

Africa Policy Outlook 2006

By Salih Booker & Ann-Louise Colgan | March 17, 2006

2006 will help clarify whether the compassionate concern for the African continent, worn like a badge by western leaders last year, is a true determinant of Africa policy, or whether it merely masked other, more “strategic” and less “benevolent” impulses and interests.

In 2006, Africa will witness a new wave of U.S. soldiers landing on the continent for training and other missions, as Washington takes aim at reshaping Africa to better serve America’s security interests. The trend in the Bush Administration’s Africa policy is toward an even greater focus on the so-called “War on Terrorism,” with emphasis on intelligence gathering, securing “ungoverned spaces” on the vast continent, and pre-positioning soldiers and equipment to project force globally and to deter al-Qaeda in Africa. But American involvement in actual peacemaking or peacekeeping missions in Africa is far less likely, even as genocide continues in Darfur, Sudan.

The same Africa policy is equally intended to secure access to West African oil, which the Bush Administration now views as a strategic national interest. Imports of African oil are projected to grow from their current 15 percent of the U.S. total to 25 percent by 2015. The U.S. already imports more oil from Africa than Saudi Arabia, and within a decade it could become a greater source of oil imports than the whole of the Persian Gulf.

This year, when it comes to U.S. relations with Africa, the pre-occupation of U.S. officials with oil and guns will stand in stark contrast to the expressed concern of the American people regarding the ongoing genocide in Darfur and global health challenges like HIV/AIDS and the bird flu.

The Bush Administration’s policy also fails to address Africans’ own concerns with human development, still an urgent priority despite last year’s proclaimed Africa focus.

From Live 8 to LIVE X: Assessing the Aftermath of “Africa’s Year”

If 2005 was the “year for Africa,” 2006 is likely to offer a different picture of U.S. designs on the continent.

Last year, rich country governments fell over one another making new promises to double aid, relieve debts, treat more people living with HIV/AIDS, and support African initiatives. The promises made were wholly inadequate, but they now provide African governments, civil society and international activists with specific measures to hold rich country leaders and institutions accountable in 2006.

The Group of Eight (G-8) rich country leaders last year promised to increase aid to Africa by \$25 billion annually by 2010. This year will be the first opportunity to measure progress towards this commitment.

While European Union countries have committed to provide 0.7 percent of their Gross National Product (GNP) in development assistance for impoverished countries by 2015,¹ the U.S. still refuses to embrace that longstanding commitment.



The Bush administration claims that it has tripled aid to Africa since 2000, but the reality is that U.S. development aid to Africa has not even doubled. The total of all forms of U.S. aid to Africa increased by only 56 percent during President Bush's first term, and over half of the increase consisted of emergency food aid rather than development assistance. In his new budget for 2007, the President has requested only

\$3 billion for the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), which he had initially promised would reach a budget of \$5 billion per year by 2006.

In successive years, the amount requested and ultimately appropriated has fallen far short of the President's promise. Only three African countries have received any money from the MCA to date—Benin, Cape Verde and Madagascar.

Last September, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank approved a G-8 plan to cancel the debts of 18 countries, 14 in Africa, beginning in 2006. This move by the G-8 and the financial institutions set an important precedent for 100 percent debt cancellation, but it excludes the majority of African countries. It also continues the precedent of future debt relief being tied to harmful economic conditions. At present, there are still 20 African countries burdened with such conditions in the queue for possible future debt cancellation. The debt deal equally fails to acknowledge the illegitimate nature of these debts, most of which resulted from irresponsible loans to former unrepresentative regimes and did not benefit the people that must now pay them.

Contrary to popular perceptions, more money continues to flow out of Africa than trickles in from donors. There are also real concerns that additional

nations now in line for debt cancellation will have to wait at a minimum until mid-2007—a full two years after the G-8 Summit in Scotland—for their debts to be cancelled to the World Bank, and that these countries will have to continue paying their debts in the meantime even after they have met all the onerous creditor conditions.

On HIV/AIDS, the G-8 promised last year to make treatment available to all who need it by the year 2010. But these rich countries failed to say how they would reach this goal and how much it will cost. Last year, the deadline passed for the “Three by Five” initiative of the World Health Organization, which was intended to put three million additional people living with HIV/AIDS on life-saving therapy by the end of 2005. The goal

was not met: only an additional one million people had been given access to anti-retroviral treatment by the end of the year, and the death toll from the pandemic still surpassed three million people in 2005.

This year, the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS will review progress and challenges in meeting the goals set by the 2001 UNGASS, and will discuss the new universal access targets for HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support to be achieved by 2010.

