

CURRENT HISTORY

May 2002

“The new African leaders policy was intended to be the [Clinton administration’s] story of peacemaking, partnership, and economic development. Instead, it became a subplot in a story of war, casualties, and the remaking of old African leaders.”

Irrational Exuberance: The Clinton Administration in Africa

PETER ROSENBLUM

On March 25, 1998, President Bill Clinton traveled to Entebbe, Uganda to huddle with the president of Uganda and the leaders of five neighboring states for what his national security adviser referred to as a “unique gathering” and an “honest discussion.” It was President Clinton at his best—batting around important political issues with key leaders. But for the first time in United States history, this was occurring in Africa, and the leaders were African. At the end of the meeting, the leaders signed a joint declaration of principles. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni declared that Entebbe—site of the famous 1976 raid by Israeli commandos to free passengers of a hijacked airliner—would henceforth be known for this summit and its promise of “peace and prosperity.”

The president’s Africa trip marked a crescendo in the renascent Africa policy of the Clinton administration. Bill Clinton’s first term was characterized largely by disaster and disengagement with Africa: the Somalia debacle followed by the Rwanda genocide. But the arrival of Madeleine Albright as secretary of state in 1997 and the appointment of Susan Rice as assistant secretary of state for Africa that same year brought a renewed dynamism to Africa policy. The president’s trip was intended to demonstrate this, but even more so, it was intended to promote a positive image of Africa to the American people. On this, the entire policy community agreed: if the United States was to increase engagement in Africa, the American public had to believe it was worthwhile. And for that, the administration

had to overcome a profound skepticism nurtured by persistent images of disease, corruption, and war.

Each step in the president’s hotly debated agenda was carefully choreographed to convey a select number of positive messages—economic renewal in Ghana, democracy in South Africa, civil society in Senegal—and to showcase selected figures. In Uganda the president stressed partnership, economic development, and cooperation to end genocide. For Africa watchers the visit consecrated the status of Ugandan President Museveni as the exemplar of a “new generation of African leaders.”

Administration officials had been developing close personal relationships with a select group of African leaders throughout the 1990s. The core group included, in addition to Museveni, Presidents Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea. After the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Major Paul Kagame was brought into the group. The four had much in common: they were all successors to venal and abusive leaders of corrupt regimes. They spoke a proud and confident language of self-reliance, worked closely with international financial institutions, and shared a willingness to engage in robust military action to achieve foreign policy goals. They were military men—warlords to their detractors, and “soldier princes” to their admirers. Each came to power through long guerrilla struggles, rather than elections, corrupt political maneuvering, or foreign intervention. And while some notion of political participation figured on their agendas, they shared an opposition to multiparty democracy on a Western model.

The odd men at the Entebbe meeting were Presidents Daniel arap Moi of Kenya and Laurent Kabila

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of the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Zaire). Moi was the model of the “old” African leader: venal, corrupt, and out of favor with the United States. His presence was a face-saving gesture by the United States to compensate for earlier insults to an old cold war ally (who also happened to be willing to station American troops in times of need). Kabila, who was recently installed as leader of the neighboring Congo, was a client and beneficiary of the new leaders. Museveni and Kagame plucked him from obscurity and led the war that brought him to power. For the United States, the Entebbe meeting was the last in a series of ultimately vain efforts to keep him in the fold of the new leaders. To mark the distinction between these two and the real “new leaders,” both Kabila and Moi were pointedly subjected to severe private meetings with President Clinton.

The “Entebbe Principles” produced at the meeting promised “genuine transparent partnership” and “long-term meaningful engagement” to achieve peace and prosperity and to stop genocide. They were signed on the day of the meeting: March 25, 1998. Within three months, Ethiopia and Eritrea were at war. Two months later, Rwanda and Uganda were fighting in Congo, first against Kabila and then against each other. Meanwhile the host of the Entebbe summit, Yoweri Museveni, began behaving in a manner strikingly similar to his “old” neighbor in Kenya: manipulating elections, harassing his opponent (whom he accused of being HIV positive), and standing by as relatives and cronies exploited the Congo war for economic advantage.

