

LESSON 6

Continental and World Affairs

Africa holds a strategic place in the world. It contains many minerals that are essential for industrial growth. It sits squarely in the middle of three of the world's most important trade routes: the Atlantic and Indian oceans and the Mediterranean Sea. Its fifty-three states represent over one-fourth of all votes within the United Nations system. Still, most African countries exert little influence in world affairs because of their weak political and economic systems and limited military capabilities. This update examines four areas with respect to foreign policy in Africa: 1) relations among African states; 2) major conflicts in Africa; 3) relations outside Africa; and 4) the United States and Africa.

RELATIONS AMONG AFRICAN STATES

In order to create greater unity among African states, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana convened the first Conference of Independent African States in 1958. By 1963, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) had been created, despite strong differences among African states on how to unify. The organization long served as a sounding board for the opinions of its members on problems such as conflict, colonial legacies, and apartheid. It mediated border disputes and helped settle some disagreements. The OAU gained widespread recognition for its role in combating apartheid.

However, the OAU's general focus was on African liberation and maintaining the independence of African states. It experienced significant internal divisions and financial constraints. Blatant human rights violations by some African leaders were not effectively addressed. As a result of such problems, in 1999, the OAU was transformed into the African Union (AU). The AU has been more focused on maintaining peace and security across the continent. It has also been concerned with promoting economic development.

The AU is modeled primarily on the European Union. It proposes to create an African Peace and Security Council, an African Parliament, a Common Court of Justice, a Central Bank, and eventually a single currency. The Assembly of Heads of State and Government has important responsibilities, including the power to intervene in the affairs of member states, particularly in cases of genocide. In 2004, the AU sent a peacekeeping force to Darfur, Sudan, to help address genocide in the area. However, this force is underequipped and underfunded to address the situation.

African states have also formed a host of sub-regional organizations on the continent. However, like the OAU, their records have often been mixed-to-poor. Two of Africa's more important sub-regional organizations are the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). These organizations have worked to decrease trade barriers among members, to settle disputes, and to increase regional cooperation.

MAJOR CONFLICTS IN AFRICA

The AU and Africa's regional organizations highlight the cooperation seen in Africa. However, no discussion of African foreign relations can ignore the violent conflicts taking place on the

continent. Here we focus on the wars in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Sudan

In 1955, Christian and animist groups in southern Sudan feared efforts by the Islamic north to conquer and convert the south. These groups revolted. After the British governor-general promised justice and the northern Sudanese parties agreed to consider the creation of a federal state at independence, the southerners agreed to a cease-fire. However, soon after independence was granted on January 1, 1956, leaders in the north attempted to adopt an Islamic constitution. This move alarmed groups in the south. It helped spark a long civil war that left almost two million people dead. In 2005, after years of broken cease-fires, a peace agreement was finally signed.

In the 1990s, Sudan became increasingly isolated on the international scene. In 1993, the United States placed Sudan on the list of states that sponsor terrorism. In 1998, the United States launched cruise missiles on the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. This attack was based on a report that a chemical factory there was linked to al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden.

In 2003, a horrific situation developed in the Darfur region in western Sudan. Here, the Arab Janjaweed militia has engaged in a genocidal campaign to drive other local ethnic groups out of the country. The militia is supported by the Sudanese government. By 2006, as many as 400,000 people had been killed.¹ While the African Union has sent a peacekeeping force, many have called for a more robust UN force. Indeed, the UN has approved a 20,000-person force. However, Sudan has so far refused to accept it, saying it would see the force as a foreign invasion.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Great Lakes region of East and Central Africa has seen alarming turmoil in recent years. In 1994, genocide in Rwanda left at least 800,000 people dead. Civil war in Burundi claimed over 300,000 lives between 1993 and 2005. War in the Democratic Republic of the Congo cost nearly four million lives.² Here, we focus on the situation in the DRC.

The DRC has a history of brutal rule and exploitation. This history goes back to the slave trade and the treacherous colonial rule of King Leopold I of Belgium. Between 1965 and 1997, President Mobutu Sese Seko ruthlessly ruled the country with U.S. backing. He accumulated a huge personal fortune. By the mid-1990s, the deterioration of the economy created tremendous popular unrest.

