internationally for the express purpose of preserving its national interests, exploiting situations, circumstances and people to achieve its national objectives. If ideology is mythology created to mask a nation’s true intentions or protect a nation’s true interests, then the idea of American exploitation submits that the American dogmatic master narrative is the cover story for policies established to accomplish defined national objectives.

## AFRICAN PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. STRATEGIC CULTURE

So deep is a security community's vested interest in its version of its own master strategic historical narrative, that one should not expect objective self assessment. - Colin Gray<sup>33</sup>

In this study, a critical review of U.S. strategic culture is explored so that the knowledge gained may be used to develop a better understanding of how U.S. values and actions, manifested as foreign policy, are perceived by state leaders in the African region. The challenge with critical, introspective analysis is that its results are often difficult to accept. The issue to ponder is whether American leaders candidly assess the national cultural identity or do they cloud their views with a national narrative that draws on the "positive" inception, development, prosperity, and preeminence of itself?

The African perception of U.S. strategic culture is formed by a history of exploitation and oppression by Westerners from the colonial to the modern neocolonial era. Over the past 150 years, the political and sociological relationship between Western and African states has framed African perceptions. This volatile relationship has led Africans to be skeptical and untrusting of Western designs and intentions. Four themes are presented that capture African perceptions of the American cultural identity, manifested by American attitudes, policies, and practices: imperialistic exploitation, political hypocrisy, civil apathy, and increased militarism.

### Imperialistic Exploitation

The continent of Africa was economically, politically, and socially decimated by imperialistic exploits by Western powers in the 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The exploitation of resources (human and natural), extraction of wealth, and subjugation of the people on the continent has not only had a damaging affect on Africa, but still remains the central cause for crises in that region.<sup>34</sup> The Scramble for Africa commenced with European nations hurrying about the continent, attempting to claim territory for their respective monarchs. Instantly, Africa became

the part of world most completely overwhelmed by European occupation and conquest. In 1876, more than 90% of the continent was ruled by Africans; however, by 1914 all but a small fraction was under European rule.<sup>35</sup>

The European powers that participated in African colonialism each maintained their own motives for pursuing expansion and imperialism, but all of them were driven by a desire to pursue their respective national interests. So rapid and rampant was the spread across the continent that Germany's Otto von Bismarck initiated the Conference of Berlin in 1884 in an attempt to bring order to the colonization of Africa. During the conference, the European powers decided on the boundaries and the rules with which to carve up Africa.<sup>36</sup> This led to the invasion, occupation, and eventual subjugation of indigenous peoples by Europeans, and the indiscriminate establishment of territorial boundaries, without deference to ethnic and tribal relationships. While under occupation, African territories were raped of their human and natural resources, as well as their psychological pride. The scramble had negative implications for the African peoples and societies for decades.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, Africans perceive Westerners as malevolent and are apprehensive to trust Westerners after facing subjugation for over 100 years.

During the colonial era, European states used the continent as a field on which to play out rivalries; Africa became the arena in which European powers could engage in strategic-level tension without inciting another major conflict on the European continent. Similarly, during the post-colonial era, Africa became a safe zone for competition between the superpowers.<sup>38</sup> During the Cold War, the U.S. and USSR distributed foreign aid to African states in return for political support.<sup>39</sup> The U.S. generally pressured international institutions to lend to anti-Communist favorites. Again, Africa found itself as a sideshow in international affairs; world powers were unwilling to commit aid towards African needs, but eager to establish eco-political relationships

in order to achieve national interests. At the end of the Cold War, the U.S. emerged as the sole superpower, disengaged from Africa, and showed little interest in African affairs.

