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THE CONFLICT OF INTERESTS IN AMERICAN POLICY ON AFRICA

(Part of a larger study of the new role of Africa in World Politics)

In a sense, the challenge which Asia and Africa (including the Middle East) presents to American policy Springs from the same Source. The peoples of these areas have in common the spirit which the Bandung Conference expressed so well -- a relentless breaking of the old foundations of their societies, with the expectation of creating a new order in which the individual will have some hope for achieving human dignity.

There is another factor effecting our policy toward Asia and Africa which we of the West are reluctant to recognize overtly; but nevertheless are forced to take into account covertly. The balance of power between the Soviet world and the West now appears to have shifted to these areas with their vast populations and stores of strategic raw materials. The ultimate values and directions determined upon by this majority of the human race will probably decide in the long run whether we have another total war or attain a tolerable peace and whether the tenuous foothold the democratic faith has established within the last century will survive the totalitarian avalanche gathering force in much of the world.

To date there is little indication that American and Western policies have found any more promising basis of accomodation in Africa than in Asia and the Middle East. American policy in each area has been torn by a basic dilemma. This dilemma is created by a natural sympathy on the one hand for the legitimate nationalist aspirations of self-determination, equality, and social progress, and on the other hand, the recognition that advances in this direction often threaten vital strategic bases and economic interests of the United States and the Western World. In an article entitled "African Dilemma", President deKiwiet of Rochester University, pointed out the significance of this problem for American policy in Africa today when he said, "the political and historical idea of independence for subject peoples and the strategic need for dependable bases and safe lines of communication dwell together in American foreign policy..."¹. Our inability to resolve this dilemma by positive new policies in a world where the fundamental law, as E.H. Carr has described it, "is change", has resulted in alarming gyrations between propaganda statements of our belief in the rights of man, calculated to win the sympathy of subject peoples, and the pursuit of policies that sustain the status quo. Within a period of a few weeks in 1957, it was possible for President Eisenhower to sign a statement with the King of Morocco declaring our mutual belief that the problems of the peoples of North Africa should be settled according to the principle of self-determination and a short time later to extend additional credits to France by which she was able to continue her warfare against the Algerian independence movement.

1. Foreign Affairs, April 1955, p. 448
George V. Allen, under Secretary of State, in 1956 phrased this dilemma in these words: "The United States attitude toward Colonialism is known... But the application of this principle to present-day problems of foreign policy all over the world requires patient understanding and a high sense of responsibility, including regard for the ultimate and basic security interests of the United States"., "United States Foreign Policy in Africa", Annals, July 1956, p. 118

Interests and Foreign Policy

Modern pluralists such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Walter Lippman have pointed out that foreign policies, like domestic policies in a democratic society, are the reflection of the balance achieved between competing group interests.¹ Our policies toward Africa mirror such various interests. As a result, the picture remains badly blurred and miscalculations easily arise from a poor perception of the real nature of our interests. It is important, therefore, to take the true measure of these interests in order to gauge both their present influence and their proper influence upon policy.

American interests in Africa can be compressed into three major categories -- the economic, the strategic, and the humanitarian. The first two interests are rooted in immediately perceptible advantage and profit for group and nation, while humanitarian interests spring from a sense of responsibility transcending the narrow national interest and seek a plain of mutual benefit in respect for human right. It will be noted that these categories often impinge on each other and are not always necessarily in conflict.

Economic Interests

American economic interests in Africa have mushroomed since World War II. While this activity does not begin to equal that of the European colonial powers, in terms of proportionate trade and investment, the percentage increase of American participation in African economic life is nevertheless very large.

American private capital is finding increasing sources of gain in Africa primarily in the extraction industries. The total amount of private American investment in Africa has leapt from 93 million in 1936 to 700 million in 1956.² Most of this capital is being invested in iron ore, mining in Liberia, oil exploration and distribution in North, West, and South Africa, and copper mining in Central Africa.

Comparatively little American private capital has been invested in farming, or in industrial enterprises of Africa outside of the Union of South Africa. Also Africa has not yet become an important market for American-made goods. Today only 10% of Africa's imports are supplied by the United States.