But without a significant new political and financial commitment from the U.S. to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and other important multilateral initiatives, little change is anticipated in the course of this pandemic and new targets will likely remain elusive. At best, one in ten Africans in need of antiretroviral treatment is now receiving it.

While last year was marked by the “Live 8” concerts, this year will feature the “LIVE X” military

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maneuvers in West Africa. This “live exercise” will see 6,500 troops of the NATO Response Force sweep in on the 10 islands that constitute Cape Verde for 14 self-sustaining days of make-believe missions. LIVE X is a large-scale military exercise to be run out of the Netherlands with forces coming from bases in Germany, Spain and France. Sadly, the nearly three million people internally displaced in Darfur and threatened by continuing violence cannot expect to see a “live exercise” of a Response Force to provide them protection and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The LIVE X and other training exercises, such as operation “Africa Endeavor 06” scheduled for Pretoria in July, along with military sales programs and military officers training, are indicative of the higher priorities of U.S. policy in Africa. Testifying before Congress in 2005, General James L. Jones, Supreme Allied Commander of the U.S. European command, said, “the breeding grounds of terrorism and illicit activity on the continent of Africa require our attention.” He said that a more proactive U.S. approach would offer a “powerful inoculation” against future terrorist activity. Jones stated that U.S. military programs in Africa, “support the long-term strategic objectives of the ‘Global War on Terrorism’ by building understanding and consensus on the terrorist threat; laying foundations for future ‘coalitions of the willing;’ and extending our country’s security perimeter.”²

General Jones described dozens of current U.S. initiatives on the continent designed to develop effective security structures in Africa and boost African governments’ counter-terrorism efforts—from NATO action on the Mediterranean in North Africa, to the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative, which is the long-term interagency plan to combat terrorism on the continent. These initiatives are the framework through which the U.S.

envisions engaging future threats on the African continent.

With 1,500 U.S. troops of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa based in Djibouti since 2002, an increase in training exercises across the continent and an explosion in Africa-focused anti-terrorism training programs, what is now unfolding is the most significant U.S. military engagement in Africa since 25,000 troops went to Somalia in 1992. More importantly, this ongoing expansion of U.S. military assets and interests in Africa reflects a growing bias toward African militaries as the key institutions through which to promote security in the region, a security defined differently than that presently preoccupying most African governments and their people.

Africa’s “New” Strategic Value: The U.S. Quest for Energy Security

At present, conventional wisdom holds that African oil will occupy a position of even greater strategic importance to the U.S., Europe and Asia (principally China) over the next decade. Africa has always been considered of strategic importance to U.S. global interests because of its enormous resources and its expansive geography. Now, it is estimated that the U.S. will invest over \$10 billion per year in oil activities in the region in the coming decade. According to the latest trade statistics (2004), oil imports account for more than 70 percent of all U.S. imports from Africa.

The principal motivation for the U.S. focus on African oil is uncertainty over Middle East oil supplies and the consideration of petroleum imports as a matter of national security. According to observers, West African oil is advantageous for western countries because it is high-quality and low sulphur (therefore easier to refine) and closer to markets in the U.S.

It is also assumed that because this oil is mostly extracted from offshore fields, it is somehow removed from political instability and conflicts in the producing countries and can more easily be protected from turmoil. However recent headlines remind us that the 50-year turmoil over oil extraction in Africa continues unabated. Hostage-taking and takeovers of oil platforms in the Niger Delta are becoming almost routine and are increasingly the defining strategy for marginalized communities demanding justice and economic compensation from foreign oil companies and the Nigerian government.

In fact, the projected increase in U.S. investments in Nigeria's oil industry and the subsequent U.S.-Nigeria security deal on the Niger Delta, point toward a further militarization of a longstanding conflict over economic compensation for environmental damage and economic injustice. In early 2006, a court in Nigeria ordered Royal Dutch Shell Oil Company to pay \$1.5 billion in compensation to the ethnic Ijaw inhabitants of the Niger Delta, where clashes over the control of the region's oil wealth have intensified. The Ijaw community took the case to court after Shell refused to pay compensation ordered by the country's parliament. These demands for compensation for decades of environmental damage are increasingly part of the rallying cry of armed groups in the Niger Delta threatening Nigeria's oil industry.

Some in the U.S. foreign policy establishment argue for a "geopolitical shift in U.S. energy policy" by replacing the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Guinea as America's main foreign spigot for oil. However, a failure to understand that Africa's oil wealth is itself a source of violent conflict and instability is likely to aggravate the situation further and make U.S. operators easy targets in local battles.

