Late September cartoon in the Cincinnati Inquirer showed Ross Perot stamping on his Western hat in anger at being excluded from the Presidential debates. A plaintive globe-headed figure labelled “Foreign Policy” looked on, empathetically remarking “I know how you feel ... I can’t get in either.” Africa, rarely edging onto the priority agenda of top foreign-policy makers, will find it even harder to make it onto the campaign trail. While marginalization of African concerns may be less dramatic in some European countries, the trend is not limited to the United States. Much of the Western world’s policy establishment would prefer to forget the continent exists.

Like it or not, however, policymakers in office in the coming years will have to decide how to respond to African crises and structural concerns. The issues may be neglected, but they will not go away.

It is now widely acknowledged that the primary initiative for redressing Africa’s marginalization must come from Africa—from civil society as well as more responsive governments and regional institutions, from those living on the continent as well as those who have settled elsewhere for political or economic reasons. As a recent statement by African non-governmental organizations put it, “The international community lacks the moral and political will to constructively assist Africa with its dilemmas.” The statement went on to conclude that “strong, accountable and responsible African institutions” must take the lead.

On issue after issue, nevertheless, the “international community” is inextricably involved, whether in calls for United Nations support for peacekeeping, for reform of the international financial institutions which play a dominant role in the economy of most African countries, or in deciding on bilateral relations with repressive regimes opposed by pro-democracy forces. The US in turn, by default or by active engagement, has much to do with the “moral and political will” as well as the policy content of the international response.

This issue of Washington Notes on Africa contains a summary checklist of many of the African issues which the next administration and the next Congress need to consider. Some—perhaps most—may only be the subject of inside-the-beltway debate by a handful of policy advocates and middle-level officials. Some may also force themselves on the agenda for serious attention by major policy players. That depends, in part, on CNN, The New York Times, and the media pack. But, even more, it depends on whether Africa’s advocates here can make loud enough and coherent enough noises.

Please use one or more of these questions, adapt them, or substitute your own. Raise them at campaign events and/or mail them to candidates’ campaign.

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headquarters in your congressional district. Include candidates for the House of Representatives and the Senate as well as for President. Concentrate on one or two related questions in any one message, and ask for a specific reply, not just a form letter. You may wish to include other background material, but keep it short. You may or may not get an answer, but you will let the candidates know that voters do care.

Note: More detailed background on most of the policy issues below can be found on the Web in the document archive at http://www.igc.apc.org/apic/index.shtml. The archive contains more than 150 documents from 1995 and 1996, from WOA, APIC, and other organizations, and is searchable by keyword. For suggestions on additional on-line resources, see “Africa on the Internet,” also available on the same Web site.

Security, Conflict Resolution and Humanitarian Assistance

“Africa” is still widely perceived as a country, and not accurately understood as a highly diverse continent three times the size of the US containing more than fifty distinct countries. Most of the continent’s countries are now at peace, whatever other problems they face. Having experienced among the most destructive conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s, countries such as South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Uganda are all dealing with “post-conflict” rather than “conflict” issues. Others, such as Tanzania, Kenya, Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Benin, and Tunisia, to name only a few from around the continent, have avoided post-colonial internal war, despite smaller-scale conflict and the cross-border impact of refugee flows from their neighbors.

Nevertheless, full-scale conflict in too many countries and the absence of minimal security for citizens in many others endangers not only the continent’s image but its future. Neither democracy nor development can advance if citizens are at the mercy of unrestrained gunmen. A newly emerging consensus, contrary to the Organization of African Unity’s general assumption since the 1960s, maintains that internal conflicts are not just the concern of one country. Neighboring countries and indeed the continent at large are victimized by spillover effects. Genocidal violence is in theory—if not yet in practice—the concern of the entire human community.

Yet the “international community” (both Africa-wide and world-wide) often lacks the capacity and the political will to respond. When governments and humanitarian NGOs do mobilize in response to a crisis, lines of accountability are often vague or ignored. One fundamental question is who takes responsibility to respond, and where the buck stops. In a crisis, neighboring countries are often the most intensely engaged. This can be an advantage but also a handicap in resolving conflicts. African regional and continental institutions have been taking a more active role in many crises, a trend which should be encouraged. But the scale of the military, organizational, and logistical resources needed means that the global community as well must take a hand.

