What Can We Hope For/Expect In a Clinton Africa Policy?

by Martin Lowenkopf

Any attempt to predict, as of mid-December 1992, either the substance or the key players who will implement Africa policy in the Clinton era runs into two major barriers: (1) No selections have been announced for any of the key Africa slots in the Departments of State or Defense, the National Security Council, or USAID and rumors of likely choices change from day to day. (2) Although President-elect Clinton returned election-night congratulatory calls from Nelson Mandela, South African President F.W. de Klerk, and Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida and in his first postelection policy statement listed the famine in Somalia as one of six pressing foreign policy issues, he also announced that he was "going to focus like a laser beam on this economy, and foreign policy will come into play in part as it affects the economy."

The latter statement, along with the recommendation of the Progressive Policy Institute (often described as Clinton's think tank) that diplomats be given bonuses for enhancing U.S. trade and other economic interests abroad, gave little reason to believe that the foreign policy community would be encouraged to allocate much time or energy to Africa. For whatever Clinton's apparent sympathy for African and Third World causes, the continent's relative weakness in the global economy would seem to give it little claim to U.S. attention or resources if Washington's priorities were shaped primarily by economic considerations.

Then Came Somalia

U.S. intervention in Somalia has demonstrated once again that unforeseen developments in the foreign affairs area can force action in unpredictable ways. Even before taking office, Clinton has been caught up in the Somali crisis as a result of President Bush's commitment of nearly 30,000 troops to humanitarian relief in this devastated country on Africa's eastern Horn. Does Clinton's endorsement of the U.S.-led United Nations action presage a new and stronger U.S. role in Africa?

Not necessarily. Although the U.S. intervention appears to have set a precedent for the use of combat troops for humanitarian reasons (at least the UN would see it so), perhaps just as important is the fact that it was a defeated lame-duck president who dispatched forces in the absence of
anything meeting the standard definition of a threat to vital U.S. security interests. Because Bush acted so belatedly and had exerted no previous leadership concerning Somalia in the international community, it is questionable that he would have followed the same course of action if he had won reelection, especially given the criticism he received from some quarters during the campaign for giving too much attention to foreign affairs and not enough to the domestic recession. Nor is it at all certain, despite his endorsement of Bush's actions, that Clinton as president would have launched so daring and precedent-laden an international initiative when his promises to focus on the domestic economy were still warm.

The first lesson of Somalia, then, would seem to be that the United States will undertake risky and costly military action in Africa only at times when the domestic political switches are temporarily off. This is unlikely to happen again soon. Nevertheless, academics and media pundits will coin new doctrines of humanitarian intervention. Africanists will want to apply the Somali "precedent" to Liberia, Sudan, and wherever else a cruel or weak government will not or cannot provide for the survival of its people. Conspiracy theorists will warn of militarists-become-humanitarians in search of a post-cold war role (and a budget to match).

De-precedentarians, on the other hand, will argue that Somalia is sui generis, and that indiscriminate duplication of such interventions elsewhere would be hazardous, costly, and (once the political switches are back on) not in the national interest. This, I suspect, will be the position of the Clinton administration, which will not want to lock itself into a specific policy—especially in Africa—before it has its economic policy house in order.

Beyond Somalia: New Policy Implications

Clinton's foreign policy team would err, I believe, in seeking a hasty withdrawal from Somalia, or in attempting a total uncoupling of Somalia from other African problems. A better approach to the lessons of Somalia (assuming the intervention goes reasonably well) would be to recognize that:

- The Somali tragedy need not have reached such desperate proportions, leaving no recourse but the deployment of military force, had Western countries and the UN not shamefully delayed effective action until well after receiving clear evidence of the human disaster (see, for example, the extended on-the-ground coverage by Jane Perlez of The New York Times). As I noted in a January 1992 contribution to CSIS Africa Notes: "Somalia and the protracted war in southern Sudan offer compelling cases of murderous civil strife begging for resolution. Unabated, these conflicts will continue the slaughter of countless civilians and constitute ongoing threats to neighboring nations. Regional, Organization of African Unity, and UN-sponsored peacemaking initiatives and refugee assistance programs are required, but they can succeed only with assertive U.S. and West European interventions (as in the Gulf). The UN's December 1991 agreement on refugee assistance was a step toward establishing a right of humanitarian intervention, particularly in zones of civil strife. Some would complain that this represents a violation of sovereignty, but (as was true with Iraq) the pressure of world disapproval and the threat of punishment would help force compliance."

