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**SPECIAL REPORT 17**

# Future U.S. Engagement in Africa *Opportunities and Obstacles for Conflict Management*

## Executive Summary

Africa's marginalization in U.S. foreign policy has increasingly become a reality; this disengagement by the United States from African affairs presumably weakens its interests as well as its ability to help prevent and end armed conflicts on the continent. The effect of this disengagement on the management of conflicts in Africa was the subject of a one-day symposium convened by the United States Institute of Peace on April 22, 1996. Twenty-five specialists on Africa -- U.S. diplomats, scholars, and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) -- discussed the causes of and problems with U.S. disengagement, and prospects for future U.S. engagement, with a specific focus on situations in Nigeria, Sudan, Angola, Burundi, and Liberia. This report summarizes the discussion and outlines the principal participant recommendations that emanated from the symposium.

### The Commitment Problem

- In virtually every conflict situation in Africa today, the credibility of the U. S. government's words and deeds is questioned. American diplomats are hamstrung by the U.S. domestic climate of disengagement, which has produced a decline in the attention given to these conflicts by senior officials and in the institutional and resource capabilities that would facilitate U.S. engagement.
- Overcoming declining U.S. credibility, analysts suggest, is not just a matter of reversing the disengagement trend, but is also a matter of devising innovative ways to deal with new types of problems that armed conflicts in Africa pose.
- Disengagement from Africa affects U.S. interests in a number of tangible ways. It undermines U.S. claims to global leadership, results in lost opportunities for trade and investment ties, may jeopardize access to critical strategic minerals, and inhibits the ability to stave off environmental disasters that can have global consequences. Moreover, the United States has a humanitarian interest in saving lives and preventing, or refusing to tolerate, genocide.

Endnotes

### Engaging Recalcitrant States: Nigeria and Sudan

- The U.S. government's credibility problem is especially acute in dealing with ongoing or potential conflicts in states where the regimes are relatively powerful and wield considerable influence in their subregions or in Africa as a whole, such as Nigeria and Sudan.
- Many participants argued that it is critical for the United States, in pursuit of its own interests, to play a central role in helping bring Nigeria back into the international fold. Nigeria is far too significant a player in regional and international politics to be allowed to become an isolated and angry "rogue" state.
- Symposium participants were divided on how to best persuade the present military government in Nigeria to encourage meaningful democratic reform and stave off impending conflict. Some recommend a heavy sanctions policy, others favor pressured engagement, and still others advocate a selective engagement policy. Some observers questioned whether the current regime is reformable at all.
- Participants offered ideas on how to influence the Nigerian regime. These include focusing on Nigeria's need for debt relief, bolstering the democratic opposition, capitalizing on the desire for new direct foreign investment, engaging the country's rulers more directly through enhanced military-to-military exchanges, seizing the rulers' offshore assets, and considering the promotion of shared military-civilian rule for a transitional period.
- The problem in Sudan is similar to that in Nigeria in that this cornered, aggressive regime is resistant to most external pressures to reform. The situation in Sudan is further complicated by the fact that within the North and South the parties are factionalized and sometimes in violent conflict with one another.

### Managing Complex Civil Wars: Burundi

- The principal challenge for U.S. policy in "failed" or failing states such as Somalia, Rwanda, and Burundi is how to provide an appropriate blend of incentives toward more peaceful interaction and disincentives toward violence.
- The challenge in Burundi is no longer one of early warning and preventive action -- levels of violence are already high -- but one of containing violence and preventing escalation to the point of genocide.
- In the absence of extensive official U.S. engagement and easily identifiable traditional levers of influence, NGOs and private diplomacy have helped fill the vacuum. Among the more important innovations are the Burundi Policy Forum and the "Great Lakes" initiative of former U.S. President Carter and former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere.
- In situations such as those in Rwanda and Burundi, dealing effectively with the injustices of the past is critical to breaking the culture of impunity that provides incentives for violence. Truth commissions and other transitional justice mechanisms such as international criminal tribunals can often have "demonstration" effects in neighboring states -- that is, they show that severe human rights abuses may eventually

lead to punishment.