Few doubt that the United Nations and other agencies need to improve their efficiency, management capacity, and accountability. But unjustified and indiscriminate UN-bashing has become commonplace in US politics. The far-right attacks the institution as such. The Clinton administration has also used the institution as a scapegoat. “Reform” proposals have too often
been designed simply to cut costs rather than to increase the UN's capacity to respond effectively to crises, such as the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and current threats of escalated genocidal violence in Burundi.

Polls show that the general public takes a far more positive stance towards the United Nations than is reflected in the public political debate and the standard assumptions of policymakers. Indeed, some polls show that the UN is more widely trusted by US citizens to do the right thing than is the US Congress. A June, 1996 poll showed solid majorities willing to commit US troops to peacekeeping in Burundi, as long as other countries did their share. But such alternatives are excluded from the menu of options policymakers will take seriously.

Currently, the largest UN peacekeeping contingent on the continent is in Angola, where the peace agreement signed in late 1994 is threatened by repeated delays. Angola faces a grave risk of a resurgence of war or an indefinite continuation of the current deadlock with two separate armies and little security for civilians. In Liberia, regional West Africa peacekeepers are the key force on the ground, but the chances of implementing the latest agreement depend on greater support from outside the region. The volatile Great Lakes region is still coping with the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and escalating ethnic violence both in Burundi and in neighboring eastern Zaire. While intense peace efforts are currently under way, everyone involved warns that their chances of success are very unpredictable, and the weekly death toll could easily rise from hundreds to thousands or tens of thousands.

No peacekeeping operations are currently envisaged for war-torn Sudan or for Somalia, still without a national government. Among the critical issues are not only the international community's continued involvement in humanitarian relief, but also what actions can be taken to promote peace and respect for human rights.

Questions:

(2) What level of financial and logistical assistance do you advocate for peacekeeping mechanisms and operations by the Organization of African Unity and African regional organizations? Increase? Decrease? About the same? Why?

(3) How do you propose to help strengthen the voices of African civil society to participate in international debates about the future of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance and in monitoring the record of "donor" governments, international agencies, and non-governmental organizations?

(4) Angola: Should the UN peacekeeping operation in Angola be continued beyond February 1997, if full implementation of the 1994 Lusaka peace agreement is further delayed? If UNITA continues to refuse to implement the agreement's provisions on military and political integration into one national army and a government of national unity, what additional sanctions, by the US and the international community, do you support?

(5) Liberia: What level of involvement and assistance from the US in the peace process in Liberia do you support? Increase? Decrease? About the same? Why? Do you support H.R. 4001, which proposes sanctions on countries violating the arms embargo against Liberian factions and investigation of war crimes by faction leaders?

(6) Great Lakes (Burundi and Rwanda): What level of US involvement and assistance in possible international peacekeeping in Burundi would you support? Funds? Logistic support? Contributing troops to UN peacekeeping? What can the US do to help impose effective embargoes against arms flows that fuel the conflicts in the region? In particular, what actions would you support against the Mobutu regime in Zaire? How would you propose to increase US support for the International Tribunal on the Genocide in Rwanda?
Horn of Africa (Sudan and Somalia):
What additional sanctions against the military regime in Sudan, or new diplomatic initiatives, do you propose to increase the chances for peace negotiations in Sudan's civil war, as well as advancement of democracy and human rights for all Sudanese? In the absence of a national Somali government, what measures do you propose to provide protection for humanitarian agencies and human rights advocates, both foreign and Somali, in that territory?

Democratization & Human Rights

Support for democratization and human rights in Africa is in principle one of the cornerstones of US policy in Africa. Public pressure against abusive regimes, support for elections, aid to a wide variety of groups in African civil society—all are on the standard list of policy instruments. Despite the relative consensus on this general policy framework, however, there are substantive concerns about US policy in practice.