The “new African leaders” policy appeared to be a colossal failure. The countries expected to help keep the peace in the region instead contributed to wars that cost about 100,000 lives directly in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and close to 2 million, overall, in Congo. And the policy—whether distorted or correctly understood—created widespread resentment in Africa, Europe, and even inside the State Department. The Entebbe Principles and references to new African leaders quietly disappeared from official statements; those most closely associated with the promotion of the new leaders now say that it was little more than a turn of phrase that the press blew out of proportion.

THE NEW AFRICAN POLICY LEADERS

On closer analysis, the story that emerges is more subtle—partly inspiring, still unsettling. Never before had an administration worked so hard to raise Africa to the status of other regions on the foreign policy agenda: the president’s visit was unprecedented, and despite the wars that erupted,

most of the president’s cabinet followed with visits of their own. A major economic ministerial meeting was organized in Washington and a meeting of African ministers took place in Arizona.

Instead of a single policy, there were several: a Rwanda policy, a Great Lakes policy, a Sudan policy, and a policy of selling Africa to the American people. But they were all characterized by close personal relationships nurtured by Albright’s team and eventually exploited by the African leaders themselves. These relationships facilitated communication but threatened the role of the United States as unbiased peace broker when war broke out. These policies also had other commonalities, one of which was ironic in light of the broad policy goals of the first Democratic administration since President Jimmy Carter: democracy and human rights became an impediment to the Clinton administration’s goals in Africa. The “new leaders” of United States policy had to invest their credibility in deflecting criticism of the “new leaders” in Africa.

The principal figure in the new policy was Susan Rice, a brilliant woman with family connections to the new secretary of state. Rice was 28 when she was appointed to the National Security Council in 1993. She was named assistant secretary in 1997. Although her doctoral thesis was on Zimbabwe, she had no significant African field experience, and limited interest. After she finished her thesis at Oxford, she moved to Toronto and worked as a management consultant. She made no secret of the fact that assistant secretary for Africa was not her first choice; she took it as a kind of consolation prize when she was rejected for other senior posts.

The first choice for assistant secretary among many Democrats and allied groups in the nongovernmental community was Howard Wolpe. As a congressman from Michigan in the 1980s, Wolpe headed the Subcommittee on Africa in the House of Representatives. During those years of Republican administrations, the subcommittee was nearly a shadow ministry for the Democrats. It had a top-notch staff and active chair who nurtured anti-apartheid initiatives, exposed hypocrisy in United States policy, reduced military support to dictators like Zaire’s Mobutu Sese Seko, and to the great dismay of the Reagan and Bush administrations, spoke out actively in support of human rights. The pronouncements of the subcommittee, and its chair, often upstaged the official government policy. Throughout the Clinton administration, Wolpe was a special envoy to the Great Lakes, playing a key role in Burundi and Congo. It was eventually Wolpe

who traveled from one capital to another during the most tense negotiations.

The other key force in setting Africa policy is the staff of the National Security Council (NSC), which reports directly to the president. Susan Rice eventually helped bring Gayle Smith in as her replacement. Smith was an activist and sometime journalist in the Horn of Africa, known for her contacts in Eritrea and Ethiopia, but particularly close to the Tigraean leadership of Ethiopia. In 1982 she coauthored *The Hidden Revolution*, a highly complimentary book about rebel administration in zones occupied by the Tigraean People's Liberation Front (TPLM), the future leaders of Ethiopia. Another prominent activist on her staff, John Prendergast, was a prolific advocate and analyst who played a significant role in focusing attention on human rights in Sudan before he joined the administration (United States concerns about Sudan were another factor motivating the new African leaders policy).

Other important figures played roles at different times. Stephen Morrison, an alumnus of Wolpe's subcommittee staff, was a persistent inside critic of policies that focused narrowly on the new African leaders to the exclusion of civil society and political parties. He was located in the Policy Planning Bureau of the State Department. The Reverend Jesse Jackson was another person who played more than a cameo role. Although he was not an expert on the continent, the Clinton administration felt compelled to give Jackson a high-status position as the president's envoy for democracy in Africa. Like some other new appointees, he exercised his role with flair and without discretion, quickly alienating democracy activists in the countries he visited, particularly Nigeria and Kenya.

The "new leaders" of American policy, particularly Susan Rice and Gayle Smith, could be as brash and peremptory as their African homologues. That they were young women contesting a space perennially controlled by older men did not facilitate their task. Some of their detractors referred to them as "Thelma and Louise," recalling the characters from the 1990 film by the same name who liberate themselves from the world of male dominance and leave a trail of destruction before they drive off a cliff together.

