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THINKING THROUGH U.S. STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR AFRICA

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For the past decade, much has been debated and written about U.S. security interests in Africa. The George W. Bush administration has demonstrated a heightened awareness of Africa's importance to American geopolitical and economic interests as well as sensitivity to the continent's humanitarian challenges. The 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy identifies Africa as "a high priority" and "recognizes that our security depends upon partnering with Africans to strengthen fragile and failing states and bring ungoverned areas under the control of effective democracies."[1] To this end, the Bush administration has significantly increased aid, developmental assistance, military assistance, and other economic investments over any previous administration.[2] Moreover, it has taken the important step of creating a unified combatant command for Africa, which "will strengthen our security cooperation with Africa and help to create new opportunities to bolster the capabilities of our partners in Africa and help bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa."[3]

Africa Command, or AFRICOM, is a sensible and innovative mechanism for addressing U.S. security relationships with African nations and institutions. It reached full operational capability in October 2008 and will demonstrate sincere U.S. intentions for support to Africans while raising American awareness and understanding of both the security and humanitarian challenges on the African continent. AFRICOM will also help American policy makers understand the importance of the strategic relationship with Africa and move us from an era of

crisis-response relationships to a more mature partnership in order to foster stronger relationships on the continent and a more stable, secure environment for African citizens.

To date, however, the United States has neither publicly defined its own strategic goals and objectives with regard to Africa nor effectively coordinated its actions across various departments and agencies of the U.S. government. This has led to suspicion on the African continent as well as uncertainty among other U.S. allies about Washington's true intent. The purpose of this article is to present a framework for such a strategy—a "white paper on Africa"—and encourage the next administration to form promptly a task force to define a U.S. strategy. This strategy should lead to coordinated interagency actions and to engagement and actions with other supportive governments, as well as representatives of responsible nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil-society groups in the United States and in Africa.

A VISION FOR AFRICA

The first step is to establish a long-term vision for Africa in which its citizens' economic and human security needs are addressed and the strategic interests of the United States are protected. Formulating such a vision requires a more granular understanding of Africa and its constituent nations and people than the United States has customarily brought to bear on policy. This vision must be couched in reality and must be achievable within a definable time frame. I offer the following as a straw man—fully cognizant that before it is accepted as valid this vision must be discussed and coordinated with a wide audience: within our government, with Africans, and with other nations and institutions.

Africa is a continent made up of stable, well-governed nations, committed to peaceful coexistence and international order, contributing to the global economy, and rewarding its citizens with freedom, security, and prosperity.

When discussing Africa—if not the entire continent, certainly the sub-Saharan region—people often speak as if Africa were a single nation. In fact, Africa comprises fifty-three unique and different nations (fifty-four, if you include Western Sahara) and a population approaching a billion people—a sixth of the world's total. Some nations are democratic, some autocratic, and many are somewhere in between. Some are well governed, by leaders who want what is best for their citizens and have visions for the future. Some are governed poorly, by leaders who seemingly are interested only in preserving their own power bases or further enriching themselves. Poverty is rampant in many of the countries, yet some are blessed with abundant natural resources that could be developed; these countries, given the required investment in technology and value-adding industrial assets, could be transformed into modern, wealthy states. Other nations are

without these natural resources and also suffer from lack of water, fertile soil, temperate climate, or other means of sustaining their citizens. Corruption is a major factor in many African nations. Some of the world's most devout Christians and Muslims can be found throughout the continent, and with just about equal representation. In Africa one finds Nobel laureates, esteemed poets, and educators. One also finds vast numbers of the uneducated, unemployed, impoverished, and hopeless.

Africa is a very diverse landscape that does not respond to a unitary, one-size-fits-all solution. Africa also has a long history of being exploited, a factor that contributes greatly to suspicions that exist today. This history must be understood and appreciated as U.S. strategy is developed. Europe, Asia, and the United States have all seen Africa as a source of labor and natural resources and generally have taken what they wanted. No one can go back and rewrite history or make right all the wrongs of centuries, but we can be sensitive to this history as we forge our way ahead.