Probably the most predictable issue as well as the most disturbing is the pervasive inertial tendency towards business as usual. Human rights are almost always given lip service, but far too often in practice are shoved to the side in favor of more "realistic" preoccupations with economic ties or other pragmatic considerations, including conflict resolution. High-profile criticism and, at the extreme, sanctions are not appropriate in all cases, of course. However, in many cases the US response has been far too weak. With respect to Nigeria, Kenya, Zaire, Ethiopia, and many other cases, the response to repression, human rights abuses, or political exclusion of opponents has typically been to speak softly and carry a small stick, or none at all. The US has been more consistently willing to exert meaningful pressure to gain concessions on economic issues than to use effective leverage in support of the cause of human rights and democracy.

To the extent that the US has become engaged, through USAID and other bilateral agencies, in support of civil society and pro-democracy forces, there remain substantive issues of both quantity and quality. With strong Congressional pressure to cut back on funds available for almost all international involvement, many promising initiatives—including US support for multilateral initiatives—are ruled out for budgetary reasons. To give only one set of examples, programs for international human rights monitors in conflict situations, as well as the international genocide tribunal, have been crippled by lack of timely funding and personnel.

There is also the issue of the content of support that is given. Critics maintain that in many cases US programs inappropriately promote the uncritical transfer of US views to other societies, neglect the substance of democratic participation in favor of formalities of electoral systems and ill-defined "training" programs, and neglect the potential for dialogue with Africans themselves about priorities in building democratic institutions suitable for each country. At a time when the World Bank and other multilateral institutions are increasingly realizing the need to listen to grassroots critics, the US still gives little opportunity for the intended beneficiaries to engage in dialogue with policymakers on the results and process of bilateral programs.

Questions:

(1) Support for democracy and human rights: What level of US funding do you support for civil society, pro-democracy, and human-rights groups in Africa, through US agencies? Through multilateral institutions? Through African governments that demonstrate the political will to build more effective and participatory democratic institutions? About the same as now, less than now, much less than now, more than now, much more than now?

(2) Program accountability: What mechanisms do you propose or support to gain feedback from African human rights and pro-democracy representatives, and African civil society more generally, on US policy and programs concerning human rights and democracy in African countries?
Nigeria: What additional measures, including specific sanctions, do you propose to increase pressure on the Nigerian military regime to respect human rights and accept popularly elected democratic authority? Do you support the Nigerian sanctions legislation introduced in 1996 by Senator Kassebaum (R-KS) and Representative Payne (D-NJ)? Would you support additional US funds to aid pro-democracy groups and Nigerian civil society?

Kenya: Do you support withholding US and international aid from Kenya in response to the Moi regime’s abuses of human rights, instigation of ethnic violence, and harassment of political opposition groups?

Zaire: What concrete measures would you support to induce pressure on Zaire leader Mobutu on issues including ethnic violence in Eastern Zaire, the flow of arms through Zaire fueling conflicts in Angola and the Great Lakes region, and repeated failure to stop impeding the process of democratization for Zaire?

Algeria: Given the economic importance of US-Algerian ties, and the region-wide implications of the violent confrontation between a repressive regime and extremist fundamentalist forces, do you support a more active role for the US, with European and other countries, in promoting peace negotiations and an end to violence in Algeria?

Sustainable Development & Social Equity

The issue of what policies are most effective in promoting sustainable development that can benefit the majority of Africa’s people is complex. There are no magic formulas to ensure success. US policy should integrate different components rather than viewing sustainable development and private sector approaches as contradictory alternatives. Sustainable development should be the goal, including economic growth, social equity, and preservation of environmental capital which protects the options of future generations. These are goals and values which apply equally to the least developed countries and the most advanced industrial countries. As Africa advances towards these goals, the potential for mutually beneficial ties between the US and Africa also grows.

Trade and aid policies should be seen as complementary, rather than mutually exclusive options applied to different sets of countries. The effectiveness of both will also be significantly affected by the adequacy of measures to address the serious problem of indebtedness of African states. Both existing and new programs should be considered in relationship to each other, and evaluated in terms of their potential contribution to sustainable and equitable development. There should be procedures for results-based evaluation of programs, regardless of whether they are implemented primarily through governmental agencies, the private sector, or the voluntary sector.