- Prevention and peacemaking are cheaper and politically more palatable than peacekeeping, which usually takes place only after considerable damage has already been done.

- U.S. military intervention in Africa, or anywhere for that matter, must be on a case-by-case basis.

- With the end of the cold war, it seems only the United States can get the UN to move effectively, at least in conflict situations (i.e., peacemaking). Isn't it time to offer greater U.S. support and participation in peacekeeping as well? In this connection, we should move without further delay to pay the $300+ million our dues are in arrears.

Not yet a "lesson," but inescapable, is the fact that temporarily alleviating Somalia's suffering will accomplish little if adequate measures are not taken to resolve the internal clan wars, restore some semblance of civil authority, and get the country on the road to economic and social recovery. This is a job clearly not for the United States alone, but for the UN (protests about its overburdened and underfunded condition notwithstanding) and for the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) which hung on so bravely when the world was ignoring the country's disintegration. For as goes this aspect of Somalia's rescue, so goes...
Some Thoughts on a Critical Appointment

The incoming administration has an opportunity to focus on African needs unburdened by cold war considerations. To define the interests that will govern our policy in Africa in the 1990s and then to advance them effectively will require both careful analysis and creative thinking.

The new Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs will have a considerable task. In contrast to the interest in the continent during the Kennedy era, today Africa ranks lowest on the totem pole of our international concerns. U.S. domestic needs and the general disinterest in aid programs militate against large or expanding foreign assistance programs.

In the climate of the 1990s, little that is useful can be accomplished if there is not an individual in this key position with sufficient stature and experience to be effective in dealing with the White House staff and other relevant executive agencies, with Congress, and with the U.S. public. Also of critical importance will be an ability to deal with the U.S. business community, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Community, and Japan. Effective relations with U.S. nongovernmental organizations, which are playing an important and growing role in Africa, are essential. This range of considerations calls for the selection of an Assistant Secretary who brings to the position a widely recognized presence in U.S. public life as well as a known general interest in Africa. Professional foreign service officers and Africanist scholars should not be excluded from consideration as candidates if they meet the criteria.

Just as the election of President Kennedy in 1960 was warmly received in Africa, so has the election of President Clinton lifted the hopes among Africans for a new and creative policy oriented to the true needs of the African people. This is a unique opportunity for U.S. leadership.

—Adapted from a recent commentary by Wayne Fredericks, who was Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Department of State's Bureau of African Affairs in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Now a Counselor-in-Residence (but more frequently in Africa) with the Institute of International Education (New York), he served (1974-1988) as the Ford Motor Company's Executive Director for International Affairs and (1967-1974) as head of the Ford Foundation's Africa and Middle East program. He is cochair of the CSIS Working Group on South Africa.

humanitarian intervention elsewhere in Africa and the world.

These precepts provide the Clinton administration with the basis of a new Africa policy, one that integrates the lessons of the Somali experience and builds on the broad popular support the intervention has received thus far. If the intervention has put Africa on the domestic U.S. map, the natural American compassion for people suffering starvation and brutal oppression can keep it there.

Calls already are abroad for a new "preventive" or "preemptive" diplomacy. That is a worthy idea, but it comes too late for many of the world's strife-torn countries and regions. The questions that need to be addressed are: Which crises have a reasonable chance of resolution? And what will it take to resolve them?

What Can Be Done About Liberia and Sudan?

Precedent-mongers have already placed Liberia and Sudan on the post-Somalia crisis agenda. Similarities to Somalia (e.g., bloody internal wars, hunger, near-anarchy) abound in both countries. But careful analysis reveals critical differences as well. Governments do exist in both Liberia and Sudan, if one can consider as governments Charles Taylor's collection of armed thugs who control over 90 percent of Liberia (but are not always under Taylor's control) or the ECOWAS-brokered caretaker regime in Monrovia. The Khartoum regime, however cruel and ruthless, wields real power and will not easily be reformed or dislodged. Neighboring countries are involved in both internal conflicts—a state of affairs that could endanger peace and order in the respective regions. In neither case is Colin Powell's "cavalry riding to the rescue" an immediately appropriate—or politically feasible—response. Nor, it should be added, does internationally mediated reconciliation look promising.

Sudan. Sudan's troubles probably have the least potential for resolution. The Khartoum regime has until now dismissed humanitarian appeals on behalf of the 4 to 5 million people at risk in the civil-war-wracked south, who, unlike their Somali counterparts, receive little coverage in the Western visual media. The Islamic fundamentalist regime in Khartoum has no intention of granting either independence or autonomy to the Christian and animist southerners. The southern rebels are themselves now deeply divided, and warring factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) are interfering with humanitarian relief efforts as much as are government forces. Those who seek to alleviate the suffering of the noncombatants in the south risk appearing to take sides.