The primary motivation of American enterprise in Africa is not sensational profit-making, although there have been a few windfall gains by American owners of capital in South and Central Africa. The principal dynamic appears to stem from large scale American enterprise, such as petroleum, steel, and copper producers who are concerned about the depletion of American domestic resources and who, confronted with rising costs of production at home; are seeking cheaper sources of raw materials abroad. It is of considerable significance that the American industrial plant has, in recent years, become dependent upon sources of overseas supply. The United States is now a net importer of raw materials rather than a net exporter. For example, in 1956 25% of our iron ore needs were imported and Liberia contributed a significant portion.

1. "Interest", as defined by Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, is: "Participation in advantage, profit, and responsibility." It must be remembered, too, that there are various types of interests, such as self-interest, mutual interest, and selfless interest; the latter being exceedingly rare.
2. Kamarck, A.M., "The African Economy and International Trade", The United States in Africa, American Assembly, 1958, p. 129

In areas like West Africa, American business finds its interests, on the whole, complementary to the interests of the peoples of the developing economies. In other areas, like South Africa and the Portuguese territories, American capital tends to strengthen racial and feudalistic structures by investing dollars in mining industries based upon compulsory labor systems.

There are, however, great limitations upon the possible rapid expansion of American private capital in Africa. They arise from a variety of problems -- the hostility of colonial powers, unfamiliar legal and cultural systems, and the rise of African nationalism, with its emphasis on mass welfare and its severe restrictions on profit-making. Increasing racial tensions in white-settled areas create an atmosphere of instability that further dampens the ardor of American enterprise. Therefore, American business is not likely to develop the extensive interest in Africa that British and French capital have had for nearly a century.

At present, Africa is at the bottom of the list of the major areas in the under-developed world receiving United States Government aid; but there has been a remarkable growth in American-supported economic development and technical assistance programs within the last few years. The total amount of United States aid has leapt from nothing prior to the end of World War II to \$222 million in 1956.¹ This does not include assistance from the International Bank of \$462 million by the end of 1957.² Not only are the needs of this vast continent immense for the creation of an infrastructure of roads, railways, ports, hydro-electric schemes, village development, and social welfare programs but changing conditions are making such developments far more practical than before.

The eight presently independent African Governments will shortly be joined by Nigeria, Italian Somaliland, Togoland, and other British and French territories all of whom will soon be in a position to request extensive American aid. It has been one of the continuing characteristics of colonial rule that Metropolitan powers have been very slow in requesting economic assistance for their African wards; yet even here suspicion and resistance to American involvement are breaking down.

Strategic Interests

Probably the strongest motive for American Government aid programs in Africa is an interest in securing assured sources of raw materials both for our own industries and for those of Western Europe. The United States recognizes that such security is related to rapid economic progress with rising standards of life for the African people and the development of strong, viable African economies.³ Also, European colonial powers lack the means the means for more rapid development and in some cases have not fully realized the importance of such programs.

Thus, American economic interests are directly related to security considerations. While our industrial plant would undoubtedly survive the

1. Ibid.,
2. Ibid., p. 130
3. William Moran, Chief, Africa Division, Foreign Operations Administration, stated "The resources of Africa have scarcely been touched, and the development of these resources is essential to its own development as well as to the continued expansion of the economies of the United States and Western Europe." "U.S. Technical and Economic Assistance to Africa", Africa Today, ed. Haines, p. 440-41

loss of vital African supplies, European economies would be badly crippled. Inasmuch as the defensive system of the Western World is an integrated one, American strategic planners are deeply concerned over the maintenance of close friendly relations between the African Continent and ourselves.

There has been a growing tendency among American military planners to link Africa to the defensive system of Europe. Strong pressure has been exerted upon President Bourguiba of Tunisia to join NATO and the United States has steadfastly refused to re-negotiate the position of military air bases in Morocco with the new Government. Despite these and other American and Western pressures, no independent state in Africa is currently a direct participant in NATO. However, the colonies of the European powers, are indirect participants in the Western security system. In Africa South of the Sahara agreements with colonial powers and the South Africans bind Africans to the defense of Western Europe. This fact, probably more than any other single factor, often influences the United States to accept without objection the less savory aspects of the colonial policies of our European allies. As one astute foreign policy analyst, Hans Morgenthau, expressed it: "The United States has tended to opt in virtually all respects for the policies of the metropolitan powers, however modified and qualified in detail, and it has subordinated its long-range interest in the autonomous development of the native population to short-range considerations of strategy and expediency."¹

It is difficult to see any prospect for change in this policy until our policy-makers become less pre-occupied with the creation of a system based largely on the military containment of the Communist bloc, and broaden their policies to include a more creative economic approach, that strengthens Western & African economic ties but de-emphasizes the presently predominant military strategic considerations.