Today, after all of the original colonial powers have retreated from Africa, it appears that the U.S. is headed back in. However, African leaders wonder whether there is a coordinated foreign policy agenda that includes reparations for the continent, or are American interests less noble and riddled with neocolonial economic objectives.<sup>40</sup> Clearly, the U.S. is interested in oil and other natural resources on the continent and is actively seeking an alternative to importing oil from the Middle East.<sup>41</sup> Recent figures indicate that Sub-Saharan Africa supplies approximately 18% of U.S. oil imports, but with a projected increase of up to 25% by 2015, African oil imports would surpass the amount of oil currently imported from the Persian Gulf.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to seeking to increase access to natural resources, the U.S. is interested in expanding American private industry ventures and increasing military presence in the region. World Bank officials recognize the new colonialization in Africa, where the U.S. political and military muscle is being used to facilitate the exploitation of Africa's resources by American corporations.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, an increase in militarization on the continent is perceived, as the U.S. establishes the new geographic combatant command for Africa (AFRICOM). The proposal for the establishment of AFRICOM revealed an objective of preserving U.S. access to African oil and other natural resources on the continent.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, a hunt for resources, political coercion for financial ties, and increased militarization, give credence to an African perception that the U.S., as a "Western imperialist," seeks to exploit Africa, once again.

### Political Hypocrisy

Africans see a contrast between the political ideology documented in America's foundational documents and the actual practices conducted by the U.S., which is politically



manifested in the form of domestic and foreign policy. When Africans observe “American democracy,” they cannot ignore the historical hypocrisy—that the freedoms professed have not been shared equally by all within its own society. African leaders do not believe that Americans can replicate the American political system in African states without also importing its hypocritical imperfections.

Africans acknowledge that most U.S. presidents up to the present have neglected Africa except when American strategic interests are involved. Even then, Africans perceive that U.S. intervention to secure its interest in Africa have been disastrous.<sup>45</sup> Until recently, U.S. actions, inactions, and policies have reflected a lack of awareness and interest in Africa, suggested in the opposition to the release of Nelson Mandela, American votes against imposing sanctions on apartheid, the lack of U.S. action in Rwanda and Darfur, and the continuous rejection of non-conditional debt relief for African states.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, African leaders are concerned about the direct involvement by U.S. agencies in the internal affairs of African states.<sup>47</sup> Some African leaders believe that the most significant threats to furthering democracy in Africa are the International Republican Institute (IRI) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Both agencies, funded by the U.S. Congress, are accused of “[masquerading] as philanthropic organizations of goodwill”, while working directly in the interests of American foreign policy.<sup>48</sup> The IRI and USAID currently operate in more than 40 African countries and are chartered to make states friendlier to U.S. interests by expanding democracy and free markets while improving the lives of their people. The concern is that democratic principles and sovereignty are often violated in pursuit of American interests. In order to establish “solid” democracies in some states, these organizations attempt to unify opposition against a target government by providing strategic and monetary

support to the opposition and infiltrating educational, trade, and civic associations within the society; therefore, arousing support for the opposition party that they have effectively turned into a coalition. Akin to a coup, the IRI and USAID course through the veins of the country, affecting "regime change" through the civil society. It is this hijacking of the democratic processes by U.S.-funded agencies that causes Africans to glare at the U.S. with a cynical eye.<sup>49</sup>

### Civil Apathy

Despite American claims of altruism and goodwill throughout the world, many African leaders believe that the U.S. has demonstrated an attitude of apathy regarding human rights violations and social atrocities on the continent. Regardless of the notoriety of the crisis, the impression is that the U.S. historically has been apprehensive to commit to efforts requiring substantial military, civil, economic, or medical support. From the establishment of the slave trade and subjugation of indigenous peoples during colonialism, to "ignoring" atrocities during the post-colonial era (e.g., apartheid in South Africa, civil unrest in Somalia, genocide in Rwanda and Sudan, and rampant poverty, disease, and malnutrition throughout the continent), the perception is that the U.S. lacks concern for the issues adversely affecting Africans.