**Sustaining Attention to Peacebuilding: Liberia and Angola**

- Even when peace agreements are reached, their implementation is by no means ensured. Liberia's most recent strife, like Rwanda's, is a case of the implementation of a peace agreement gone awry. There is an urgent need to renegotiate the Abuja agreement, Liberia's most recent peace accord, and to solve the critical problem of warlordism.
- A critical current concern among policymakers is how to reconfigure the West African peacekeeping force ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group) in such a way that it can contribute to stabilizing the situation in Liberia.
- Very close U.S. oversight in Angola has kept the pressure on the involved parties to live up to the terms of the 1994 peace agreement, particularly with regard to military integration and troop demobilization. The United States is therefore well placed to stimulate a national dialogue within Angola on its long-term future.

**Coping in a Disengagement Environment**

- There are ways for the United States to continue promoting conflict management in a disengagement environment: create trade and investment incentives for peace, back NGO and private peacemaking efforts, enhance cooperation with U.S. allies, and further strengthen African and regional conflict management capabilities.
- Participants widely agreed that policymakers should take a closer look at the actual and potential role of foreign (particularly U.S.) investors in promoting peace (or contributing to conflict) in Africa, and, relatedly, the role of international financial institutions in supporting conflict management as an element of structural adjustment and development programs.
- The future of U.S. engagement in Africa in promoting conflict management will increasingly depend on the ability of proponents of such engagement to clearly articulate not only U.S. interests in the continent, but also how various policies and tools aimed at conflict management can have a demonstrable impact on furthering those interests.

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## IV. Sustaining Attention to Peacebuilding: Liberia and Angola

Even when peace agreements are reached, their implementation is by no means ensured. Many observers of Africa point to the fact that after a reasonably good settlement was agreed upon for Rwanda (the 1993 Arusha Accords), insufficient international attention to implementation of that agreement created an environment in which the 1994 genocide became possible. Participants discussed what new peace accord implementation, or peacebuilding, issues the United States could address and what new roles are possible in demobilizing and disarming combatants, constitutional development, transitional justice, economic policy in relation to peace, and postconflict rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The situation in Liberia was discussed in such terms. Liberia's most recent strife, like Rwanda's, is a case of the implementation of a peace agreement gone awry. The recent anarchy in the streets of Monrovia reflects, as Kevin George of the Friends of Liberia argues, "the symptomatic atrophy of the entire Abuja peace process, the dying on the vine of that process through neglect, lack of good faith, lack of resources." The recent reemergence of "predatory warlordism" was facilitated by a lack of international engagement and support for the peace process, especially the demobilization component. "If that failed, everything else failed," George remarked. The August 1995 Abuja agreement that brought Liberia's five-year civil war to an end failed to include a realizable process for encampment of the armed factions. In addition, insufficient resources were provided to the West African (ECOMOG) and UN peacekeeping forces (UNAMIL). Furthermore, international coordination of the peace process is inadequate, some participants noted.

In looking to the future, the options for restarting the Liberian peace process are related to the cause of its breakdown. The most urgent need is to renegotiate the Abuja agreement and solve the critical problem of warlordism and in particular which factional leaders should be included -- and perhaps more important, which ones should be excluded -- in the power-sharing government. In this respect, emphasis on power sharing (probably the only realistic short-term scenario for reconstituting a Liberian state) is problematic

Endnotes

because it gives incentives for warlords to "spoil" the process if they are not included in the settlement and incentives for current groups to further factionalize. Yet, if such leaders are included in a power-sharing pact, their legitimacy as political leaders is affirmed and reinforced by the international community.

A second set of concerns relates to the West African regional peacekeeping force, ECOMOG. Although there was considerable enthusiasm about ECOMOG when it was first deployed in Liberia in 1993, the attitudes of some analysts toward the force have changed in recent years. Some participants suggest that ECOMOG has become just another party to the conflict in Liberia, even prolonging efforts at conflict management, whereas others see it as a still-viable peacekeeping and even peace enforcement operation. Detractors of ECOMOG point to the fact that some elements of the peacekeeping force were allegedly engaged in looting during the recent violence and backed some of the warlords against the others. Nevertheless, the United States has supported ECOMOG diplomatically and financially, recently releasing an additional $30 million in support of its operations.