Africa is especially unsuited to a military containment policy. In the first place, neither the Soviet Union nor any other Communist power presents currently a direct invasion threat. Their major influence is confined to ideological penetration and the shrewd exploitation of frustrated African nationalism. Secondly, it should be noted that the extent of Communist influence in Africa is often exaggerated by our sensation-hunting press, and sometimes by colonial powers, who seek to play upon American fears in order to gain support for repressive policies.

Professor Vernon McKay points out in this connection, "If Communism were to win the Middle East, it is true, the Moslems south of the Sahara might be easier prey".² But he adds that Communism is far from having gained the position of strength it would need to present such a grave threat today. It should be increasingly obvious in Africa today, our policies are weakened when they are drafted primarily with an eye to military containment of the Soviet Union.

1. Morgenthau, Hans, "United States Policy Toward Africa", in Africa in the Modern World, ed. Stillman, University of Chicago Press, 1955, p. 321
2. "External Pressures on Africa Today", The United States and Africa op.cit., p. 84

The newly-independent countries of Africa have already made it thoroughly clear that they wish to devote their limited resources to the strengthening of their internal economic systems and do not wish to be involved in the cold war struggle between the two chief power blocs. American policy is, as yet, far from reconciled to this "non-alignment" thesis as it was propounded most specifically at the 1958 Accra Conference of the eight independent African Governments.

Humanitarian Interests

From the complex of various humanitarian interests stem many important ideas and influences which may in time supply the corrective needed for the imbalance of security considerations noted above. American humanitarian interest come from our Judeo-Christian, democratic heritage, with its strong respect for the human personality and faith in the principles of equality and self-determination. Several groups in American society have a considerable interest in Africa from this perspective. They include Protestant and Catholic missions, the American Negro community, trade unions, foundations, and educational bodies.

The major point of contact with Africa for millions of Americans has been their membership in a local church which helps maintain a mission station somewhere in Africa. It is of some significance that 20 million Africans have embraced one form or another of Christian faith and many millions more have benefited from the healing drugs or educational programs of the Missions.

Foreign missions have often been criticized by African nationalists for being ideological apologists for imperialism. Yet while missions have often stood aside on the heated political issues of the day, it is unfair to equate their interests with colonialism. Certainly most American Christian denominations and their national boards are today increasingly concerned that American influence be exerted on behalf of African human rights. One of the spokesmen of American Churches who has perhaps done more than any other American to stir this consciousness is Dr. Emory Ross. In his book African Heritage Dr. Ross draws a relationship between the pioneering work of missionaries and the large-scale Government economic and technical assistance programs of today. "The real and heavy task, essential for Africa, for us, and for the world, is the creating of Christian Community in and with Africa ...In such a Christian Community, what has come to be called Point IV, is a basic and historically accepted major element -- the aiding of all the life of all the people -- land, food, clothing, shelter, health, religion, literacy, literature, education, communications, recreation, economics, family, community, government -- all these things are, or should be, the Christian concern of Christians everywhere, for everybody." 1. Christian leaders have called for policies that enhance the dignity of life in Africa. They deplore compromises with racial injustice and are skeptical of the value of military and economic agreements that subordinate human values to security considerations.

Since the collapse of the inflated "back to Africa" Garvey movement American Negroes have sought to forget their African past. But this prevailing mood of the Negro is changing. The achievements of Ghana have done more to kindle American Negro confidence in their blood brothers on the African continent than any other single event. Leaders of the American Negro intellectual community from Richard Wright to Martin Luther King have been urging their people to regard the

1. Ross, Emory, African Heritage, Friendship Press, 1952, p. 138

struggles of Africa and themselves as one for equal rights. The more politically-minded American Negroes have been attracted to the Pan-Africa ideas of African leaders like Nkrumah and Azikiwe who are themselves products of American universities. Pan-Africanism has a racial aspect that identifies Western Hemisphere negroes with those of Africa. George Padmore, a West Indian by birth, has set forth most ably in several of his works the ideas of Pan-Africanism. The latest of his writings is Pan-Africanism or Communism.