DR. ALBRIGHT GOES TO AFRICA

It was Madeleine Albright's trip to Africa in December 1997 that first signaled a major change

in the administration's priorities. Albright's predecessor, Warren Christopher, waited four years before he made his one and only trip to Africa, in October 1996, a couple of months before he left office. Born of poor planning and lack of consultation, that trip avoided disaster only by leaving few traces. Not only did Albright travel to Africa in her first year, but she returned several times.

Many of Albright's advisers wanted her to engage in a show trip, heavy on symbols and light on substance. But with the support of Susan Rice, she insisted on diving into serious policy issues. She chose to focus attention on the Great Lakes and southern Africa. She started in Ethiopia with a powerful speech to the Organization of African Unity that set the tone for her administration. The text is still inspiring, coming after years of neglect, benign and otherwise: "I have come because it is time for the people of the United States to open a new chapter in our relations with the people of this continent," she said. All the major themes were there: a new partnership with new leaders,

working for economic development, the rule of law, and democracy "in all its forms," of which, she added, "there are many." And then she focused substantively on the need to

achieve peace and democratic elections in Congo.

About the new leaders Albright spoke at length:

Africa's best new leaders have brought a new spirit of hope and accomplishment to your countries—and that spirit is sweeping across the continent. . . . They share an energy, a self-reliance and a determination to shape their own destinies. . . . They are challenging the United States to get over the paternalism of the past: to stop thinking of its Africa policy as a none-too-successful rescue service; and to begin seizing opportunities to work with Africans to transform their continent.

Although broad enough to encompass the continent, her trajectory through the Great Lakes seemed intended to consecrate the status of leaders in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Rwanda and to draw Congolese President Laurent Kabila into their club. She traveled to each capital, held intimate conversations with the leaders, and shared press conferences with them afterward. At one press conference after another, she acknowledged the errors of the United States—supporting dictators like Mobutu, failing to

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respond to the genocide in Rwanda—and promoted a vision of a new, more egalitarian partnership between America and Africa.

At each press conference the secretary of state also deflected questions about problems with human rights or democracy. In Uganda, where a previous American ambassador had criticized Museveni's "no party" democracy (and, in turn, was severely criticized by Rice), Albright skirted the question of past criticism and declared Uganda a "beacon in the Central African region." "We admire the work that the president is doing," she said. As for human rights, "every country's human rights record can be improved, and that is true here also." Similarly, at the press conference in Rwanda, she acknowledged "room for improvement," while focusing attention on the progress that had been made.

The secretary of state seemed oblivious to the way in which the new African leaders recalled America's relations with the old African leaders. At the press conference in Kinshasa, one journalist asked whether the United States risked creating another Mobutu in Uganda. After all, the French-speaking journalist noted, "Uganda is not a model of respect for human rights." Albright answered defensively: "I don't exactly know on what you are basing your comments about what I said about President Museveni. I made quite clear as I also did in Ethiopia with President Meles that Africa at this stage is fortunate to have a group of strong leaders who are interested in regional cooperation."

As she continued, she included Rwanda among the countries that made Africa proud and then began to trip over how to characterize Congo's Kabila. "I just finished with President Kabila, making it clear that he is among those leaders," she started to say, and then interrupted herself before concluding that all the leaders have a responsibility to "act together in support of economic development [and] democracy in this region of Africa."

Kabila himself presented the greatest problem for Albright during her trip. When she arrived in Kinshasa, a United Nations team was struggling to investigate the massacre of hundreds—perhaps thousands—of Rwandan Hutus killed during the war that had brought Kabila to power. While agreeing to the terms of the investigation (negotiated largely by United States ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson), Kabila's government was

also blocking every initiative. Some had urged Albright to play "good cop" to Richardson's (supposedly) "bad cop." She certainly referred to the mission during her press conference, and made allusions to dealing with broader human rights concerns, but she struggled to keep the focus on building a good relationship with the new regime.

Unfortunately for Albright, Kabila undermined her efforts—and did so to dramatic effect. Toward the end of their press conference, the secretary was asked a very specific question about a political opponent who had recently been jailed. She answered with a general description of her discussions with Kabila about the importance of democracy, civil society, and the rights of association. She then concluded by saying that she and Kabila "established what I believe to be an excellent relationship" in which they exchanged phone numbers so that they could discuss future problems as they arose.