Finally, and significantly, Africans are not anti-American. It is true that they are suspicious of American intentions, a bit envious of what they see as disproportionate American wealth, and that they see Americans as sometimes arrogant and overbearing, but they like America and the ideals it advocates. The U.S. strategy should understand and build on this fact.

STRATEGIC COMPONENTS

I propose that the U.S. strategy focus on governance, security, and economic opportunity. If the nations of Africa are to succeed in this age of globalization, they must have all three of these strategic components. Failure of any of the three will cause the other components to fail and ultimately thrust the affected country into chaos and turmoil. Furthermore, to be successful, America's strategic relationship with Africa cannot rely on military, diplomatic, commercial, or humanitarian relationships alone. Only by coordinating actions across a broad engagement front can the United States effectively support Africa in building a civil society and attaining a better quality of life for its citizens while achieving the vision I am proposing.

Governance

Governance is fundamental to building a stable nation but has often been overlooked in planning efforts to develop strategic relationships with countries in Africa. The challenge of putting in place an effective, accountable government is formidable. The United States and other nations tend to accept what is in place and are reluctant to attempt to alter the internal relationships between the people of a nation and the government that represents them. Consequently, it often

appears the United States is more concerned with *regime* security than *national* security.[4] A few decades ago, there were divisive political debates over U.S. foreign policy emphasis on human rights within the countries with whom we interacted. During the Cold War, when ideological alignments were paramount, the prevailing view was that the United States put itself at a strategic or economic disadvantage by focusing on the "internal affairs" of a nation. Emphasis on good governance in the twenty-first century could be viewed as an evolutionary manifestation of human rights. Today, an increasing number of key leaders on both sides agree that governance is a key component of stability and that supporting nations have the moral justification to concern themselves with this component.

Dictating what kind of government a nation chooses and publicly assessing how well that government executes its responsibilities can, if carried to extremes, become symbols of arrogance and barriers to productive support. That said, the United States should endeavor to apply baseline standards to African nations—standards reflecting American values as well as those of any nation with whom the United States elects to build partnerships. To take an extreme example, the actions of the government of Sudan with respect to its citizens in Darfur are governance practices that the international community should refuse to accept. The same goes, with only slightly less force, for Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. There are other signs of poor governance on the African continent that the U.S. and other governments should refuse to recognize as acceptable.

More broadly, the United States can help build more effective governance by setting standards higher than it has in the past—against corruption, fraudulent elections, human rights abuses, and human trafficking. The United States should not condone such abuses in Africa any more than it would in any other part of the world. Rather, American leaders should work with responsible African leadership to define acceptable universal standards of governance to ensure that the cultures and identities of African citizens are preserved. These standards should be applied consistently and comprehensively in our relations with each country, providing support and assistance only to those governments meeting the standards. In those countries failing to meet the standards, the United States should seek ways to provide humanitarian support and hope through nongovernmental and responsible civil organizations, while exposing and condemning poorly performing African governments. This will require discipline within the U.S. interagency across economic, commercial, diplomatic, and security relationships. Once the United States demonstrates intolerance of poor governance over the spectrum of these activities, governments will change and conditions will be set for progress in security and economic opportunity.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation takes a step in the right direction by tying financial loans and grants to performance in seventeen governance

categories. These indicators focus on investments in education and health, control of corruption, respect for civil liberties and the rule of law, and commitment to policies that promote political and economic freedom.[5] These indicators should be expanded and consistently applied in our relationships with African nations. The United States is committed to democracy as the best form of government. Most African countries proclaim a public adherence to democracy, but their commitment to democracy in Africa is likely to remain, for the foreseeable future, a "mile wide and an inch thick."[6] Accordingly, the focus here should not be on telling Africans what kind of government they must have but on how well or how poorly an existing government is carrying out its responsibilities to its citizens. Countries that are moving toward or consolidating democracy are making significant gains: multiparty elections are becoming institutionalized, and the activities of their parliaments, courts, and other institutions of government are improving. African nations that meet the standards should be encouraged and supported. Those that do not meet the standards should suffer consequences.