The government's recent agreement with the UN to allow relief shipments remains to be tested. Advocates of more forceful humanitarian intervention will not win unanimous UN Security Council support, as they did on Somalia. African members, as well as other countries experiencing internal unrest, will object to setting a precedent that might one day be used against them. Still,
if the media eventually begin to broadcast images of the human tragedy in the south, Clinton’s protests about “doability” may be swamped by humanitarian passions.

**Liberia.** The issue of sovereignty is far less clear in Liberia. The provisional government in Monrovia under the interim presidency of Amos Sawyer controls only that city, behind the guns of the multinational regional ECOMOG force and on the international dole; an estimated one-half of the country’s population are refugees in neighboring countries. (See “A Conversation with Liberia’s Interim President,” CSIS Africa Notes no. 129, October 1991.) Because Presidents Reagan and Bush stuck by the late Master Sergeant (later General) Samuel Doe’s presidency much too long, the United States has been unable to play an impartial broker role. Ecowas is too closely linked to the Monrovia regime established under its auspices to play such a part. The recent appointment of a special UN representative may bring a new international authority to efforts at reconciliation, but the UN official will have only a few observers available to oversee an agreement, should one be reached.

The incoming Clinton administration has an opportunity to put the United States back in the picture by a careful application of carrots and sticks and by ratcheting up international pressures against external powers aiding and abetting those responsible for the suffering. (The U.S. recall of its ambassador to Burkina Faso, which is supplying weapons to Taylor, is a modest beginning.) Ultimately, if he persists in ravaging his own people and defying the international community, Taylor may have to be confronted by a credible threat of the use of force on behalf of humanitarian intervention. This would require a broader international effort beyond the capacity of the sometimes internally riven ECOMOG force currently in Liberia, preferably involving a UN security presence in which the United States—which has both an historical and a moral responsibility for Liberia—should play a substantial role.

... **And Then Mozambique and Angola**

It would not then be a great leap to examine other potential Somalias on the continent, in particular Angola and Mozambique, where the political orders are extremely fragile and the economy in much of Mozambique and in parts of Angola is virtually moribund. Lengthly negotiated peace agreements intended to end civil wars in these countries have not yet brought peace, stability, or succease to the respective 1.4 million and 2 million people (many of them dependent on emergency food aid) who have been displaced or otherwise affected by the strife and a regional drought. High child mortality rates afflicting both countries, especially Mozambique, where one of every three children dies before reaching the age of five.

**Mozambique.** Following up on the peace accord signed in Rome on October 4, 1992 by Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano and Renamo’s Afonso Dhlakama, the UN agreed in December to send some 7,500 peacekeepers and election supervisors to the country—to keep apart and demobilize the former adversaries, to clear mines and reopen roads for the distribution of relief supplies, and to arrange for elections in late 1993. Italy has taken the lead in enlisting further economic support. The United States has played a largely constructive role in Mozambique, from encouraging movement toward reconciliation in the 1980s (despite the so-called Reagan Doctrine), to cajoling others to see the peace process through, to establishing one of the largest U.S. aid programs in Africa. But the road back for Mozambique, which has been torn by conflict during much of the period since independence in 1975, will be hard and long. Elections alone will not resolve past hostilities.

**Angola.** Angola, where the United States did play out the Reagan Doctrine, presents a less promising picture. The questions of peace, stability, and economic rehabilitation boil down to the real intentions of the former U.S. client, UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi. Defeated in a UN-supervised September 1992 election that was deemed “generally free and fair,” Savimbi again unleashed his guerrilla army. His political posturing—most recently, unofficially accepting his party’s junior partnership in a government of national unity and agreeing, under U.S. pressure, to withdraw his forces from key northern cities—smacks not just of duplicity but of an unquenchable determination to win power any way he can. Another concern is that in Angola, unlike Mozambique, the United Nations is drawing down, perhaps only temporarily, its modest peacekeeping presence. Because the United States had a great deal to do with building up UNITA and bringing the antagonists to a peace agreement (see “Angola: The Road to Peace” by Shawn McCormick, CSIS Africa Notes no. 125, June 1991), it cannot sit on the sidelines now when the situation in this important and potentially prosperous country is becoming so explosive. It is not yet time to send in the cavalry, but an expanded Mozambique-type UN peacekeeping operation would be in order.