This perception is influenced by what Africans may think is an American continuance of European hegemony. When the European powers carved up Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it appeared to confirm Western claims of racial, cultural, and technical superiority. There was a common feeling among Westerners that Africa was the "white man's burden," and that white civilizations were tasked by virtue of its manifest global hegemony to civilize the continent.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, Westerners committed wide-scale subjugation of African populations without apology. The revelations of brutality, misrule, and misuse stoked fires of anti-colonialism and have rekindled an anger towards Westerners that has festered for decades.<sup>51</sup>

Conversely, Africans perceive that Westerners will not intervene on the continent if the price of the white man's burden costs white lives. In Somalia, despite the epidemic violence that plagued that country, the U.S. quickly abandoned that cause after support for intervention dissipated once American lives were lost.<sup>52</sup> Fifteen years past the U.S. withdrawal, Somalia is still a politically broken state experiencing considerable social and economic challenges. African critics muse that Americans did not perceive ensuring the protection of millions of Africans was worth the 18 lives lost in Mogadishu during U.S. intervention. Since Somalia, the U.S. has been increasingly more reluctant to intervene in African affairs, regardless of how seemingly dire the situation appears. Overall, the perception of American apathy toward African civil concerns is that the U.S. wants to gain access to the region, but does not want the headache of the social issues.

#### Increased Militarism

A key aspect of the imperialistic legacy during the European colonization of Africa was militarism—the subjugation of native peoples by colonial militaries in order to maintain security and stability within a territory so that national interests could be pursued. The perception of the current U.S. intervention in Africa is a perceived increase in militarism, where the U.S. is positioning itself militarily, leveraging its strengths to exploit continental governments. As previously substantiated, a part of the U.S. strategic cultural identity is a legacy of exploitation and heavy-handed diplomacy. Therefore, African perceptions of American actions and intent are formed through the lens shaped by this American legacy.

These perceptions may be substantiated by the current growing military footprint in Africa. Since 2001, the military base in Djibouti, East Africa, has been the main U.S. base for counter-terrorist activities in that region. However, the U.S. has grown increasingly interested in

establishing military bases and securing access to ports and airfields in Africa for additional strategic interests. The U.S. plans to increase military presence in other regions of Africa that are strategically important to the U.S. due to oil interests.<sup>53</sup> As recently as 2008, the Bush Administration engaged in escalating the militarization of U.S. policy in Africa to pursue security and the “war on terror” objectives in the region.<sup>54</sup>

The most notable increase in militarism has come with the establishment of AFRICOM. AFRICOM has been so widely unpopular amongst African leaders that the U.S. has been unable to persuade African governments to host it.<sup>55</sup> The recent Administration attempted to convince skeptical audiences in Africa that AFRICOM is ultimately driven by altruistic motives.<sup>56</sup> This will continue to be an uphill battle, given African perceptions of the American diplomatic legacy (strategic cultural identity) mixed with their own sensitivities about imperialism.

### Analysis

African leaders have developed an attitude of indignation and skepticism regarding American intentions on the continent, based upon hundreds of years of political manipulation, social disregard, and economic exploitation. Their perception and expectation, then, of American interests in Africa is that the U.S. will continue to pursue security of its interests through enhanced, low-intensity commitments in resource rich parts of the continent—not to end conflict and protect and secure African lives, but rather to protect narrow U.S. investments and interests. An interpretation of U.S. strategic culture as identified above may persuade African leaders to be skeptical of actual American objectives on the continent, potentially rendering U.S.-African policy ineffective.

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### U.S.-AFRICAN FOREIGN POLICY

[President Bush has sent] a message that the American people stand committed to helping the African continent, and helping on education, malaria, HIV/AIDS, trade, development. -Dana Perino, White House Press Secretary<sup>57</sup>

### Africa's Vitality to U.S. National Interests

Africa is vital to U.S. interests; however, U.S.-African policy has not set the conditions to yield the type of significant, positive results necessary to secure U.S. interests in the region. American leaders overtly acknowledge that African oil has become a national strategic interest. U.S. Senator Ed Royce, Chairman of the Congressional African Sub-committee, proclaimed that African oil should be treated as a priority for U.S. national security in the post 9-11 world. With an output of more than four million barrels a day, sub-Saharan Africa is the third largest producer of crude oil in the world. Furthermore, the Gulf of Guinea is likely to become the world's leading deep water offshore production centre, with an estimated 24 billion barrels of reserves. The long-term strategy for the U.S., then, is to weaken OPEC's hold on the market and eventually increase oil imports from Africa 9% by 2015.<sup>58</sup> Pursuit of economic interests in the region will require the U.S. to pursue policies that develop and maintain diplomatic relations with African oil producing states.