At that moment, Kabila cut in and began to rant about the politician who had been arrested, promising that others would face the same punishment. According to Howard French, the *New York Times* correspondent

present at the conference, Kabila then "smirked" and "sarcastically pronounced 'Vive la démocratie!'"

The press conference was a disaster and colored the trip for much of the media. The *New York Times* highlighted the contradictions: elsewhere in Africa, the United States was pushing for multiparty elections, but in the region of the new leaders it was putting its faith in leaders who had taken power by the gun. In Congo, years of tepid support for nonviolent resistance to Mobutu had given way to enthusiastic backing for a new military leader whose only credible claim was the support of United States allies in the region.

The Albright team was bitter about the coverage and blamed the human rights community. Philip Gourevitch, the *New Yorker* writer who had written a critically acclaimed book on the Rwandan genocide, published an opinion piece in the *New York Times* that fought back against the critics, accusing human rights groups of simplistic absolutism and a desire for instant human rights and democracy. Albright herself also published opinion pieces in the press. But these efforts only served to define the battle lines more clearly. The human rights groups felt caricatured and the administration, misunderstood.

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“They were convinced that it was a problem of communication,” said Salih Booker, another graduate of the House Africa Subcommittee who was then Africa director for the Council on Foreign Relations. “I tried to explain to them that it was more than that. Although they talked about democracy and civil society, they really didn’t have policy behind it.” In the course of the trip, Albright’s entourage had not met with any significant members of civil society or the political opposition—even in Congo, where both groups were renowned for the struggle against Mobutu. “The administration didn’t even know about the civil society in the Congo,” Booker said, “and they blocked any serious meetings with Etienne Tshisekedi,” the leader of the political opposition, first, to Mobutu and now to Kabila. Assistant Secretary Rice did not take well to the criticism. Even Booker himself was given the cold shoulder after he raised questions about the trip—although he was later invited to join the administration (an invitation he declined).

An entente was reestablished for the president’s trip to Africa, three months later. Although both sides still harbored resentment, everyone agreed on the importance of the trip. It was a milestone in America’s relations with Africa. Conversely, it was nearly eclipsed by the crises that followed. In the end, United States policy recovered much of the momentum, but not before ridding itself of the discourse of new African leaders.

FIRST BREACH: ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea came as a tremendous shock to most Africa watchers. Tensions existed between the two countries, but the leaders of Ethiopia and Eritrea and their respective movements had developed a mutual dependency that seemed unbreakable. Both emerged from a long guerrilla struggle against successive Ethiopian rulers—first the Western-backed Emperor Haile Selassie and then the Marxist regime of Colonel Haile Mengistu. The administration of President George H. W. Bush had helped negotiate Mengistu’s departure in 1991, effectively placing the country in the hands of the rebel groups that had led the struggle, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) of Isaias Afwerki and the Tigraean People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) of Meles Zenawi. The EPLF was the more powerful group, but favored independence for Eritrea, the sliver of land along the coast that had once been an Italian colony, rather than participation in a restructured Ethiopia. In 1993 Eritrea formally became independent. And the TPLF, which had emerged with Eritrean support as the strongest

Ethiopian movement, took control of the Ethiopian transition government in Addis Ababa.

The United States backed both leaders and, after a few months, gave up focusing any serious attention to the obvious problems of human rights and democracy that were surfacing. It instead focused on stability and the desire to prevent Ethiopia from following the dissolution of neighboring Somalia. Neither leader had much tolerance for discord or much interest in broad public participation; both men were more concerned with establishing authority and control over the territory. Their model was the Soviet Union. For Ethiopia this quickly led to severe repression against competing movements, including armed opponents and civil society—and public participation was carefully orchestrated. The ideology remained “ethnic federalism,” promising decentralization and autonomy along ethnic lines, but the practice was centralized power in the hands of the TPLF. Eritrea, referred to by Africa scholar Marina Ottoway as a Marxist-Leninist state minus the ideology, succeeded in maintaining power and control without as much overt repression (until recently) but with even less public commitment to democracy.