**Ethiopia.**

For the moment, the Ethiopian situation seems to be relatively benign, thanks in great measure to a good rainy season. But the regime that took power after Mengistu’s 1991 exit (see “The Transition in Ethiopia” by Terrence Lyons, CSIS Africa Notes no. 127, August 1991) has not yet established a healthy political order in the wake of decades of repressive rule and a destructive civil war, nor has it solved the problem of an excessive population working too little arable land. Only last year, a prolonged drought in Eritrea, Tigre, and Hararge put 6 to 7 million people at risk. One good rain is unlikely to have relieved their suffering permanently. In addition to 350,000 Ethiopians displaced by the civil war that ended in 1991, at least that many Somali refugees are struggling for existence in the Ogaden region. Separatist movements in parts of the country further strain the situation. (Eritrea, a region carved out by Italian colonialists in 1890...
and not integrated into Ethiopia until after World War II, is a special case. In a process agreed to by the new Ethiopian government, which is too weak to do anything about it in any event, Eritrea will almost certainly choose independence in a 1993 UN-supervised referendum.) The United States played a critical role in helping end the armed conflict in Ethiopia in 1991; it cannot now allow the international community to neglect this populous and strategically placed country, particularly while the rest of the Horn is aboil.

... But Where’s the Policy?

There still is time, well before even considering military action, to enlist support—within Africa (including the Council of African Elders, comprising seven former heads of state), among the Western powers, and in the UN—for political and economic initiatives aimed at conflict resolution and humanitarian relief for the millions at risk in these countries. Ignored, or inadequately addressed, these volatile situations could easily produce fragmentation and anarchy in which, once again, only the gun will speak with authority.

At a time when (as cliché becomes reality) the world is entering a new era, the Clinton administration has an opportunity to formulate an Africa policy clearly distinguishable from that of its predecessor. The issue here is not labels (e.g., New World Order) or ideology, but the prospect that the Clinton administration can set operational standards for the next four to eight years. It may be argued that the prescriptions discussed thus far do not constitute “policy” in a rigorous sense, that they are essentially ad hoc crisis reactions. First, there never has been a single U.S. policy for all of Africa. Even during the cold war, Washington selected areas where the “spread of communism” and/or Soviet influence would be resisted. Second, in a world now bursting with conflicts serious enough to qualify as real threats to international peace and hence U.S. national interests (one can start and end with Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the conflicted and economically failing states of the former Soviet Union, and the Middle East), Africa is virtually off the screen. The issue then is not so much to develop a new policy, but to see if there is a conjunction between Africa’s most pressing needs and the Clinton administration’s willingness and ability to help meet them.

First the Economic Kingdom. . . .

CSIS recently held a conference, with World Bank support, on “The Transition to Pluralism in Africa: Implications for Economic Development and Investment.” (For a summary of the conference findings, see “Africa’s Transition to Pluralism: Economic and Investment Implications” by Witney W. Schneiderman, CSIS Africa Notes no. 142, November 1992.) It might have been more accurate to entitle the conference “Implications of Persistent Economic Underdevelopment for the Transition to Democratic Pluralism in Africa.” For the much-lauded transitions to democracy in a number of African states simply will not succeed without a firm economic base. The pie to be divided must be enlarged (or at least not further diminished) before the political rules for sharing it can be fully worked out.

This reality is vividly illustrated in L. Gray Cowan’s description of how Zambia’s profound economic problems are hindering the country’s efforts to maintain a democratic system of government. (See “Zambia Tests Democracy” by L. Gray Cowan, CSIS Africa Notes no. 141, October 1992.) In a similar vein, out of some 26 countries categorized by the U.S. Department of State as trying to democratize, only 5 or 6 have projected GDP growth rates sufficient to keep them ahead of population increases for the remainder of this decade. Among the exceptions are Botswana and Mauritius, already quite democratic.

Finally, while everyone is for democracy—and President-elect Clinton has expressed an intention to pursue it vigorously abroad—not everyone’s definitions, standards, and concerns about appropriateness are the same. We have only to recall the debates among U.S. officials and academics about Algeria’s cancellation of elections in January 1992, the clumsy military coup, mass arrests, and declaration of a state of emergency. It was easy to condemn the ruling Front de Libération Nationale for its affront to democracy, but it became harder to do so in light of the likely electoral victory of the Front Islamique du Salut, a fundamentalist party that, in the view of some, would likely have pushed Algeria toward extremism. Well, that’s exactly what the FLN, heir to the heroes of Algeria’s liberation from French colonial rule, has done. Democratic pressures may well persist in Algeria and in much of the rest of the continent, but it should be kept in mind that authoritarian rule still prevails in both North and sub-Saharan Africa.