Africa is vital to U.S. national interests to reduce the threat of transnational terrorism and international narcotics trafficking that exists and persists within the borders of failed and failing states in the region. There is a real threat of terrorism in Africa, validated by the bombings of U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Additionally, there are indications that terror groups operating in Africa, which have aligned themselves with Al Qaida, are recruiting, training, and targeting Western interests and people. However, many African states will need support to increase their ability to thwart terrorism, denying terrorists potential safe-havens, recruits, and financing.<sup>59</sup> The previous Bush Administration recognized that defeating those threats depends as much on strengthening states and societies as on destroying enemies.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, the pursuit of national security interests in Africa will require the U.S. to partner with

African states to train, equip, and support African militaries to combat these transnational threats, while preventing the state-on-state military conflicts that have destabilized the region.

Additionally, it is within U.S. national interest to combat global poverty. Global poverty is a threat to national security because it facilitates the emergence and proliferation of a myriad of transnational security threats, including terrorism, crime, and pandemic disease.<sup>61</sup> Africa is at the center of the global AIDS crisis. More than 70% of the global population that has died from the disease is African.<sup>62</sup> However, the primary cause of death in Africa is not AIDS, but malaria, with 300-500 million cases emerging each year.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, nearly six million children die annually from malnutrition before their fifth birthday; and of those that survive, just more than a third will complete primary education. These statistics represent the horrid conditions within which the African people must survive. These conditions substantially increase the risk of violent intra-state conflict and erode a poorly governed state's ability to counter transnational threats.<sup>64</sup> Pursuit of national security interests in Africa will require the U.S. to invest in the African people through programs and initiatives that provide financial aide, as well as medical and educational assistance.

#### Proposal for Effective U.S.-African Foreign Policy

There is an intellectual dissonance between the American view of its strategic cultural identity and African interpretation of U.S. strategic culture. If this difference in perspectives is not addressed, it could lead to the failure of U.S.-African foreign policy objectives.

Consequently, a main objective of this study is to provide relevant recommendations on how to implement strategic cultural awareness concepts to positively effect U.S.-African foreign policy.

It is easy to comprehend that cultural ignorance has been a major impediment to Western-African progress; an obstacle that is aggravated when adverse actions validate poor perceptions.

American leaders must be willing to acknowledge that Africa's historical relationship with Westerners has led to their peril, eliciting a justified cause for suspicion and antagonism.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, given African perceptions of American hypocrisy and double-speak, American leaders must ensure that the practical nature of its policies are consistent with the rhetoric that it proliferates. Finally, an empathetic attitude must be taken toward African issues, as opposed to any intimation of exploitation that has characterized U.S. involvement on the continent.

Specifically regarding finite points of U.S.-African foreign policies, the U.S. needs to develop coherent plans to curb the actions or reduce the perceptions of economic exploitation, increased militarization, and political activities that challenge state sovereignty and self-reliance.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, a change in the national attitude is required; the U.S. must adjust its negative judgments, opinions, and perceptions of Africa and replace them with a positive outlook of transparent partnership and mutual respect. Doing so will enable African states to achieve self-determination, eventually maturing into a stable region where, collectively, African states can manage African affairs. The U.S. must pursue a whole of government approach that ensures actions across the spectrum of strategic engagement are consistent with this strategic message.

