CHAPTER 6

US Foreign Policy and the Quest for Regional Security in Sub-Saharan Africa

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**Introduction**

The US long-term national interests are served by its increased engagement with African states. It should be emphasized that for too long Africa has been an afterthought in US foreign policy. During World War II, Africa was a strategic stepping stone to the places that mattered to America’s foreign policy goals, and during the Cold War, Africa was a pawn in the political struggle between the East and the West. Historically, the United States has engaged in both a socioeconomic and political relationships with Sub-Saharan Africa. Different American presidents have committed to building strong relationships based on common interests and shared values, and this has, no doubt, made this region of Africa a higher priority and given it the attention it deserves. For instance, over many decades, the United States has provided strong and visible support for the movement toward democracy and free market economies in this part of Africa. America has worked with many sub-Saharan African countries to address issues such as security, preventive diplomacy, and interstate conflict resolution.

One major priority of American foreign policy in sub-Saharan Africa is to provide security assistance programs that are critical to securing a peaceful African continent. The United States is working with some African leaders to build capacity at different levels. Phillip Carter identifies three major levels of US foreign relations with sub-Saharan Africa: first, at the level of the African Union, second, at the subregional level, and lastly, at the level of individual states. Relations at the regional level involve supporting the Strategic Planning and Management Unit of African Union (AU) at the headquarters of the organization in Addis Ababa. At the subregional level, America has provided assistance to peacekeeping training centers in Ghana, Mali, and Senegal in West Africa, South Africa, and Zimbabwe in the
Southern Africa Development Cooperation (SADC) area and Kenya in East Africa. The United States also provides a peace and security advisor to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) headquarters, and continues to support the ECOWAS logistics facility in Freetown, Sierra Leone.  

Although some countries in Africa can be characterized as reasonably peaceful, many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have continued to experience serious political instability, small arms importation, and a high level of political insecurity. Many leaders in the continent violate core human rights and the sovereignty principles enshrined in the African Union Charter, and some have treated their populations as badly as, if not worse than, their colonial predecessors. Many African leaders have engaged in economic mismanagement, embezzlement of state revenue, centralized approaches to economic management, precipitated economic decline, and the deterioration of infrastructure and government services. Sub-Saharan African politics is faced with postcolonial conflict, underdevelopment, failed states, and regional insecurity.

It should also be noted that Africa’s pathetic human security situation can also be attributed to a host of other factors, including: nontransparent and faulty institutional structures, pervasive corruption, managerial and productive incompetence, poor health conditions and diseases, bad policies and poor governance as well as external exploitation. The net result has been social and political conflicts, insurgencies and failed states, large areas of ungoverned and undergoverned space, which combine to generally inhibit economic growth and precipitate the conditions for the poor state of human security on the continent. The African continent is exposed to numerous security challenges, such as intractable political instability, civil wars, terrorist activities, the use of child soldiers, and small and light weapons trafficking. The sense of disconnectedness in Africa is strong, and Africans are searching for new development strategies to erect viable, stable, enduring, and legitimate governmental structures that can ensure their citizens have a reasonable quality of life. Disillusionment, combined with Africans’ fear of being absorbed into a world outside their control, has emerged as a major concern for African leaders.

This chapter examines the US foreign policy toward sub-Saharan Africa. More importantly, the chapter discusses the efforts of African leaders to achieve regional security and overcome developmental challenges on the continent. Washington views terrorist networks in some sub-Saharan African countries as posing one of the greatest challenges to US interests in Africa. In the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, the United States has sought to contain terrorism by taking the war against terrorists to their breeding and training grounds. As such, it would be in the US interest to readdress the priority it gives its strategic and political policies toward Africa.

United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: A Background Analysis

The starting point for modern US-Africa relations can be traced back to the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, when European powers carved up Africa “recklessly” and with little regard for historical and cultural affinities or ethnic boundaries on the continent. The United States never assessed its interests with African nations, and