The shift in American policy occurred at perhaps the peak moment of United States democracy promotion elsewhere on the continent. It stood in striking contrast to policy toward neighboring Kenya, for example, where United States Ambassador Smith Hempstone was sometimes accused of leading the movement for multiparty democracy. At the same time, the United States was fully backing elections in Angola and democratic transitions in South Africa and Mozambique.

Two members of Albright’s future Africa team were in Ethiopia at this time. Steve Morrison, who was working for USAID, was trying to find a way to help the government without giving in to its authoritarian impulses or the complacency of the United States ambassador. When he returned to Washington, he remained a persistent critic of the personalized politics of the Rice team. Gayle Smith, in contrast, was based in Ethiopia where she was an expert on the rebel history and a confidante of the Tigraean leadership. She was widely perceived as a booster for Meles and the new government. Internationally, she was not alone among United States figures enamored of Meles—former President Jimmy Carter was another fan. It was easy to be impressed by Meles, and easier still to dislike his confused and divided enemies.

War broke out on May 12, 1998 when, after a few smaller skirmishes, Eritrea moved soldiers into dis-

puted territory on the border with the province of Tigray. It remains unclear whether the precipitating act was a falling out between Meles and Isaias or a less personal dispute between the two countries. Ostensibly, the fighting began over what Karl Vick of the *Washington Post* described as a “dusty terrain of termite mounds, goatherds, and bushes just tall enough for a camel to graze upon comfortably.” But important economic tussles also had preceded the land dispute, including disputes over currency and access to the port at Asab in Eritrea. The substantive issues, however, were difficult to disengage from the relationship between the two men.

Even more difficult to learn is whether American promotion of the two leaders inflamed the conflict, a common accusation as fighting spun out of control. An Ethiopian cab driver in Washington, D.C. summed up the suspicion of many when he explained to me that the conflict was between two arrogant men, “made more arrogant by the United States,” who would not back down without a fight.

The United States dispatched Rice and Smith to the region soon after fighting began. For a time, Rice worked jointly with Paul Kagame of Rwanda to provide mediation. But the talks broke down quickly. What is publicly known is that Rice announced the terms of a plan agreed to by Ethiopia, suggesting that Eritrea would have to accept it, before Isaias had given his approval. He responded angrily, rejecting the plan and heaping abuse on Rice. Soon afterward, Ethiopia bombed the capital of Eritrea, and Eritrea dropped cluster bombs on Ethiopia. Isaias later accused the United States of complicity in the bombing of his capital.

Privately, much speculation remains about what actually happened to render the Rice–Smith intervention so politically disastrous. Susan Rice was summoned back to Washington in early June after the negotiations collapsed. Insiders agree that the secretary of state was furious. According to one, Rice was essentially “put on probation,” kept in Washington where the secretary could keep an eye on her. “Susan had misread the situation completely,” according to one State Department insider who observed the conflict with Albright. “She came in like a scoutmaster, lecturing them on how to behave and having a public tantrum when they didn’t act the way she wanted.” Apparently, Rice provoked a belligerent response from the Eritreans by disclosing the terms of the agreement. Some speculate that she did it to prove that she was making progress. But the effect was to make the Ethiopian counterattack “inevitable,” according to another high-level State Department official.

There is also suggestion that Gayle Smith’s involvement was badly conceived. She was known to be close to Meles and had previously been in a tiff with Isaias, who had refused to attend President Clinton’s Entebbe summit. Isaias was the one to react most harshly to the United States intervention. He was quoted in the press as saying that the Americans “believe in quick fixes and bulldozing and that does not work. It is not in our culture.” Privately, he was reported to have made much more insulting comments about Rice’s age and behavior. But other long-time analysts of the region, including Alex de Waal of the London-based group Justice Africa, think the criticism of both Rice and Smith is overstated. “It could just have well have succeeded, in which case we would be celebrating the brilliant use of intimate personal contacts in diplomacy,” he said. “The fundamental problem was the unwillingness of either side to contemplate compromise.”

Compromise came once the Ethiopians deployed massive manpower at the cost of thousands of lives. The war escalated until the United States helped broker an end to the air strikes and eventually named a senior envoy, former national security adviser Anthony Lake, to mediate confidentially. A relative peace was established, largely on the terms originally proposed during the United States mediation. By then, more than 100,000 people died, a third of Eritrea’s population was displaced, and both countries had squandered millions of dollars in an arms buildup.