Rhetoric vs. Reality: The Case of Sudan

While U.S. geo-strategic interests define the heart of Africa policy, the growing U.S. presence on the continent is being cast in terms of a humanitarian mission for public relations purposes. In East Africa, the U.S. anti-terrorism task force is rebuilding schools and clinics, installing water pumps and making medical house calls, as part of the campaign for hearts and minds—especially in heavily Muslim parts of the continent. The State Department estimates that 75 percent of public diplomacy resources for Africa are engaged in reaching out to the Muslim community, which constitutes about 43 percent of the continent's population. As one Task Force soldier put it, "It's about pushing the boundaries of where we are wanted."³

But perhaps nowhere is the confusion between the warm façade of humanitarianism and the cold calculations of security concerns more revealing than in U.S. policy toward the Sudan. And 2006 is likely to be the pivotal year in determining the course of U.S. relations with Sudan and the ultimate response to the genocide in Darfur.

On the one hand, the Bush administration accuses Khartoum of genocide—a crime against humanity—and has taken some steps to respond to this crisis. Yet on the other hand, the U.S. forges a strategic alliance with the Sudanese Mukhabarat (intelligence services) and is anxious to maintain an intelligence-sharing relationship with the Sudanese government in the context of the so-called "War on Terrorism." Last spring, in an attempt to forge closer ties with the Islamist regime in Khartoum, the CIA sent a private jet to transport the Sudanese head of intelligence, General Abdullah Gosh, to Washington for high-level talks.

Recently, Gosh's name was revealed on the list given to the International Criminal Court by the United Nations (UN) Commission of Inquiry into the crimes against humanity in Darfur, suggesting that he is one of the most senior officials responsible for the genocide. Now, the CIA is building a listening post on the outskirts of Khartoum to monitor events in the Horn of Africa and wants Khartoum's cooperation.⁴ This continuing collaboration shows how the growing U.S. relationship with Khartoum constrains the U.S. response to the genocide in Darfur.

As Africa policy increasingly mirrors cold war dynamics, U.S. policy toward Sudan reveals a similar hierarchy of geo-strategic interests, equally distorting and bringing equally negative consequences. In this hierarchy of interests, intelligence sharing with Khartoum is more important than stopping the genocide that has already claimed over 400,000 lives. And Sudan's North-South peace agreement is valued more for facilitating the normalization of ties with the Khartoum government (including the prospect of lifting sanctions and renewing U.S. operations in Sudan's growing oil industry) than for the reconstruction of the South and the development of its people.

In 2006, as during the past two years, vigilant advocates and observers will highlight this duplicity and will urge the Bush administration to place higher priority on stopping the genocide in Darfur and providing support to the Southern Sudanese' efforts to realize the full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Whose Security? Human Security through Human Rights and Human Development

This year, U.S. policy toward Africa should provoke a focused debate over what really constitutes security in today's world.

While the Bush administration promotes conventional concepts of U.S. security interests in Africa (restricting opportunities for terrorism, securing oil, combating drug trafficking, and monitoring uranium production), this perspective is at odds with a broader concept of human security interests in Africa. The latter conceptualization emphasizes the interdependence of all peoples and countries, the priority that must be given to defeating AIDS and other public health challenges, to reducing poverty and protecting the environment.

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Africa remains by far the region worst affected by HIV/AIDS, still the greatest global threat to human security and far more deadly than terrorism. Yet little progress can be expected again this year in turning the tide of this global pandemic. In

addition, the ideological bent of Bush Administration policies on HIV/AIDS is directly at odds with African countries' priorities. African civil society groups, like the Pan-African Treatment Access Movement (PATAM) will continue to assert their opposition to the administration's imposition of abstinence-only efforts and other such restrictions that hinder a comprehensive approach to this crisis.⁵ In the U.S., Europe, and Africa, the HIV/AIDS crisis continues to grow each year.

The consequences of the Administration's failure to prioritize human security and to address HIV/AIDS with appropriate urgency will also increasingly be felt as the world prepares for a possible bird flu pandemic. The best way to protect

Americans against a catastrophic outbreak of the H5N1 avian influenza virus is to work to prevent and control outbreaks elsewhere in the world—by helping to strengthen the emergency public health infrastructure in affected developing nations and by ensuring access to treatment in those countries, especially in Africa.