A critical, current concern among policymakers is how to reconfigure ECOMOG in such a way that it can contribute to stabilizing the situation in Liberia so that peacemaking, and eventually peacebuilding, efforts can get back on track. Some suggest that ECOMOG, which is dominated by Nigeria, can never be a viable neutral force and that U.S. military intervention is the only way to stabilize Liberia and create the environment for a renegotiation of the Abuja agreement. Others suggest that ECOMOG is the only viable option and that U.S. efforts should be geared toward improving its operations and professionalism.

For the long term, participants were concerned that although the Abuja process set up a solution for the short term by creating a government of national unity, insufficient attention is being paid to the longer term process of normalizing politics in Liberia. Without a sense of how to create a sustained dialogue on Liberia's identity and structure as a state, any peace pact is likely to be short lived. Some believe that the United States is especially well suited to stimulate such a dialogue, in part because of its experience as a multiethnic democracy and the durability of its democratic political institutions.

The implementation of peace accords in Angola faces somewhat similar problems. Unlike many of the cases considered at the symposium, the United States is heavily engaged in implementing the peace agreement in Angola. David Smock, coordinator of Africa programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace, noted that "major U.S. support is being given for the UNAVEM III (United Nations Verification Mission in Angola) peacekeeping operation. Very significant American sums have been allocated for humanitarian assistance. Paul Hare, a special envoy, and Ambassador Donald Steinberg and his staff are intimately involved in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol [Angola's peace agreement]."[3]

By all accounts, current U.S. engagement in Angola is in part a function of learning from past mistakes; the last attempt at peacebuilding in Angola in 1992 (implementing the Bicesse Accord) ended in failure when the former U. S. client UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), led by Jonas Savimbi, refused to accede to the results of the November 1992 elections and returned to the battlefield until the current peace agreement, the Lusaka Protocol, was clinched in 1994. Since then, very close U.S. oversight and the "carrot and stick" approach has kept the pressure on the parties to live up to the terms of the agreement.

In addition to constant attention to the pressing short-term issues of implementation -- such as encampment of soldiers, demobilization, and disarmament, which receive very close, daily attention from U.S. diplomats -- participants suggested a need to focus on several issues that will be decisive for longer term peacebuilding in Angola. One of the most important tasks, as in Liberia, is to determine what lies beyond the power-sharing formula arrived at in the Lusaka Protocol. Participants noted that the current political institutions are a holdover from the centralized Marxist state that was Angola in the immediate post-independence era (beginning in 1975). There is no vision of the long-term political institutions that can serve Angola into the indefinite future and what the process of constitutional change would look like.

Some participants suggested that the United States could encourage and seek to facilitate a longer term discussion of constitutional reform in Angola. Such a discussion would support emergence of a more stable form of democratic institutions that will avoid a rerun of the problem of the November 1992 elections, in which a majoritarian electoral system led to a face-off between the two main political antagonists (Savimbi and current president Jose dos Santos). Participants recommend that the United States stimulate the creation of a national, multiparty constitutional convention to allow for negotiations by Angolans on the future structure and nature of their country -- analogous to the need to stimulate a national debate in Burundi. The model of the multiparty talks on a postapartheid constitution in South Africa is one with potential relevance to Angola, some participants suggested.

Participants also recommend that such a national dialogue be extended to economic issues, noting that both the Angolan government and UNITA have control over the country's natural resources in a manner that prevents the national economy from being used as a mechanism for integration and peacebuilding. The government controls the country's oil exploitation and derives the lion's share of its revenues from crude oil exports, whereas UNITA has control over much of the lucrative diamond trade. Not only does such bifurcated control of the country's economic bounty mean that the state has, in effect, no ability to coherently manage the economy, but it also gives the parties exclusive sources of revenue -- a disincentive to sharing the economic wealth with each other or engaging in collective problem solving.

