

# foreign policy *in focus*



Interhemispheric Resource Center  
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## Peace and Military Policy in Africa

During the cold war the principal aim of U.S. security policy toward Africa was to contain Soviet influence and to eliminate communist and radical nationalist governments and movements throughout the continent. The U.S. government mounted air strikes against Libya, conducted direct military intervention in Zaire, and carried out covert military operations against Soviet-supported governments in Angola and Ethiopia.

Through grants and low-interest loans, the U.S. government provided through the late 1980s more than \$1.5 billion dollars in arms and other security assistance to independent Sub-Saharan African countries, which were selected for their strategic importance in the cold

war duel despite their often questionable commitment to democracy, human rights, and equitable development. The largest arms deliveries went to such allies as Sudan (prior to the 1989 Islamic fundamentalist takeover), Kenya, Somalia, Zaire, and Ethiopia (until a pro-Soviet military government took power in the mid-1970s).

In addition, commercial sales of U.S. weapons (mostly small arms and police equipment) came to

nearly \$300 million. The largest buyer by far was Nigeria (about \$110 million), followed by Botswana (about \$30 million), Chad (about \$25 million), South Africa (about \$27 million), Kenya (about \$20 million), Cameroon (about \$17 million), and Sudan (about \$16 million). These arms fueled internal repression and military conflicts that led to the deaths of many hundreds of thousand of people, most of whom were civilians.

In reassessing U.S. security interests in Africa in the post-cold war era, the U.S. faces new rivals in Africa, including the challenge of Islamic extremism and competition with France, particularly in central Africa. American policymakers have also become increasingly concerned about the impact of a wide variety of what are known as transnational threats: global problems that could have a direct or indirect impact on the United States.

One of these concerns is what policymakers call “rogue states.” Africa’s rogues are the Islamic extremist regime in Sudan, which is backing armed groups in other African countries and is accused of involvement in international terrorism—including attacks on American citizens—and Libya, which is suspected of developing weapons of mass destruction as well. The U.S. has sought to contain these “rogue states” by isolating them diplomatically, imposing bilateral or multilateral economic sanctions, and providing security assistance to neighboring countries.

No clear consensus has emerged about how to deal with another security challenge: the humanitarian disasters caused by internal conflict and the collapse of the state in Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, and Zaire. Internal conflict now threatens to lead to the collapse of several strategically important countries, especially Nigeria and Kenya.

In the early 1990s, following U.S. “victories” in both the cold war and the Gulf War, there was considerable optimism in Washington about America’s ability to play a leading role in resolving these conflicts through direct military intervention. Events in Somalia—particularly the deaths of 18 U.S. Rangers—undermined domestic support for American military involvement in efforts to resolve African conflicts and U.S. policy makers became extremely reluctant to commit American troops to this type of intervention.

Instead, the U.S. has sought to enhance the capacity of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), subregional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and individual African countries to play a greater role in conflict resolution by providing them with military equipment, training, funding, and logistical support.

Transnational threats include, as well, the growing involvement of citizens in Nigeria, South Africa, and other African countries in the international drug trade and other criminal activity, the global impact of Africa’s environmental degradation, and the spread of AIDS and other diseases.

### Key Points

- The U.S. views Libya and Sudan as “rogue states” that should be contained by providing U.S. military aid to neighboring countries.
- Washington has sought to avoid direct military intervention in African conflicts by providing limited U.S. military support for conflict resolution by African countries and organizations.

In September 1996 the Clinton administration announced that it would provide \$20 million in additional security assistance to Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia on the grounds that these nations are threatened by forces armed by Sudan. These countries, in turn, are providing weapons and other support to armed antigovernment groups in Sudan. U.S. security assistance to these countries is helping to fuel conflict in the region and could lead to a direct military confrontation between Sudan and its neighbors.

America's emphasis on the containment of "rogue states" also distracts attention from more significant policy issues, particularly the growing demand of Africans for democracy and political accountability, economic equity, and respect for human rights. And America's confrontational approach to Islamic extremism is increasing support for anti-Western and antidemocratic regimes and movements throughout Africa and the Middle East.

Since the end of the cold war, Congress has eliminated most of the U.S. government's arms sales financing programs to African countries and arms deliveries have declined significantly. The U.S. government, however, continues to supply military equipment from surplus U.S. stockpiles through the Excess Defense Program to countries such as Uganda, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana. Commercial sales also continued; exports from 1991 to 1995 totaled more than \$23 million and included major deliveries to Nigeria (before Clinton imposed sanctions), Uganda, Botswana, Zambia, South Africa, and Namibia.

U.S. support for African peacekeeping efforts has been largely positive, though modest. The U.S. has provided \$10 million to support the development of the OAU's new Mechanism for Conflict Resolution, Management, and Resolution. Washington has also provided equipment and nearly \$30 million in funding for the West African-led peacekeeping operation being conducted in Liberia under the auspices of ECOWAS. During his October 1996 visit to Africa, former Secretary of State Warren Christopher stated that the U.S. would provide up to \$20 million to help create a new all-African peacekeeping force, known as the African Crisis Response Force (ACRF). The proposal received a mixed reception in Africa, with the governments of South Africa (an important potential participant in an all African force) and other countries raising pertinent questions about how the force would be organized, controlled, and funded. The proposal was also widely seen as an attempt by the U.S. to avoid endangering American troops by shifting the risks and burdens of conflict resolution to Africans.