The World Bank measures and ranks the actions of 212 nations in six dimensions of governance, and the data it collects allow officials to compare trends by country over the past decade. The metrics are increasingly comprehensive and use data derived by multiple sources across a wide spectrum of academic, private, and nongovernmental organizations.[7]

Unfortunately, eight African countries appear in the lowest tenth percentile, while almost all the remaining nations are in the lower fiftieth percentile. These findings demonstrate the seriousness of the problem of poor governance and weak institutions on the African continent. That said, Botswana and Namibia rank among the world's leaders in the dimension of political stability, South Africa ranks in the top twenty-fifth percentile in government effectiveness, and Botswana is in the top twenty-fifth percentile in control of corruption.[8] These performances should be held out as examples and models of what can be accomplished. Notably, no African nation ranks in the top twenty-fifth percentile in the rule of law, and thirteen of the bottom twenty nations in this category are African.[9]

Trends also provide insights. The evolution of governance standards in Côte d'Ivoire and Zimbabwe—both of which were once among Africa's best-governed nations—have shown the most sharply negative trends in governance over the past decade. On the positive side, South Africa, Algeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are among the ten countries showing the greatest improvement over this same period, though some of these countries started at very low levels.[10] These trends demonstrate the profound impact that political leadership can have in both directions. At the

same time, the distinctions among African countries caution us not to view the continent simplistically as a "hopeless" region (as the *Economist*'s May 2000 cover put it). Different countries face different problems and present different opportunities, relating to size, natural resource endowment, location, and past political record. This calls for greater differentiation and policy nuance on the part of the United States.

African nations require focused internal actions to improve governance as well as international encouragement and support. Improvement will establish the conditions necessary to achieve the vision. Failure, however, will lead to further disenfranchisement, vulnerability to extremist ideology, and, ultimately, violent conflict.

Inconsistent application of international governance standards on the part of the United States and other nations for economic or security reasons may provide short-term tactical advantages but will inevitably create strategic setbacks. The recent unrest in Kenya, a close and traditional U.S. partner in East Africa, highlights this fact. Kenya's governance factors have been trending negatively for some time; for example, Kenya recently overtook Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations in the world, as measured by Transparency International.[11] Kenya's December 2007 presidential election was marred by fraud, intimidation, and political abuse; observers unanimously labeled it as deeply flawed. Yet the United States officially congratulated President Mwai Kabiki within a day of his claim of victory, even before Kenyan election officials announced results. This and similar actions from the international community probably did not trigger the violent reaction that led to the deaths of over a thousand Kenyans, but it did reinforce arguments by the opposition faction that the "system" was stacked against it and that only violence would vindicate its position. Kenya's internal stability and the Kenya-U.S. bilateral relationship would have been much better served had the United States withheld its approval and supported a review of fraud allegations by Kenyan election authorities, with African Union and other international oversight.

Generally speaking, most African governments need to show serious improvement in how they provide for the welfare of their citizens at the most basic level. Responsible African leaders have formally recognized the importance of good governance. When the African Union (which succeeded the moribund Organization of African Unity) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) were established earlier this decade, both prescribed a peer-review process. The idea is for nations to have their governments evaluated by knowledgeable and reasonably impartial Africans, who would expose weaknesses and highlight strengths. The United States should formulate, in conjunction with the African Union and respected African leaders, universal standards of

governance and apply these standards consistently across the breadth of its activity with each nation. Thanks to NEPAD, these standards need not be imposed in a heavy-handed way that might feed African fears of neocolonialism. Rather than stitching the standards from whole cloth, the United States should support and help refine and energize NEPAD's peer-review process. This process was institutionalized specifically to temper international cynicism and build support for African initiatives, and several nations have completed it. Unfortunately, results have not been made public; the peer-review process has been slow to achieve its intended result. With American backing and technical assistance, the African Union should develop a schedule for all its member nations to undergo the peer review at least once every five years and hold its members accountable for taking corrective action.