THE SUMMER FROM HELL

The next months brought several more crises in what Salih Booker refers to as the summer from hell. On July 7 Chief Moshood Abiola, the leader of the Nigerian political opposition, died in prison shortly after a meeting with a United States delegation that included Susan Rice. On August 7, car bombs destroyed the United States embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, killing hundreds of Africans. On August 20 the United States, arguing that the embassy attacks were the work of Saudi-born terrorist Osama bin Laden, retaliated against Sudan with an ill-advised cruise-missile attack on what appears to have been a legitimate pharmaceutical plant that was not, as initially claimed, linked to bin Laden.

In Congo, the last alliance of the new African leaders was also beginning to dissolve. In July Kabila fired his military chief of staff, Rwandan military officer James Kabarere. Days later, high-level Tutsi officials in the Kabila government quietly disappeared from Kinshasa and began to regroup in Rwanda. On August 2, barely 14 months after ending the war that

brought Kabila to power, another “war of liberation” was under way from the east of the country.

The United States response to this war, more than any other event in the region, continues to color United States relations across the continent. The war looked like a replay of 1996 in every essential detail: the disaffected Congolese Tutsis were, again, presented as the motor force of a popular rebellion. In place of Kabila was Wamba dia Wamba, a respected anti-Mobutu academic. And around Wamba was a motley assortment of former Mobutists, along with Ugandans and Rwandans. Although Wamba’s telephone literally rang in Kigali, Rwanda and Uganda denied any involvement, as they had in 1996. A month into the war, the Rwandan ambassador to the United States testified to Congress that Rwandan forces were not involved, but if they were, they would have the right to be.

The natural tendency of the United States was to support Rwanda and Uganda. When the first Congo war broke out in 1996, the United States embassy stood firmly behind the government in Kigali. Ambassador Robert Gribben and his deputy, Peter Whaley, produced a steady stream of reports supporting the Rwandan perspective on the war: no Rwandan troops, no refugee problem, no massacres of Hutus (or at least, “no proof”). Meanwhile, the embassy in Kinshasa was reporting the war as a foreign invasion. “There was a pissing match going on between Kigali and Kinshasa,” said one high-level official. Ambassador Dan Simpson, in Kinshasa, lost his temper and officially lashed out at the reports coming out of Rwanda.

Insiders uniformly refer to this phenomenon as “clititis.” It is not rare, but in the ideal case there is an official in Washington to “smack their heads together,” as one official explained. In this case, Washington simply backed the embassy in Rwanda and did little to distinguish its position from Rwanda’s. The credulity was so complete that when Rwandan leader Kagame admitted to journalists, first, that Rwanda was involved from the start and, later, that he had played the essential role in prosecuting the war to its conclusion, some members of the State Department felt deceived. By all accounts, guilt was a major motivating factor for the energetic commitment to Rwanda’s new leaders. The 1994 genocide was no abstract event: the United States representative to the UN at the time, Madeleine Albright, actively blocked UN intervention to stop the killing. No one had forgotten the recent history.

After Laurent Kabila became Congo’s president, the United States had continued to underplay Rwanda’s role in maintaining him in power. When I

visited Kinshasa in August 1997, a high-level official in the United States embassy insisted to me that the army strongman and future chief of staff, James Kabirere, a Rwandan Tutsi, was Congolese. Kagame, meanwhile, did not deny that James was a Rwandan officer. Even after openly acknowledging Rwanda’s preeminent role during and after the war, the United States continued to ignore the Rwandan role in Congo. The most dramatic example was the investigation of massacres of Rwanda Hutus, which became the premier international source of contention between the international community and the Kabila government in 1997. Although Rwandan officers were present when thousands of Hutus were killed, and although they had the primary motivation for disposing of the fleeing Rwandan Hutus, public pressure was never brought on Rwanda to acknowledge their role or help the investigation. (There is also no sign of any significant private pressure.) Instead, all the pressure was placed on a nearly powerless Kabila.