Back to a Humanitarian Agenda

Most observers would agree that the immediate needs in much of Africa are straightforward. For the first time in “modern” history (i.e., since the beginning of European colonization), there is widespread hunger in the continent. Agricultural growth registered 1.3 percent in the 1980s whereas the population grew 3.1 percent. Nearly half of Africa’s estimated 450 million people are often short of food, and many are in danger of starvation. The World Bank noted some improvement in agricultural production in the late 1980s, but that may well have been nullified by the severe droughts that afflicted southern Africa, the Sahel, and the Horn over the past two years.

The United States has unique capabilities to help address Africa’s food crisis. Such a focus—building on the humanitarian consciousness-raising generated by the intervention in Somalia—would have the coherence and consensus that have been lacking in U.S. aid strategies in the past. (See “A Watershed in U.S. Aid to Africa: Disengagement or a New Approach?” by Carol Lancaster, CSIS Africa Notes no. 138, July 1992.) The remedies—admittedly more easily listed than implemented—are (1) the provision and better distribution
wasteful spending, and bloated bureaucracies. And the justice, and human rights in such countries as Kenya, attractions), and how many Botswanas will result is addresses South Africa, it is an intentional omission. Something about democracy is cheap (perhaps that's one of its growth-inhibiting hyperregulation of internal markets, they are paying for poor governance, including Zaire, Cameroon, and Uganda. Throwing in preaching Africans have learned through bitter experience the costs within the central humanitarian theme and the priorities unpredictable. As for South Africa, if its people are to overcome their bitter history, persistent deep divisions, and the more than usually painful obstacles to fashioning pluralistic, multiracial democracy, it will be by their own efforts—and because failure will bring them all down. The United States can do little about that, but should help when asked.

There is plenty of scope for the Clinton administration's presumed abiding sympathy for Africa within the central humanitarian theme and the priorities noted here. The Somali precedent of humane intervention, conducted under UN auspices and intimately involving NGOs, offers a flexible model for actions elsewhere in Africa. The United States will have to continue to play a leading role, but should take care not to appear domineering if it expects the rest of the world to participate and share the costs.

Under this policy umbrella, perhaps U.S. diplomats serving in Africa could be exempted from the mercantilist imperative being invoked by the Progressive Policy Institute. They could instead be offered bonuses for such achievements as helping to increase a country's caloric intake, the number of children surviving their fifth birthdays, or life expectancy. Military personnel could earn promotion points by serving in international peacekeeping operations, and bonuses based on the numbers of guns turned in to legitimate authorities.

The Bottom Line
A new wave of self-proclaimed "compassionate but wiser" critics of the Somali initiative has already raised the argument that humanitarian intervention when U.S. strategic interests are not at issue is fraught with danger. Will the U.S. electorate be willing to pay for a protracted involvement once the basic issue of starving people gives way to others that are more complex? Because the same question may be—and has been—posed in situations where the United States became bogged down in brutal and much costlier interventions, there is nothing new here. In all such cases, the bottom line is: Did it succeed? Thus, the Clinton administration's object in Somalia and elsewhere should not be to get out as soon as possible, but to help create reasonably peaceful and functioning countries.

Building on this type of humanitarian policy is consistent with a broader U.S. goal—a more peaceful and stable world. U.S. economic interests would be better served in such a world, where the gun is not the most critical instrument of political expression, and where people can pursue productive lives unhindered by war or repression, getting their countries off the international dole and back into the global marketplace.

Martin Lowenkopf retired in 1989 as director of the Office of Research and Analysis for Africa in the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR). He served as an analyst of East Africa, Zimbabwe, Liberia, and southern Africa before becoming deputy director and then director for all of sub-Saharan Africa. His experience with the continent spans three decades, including extended residence in East Africa and Liberia. His published works include Liberia: The Conservative Road to Development (1976), a chapter on Mozambique in Reassessing the Soviet Challenge in Africa (1986), and articles and book reviews on various African topics. His previous contributions to CSIS Africa Notes have been "Some Lessons From the Past and Some Thoughts for the Future on U.S. Policy in Africa," issue no. 132 (January 1992) and "If the Cold War Is Over in Africa, Will the United States Still Care?" issue no. 98 (May 1989).