One of the most significant hindrances to progress in Africa is an attitude of disrespect and disregard for African people and African matters. Instead of forcing its way into Africa and imposing its will, the U.S. should treat African states, institutions, and leaders with respect, as equal partners with common strategic interests. Long considered international underachievers, African leaders are yearning for respect.<sup>67</sup> The Africans must be treated as having an equal share in the establishment, development, and achievement of strategic ends in their region.

However, it will take more than a good attitude to erase over fifty years of damaging U.S. foreign policy with Africa. The U.S. will also have to listen to the Africans themselves; there are

many who “continue to fight for democratization, human rights, and control over their own natural resources and economic rights.”<sup>68</sup> The Africans know where their problems are, what type of support they need and where to apply aid—they need to be treated with respect and empowered to act. Understanding strategic culture precepts, American leaders must be sure to develop open, transparent relationships, partnering with Africans as equals, listening to their ideas, and developing common interests.

Africans feel that they are already re-colonized under the yoke of economic development programs imposed without consultation and under the guise of democracy packaged to every country in the same wrapping. To break this perceptive yoke, the U.S. must catalyze African states towards self-determination. There is more than enough aid money for Africa; that money needs to be refocused and redistributed by those who know better. U.S. agencies need to work with Africa’s community institutions and rapidly emerging civil societies capable of defining their own need to determine where and how best to apply aid.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, the U.S. should begin working towards supporting a regional body that can manage the economic, political, security, and social issues of African states. Instead of engaging within individual states, violating the sovereignty of a state or risking destabilizing and igniting political tension between states, the U.S. should seek to work with and through a regional entity that is familiar with and, perhaps, better suited to handle African affairs. The U.S. should send resources to this regional organization that would be charged with revitalizing the political and economic structures of states within the region. Additionally, pursuing regionalization would establish “larger markets and greater commerce among African entrepreneurs [that] would not only afford populations greater prosperity but help foster internal and interstate peace.”<sup>70</sup> The regional entity could monitor African election processes within states, ensuring elections were



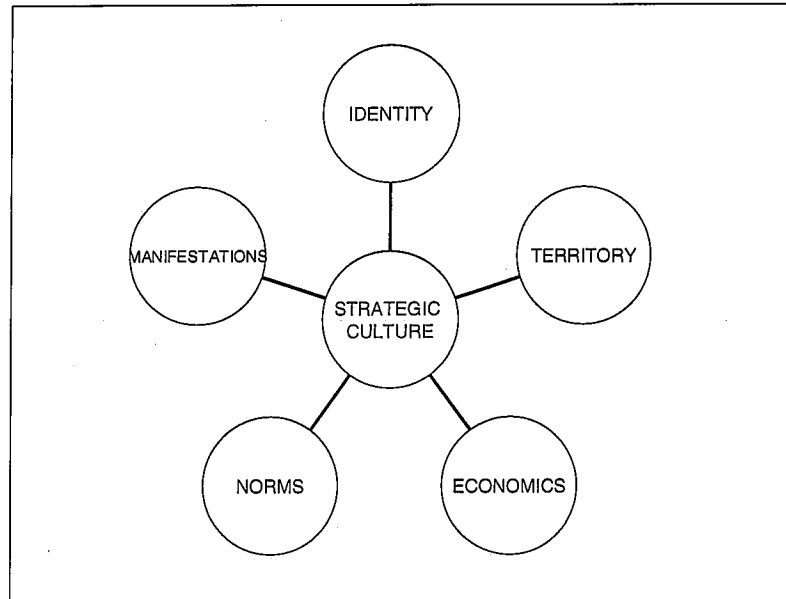
peaceful, legal, and fair.<sup>71</sup> The last piece of the puzzle would be to have a military force at its disposal that could enforce peace, maintain security, battle terrorism, and thwart transnational threats and crime. The U.S. would provide training and support to that force, as opposed to committing American military forces to individual states, which destabilizes regional balance.