Security

Security—like the other aspects of any strategy toward Africa—is both complex and multifaceted. African countries have been beset by political conflict and instability over the last fifty years of independence, causing human suffering on a massive scale and retarding economic, social, and political development.[12] Success in this realm is important, in that good governance and economic opportunity have no chance without a reasonably safe and stable environment. Yet excessive emphasis on security consumes valuable resources and opens the door to abuse by illiberal regimes and rogue elements. Many Africans, after many years of violent military takeovers, conflicts, and corruption, view their security forces with fear and suspicion. Others live in fear of armed militias that weak armies and police forces cannot keep at bay. The challenge for African states is to build professional security forces with limited resources while keeping them under civil control.[13] For this reason, assistance in building capability and capacity in security structures must be accompanied by efforts to provide professional education and training and to inculcate ethics consistent with high international standards and in harmony with the cultural ethos of the region.

My vision is of an Africa that is committed to peaceful coexistence and international order. To achieve these goals, Africans must work harder to get along with their neighbors; maintain awareness of activities within their borders, airspace, and maritime regions; develop collective capacity to respond to illegal or threatening activity; and provide local law and order forces that are respected, not feared.

Several strong trends point in the right direction. One of them is that interstate conflicts are declining. However, all too frequently militias, rebels, extremists, and criminals find sanctuary just across national boundaries and use this sanctuary to enable conflict, intimidation, or illegal activity. Borders—land,

maritime, and air—are vast and frequently unregulated. Although larger, better-equipped border control forces are needed, improved subregional cooperation growing out of greater trust and recognition of mutual interests with neighboring states is the single most important requirement.

Another positive trend is that coups are no longer casually tolerated by the African Union and the international community. Even when a despotic leader is overthrown, as in Mauritania in 2005, the clear message from Africans and from the international community has been that regime change by force will not be condoned and that recognition, support, and relationships would be suspended until a civil government is restored. Unfortunately, after a brief (two-year) period with a democratically elected leader, Mauritania again finds itself under military rule. The people of this troubled nation will suffer as the international community suspends relationships in disapproval. This policy is sound and should be continued, without exception. The corollary has also to be recognized: How should the United States react when a civilian "coup d'état"—an abrogation of the electoral process—happens, such as recently occurred in Kenya and, even more egregiously, in Zimbabwe?

Further, the Peace and Security Architecture of the African Union is conceptually sound, though slow in actualization. The Peace and Security Council as a major subordinate organ of the African Union works to develop programs and concepts across the continent. The Africa Stand-By Force, the Military Staff Committee, the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System, and the Peace Fund are all sound, useful concepts for Africa. If these mechanisms were fully implemented, the security of the continent would vastly improve. Unfortunately, organizational incapacity, limited resources, and bureaucratic lethargy have rendered implementation slow and weak.

In many cases, such subregional economic aggregations as the Economic Community of West African States, the East African Community, and the Southern African Development Community have made decisions and moved forward absent guidance and support from the African Union. This is understandable and not all bad, but it will lead to problems down the way in matters of interoperability, logistics and sustainment, and balance of forces. U.S. strategy should strongly support the African Union and the regional economic community organizations that show promise. Diplomatic and developmental posture should be increased with these multilateral organizations, and AFRICOM should have a presence nearby to offer support, assistance, and advice when needed. This does not mean that bilateral relations should be forgone but that bilateral support and assistance should be congruent with the goals and aims of larger subregional and regional security plans. AFRICOM could be a very effective enabler of this approach.

On the bilateral level, nations should be encouraged and assisted in conducting comprehensive, cross-government reviews of security force requirements. Typically, African armies are too large, and police and judicial systems are weak and underresourced. Likewise, most nations' maritime and air forces are too small and too poorly equipped to serve their security needs. Logistics, maintenance, and sustainment capacities either do not exist or are far too small to meet requirements. AFRICOM could assist through training, mentoring, and negotiating affordable but effective contract-support efforts at the regional level. The U.S. Navy's Africa Partnership Station, which recently completed its inaugural tour in the Gulf of Guinea, represented a significant enhancement of some of these efforts.[14]

African nations should be strongly encouraged to conduct comprehensive and realistic security reviews to identify and evaluate security threats, highlight and understand the risks of various courses of action, commit resources pragmatically, and develop long-term capacity-building plans to structure their security forces to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. These plans should include agreements for regional cooperation where possible. Regional hubs for maritime operations, air and transportation capacity, and maintenance/logistical support are all feasible and would likely garner donor support while yielding operational efficiencies.