The actual economic ties between the United States and each of Africa’s five regions (North, West, Central, East and Southern) are already substantial. Sub-Saharan Africa alone, excluding both North Africa and South Africa, accounts for more US trade than Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union combined. The potential for expansion is enormous. To develop that potential and insure that it benefits ordinary citizens both in Africa and the United States, however, requires sustained investment in human resources and infrastructure, understanding that the payoffs will take time.

With the end of political apartheid and the beginning of democracy in South Africa, the US and South Africa now confront many of the same dilemmas. Both need to deal with racially and class-divided societies, as well as with escalating crime and economic insecurity. Both must find how to invest in human resources and promote social equity while confronting serious budgetary constraints. There is much opportunity for mutually beneficial exchange, not only in trade and investment, but also in dialogue about how to confront similar societal problems.
Questions:

(1) Do you support reinstatement of the "earmarked" allocation of assistance funds for the Development Fund for Africa, which ensures a minimum level of US bilateral support for African development?

(2) The US is dead last among developed countries in percentage of Gross National Product going to investment in sustainable development assistance world-wide, which accounts for less than 1% of the US federal budget. Yet the average American thinks we are spending 15 times that much or more. What are you doing as a candidate to correct this misinformation, and to promote increases in assistance that facilitates development?

(3) Do you support prompt US payment of outstanding arrears and current obligations to the World Bank's International Development Association, as well as to United Nations agencies engaged in development-oriented programs?

(4) Program accountability: What mechanisms do you propose or support to gain feedback from African grassroots development groups, and from African civil society generally, on US policy and programs concerning economic policy and development in African countries?

(5) The "structural adjustment" packages promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the parallel "market-oriented economic reform" packages pushed by the US government, have been strongly criticized by African grassroots groups as often overly rigid, damaging to the poor, harmful to the environment, and having a doubtful record even in terms of economic growth. What mechanisms would you suggest to promote a wider, more democratic debate about the proper mix of economic policies, both in international institutions and the US policy community, which would allow substantive input from African civil society, including environmental, labor, human rights, and women's groups?

(6) What measures do you support for more rapid debt relief for heavily indebted African countries, including better terms for relief of bilateral loans and of debts to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund?

(7) Do you support measures such as the one advanced by Representative McDermott (D-WA) and others to expand US trade and investment with Africa, and to move towards a US-Africa Free Trade framework? If so, what measures do you propose to include so that the benefits are equitably distributed, with increased African access to the US market as well as vice-versa, and so that workers' and environmental rights are protected both in the US and Africa?

(8) South Africa: What measures do you support to increase the dialogue between the United States and South Africa, at different levels of government and civil society, about common problems? What mechanisms do you support for both the South African and US public to provide more input on the content of US government programs in South Africa and US-South African dialogue at elite levels of government and business?

Shaping and Changing Gender Relations

Highlighted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995, there is an increasing recognition that the solution of the full range of Africa's problems cited above will hinge in large part on the extent to which Africa's women move towards full participation at all levels. Women and children are disproportionately the victims of war and displacement. The voices of women, if they are heeded, are often the most eloquent and coherent for peacemaking. Support for the small farmer and rural food security, as well as for micro-enterprise and viable survival strategies in Africa's sprawling cities, in practice must mean support for women, who are disproportionately represented in these life-sustaining roles. Concerns for equity, human rights promotion and political participation must integrally support the protection of women's rights, including protection against domestic and sexual violence. New

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Africa Low-Priority for Presidential Candidates

With the end of the Cold War—during which US interest in Africa was invariably shaped by larger geo-strategic concerns—Africa has slipped even farther down the Washington foreign policy agenda. Although both the Democratic and Republican platforms include brief passages relating to Africa (see below), neither incumbent President Bill Clinton nor his Republican rival, Bob Dole, has given high-level priority to enhancing the continent's visibility or building long-term relationships with African nations.

Of the two candidates, President Clinton has paid slightly more attention to Africa. His campaign has produced a three-page document, entitled “Promoting Democracy and Stability in Africa.” This highlights US support for electoral processes and conflict resolution initiatives in a number of African nations during the Clinton administration.