When the crisis in central Africa escalated in late 1996, the Clinton administration announced that it was will-

ing to send up to 5,000 American troops to join a multilateral force, but only if the mission of the force was strictly limited to providing humanitarian assistance, not military intervention. After a substantial number of refugees returned to Rwanda, the Clinton administration cut the number of American troops that might be sent to the region to less than 1,000. Signaling the lukewarm support of the U.S. and other western governments, any international military intervention was put on hold when the Rwandan government contended it was not necessary.

Current levels of funding for U.S. security assistance for conflict resolution by African countries and organizations are insufficient to provide them with the capacity to deal effectively with internal conflicts and the collapse of states. The debacle in Somalia created a wide gulf between America's declared commitment to enhancing the capability of Africans to resolve African conflicts and the actual level of support that the U.S. is providing for African conflict resolution. American support for conflict resolution in Africa—less than \$100 million for the entire continent over the past five years—is remarkably small when compared, for example, to the \$1 billion that the U.S. government is spending each year for the Bosnia peacekeeping operation.

At the same time, however, the U.S. is largely unwilling to play a direct role in conflict prevention, peacekeeping operations, and other efforts to resolve African conflicts, even when these efforts do not involve the use of force in peace-enforcement operations conducted under Chapter VII of the UN charter. Thus, the Clinton administration has rejected proposals for the use of American troops to help monitor peace agreements, demobilize combatants, or protect civilians in Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, and elsewhere in Africa. American military technical advisers have been involved in UN-led peace negotiations to end the civil wars in Mozambique and Angola (one of the principal targets of American covert military intervention during the cold war).

The U.S. is also failing to mobilize the resources that will be needed if the international community is to effectively address transnational threats other than "rogue states." The U.S. has financed efforts to combat drug trafficking and other criminal activity, reverse environmental degradation, and improve the capability of African health care services in only limited ways.

## Key Problems

- U.S. security assistance to Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia is helping to fuel conflict in the region.
- There is a wide gulf between America's declared commitment to enhancing the capability of Africans to resolve African conflicts and the actual level of support.
- The U.S. is unwilling to use its considerable military and diplomatic resources to play a direct role in efforts to resolve African conflicts, even when they do not involve the use of force.

If the U.S. is to meet the post-cold war challenges to its national security interests in Africa, Washington needs to develop a new policy that is clear and consistent and pursue it with energy and perseverance. To accomplish this, the U.S. government should work with non-

## Key Recommendations

- The U.S. should exercise firm restraint in providing security assistance to African countries.
- The U.S. should increase its material and financial assistance for African conflict resolution and work in sincere collaboration with the UN.
- The U.S. should play a leading role in African peacekeeping operations and other conflict resolution activities.
- The U.S. should increase the level of funding for assistance programs that are aimed at promoting democracy and equitable economic development in African countries.

governmental groups to build domestic support to ensure that its policy is backed up with adequate resources and can be sustained over time.

The U.S. government should also work to provide adequate funding to the United Nations. In particular, the U.S. government should pay its dues in full, avoid unilateral actions that antagonize African countries (such as the campaign to remove Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali), and resolve disputes about the command of U.S. troops. This will make it easier for the U.S. to obtain the cooperation of other members of the international community in coordinating activities and sharing the financial burden.

A new U.S. security policy toward Africa should be guided by the following principles:

- The U.S. should exercise firm restraint in providing security assistance to African countries. This is important in the case of countries which are experiencing internal conflict (such as Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, and Kenya) or in the case of countries which are involved in conflicts with their neighbors (such as Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia). The administration should continue its cutoff of military aid and sales to Nigeria—as well as impose an oil boycott—until a civilian democracy is restored.
- The Clinton administration should back the proposal for a Code of Conduct that prohibits arms sales to nondemocratic governments including those that do not have civilian control of their

armed forces; are not freely and fairly elected; are human rights abusers; commit aggression against their neighbors; or fail to comply with international arms control agreements. The U.S. should also implement the Kennedy-Leahy “Transparency of Budgets” amendment, enacted in October 1996, which opposes loans from international financial institutions to any government not fully reporting its military budget. And the U.S. should support in 1997 a resolution in the UN General Assembly that would establish special envoys for conflict prevention and demilitarization. This would allow countries to negotiate mutual, dramatic reductions in military forces and spending, and then directing the savings to programs that promote sustainable economic development and that address basic human needs.

- The U.S. should increase its material and financial assistance for African conflict resolution to match its declared commitment to that goal. This assistance should come out of the defense budget—not out of funding for long-term development programs and humanitarian relief in Africa.
- American support for African conflict resolution should not be used as an excuse for the U.S. to avoid direct involvement in efforts to resolve African conflicts. The U.S. should play a leading role in African peacekeeping operations and other conflict resolution activities.
- The U.S. should increase the level of funding for assistance programs, especially multilateral ones, that are aimed at promoting democracy and equitable economic development in African countries. This will help Africans address the underlying causes of conflict, which will help prevent or reduce the eruption of violence and humanitarian crises.

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### Human Rights Watch/Africa and Human Rights Watch Arms Project

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## World Wide Web

**Africa Policy Information Center**  
<http://www.igc.org/apic/index.shtml>

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