In their internal reviews, African nations should be urged to factor in their contributions to the regional standby brigades and to commit themselves to ensuring that their contributions—staff elements, infantry battalions, or engineer, medical, or transportation elements—are organized, trained, equipped, and prepared. Units assigned to the standby brigades should view this assignment as one of honor, and nations should be held accountable to assign forces that are ready and capable.

Finally, AFRICOM should be a conduit for the professional military education of security forces in Africa. Many African officers attend military education and training institutions in the United States, Europe, and China, and this should be continued and encouraged. Beyond that, the effectiveness of several war colleges and command and staff colleges on the continent could be greatly enhanced through partnerships with U.S. professional military education institutions. Sharing research, exchanging faculty and students, and establishing virtual connectivity are but a few ways in which this collaboration could materialize and yield substantial dividends. Professional military educational initiatives should stress links between the military, parliament, and civil society. Other high-priority topics would include budgeting and fiscal responsibility, democratic control, and professional ethics.

An important operational goal of this professional education would be to advocate professional noncommissioned officer corps and to encourage and support the efforts of African nations to build them. The manpower is present, but emphasis on training, empowering, holding accountable, and properly paying this all-important element of African security forces is notably lacking. AFRICOM and other allies can render much help in this area.

Economic Opportunity

Economic opportunity equates to hope. Mankind can endure hardship and trepidation if there is hope for a better tomorrow for self and family. Too frequently in Africa extreme poverty, catastrophes (natural and man-made), and other factors combine to deny hope to citizens. Without hope, people become disenfranchised and bitter, easy prey for extremist ideology.

Economic opportunity across the continent is heavily influenced by the world's growing demands for African energy resources and other commodities. China's growing energy thirst and greater involvement in the economies of many African nations are particularly salient. China has brought the benefit of cheap and durable goods to African consumers as well as investment in infrastructure, health care, and education. China's policy of noninterference in the sovereign affairs of nations has provided de facto support for some of the world's worst despots and therefore poses an unacceptable strategic alternative to U.S. goals concerning governance standards and practices. China's trade with Africa increased dramatically, from $11 billion in 2000 to $56 billion in 2006, making it the continent's third-largest trade partner, behind the United States and France. Beijing's target for African trade in 2010 is $100 billion. Over eight hundred Chinese state-owned enterprises are active on the continent, and Angola has become China's largest supplier of oil. Chinese firms have already invested more than $6 billion in Africa in nine hundred projects, most heavily in the hydrocarbon sector. U.S. policy, then, must incorporate America's strategic interest in ensuring commercial and physical access to hydrocarbons. American policy should also recognize that while Africa's hope resides in the economic opportunity latent in its natural resources, especially oil, its potential for benefiting the African people at large has thus far been squandered. Reversing this trend calls for building both human capital and physical infrastructure.

Achieving the vision in this sphere will be neither quick nor easy, but it is attainable. On the human side, the focus must be on health care and education, in order to build a competitive labor force for the twenty-first century. It may take a generation or more, but ensuring that all children have access to schools is a mandatory first step. African nations must take the lead in promoting opportunities

for children to go to school; they must re-create a culture that emphasizes the importance of education for all children.

Public-private partnerships can help. I have been in schools on the continent that have no books, no paper or chairs, where dozens of eager children sit on the ground listening to a teacher as she writes on a slate board. If schools in the United States adopted sister schools in villages in Africa and donated books and supplies, the schools in Africa would benefit and the children, who are the future of Africa, would be durably grateful.