The African Union (AU) has the potential to perform the sorts of tasks previously mentioned, much as the European Union. With the support of the U.S., the AU could be further empowered to pursue efforts toward building greater political and economic unity, and reducing widespread poverty, malnutrition, and disease on the continent. With a goal of increasing cooperation among more than 50 countries across the continent<sup>72</sup>, the AU is seen as even more ambitious than the EU.<sup>73</sup> The regionalization of African affairs would put an “African face on African issues,” thereby reducing the cultural dissonance in U.S.-African relations and facilitating cultural empathy between those more closely accustomed to the issues.

### CONCLUSION

This study has established that understanding strategic culture is vital to comprehend states’ perceptions of themselves within the global community and how other states view strategic actions, based upon the historical pattern of their respective beliefs, values, and actions. Readers should have gained an appreciation for the complexity of developing effective foreign policy objectives without knowledge of cultural awareness. In the future, American leaders must be aware of global perceptions of U.S. strategic culture and increase cultural understanding of Africa in order to pursue mutual interests with African leaders.

## APPENDIX A: STRATEGIC CULTURE MODEL



- Identity: Includes a state's view of itself and others' views of it, comprising the traits of its national character, its intended regional and global roles, and its perceptions of its eventual destiny.<sup>74</sup> Most often, this is shaped by a state's history and collective experiences.<sup>75</sup> Thus, a state's actions are often defined and shaped by what it is taught and believes about itself.
- Territory: The physical location of a state's territory greatly influences a state's relation with other states, as well as its ethnic composition, social design, attitude and world view; a state's geographic location ultimately affects its fate or fortune within the larger global community. This variable includes the geographic region that defines that nation, to include boundaries, shared borders, topography, weather, and terrain. As "geography is destiny", oftentimes this cultural factor is greatly affected by a state's proximity to and relations with other states.<sup>76</sup>
- Authority: Cultural factors that are affected by political organization and the lawful enforcement of societal regulations. Includes the influences by decision-making leadership, as well as military and national security professionals.<sup>77,78</sup>

- Economics: Cultural factors affected by the economic organization and production infrastructure of a state. Includes the factors of production, distribution, consumption and infrastructure.<sup>79,80</sup>
- Norms: This variable describes the accepted and expected modes of behavior within a society as affected by the religions, beliefs, and values within that state. Norms are typically affected by the political, social, and religious values commonly experienced within a state. Understanding a state's norms helps define which means of negotiation and/or engagement are most likely to be employed than others in attaining state goals.<sup>81</sup>
- Manifestations: Concrete displays of a culture's thoughts behaviors and goals, usually demonstrated through language, customs, traditions, and dress.<sup>82</sup> Cultural manifestations are an outward exertion of inward reflection.

## APPENDIX B: MAPS

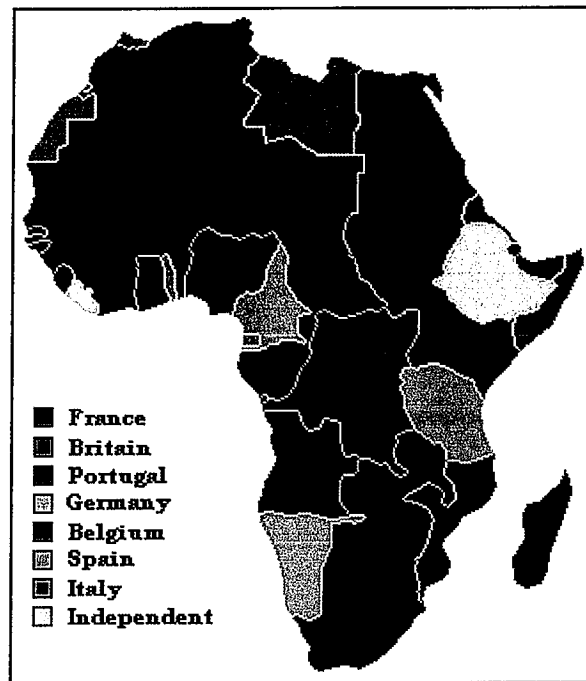


Figure 1: European Territorial Claims on the African Continent in 1914.  
Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa>