In Clinton’s first term, officials in a number of agencies, including the State Department, the National Security Council, USAID, the Department of Commerce and others, have focused on a wide range of African issues. But their efforts have often suffered from the perception and the reality of lack of high-level interest.

Dole, on the other hand, rarely mentioned Africa in his 28-year Senate career. However, he has been outspoken on a number of broader foreign policy issues that have implications for Africa. For example, Dole has been highly critical of many United Nations programs and has sought to curtail US support for and involvement in the UN's work. Last year, he introduced the “Peace Powers Act,” designed to reduce US funding for the institution and to make it more difficult for the President to commit US forces to UN peacekeeping activities. During Dole’s tenure as Senate Majority Leader, Republicans (together with some of their Democratic colleagues) have made deep cuts in US foreign assistance programs and have abolished a separate allocation for the Development Fund for Africa.

The bottom line is that neither candidate can be counted on to prioritize a coherent and effective Africa policy which promotes just and sustainable development, poverty reduction, accountable and transparent governance, peace, and respect for human rights across the continent. Whoever is elected, what is achieved will depend on the capacity of Africa advocates to insist on action from both the President and the new Congress.

Excerpts from the Republican Platform:

We support those U.S. aid programs to Africa which have proven records of success, especially the Child Survival Program of vitamins, immunizations, sanitation, and oral rehydration. We hail the social and economic progress of those nations which have used the free market to liberate the talent and the striving of their people. They deserve our attention, but our outreach must be on a case-by-case basis. Our hope for the future of South Africa, for example, stands in contrast with the military rule now imposed on Nigeria, the continent's most populous country.

The Republican Party's commitment to freedom and human rights in Africa is as old as the establishment of the Republic of Liberia. Today, the tragic fate of that small nation symbolizes the larger tragedy that has befallen much of the continent. The Clinton administration's dismal performance in Somalia, resulting in needless American deaths, set the stage for international passivity in the face of genocide in Rwanda and Burundi. The Clinton administration has even failed to rally the world against the slave trade sponsored by the government of the Sudan, whose persecution of the Sudanese Christians and others is nothing short of genocide. A Republican president will not tolerate this unconscionable treatment of children and women.

Excerpts from the Democratic Platform:

The Clinton Administration championed South Africa's democratic transition; supported Africa's many emerging democracies and led international efforts to speed the return of democracy in Nigeria; helped save countless lives in Somalia, Rwanda, and elsewhere through conflict resolution, removal of landmines, and humanitarian relief; and took steps to help sub-Saharan Africa's 700 million people develop into [sic] strong economies and markets. The Democratic Party believes that continuing to help the people of Africa nurture their continent's extraordinary potential and address its serious problems is both the right thing to do and profoundly in America's interest.
World Bank President James Wolfensohn has joined many earlier advocates in noting that investment in the education of girls is among the most cost-effective development action that countries and international institutions can take.

The solution to many of Africa’s problems will hinge on the extent to which Africa’s women move towards full participation.

African women’s groups are both growing in number and taking a wider range of initiatives. But they face many difficulties, including lack of organizational capacity, traditional prejudices, and unsupportive governments. Many of the initiatives promoting women’s rights have been advanced by multilateral institutions, particularly UN specialized agencies, which face massive budget problems, largely as a result of US cutbacks. US government support for bilateral and multilateral family planning programs, vital to women’s health, has been restricted by Congress. There is a continuing need to incorporate sensitivity to women’s rights not only in economic or civil society assistance programs but also into human rights criteria which should influence US bilateral relations with African countries.

Questions:

(1) Do you support continued and increased funding for multilateral and bilateral programs promoting African women’s rights, including protection against violence, health, family planning, education, participation in economic development (including micro-enterprise), and political participation?

(2) What measures do you support further to incorporate women’s rights issues, including implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action, into US bilateral relations with African countries? Into immigration policy towards asylum seekers?

Christian Witness for Africa: A Guide for Effective Action

The Africa Office of the National Council of Churches with the Washington Office on Africa (WOA) has produced Christian Witness for Africa: A Guide for Effective Action. Includes insightful background information and advocacy strategies to assist church activists and people of conscience interested in refocusing US assistance policy toward Africa. $7.00 ea.

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