As the Negro vote becomes more important, increased pressures will be exerted on American policy to recognize more fully African rights and interests. Negroes are of course especially sensitive to racial injustice and are other racialist political philosophies.

In addition to these two major humanitarian influences, there is the awakening of United States liberal educational, foundation, and trade union interest in Africa to the task of forwarding programs of educational and social advance, all of which exert additional pressures on behalf of policies based upon our mutual interest in democratic progress and political stability in Africa.

The Balance of Interests

In summary, we can conclude that there are several critical points at which American interests in Africa are in conflict.

From an economic standpoint, most American investment in Africa is not in conflict with humanitarian interests; but the growing American investment in the white-settled areas of Central and South Africa indicates a conflict. American assistance for settler-controlled Governments pursuing policies of racial discrimination is highly questionable in terms of elementary justice and also long-range security interests. Given the present racialist direction of the Central African Federation, American support for economic development and early independence is directly contrary to the welfare of the six million African people involved.¹

Yet the primary point of conflict arises between strategic interests and humanitarian interests. Strategic ties with South Africa and France have created the most obvious dilemmas where what policy we have both in and out of the United Nations reveals the inability of the United States to make up its mind either to support the repressive policies of these allied powers or to oppose them. American policy toward Portugal's refusal to place its colonial peoples under the aegis of the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories of the United Nations, again reveals the same dilemma. Insofar as the United States has been able to resolve its basic policy dilemma at all, it has been through the sacrifice of humanitarian long-range interests to the expediency of a short-term security interests pressed upon us by our European allies.

1. Professor James Coleman, in his article-review in World Politics, July, 1957, p. 603, suggests that American policy has given support to the ambition of the white settler-controlled Government of the Central African Federation for early independence. This would mean that British influence over the direction of policy would be entirely lost, as has happened in South Africa, where Apartheid now dominates the scene.

A more adequate resolution of our dilemma will be achieved by facing frankly the fact of its existence. Neither the self-righteous assertions of some of the proponents of current policy who see no conflict of interests or the views of those critics who believe all interests but the humanitarian must be abandoned will supply a workable alternative. A more hopeful policy can be evolved by the acceptance of a balance of interests that breaks through the deadlock of our present dilemma and gives force and direction to American policy.

Personally I believe that a break-through might be achieved by means of an African policy based upon a position of strength rather than weakness. It has been argued that present American security relations in Africa are antiquated and ineffectual, whereas our humanitarian interests are strong and vital. Therefore, far greater emphasis should be given to the humanitarian interests in various aspects of our policy as over against the security interests that presently predominate. Without attempting to elaborate in detail all the considerations that naturally arise in this connection, I should like to set forth several basic principles for operation, which, while not resolving all conflicts, nevertheless would give a new emphasis and direction:

1. Africa can no longer be approached as an extension of the Western European Security system. Our relations with the rapidly emerging new African states will need to be based on a respect for their freely expressed desires to be independent and neutral. Any new African defensive arrangements will need to be worked out with African states in terms of African interests.

2. Economic and technical assistance programs should be stepped up in order to create viable and strong African economies capable of resisting the temptations of totalitarian extremism.

3. Military and economic support for governments practicing repressive racial policies should be withheld until more reasonable adjustments have been made. (And if at the same time a forthright attempt to impliment Supreme Court decisions on racial integration at home is made, we will have a much firmer ground to stand on.

4. The United Nations could be more effectively used as a forum for the expression of traditional American attachment to the ideas of self-determination, social advancement and racial equality.

5. European colonial powers should be encouraged to expedite more rapidly the progress toward self-government and independence of their remaining African colonial possessions. While the continuation of close economic and cultural ties between metropolitan powers and African states should also be encouraged, American policy should discourage the creation and continuation of artificial Euro-African communities that deny genuine self-determination to African states.

Finally, it should be pointed out once again that a more hopeful approach to Africa cannot be made without recognizing in our foreign policy thinking that military pacts are a feeble and often unsound means for Communist containment in a period when millions of Africans and Asians are determined for the first time in their history to choose their own political values and systems. America's greatest strength is not her capacity to produce the most modern weapons, necessary as these may be for our defense, but in the force of our humanitarian idealism. In Africa we will have more success if we build upon this as our major interest.