In early 1997, long-time rebel leader Laurent Kabila started a successful drive to oust Mobutu. The governments of Rwanda and Uganda aided him. When Kabila and his army marched triumphantly into Kinshasa in May 1997, they were enthusiastically received by the local population. However, the enthusiasm of the Congolese soon faded. Kabila resisted democracy, failed to jump-start the economy, and refused to allow a United Nations investigation of a massacre led by advancing Kabila-led rebels.

In 1998, Uganda and Rwanda (the allies that helped Kabila gain power) accused Kabila of allowing DRC-based rebel groups to launch attacks into their countries. The Ugandans and Rwandans then joined with rebellious factions in the DRC to defeat Kabila. Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Chad, and Sudan sent troops to help Kabila. The conflict was further driven by the desire of all the competing groups to gain control over the DRC's tremendous wealth in natural resources. The complex regional conflict has been called "Africa's First World War."

A turning point came in January 2001 when Kabila was assassinated. He was replaced by his son, Joseph Kabila, who quickly worked to implement a peace accord. By the end of 2002, a UN peacekeeping mission, known as MONUC, had been deployed throughout the country, and all remaining Angolan, Namibian, and Zimbabwean troops had been withdrawn. In April 2003, a new constitution was signed. This constitution provided for the installation of a provisional government headed by Joseph Kabila. Four vice presidents, representing the various competing factions, were also put in place.

While the new government represented significant progress, it was unable to stop the violence. By mid-2006, escalating violence had led the UN to expand its mission to 17,500 troops. With this expansion, MONUC became the largest peacekeeping force in the world. The magnitude of the conflict is reflected in the fact that nearly four million people have been killed. In July 2006, the DRC held its first multiparty elections since 1960 despite the continuing violence. Joseph Kabila won 45 percent of the vote. His main opponent, Jean-Pierre Bemba, took 20 percent. Since neither candidate held more than fifty percent of the vote, a runoff was held between the two men in October 2006, and was won by Kabila.

RELATIONS OUTSIDE AFRICA

African states have active relations with foreign organizations and countries outside of Africa. For example, African countries rely on the United Nations and its different agencies for extensive help in such areas as economics, health, and security. In 2006, the UN had seven ongoing peacekeeping missions in Africa. These operations were located in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Liberia, Sudan, and Western Sahara. Importantly, Africans are also significant contributors to UN peacekeeping operations. Nine of the top twenty contributors of military personnel to UN operations are African countries.³ In part because of their extensive participation in UN operations, as well as their prominent role in continental affairs, South Africa and Nigeria are trying to gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

By 1980, no European country ruled any African country. Even so, for most African states, Europe remained an important player. Indeed, tens of thousands of Africans moved to France, Britain, and other European states in the second half of the twentieth century. Today, almost half of Africa's trade is with Europe. Europe provides over \$29 billion annually in development assistance to the continent.⁴ Through the Commonwealth of Nations, eighteen former British colonies in Africa have close ties with Britain. Thirty African states have close ties with France through the Agency of the French-Speaking Community. Fourteen of these states maintain even closer ties with France as members of the Franc Zone, which ties their currencies to the euro.