In early 2006, the first cases of avian flu have appeared in West Africa, and international agencies warn that impoverished African countries could be devastated by such an outbreak and that Africa could be the “weakest link” in the global effort to arrest the bird flu before it begins to be transmitted by humans.⁶ This year, the U.S. and other countries must work with African countries to address this grave and growing challenge before it is too late. Recent polls show a majority of the U.S. public is concerned about the spread of bird flu, and the Administration’s Africa policy should be seen to reflect this in 2006.⁷

As countries in East Africa declare a state of emergency in response to drought, and the UN estimates that millions of people in these countries are at risk of starvation, Africa’s vulnerability to humanitarian crises will continue to require international attention. The structural roots of such crises, in economic and environmental terms, require real scrutiny and investment by the international community this year, to sharpen the focus on human security for people in Africa and globally—for the two are increasingly connected.

The Ballot & The Bullet: Key Countries in Transition

In 2006, some of the largest countries on the African continent remain plagued by insecurity and conflict, but most are in the process of a transition requiring U.S. and international support this year.

Despite the direct responsibility that the U.S. shares for some of Africa’s current conflicts, and despite the U.S. capacity to provide key support for conflict resolution on the continent, the current U.S. approach to promoting security in Africa intends to keep the U.S. one step removed from engagement with African initiatives. The U.S. refuses to participate in multilateral peacekeeping efforts in Africa, and it has failed to lead international action to protect the people of Darfur.

In its Sudan policy, as noted above, the U.S. subordinates human rights concerns to a geo-strategic agenda. There is a clear and urgent need for an international intervention in Darfur to stop the genocide, provide protection to civilians and humanitarian operations, create a climate for successful peace talks and help facilitate the return of displaced people to their lands. The African Union mission in Darfur needs and deserves international support to arrest this crime against humanity.

But 18 months since it acknowledged that genocide was taking place in Darfur, the U.S. has yet to articulate and pursue a plan to stop it.

Meanwhile, the people of southern Sudan have stepped onto a new political battleground for continuing their own struggle for self-determination and development in the south. With the tragic death last summer of the southern leader, Dr. John Garang, the vision of a “new Sudan,” unitary and democratic, has lost its principal prophet. The Islamist segment of the Government of National Unity, which holds the reins of power in Khartoum, intends to go slow in implementing the CPA, and U.S. engagement this year will be critical in holding Khartoum to its previous commitments. Sudan also faces growing challenges from other alienated and marginalized communities throughout the country, particularly the Beja people in the

east, and these challenges will likely grow in the coming months.

The conflict in northern Uganda continues this year despite limited efforts at resolution. It has attracted international attention to the broader question of child soldiers but inadequate efforts to end the violence of the Lord's Resistance Army, which has recently been implicated in attacks across the border in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Parliamentary and presidential elections are planned for the DRC by the end of June, and these will mark the first free elections in that country since independence in 1961. These votes will form a key step in the peacemaking process in DRC, though ongoing instability in the east of the country and the presence there of Burundian and Rwandese militias remains a destabilizing reality. Many Congolese refugees have not been returned, especially in eastern Congo, and will not be able to vote, and there are concerns that the international community may be overly eager to simply hold some manner of elections this summer in order to declare a successful transition and to begin reducing the role of the UN mission there. It is estimated that more than 1,000 people are still dying each day in the humanitarian crisis in eastern Congo.⁸

In West Africa, countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone will this year take the first steps in the long climb up and out of the deadly chaos visited upon their people during the past two decades.

2006 began with the inauguration of Africa's first woman elected President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Liberia. Her accomplishment is part of the picture of increased representation of women in the political process in Africa. Three African countries—Rwanda, Mozambique & South Africa—rank among the top 15 countries worldwide in the percentage of female parliamentarians (more than 30

percent). Two of the four female Prime Ministers in the world today are in Africa—in Mozambique and São Tomé e Príncipe.

Yet the West African sub-region remains unstable, as several countries emerge from civil war seeking to consolidate peace processes and plan for elections, including Cote d'Ivoire, which is scheduled for elections in October 2006. There is still a large presence of UN peacekeeping operations in the area, with more than 25,000 troops in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire combined.

In Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, President Olusegun Obasanjo has expressed interest in seeking a third term in 2007, a move that would require a constitutional amendment. Members of the Nigerian National Assembly have expressed dismay at this possibility. Nigeria remains a key partner for the U.S. in Africa, and its internal challenges (poverty, ethnic and religious violence, HIV/AIDS, environmental issues) must be confronted as part of its ongoing democratic transition.

In East Africa, recent important elections have failed to produce new and inspiring choices. In Ethiopia, a government crackdown following a wave of political unrest, has left over 100 opposition politicians, journalists, intellectuals and aid officials behind bars for well over five months now and in Uganda harsh tactics were used to deny the opposition presidential candidate a fair contest at the polls.