As in other settings, such as Burundi, there is an increasing reliance in Angola on international NGOs as a means of engagement. Watchers of Angola suggest that international support should be provided to domestic NGOs in

Angola to organize programs for reconciliation and healing, as well as to provide relief and development assistance.[4] Such support, it is argued, would also enhance the development of a civil society that could buttress the chances of successful democratization over the long term. However, even those participants who support providing assistance to Angolan NGOs acknowledge that there are problems with this approach: it is difficult to determine which NGOs are capable of delivering services and conducting reconciliation programs efficiently and effectively; NGOs pose a threat to the respective political establishments; and such assistance to NGOs would help supplant the state's public welfare duties, removing the "organic" links between authorities and their constituencies.

Others participants pointed to the urgent task of helping transform UNITA from a fighting force to a political organization, and recommend that the United States (UNITA's erstwhile patron during the Cold War) is well placed to facilitate that transformation. Several participants argued that U.S. business and trade interests need to be brought into the equation as a force for peace, and that officials should place more emphasis on the potentially more influential roles of U.S. commercial ties in peacebuilding efforts.

**V. Coping in a Disengagement Environment**

U.S. diplomats engaged in policy formulation and implementation in Africa increasingly say that the U.S. government resources for intervention, peacekeeping, training, supporting transitional justice programs, and supporting NGOs simply aren't there. Although there is much these diplomats would like to do, and could do, to help manage Africa's conflicts and further U. S. interests, the lack of political will at home to provide resources and the lack of public support for engagement undermines their ability to act. As suggested above, however, there are ways for the United States to continue promoting conflict management in such a disengagement environment. Four themes emerged from the discussion that transcended the specific cases deliberated at the symposium: creating economic incentives for peace, backing NGO and private peacemaking efforts, enhancing cooperation with U.S. allies, and further strengthening African and regional conflict management capabilities.

Participants widely agreed that policymakers should take a closer look at the actual and potential role of foreign (particularly U.S.) investors in promoting peace (or contributing to conflict) in African environments, and, relatedly, the role of international financial institutions in supporting conflict management as an element of structural adjustment and development programs. There was a broad consensus that better coordination among mediators, peacekeepers, donors, and current or potential foreign investors could provide "focused leverage," in the words of one participant. With regard to the international financial institutions, for example, one participant noted that "they can't afford to put their investments at risk by having everything destroyed in a civil conflict," yet they seem to be insufficiently involved in peacemaking and peace implementation efforts. These ideas also suggest that the United States has a special role to play in economic policy in relation to peace and reconstruction because of its clout in international financial institutions; its strong, export-

oriented commercial sector; and its recent focus on developing emerging market economies.

Similarly, the U.S. commercial community was referred to as the "sleeping giant" that neither the U.S. government nor dedicated U.S. NGOs have cultivated in a way that would bring the potential influence of business interests to bear in African policymaking for conflict management. Enlisting the business community not only would give the United States greater influence in managing conflict, but would also help further build a constituency for Africa within the United States -- a prerequisite for generating domestic support for renewed engagement.

Participants also generally agreed that when the United States is not likely to take the lead in a major peacemaking effort, it should support private peacemaking initiatives such as the Nyerere/Carter activity on Central Africa and the Burundi Policy Forum. These initiatives are a "new level of diplomacy" as one participant argued, a peculiar outcome of post-Cold War disengagement in Africa. "If former President Carter and former President Nyerere are going to it," one participant added, "let's make sure they are able to link up with U.S. policymakers" and with those such as the OAU who may be tasked to implement any agreements.

Reliance on NGOs for U.S. engagement in Africa is likely to increase, not just for on-the-ground implementation of policies (for example, provision of relief or aid) but in helping officials formulate policy as well. For example, as James Bishop noted, "In the absence of anything appearing to be an administration strategy in Liberia, the Friends of Liberia [an NGO] has articulated a program which covers a gambit from military to humanitarian interventions." Moreover, Bishop added, the administration adopted much of the Friends' agenda. Similar to involving the commercial community in policy, one participant asserted, NGOs are important not only because they offer early warnings of impending conflict or assist in unofficial implementation of policies, but because they can serve as bridges in the field. They can rebuild a domestic constituency for Africa in this country."