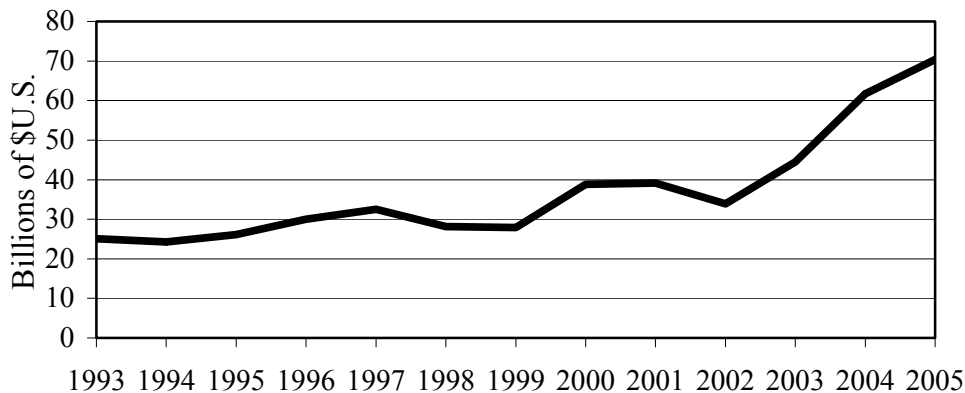
THE UNITED STATES AND AFRICA

Before World War II, the United States generally recognized Europe's dominant position in Africa and rarely showed significant interest in the continent. This changed after World War II, when the United States expressed support for decolonization. The Cold War was also important, as Africa again became part of the global chessboard.

Today, the United States has significant economic connections to Africa in the areas of aid and trade. For example, in 2004, President Bush established the Millennium Challenge Account. This program aims to increase development assistance to the world's poor countries that are "ruling justly, investing in people, and encouraging economic freedom." Through this program, the United States approved over \$1 billion in aid to Madagascar, Cape Verde, Benin, and Ghana.⁵ Overall, in 2005, the United States provided \$4.5 billion in economic assistance to sub-Saharan Africa.⁶

In the late 1990s, the Clinton Administration strongly supported passage of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The goal of this act was to assist sub-Saharan African economies and improve economic relations between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa. It was passed by the House of Representatives in 1998. However, the Senate rejected it because of strong opposition from labor unions and the textile industry. Congress feared that increased imports from Africa would undermine the American textile industry and hurt American workers. The bill was reintroduced in 1999 and signed into law in May 2000. It has contributed to increasing U.S.-African trade since the turn of the century (see Chart 1).

Chart 1
U.S. - African Trade



Source: IMF, Direction of Trade Statistics, Yearbook 2000 and September 2006.

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Under AGOA, thirty-seven sub-Saharan African countries receive trade preferences for exports to the United States.⁷ To be eligible for AGOA benefits, African countries must show they are working toward establishing a market-based economy, instituting the rule of law, eliminating barriers to U.S. trade and investment, creating economic policies that reduce poverty, protecting worker rights, and implementing a system to combat corruption. Hundreds of thousands of jobs

have been created in Africa because of AGOA. Initially, many of these jobs were in the textile industry. However, since 2005, U.S. imports of African textile products under AGOA have been decreasing, while U.S. AGOA-related imports of crude oil, platinum, diamonds, and cocoa have been increasing.⁸ Initially, AGOA was set to expire in 2008; however, in 2004 Congress extended the act until 2015.

For more recent information, please visit the timelines at www.southerncenter.org.

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¹ Save Darfur, "Background," October 25, 2006, <http://www.savedarfur.org/pages/background> (accessed November 2, 2006).

² Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2006, s.v. "Burundi," "Rwanda," "The Democratic Republic of Congo."

³ United Nations Peacekeeping, "Monthly Summary of Contributors Military and Civilian Police Personnel," August 2006, http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/2006/august06_2.pdf.

⁴ Europa: EU Press Room, "EU Support for Peace and Security in Africa," February 2005, http://europa.eu/press_room/presspacks/us20050222/africa.pdf (accessed November 2, 2006).

⁵ Curt Tarnoff, "Millennium Challenge Account," Congressional Research Service Report (Library of Congress, August 1, 2006), <http://italy.usembassy.gov/pdf/other/RL32427.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2006).

⁶ Danielle J. Langton, "Africa: U.S. Foreign Assistance Issues," Congressional Research Service Report (Library of Congress, January 26, 2006), <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/crs/ib95052.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2006).

⁷ AGOA, "Countries Eligible for AGOA Benefits," http://www.agoa.gov/eligibility/country_eligibility.html (accessed December 10, 2006).

⁸ Office of the United States Trade Representative, "2006 Comprehensive Report on U.S. Trade and Investment Policy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa and Implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act," the Sixth of Eight Annual Reports, May 2006, http://www.ustr.gov/assets/Document_Library/Reports_Publications/2006/asset_upload_file236_9455.pdf (accessed November 27, 2006).