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Summing Up... And Looking Ahead

by Chester A. Crocker

The past eight years have wrought fundamental changes in the relations between the United States and Africa. I believe the prospects for this relationship have never been as bright as they are now. For the first time in our history, the United States has a president who knows firsthand Africa and its enormous diversity, problems, and potential. George Bush has traveled extensively in sub-Saharan Africa's 46 independent nations over his many years of public service; he knows all but a few African presidents and prime ministers personally from extensive conversations with them in their capitals or ours:

Ronald Reagan has bequeathed to our new president a firm basis on which to address Africa's problems and help develop Africa's potential. Our role as peacemaker in Angola and Namibia has clearly raised U.S. prestige throughout Africa to unprecedented heights even as it has once again illustrated the folly of ignoring the intimate connection between African regional and global politics.

The new administration inherits remarkably effective working relationships on African matters with all the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and China) as well as with Japan, each of which has its own important role to play on the continent. Newly close patterns of diplomatic cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa's 17 francophone countries, with four of its five lusophone nations, and with its sole Spanish-speaking state have been added to our long-standing ties with the African anglophones. African peoples have long known that they can look first to the United States when afflicted by famine, pestilence, or war. This tradition has been more than maintained; it has been substantially strengthened.

The legacy of the 1980s is rooted in realism. We have operated on the premise that Africa can no longer be treated by any great power merely as an undifferentiated Third World bloc of votes in international organizations—or, worse, as a place of angry adolescents to be appeased with grand but empty gestures of solidarity.

From the outset, the Reagan administration chose to treat Africa as a continent inhabited by serious people with serious problems, requiring serious solutions. Our policies have, therefore, been based on Africa as it is, as well as on a vision of Africa as we and others might like to see it. All but a few African nations are now in the third or fourth decade of their independence, with established national identities. There is no reason to



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expect less of Africans than we do of nations in other regions of the world, and we have refused to follow a condescending double standard in our approach to them. President Bush inherits mature partnerships between the United States and all but a few of sub-Saharan Africa's most resolutely anti-American countries. These are partnerships he had a hand in forging and which I know he will sustain.

The Reagan administration never undertook to resolve all of the problems of the continent during its term of office, nor should it have tried to do so. So I do not consider it disappointing that it did not. Foreign policy is, after all, an endless marathon, not a sprint. But we are well ahead today of where we started.

As with other parts of the world, we have been unashamedly concerned in Africa with patient efforts to advance our own national interests in partnership with those who share them, whether in whole or in part. In such partnerships we have looked not for fleeting popularity but for lasting results. This approach may not have been universally acclaimed; but, to a notable extent, working together with African leaders, it has achieved lasting results and narrowed the challenges before us, even as it has uncovered new ones.

Some Specifics

Economic Reform. Under prodding pressure from the United States and others, many African leaders have faced up to the contribution that bad politics and worse economics have made to the suffering of their people. But not all have been willing to do so. Emergency food and relief will—tragically—remain major elements in U.S. African policy. This is particularly true in the Horn, where the limits on Soviet willingness to engage in “new thinking” and creative diplomatic problem-solving seem likely to face their most difficult African test.

Our patient efforts at persuasion have helped most of Africa's leaders to recognize that sound domestic economic policies are essential to economic progress and that foreign assistance cannot be effective without market-based economic reform. But a few countries with which we have long enjoyed close relations and which have great developmental potential continue to slide toward economic ruin under policies that have not and will not work. The Reagan administration pursued a candid dialogue with African governments, international donors, and financial institutions, and provided economic assistance to promote policy reform. We have made a start toward effective means of debt relief to support such reform. These efforts must continue and be strengthened.

Economic reform is politically risky. We cannot inject courage into leaders too shortsighted to take such risks, but we can and should continue to bolster those who are trying to turn the corner. It is not enough to say of the crushing burden of African indebtedness, as Calvin Coolidge did in rebuffing a British request for debt relief after World War I, “Well, they hired the money, didn't they?” We have done much about the problem of

African debt, but we have not found the answer, and we need to do more.