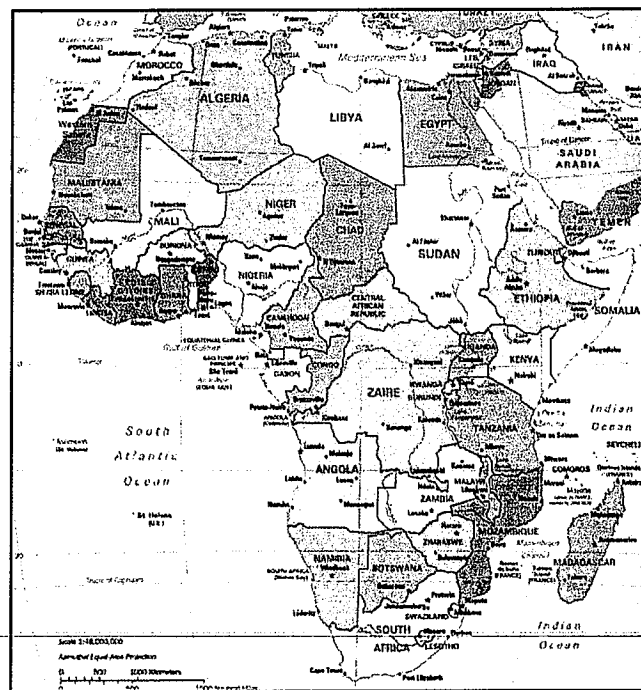


Figure 2: Political Map of Africa  
Source: [http://www.japanfocus.org/-Michael\\_Penn/3022](http://www.japanfocus.org/-Michael_Penn/3022)

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<u>Acronym/Abbreviation</u>	<u>Description</u>
AFRICOM (USAFRICOM)	U.S. Africa Command (USG multi-agency geographic combatant/functional command under DoD)
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AU	African Union (replaced OAU approx 2002)
DoD	United States Department of Defense
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OAU	Organization of African Unity
U.N./UN	United Nations
U.S.	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>51</sup> Vandervourt, 212.
- <sup>52</sup> Beinart.
- <sup>53</sup> From Africa Action.
- <sup>54</sup> LeMelle.
- <sup>55</sup> Rey.
- <sup>56</sup> LeMelle.
- <sup>57</sup> Porter.
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- <sup>61</sup> Rice.
- <sup>62</sup> From Africa Action.
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- <sup>66</sup> Vesely.
- <sup>67</sup> Marguerite Michaels, "Retreat from Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 1 (1992): <http://proquest.umi.com/pub/6gif>.
- <sup>68</sup> Rey.
- <sup>69</sup> Michaels.
- <sup>70</sup> Michaels.
- <sup>71</sup> Ngugi.
- <sup>72</sup> Refer to Appendix B: Maps, Figure 2 (Political Map of Africa).
- <sup>73</sup> Salih Booker, William Minter, and Ann-Louise Colgan, "Africa policy outlook 2003," World History Archives, *The Progressive Response* 7, no. 8, March 17, 2002. <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45/241.html> (accessed December 23, 2008).
- <sup>74</sup> Jeannie Johnson, "Strategic Culture: Refining the Theoretical Construct," RAND publication for DTRA: Advanced Systems and Concepts Office; Comparative Strategic Culture Curriculum, USG October 31, 2006, 5.

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<sup>75</sup> Gray, 10.

<sup>76</sup> Gray, 5.

<sup>77</sup> William Wunderle, "Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for US Armed Forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Countries." (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 12-13.

<sup>78</sup> Paulette Otis, Strategic Culture Lecture, USMC Command and Staff College. August 2008.

<sup>79</sup> Wunderle, 12-13.

<sup>80</sup> Otis..

<sup>81</sup> Johnson, 12.

<sup>82</sup> Wunderle, 12-13.



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