What is lacking on the part of the United States is not material, however, but bureaucratic attention and coordination. In 2002, for example, the Bush administration launched the Africa Education Initiative and committed itself to provide $600 million over eight years to increase access to quality basic education. In 2007, the President's Expanded Education for the World's Poorest Children was announced, with an additional $525 million over five years.[15] The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) recently introduced the Basic Education Initiative and asked the U.S. Congress to appropriate over $600 million in fiscal year 2009 to support basic educational programs worldwide.[16] This initiative should continue and grow, and much more effective coordination should be put in place across U.S. government agencies working in Africa.

Likewise, through the Malaria Initiative and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the United States has done a great deal to improve health care in Africa. However, much remains to be done. Two-thirds of HIV/AIDS-infected persons worldwide live in Africa.[17] African statistics in birth mortality (the average life spans of both mothers and children are at the bottom of the world's averages) reflect the inadequate health care infrastructure across the continent. African children under five die at twice the rate of those in the developing world as a whole. The odds that a sub-Saharan African woman will die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth are one in sixteen, compared to one in 3,800 in the developed world.[18] Almost half the population does not have access to clean, safe drinking water, and two-thirds lack basic sewage and waste disposal systems.[19] This situation is exacerbated by the flight of trained health care workers seeking higher-paying jobs in Europe and the United States. The international community can and should increase efforts to help. Again, this is best led by NGOs and private organizations on a local level.

Food security is the next area that needs attention. Nature is not kind to vast areas of the continent; droughts and other natural disasters routinely threaten the food supply. Still, there are large swaths of Africa that could serve as fertile food baskets for the continent. Countries like Nigeria and Zimbabwe were once food exporters that now, for different reasons, must now rely on imports or food aid. Good internal agriculture programs and governmental incentives in these

countries can turn this situation around. In the 2006–2007 growing season, Malawi doubled its agricultural productivity through United Nations assistance with fertilizers and seeds.[20] The U.S. Department of Agriculture and USAID can assist many other countries with twenty-first-century agro-technology that can turn them into bountiful food producers.

Electricity is another critical dimension of infrastructure, one requiring administrative focus as well as resources. More modern and better-maintained hydroelectric plants along the Congo and Zambezi rivers could provide clean, efficient, low-cost energy for much of south and central Africa. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and other public-private ventures could facilitate such development with investment support from the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

Transportation in Africa also needs serious help. Most of the road and rail networks on the continent were built to provide access from the interior to the ocean ports to carry extracted resources for shipment. Even now, China is repairing and modernizing a railroad from Zambia through Tanzania to support the extraction of copper from a mine China has purchased in Zambia. Both Zambia and Tanzania will benefit from this rail line, as will China. But more needs to be done within the continent to build and repair roads, railways, and navigable waterways that will encourage intercontinental trade and exchange as well as port and harbor improvements that will ease export operations. It would be in the strategic interest of the United States, as well as helpful to African partners, for Washington to play a leading role in developing these transportation networks.

If Africans are to realize value from their goods, they must be able to trade them with fewer hurdles and costs. The costs of interior transportation to major capitals can be five times higher than for shipping from African ports to markets in Europe, Asia, or North America. Part of this is due to low volumes, bad roads, and lack of competition. But corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy is also a major factor.

The United States could do Africa an enormous service and promote its own interests by acting as an agent for change of multilateral international trade rules on behalf of African governments. It has much to gain diplomatically, commercially, and strategically by doing so.

The United States should adopt a comprehensive strategy in its activities with African nations and institutions. The United States should engage international partners, challenging them to lead, follow, or get out of the way. Most importantly, the United States should work more closely with well disposed African

partners to improve their governance, security, and economic opportunity. It is the morally right thing to do; it demonstrates American intentions to maintain ethical balance; and it is in our own strategic interests. America can demonstrate its true greatness while helping worthy African citizens attain a better life.

A new administration with focused priorities, using all the tools of our nation, including a fully operational Africa Command, is positioned to accomplish the recommendations of this article and to help African nations attain the vision. In the words of that great corporate philosopher Nike—"Just do it!"

NOTES

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