Chad in Context. Our consistent support for Chad, complementing the larger effort of France, helped President Hissène Habré to reforge national unity in his country, repel Libyan invasion, and end Colonel Qaddafi's occupation of all but a 100-mile sliver across its northern border. In one of the most brilliant military campaigns in recent history, Chadian forces killed, captured, or put to flight almost a fourth of Qaddafi's vastly better equipped army and destroyed over a billion dollars of its Soviet-supplied equipment.

Until Libya ceases to practice its weird politics of terrorism, intimidation, and destabilization against its black African neighbors, continued help to menaced African nations is essential to sustain them. It remains to be seen whether the new Maghreb Union will succeed in providing a constraining regional structure for Qaddafi's behavior (surely one of its many goals) or whether he will simply use it to legitimize his current charm offensive in Africa.

Support for African independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity—a hallmark of U.S. policy during the Reagan administration—will require the continuation of effective burden-sharing with our allies, especially the French, and of our partnership with influential African states.

Human Rights. With our help, Africa's few multiparty democracies have been strengthened, and the overall human rights picture in Africa has somewhat brightened. But autocratic regimes continue to hold sway over unconsenting populaces in every quarter of the continent, and terrible abuses of human rights continue from the Horn to South Africa. Here, too, we must stay

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the course—avoiding, on the one hand, complacent acceptance of the very real limits to our influence and, on the other, self-indulgent but feckless and ultimately counterproductive moral posturing. Nor can we afford a double standard. Oppression is oppression, whether it is carried out by whites or blacks.

Angola. With our backing, Angola will soon have a buffer between itself and South Africa in the form of an independent Namibia. Angola will also be relieved of Cuban occupation and tutelage. But Angola's long civil war continues without resolution, and the domestic political imbalances and inequities that fuel that war remain unaddressed by the leadership in Luanda. It is in our interest to encourage and support African efforts to persuade Luanda to respond to UNITA's repeated offers to work out a political settlement and national reconciliation. And it is in our interest to continue assistance to UNITA until the MPLA regime does so. Such assistance is an essential disincentive to a resumed quest for a military solution to the conflict and an important incentive for Luanda to pursue a negotiated settlement.

Namibia. As a direct result of a decade-long U.S. diplomatic effort, Namibia will soon become independent, completing the decolonization of Africa. But the postcolonial history of Africa demonstrates that independence does not in itself solve a nation's underlying problems. It merely transfers the responsibility for dealing with these problems to new, indigenous leadership.

There is a great deal at stake in how Namibians choose to govern themselves. Namibians, like Angolans, need to learn how to resolve their differences through political debate rather than through violent confrontation. Namibians, like Angolans, need to find their way to national reconciliation. A stable and prosperous democratic society in Namibia would be an inspiration to faster, peaceful change away from apartheid in South Africa. An unstable and impoverished Namibia would set back the prospects for such change and would also threaten the stability of Botswana, one of Africa's few genuine democracies and the only one in southern Africa. Careful work with the United Nations, with our allies, and with sympathetic neighbors such as Botswana will be needed to get Namibia off to the right start as an independent nation.

Mozambique. With our active engagement, Mozambique has moved toward a policy of genuine nonalignment between East and West and achieved a measure of stability in its difficult relations with neighboring South Africa. But Mozambique remains a country in agony, torn by externally fostered violence of a savagery that the world has—mercifully—seldom seen. We have been generous with food aid to Mozambique, but a country still in many ways less a nation than an area in search of a state needs broader and more effective assistance than we have been able to provide. It is in our interest to overcome the domestic political divisions here in the United States that have prevented us from joining our allies in fully supporting Maputo's painful efforts at

nation-building. While the situation in Mozambique is not comparable to the MPLA-UNITA division in Angola, there is a need to find a political solution to the problems that fuel the fighting. In this connection, we cannot help Mozambique effectively unless we continue our efforts to promote more coherent and sensible policies by South Africa toward its northeastern neighbor.

South Africa. This brings me to the question of South Africa and its regional role, which seems likely to remain a shared African and U.S. obsession for the foreseeable future. From the beginning, the Reagan administration had a twofold agenda with regard to South Africa.