In each case, public outcry and calls for democratic change will continue to grow in 2006. The current battles over constitutional reform in Kenya are indicative of the new arena for political struggle on the road of democratization. African civil society actors demand a new social contract between African states and their citizens to guarantee basic rights regardless of which party may be in power.

In Somalia, the power vacuum and absence of social and economic infrastructure continue to be neglected by the international community, and should receive new scrutiny in 2006 beyond the prism of the so-called “War on Terrorism” and related security concerns.

In southern Africa, Zimbabwe poses deep questions regarding how authoritarian rule will eventually be ended there and highlights major challenges facing all the former white minority ruled states in that sub-region. The African Commission on Human and People’s Rights of the African Union (AU) has adopted a resolution strongly denouncing Zimbabwe’s human rights practices. The move marks the first time the AU has observed and condemned a member state’s government for rights abuses. This year, greater political efforts will be required to press for negotiations between the government and opposition in Zimbabwe, though the recent splintering of the opposition now poses new challenges. In South Africa, where the government has promised to transfer 30 percent of commercial farmland to black owners by 2014, less than four percent had been redistributed by the beginning of 2006.

In North Africa, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s recent trip to Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia highlights the warming relationship between the U.S. and these countries, with the backdrop of a perceived mutual interest in confronting Islamic militants and other terrorist threats. However, the dual threats of radical religious fundamentalism and the anti-democratic authoritarianism of governments in many North African countries require a well-informed policy response if the U.S. is to help increase the chances

for sustainable democracy, and decrease the chances for conflict in this vital region.

In general, the wave of democratization that has swept over Africa during the past decade and a half has all but put an end to military regimes and one-party rule. The continent has settled into a new era of multiparty politics where elections are now the norm for competing for a share of local, regional and national power, and the competing parties are representative of a range of ethnic, regional, social and economic interests. At the same time, some civilianized military rulers and old-style despots are still in place, and have been able to beat back challenges from newly legal opposition parties and their leaders.

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Whether by fixing election results or merely abusing the advantages of incumbency to deny airtime, public space or security to opponents, the heavy hands of those in power still carry significant weight. As a consequence, Africa continues to be the continent with the youngest population and the oldest political leaders.

The African Union continues to develop its own institutional structures to promote continent-wide integration, and it is developing its capacity to respond to conflicts and other political challenges. However, as the shortcomings of its mission in Darfur demonstrate, the AU is still a nascent organization and needs concerted international support in its efforts to address genocide and other serious challenges around the continent. The refusal of the AU to transfer the chair of the organization to Sudanese President Omar El-Bashir in January 2006, because of concerns over Darfur, marked an important step and a break from its predecessor institution’s shortcomings.

Finally, the United Nations Human Rights Council, proposed by the UN Secretary-General and likely to be established in 2006, will offer a reformed vehicle for addressing violations of human rights in Africa and making recommendations for changing state behavior toward its citizens.

As pointed out by Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a strong and effective Human Rights Council is in the interests of all, especially of Africa.⁹ Recent expressions of U.S. opposition to the latest proposals for this body are a cause for concern, and the U.S. should continue to engage in international efforts to create a strong and credible body as one concrete expression of U.S. support for African human rights priorities.

Conclusion

In 2006, the narrow notion of security promoted within current U.S. Africa policy, and the U.S.' rejection of the more holistic concept of "human security," will be challenged by the growing threat posed by public health concerns and other global issues. This dichotomy will also serve to illuminate the divide between African priorities and American imperatives on today's global challenges.

Increasingly, the interests pursued by this Administration appear to be at odds with what

average Americans want to see in U.S. Africa relations. Recent polls show a real interest on the part of the American public in African affairs, and indicate a more sophisticated understanding of shared interests in addressing shared global challenges.¹⁰ These polls, and escalating activism on Darfur and other key issues, show public support for greater U.S. engagement on African priorities.

In recent years, as the "compassionate conservatism" of the White House in its Africa policy has been showcased at home and abroad, the trends and expressions of Africa policy that are the most revealing have received the least scrutiny. The Administration has successfully kept the spotlight on its humanitarian façade and away from the creeping expansion of the U.S. military presence on the continent and the ongoing preoccupation with oil. In 2006, as concern grows over the most pressing security threats, from HIV/AIDS and the bird flu to the ongoing genocide in Darfur, the U.S. will face increasing demands to adapt its Africa policy to address these contemporary challenges.

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