When U.S. military forces are engaged, new and path-breaking cooperation between the military and NGOs should be strengthened, participants suggested. One of the outcomes of the U.S. military intervention in Somalia was the increasing interaction and cooperation between the U.S. military and relief, development, and conflict management NGOs. Such bureaucratic linkages are important, several participants argued, and are one of the more positive developments in the disengagement environment. Similarly, the United Nations is increasingly working hand-in-glove with NGOs to promote conflict management. In Zaire, for example, NGOs have taken the lead in helping the United Nations develop a coherent preventive action agenda to keep forthcoming elections in that country from becoming a spark for armed conflict and not a mechanism to reconstitute a broadly legitimate government.

In many instances, participants noted, the lack of a cohesive response on the part of Western states undermines U.S. conflict management objectives in

Africa. Policy coordination with France was singled out as especially important with respect to West and Central Africa, where the French are former colonizers and retain extensive influence and a commercial presence. In some cases, inter-ally coordination works. For example, U.S. diplomats worked through Portugal and Angola to help reverse a recent coup attempt in Sao Tome and Principe. In other cases, such as Liberia and Rwanda, allied actions seem to work at cross-purposes. Although there is ongoing, practical policy coordination among Western states -- and particularly among donor groups -- participants recommend that such coordination should be improved and diplomatic contacts regularized, deepened to operational-level diplomats, and made more consistent.

Within the environment of disengagement, the United States should redouble its efforts to strengthen regional and subregional institutions and peacemaking capabilities in Africa, participants argued. Western efforts to help Africans develop a more systematic and institutionalized conflict management capability can be improved. There are things that the United States alone can do to stimulate this development. Participants noted that some promising unilateral actions have been taken (for example, posting a U.S. diplomat to the OAU with the principal task of working with the Mechanism on Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution). Participants suggested that the United States can do more to further bolster the mechanism -- in particular, helping it become more operational with observation capabilities, vehicles and communications equipment, and helping develop rules of engagement. Subregional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), IGAD, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) can be further supported in their newfound peacemaking and peacekeeping roles.

The future of U.S. engagement in Africa in promoting conflict management will increasingly depend on the ability of proponents of such an engagement to clearly articulate not only U.S. interests in the continent, but also how various policies and tools can have a clearly demonstrable impact in furthering those interests. Despite even the most difficult of cases with which the United States is currently engaged, including those considered at the symposium, it is clear to participants that even in an environment of disengagement, U.S. leadership in conflict management efforts remains critical to advancing the national interest. What is changing is not whether the United States should be engaged in African conflict management, but how it can best be done in an era of U.S. fiscal belt-tightening and diminishing domestic political will for this kind of involvement.

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**About this Report**

This report, authored by Institute Program Officer Timothy D. Sisk, is a summary of discussion at a one-day United States Institute of Peace symposium held April 22, 1996. For further information, contact Timothy Sisk or David Smock, coordinator of the Institute's Africa activities. The views and recommendations presented in this report are those of symposium participants or the author's; the Institute does not adopt positions on policy issues.

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**Endnotes**

[1 ] Smock and Chester A. Crocker, eds., *African Conflict Resolution: The U.S. Role in Peacemaking,* (Washington, D.C.: USIP Press, 1995).

[2 ] See David R. Smock, "Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict in Africa," A United States Institute of Peace *Peaceworks*, February 1996.

[3 ] For further discussion on the prospects for and problems of the implemenation of the Lusaka Protocol, see John Prendergast and David R. Smock, "Angola's Elusive Peace," *CSIS Africa Notes*, No. 182 (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 1996).

[4 ] See "NGOs and the Peace Process in Angola," A United States Institute of Peace *Specal Report*, April 1996.

[5 ] For further on the broader topic, see Pamela R. Aall, "NGOs and Conflict Management," A United States Institute of Peace *Special Report*, February 1996.

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