To the extent we could, we have sought to help insulate from the death throes of apartheid the states in southern Africa whose fates are inextricably connected with that of South Africa. To this end, we have worked to help these states achieve a *modus vivendi* with South Africa that, without eroding their principled stand on the issue of apartheid, would enable them to enjoy sufficient security and domestic tranquillity to pursue effective economic and political development. So we have worked to buttress the independence, democratic institutions, and market economic systems of Botswana and Zimbabwe, while seeking to ensure the continuing ability of Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Mozambique to pursue similarly effective courses of political and economic development as they choose to do so. The Nkomati Accord and the rapprochement between Mozambique and South Africa that it has made possible, as well as the Angola-Namibia accords, are especially visible monuments to this sustained U.S. diplomatic effort. But there is a great deal more that has been done—and much more effort that lies ahead.

In South Africa itself, we have sought to promote the most rapid possible admission of all South Africans to an equal role in the political and economic life of their country. This is easy to say, but it amounts to attempting to play a constructive role in the reengineering of the political culture and constitutional system of a country separated from us by 8,000 miles, centuries of estrangement from Western values, and a dramatically different history. The difficulty is magnified by the small—and now rapidly declining—U.S. presence on the ground in South Africa, and by the obvious tensions in relations between our governments, reflecting profound differences between us. In these circumstances, we must recognize some plain truths:

- No one other than South Africans can remake South African political culture or the South African constitution. We cannot compel them, but we can and should help them move toward fundamental change, in ways consistent with our own values.
- The South African government runs South Africa and cannot be ignored or written off. It sets the pace of change in the country. It remains the only institution with the power to repeal the oppressive system it now so effectively enforces, and it is the key to more cooperative and less threatening South

African relationships with neighboring black-ruled states.

- Ordinary South Africans (black, white “Coloured,” and Indian) and a wide range of nongovernmental and private organizations set the political climate within which the South African government operates. While their direct impact on current governmental decisions is limited, we should encourage dialogue and creative thinking wherever it may take root and not give a distracted government a pocket veto over the society as a whole.

- We need to talk to both the government and the groups opposed to it, and to encourage them to talk to each other. We have a constructive role to play in helping South Africans to break down the racial and political barriers to dialogue about the future of their country.

- We cannot hope to make any real difference in South Africa unless Americans are actually there to share their experience, set an example, and, yes, work alongside South Africans as they make the decisions they must make to create a democratic, postapartheid South Africa.

- The more effectively we can coordinate our policies and activities in South Africa with those of allies with equal or greater influence there, the better our chances of having a real impact on the course of events in that country.

These are rather obvious points. Many or all of them could be made with respect to Eastern Europe or other areas where we seek to promote an evolution toward more open and democratic societies. But South Africa is different.

I would like to be able to say that we have had a serious debate in this country about how to advance our interests in South Africa. There certainly have been a lot of words expended on the subject. But, frankly, most of the debate has been about sanctions, which no serious observer of the South African scene, and none of our major allies, considers to be a viable answer to a problem that is clearly going to require much time and considerable diplomatic and political ingenuity to resolve.

Some of the proponents of sanctions in the United States and abroad are well-meaning, and I share their sense of frustration with the slow pace of change in South Africa and the elusiveness of any denouement to the South African drama. But, again quite candidly, there has been no serious discussion of what role, if any, different kinds of sanctions might play in helping South Africans to resolve the dilemmas they face.

Instead, sanctions have become a symbol of the frustration they are designed to address. They have been advocated as an article of faith, as an end in themselves. No credible case has been made for broad, open-ended sanctions against South Africa. Our experience with such sanctions against South Africa to date is that they are counterproductive. The argumentation for them has seldom risen above the level of a kind of junior-college Marxism, economic determinism of a simplicity that

would make a Communist blush.

Be that as it may, it is obvious that we as a nation need to engage in serious reflection on how we deal with South Africa on the two issues of greatest concern to us: Pretoria’s regional behavior and institutionalized racism in South Africa. Reaching consensus in the United States on these issues will tax the political skills of the new administration and the willingness of Congress to work with the White House. But there is so much at stake that we cannot afford not to try.

Some Agenda Items for the 1990s

In our obsession with South and southern Africa, we cannot afford to neglect other key challenges facing the new administration in Africa. Many of these are the inevitable product of the successes of the past eight years. Success in foreign policy tends, in my experience, to produce new and equally difficult problems, and Africa is no exception to this rule. By way of recapitulation, I would list the following as among the principal challenges for an administration that undertakes to continue the traditional U.S. focus on the future rather than the past:

The Angola-Namibia settlement transformed a major irritant in East-West relations into a remarkable example of U.S.-Soviet cooperation in the settlement of regional conflicts. If implemented in earnest, this settlement has the potential to transform the security environment of southern Africa—undercutting further the false prophets of violence and confrontation while bolstering the advocates of negotiation. Can we build on this foundation to facilitate a settlement to the Angolan civil war? A broader consensus on southern African issues? A resolution of the equally destructive conflict in Mozambique? An end to the political stalemate among South Africans themselves? Are there lessons to be learned for other regional conflicts from the successful U.S.-Soviet cooperation in producing a peaceful regional settlement in southwestern Africa?

In the Horn of Africa, the complex interplay of regional and internal conflicts with economic and humanitarian crises threatens to engulf the entire subregion. The challenges facing us are equally complex. Nor are they made easier by a simplistic moral posturing—not to say scapegoating—that passes for informed analysis in too much of our own media coverage. I refer to the tragedy in Sudan and the echoes of Marie Antoinette in policy critiques of some journalistic commentators (“let them eat words...words of condemnation from the United States”).

There is a war going on in southern Sudan, an area the size of France, and it is not a new war. No country has done more than ours to push both the government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) rebels for relief access. None has been more forthright in recognizing the need for Khartoum and the SPLA to find a political settlement. We do not believe the government of Ethiopia is contributing to the solution of any of that country’s awesome problems—or the problems of Somalia and Sudan, which it did not invent but which it is

aggravating. Ethiopia says that it wants improved relations with the United States. We have focused on getting civilized behavior from a government that has become a source of embarrassment to the Soviet Union.

The situation in the Horn may be ripening for renewed U.S. efforts to untangle the knots of conflict and human catastrophe. We are ready to support a serious approach. But we do not believe that the United States or its friends bear the principal responsibility for the current horrendous situation facing the countries and peoples of this region. We will look to the Soviet Union and its friends in Addis Ababa to move beyond abstract platitudes and begin thinking in terms of concrete solutions to the various interlocking problems of the area.

Having persuaded many African leaders to take substantial political risks to get their economic houses in order, will we now follow through with the foreign assistance and financial flows necessary to make reform policies work? Will we walk toward or out of Africa as it walks toward us? What, if anything, is the special role of Japan as the world's largest aid donor in dealing with these problems on a continent to which it is new? How should we deal with the unresolved issue of African debt?

With our annual military aid to all of sub-Saharan Africa down to about \$25 million—half the price of an F-15 with ground support—how do we sustain our friends on the continent against hostile military challenge? How do we persuade them to bear the risks of providing military access rights to the United States? Are we really prepared to write off our strategic interests in Africa? If not, how do we protect and advance them without greater resources than our budgetary process has recently been willing or able to provide? How can we sustain our role in helping African nations to defend their vital maritime and fisheries interests against pilferage by distant nations when our security assistance resources have been so sharply reduced?

A Final Word

I would like to conclude these observations on a note of realism and humility by quoting some remarks I made on our role in the search for solutions to African problems at the December 1988 Angola-Namibia accords signing ceremony in Brazzaville:

"First, our role has been welcomed by our partners in Africa and by our friends and allies around the world. My country does not have blueprints for the solution of every problem or a mandate to play such a role. But we are prepared to involve ourselves in the search for constructive solutions when such a role is welcomed and appropriate. Second, we have been realists. We have recognized that lasting solutions can only be based on the concrete historical realities of a given situation. Just as man cannot eat slogans, neither can statesmen solve problems with rhetorical clichés and abstract formulas. Third, we have tried to chart a clear course and stick with it. This is an approach that may sometimes fall short of shifting fashions and popular hopes for instant results. But, over time, this is the approach that gives confidence and predictability to key decision makers. It is the approach that works."

Chester A. Crocker has served (under a sequence of three secretaries) as the Department of State's assistant secretary for African affairs since 1981. Before joining the Reagan administration, he was for five years (1976-1981) director of the CSIS African Studies Program and associate professor at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. He describes this issue of *CSIS Africa Notes* (based in part on off-the-record remarks made at a Council on Foreign Relations meeting in New York in February 1989) as some unofficial observations by "a once and future student of Africa."

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