Nobody was fooled by Rwanda’s denials when the second war broke out in 1998. But Albright’s team had lost patience with Kabila and lost legitimacy with credible Congolese alternatives by having backed Kabila so fully before. When Rwanda and Uganda succeeded in giving the impression that they could replace Kabila quickly and start over again with Wamba dia Wamba, the United States effectively acquiesced. The official State Department statements during the early days of the war show a new concern for human rights problems in Congo balanced against tepid antiwar language. At a State Department briefing on August 6, the spokesman recounted Rwandan denials of involvement and said, “This is an internal Congolese military rebellion, as best we can judge.” An official statement on August 11 made vague allusions to possible foreign involvement and reserved its strongest condemnation for reported human rights violations by the Kabila government.

Privately, according to State Department officials, the United States took Kagame and Museveni to task for the invasion. But even if true, this was not immediately reflected in any public policy. The message heard by governments around the world, in and out of Africa, was clear: the United States was backing its allies in the new war. Before long, credible and fanciful reports of United States intervention emerged. On the credible side, United States officers were spotted on the border of Rwanda within hours of the first battle (a 10-person United States military team that apparently had nothing to

do with the conflict was recalled immediately afterward). On the less credible side, the United States was reportedly flying supplies into Kigali for weeks before the invasion.

In any event, it was a public relations disaster from which the United States has not recovered. Zimbabwe's decision to enter the war on the side of Kabila was undoubtedly partly motivated by anger at what he perceived to be United States support for the aggression. Some within the State Department were immediately aware that the war would undermine any credible American role in the future. They succeeded in adding some balance to United States rhetoric. On September 15, Susan Rice addressed the growing perception of complicity in testimony before the Congress. "Mr. Chairman, let me be clear: the United States in no way supported, encouraged, or condoned the intervention of Rwandan or Ugandan forces in the Congo, as some have suggested. This is a specious and ridiculous accusation that I want to lay to rest once and for all." But these statements did little good. Nearly four years later, an official in the new Colin Powell State Department told me the United States had gotten to the point where the French "no longer believe that the United States is funding the war." But that was about it.

The final blow to the new African leaders policy finally came in 1999 and 2000 when Ugandan and Rwandan forces fought over Kisangani, the diamond-rich city at the high point of the Congo River. Civilians were left to die in the street as Ugandans and Rwandans shelled each other's positions and areas where civilians had sought refuge. Both sets of troops eventually agreed to pull out of the city. But Rwanda's rebel allies remained in control of the city, and Uganda maintained control over the diamonds. The United Nations, with little support from the United States, subsequently reported on the extent of economic exploitation by the warring parties.

REFLECTING BACK

From interviews with many key players, close observers, and foot soldiers in United States diplomacy, Albright's Africa team clearly left a mark both inside and outside the State Department. There is widespread admiration for the energy and dynamism that they brought to the process. Future administrations will find it difficult to back away from the public profile given to Africa. "For the first time, the president had allies in Africa, the way that he had

them in Europe or Asia," according to Salih Booker. The administration has left powerful images, including President Clinton walking arm-in-arm with South African President Nelson Mandela, who frankly shared his criticisms of United States policy in Cuba.

But there is also widespread resentment and frustration. For some, the problem was born of inexperience: Susan Rice was young; Gayle Smith was a long-time activist but a newcomer to the realm of diplomacy. This, in turn, led to another complaint from some career diplomats: that nobody managed the link between the policy team and the bureaucracy. The Albright team relied on personal contacts and special envoys.

Another issue concerns "style." Rice proved herself brilliant, over time, in working the machinery of government. But along the way she burned bridges liberally, alienating and often antagonizing many potential allies. Neither she nor Smith was known for admitting error or even uncertainty. Many people they feuded with have since come to respect them, but they are not hoping to see them back in high policy positions at the State Department anytime soon. Susan Rice seems not to have convinced colleagues that her real interest was Africa, or even foreign policy.

United States policies in the region have undergone significant change, much of it dating from before the end of the Clinton administration. While leaders like Museveni, Kagame, Meles, and Isaias remain important allies, the United States has never reestablished the same level of intimate personal contact with them. Museveni has been stung by his electoral misbehavior and gaffes in Congo. A new staff in the United States embassy in Kigali is profoundly aware of the bias that infected previous reporting and is deliberately trying to reestablish balance.

Except for the actual architects—who deny it was a policy at all—most observers agree that the new African leaders policy failed. The full story will require access to classified information. For now, we know that personalities became more important than policies, and individual leaders took precedence over institutions. Democracy, participation, and human rights became the enemies of short-term policy. The new African leaders policy was intended to be the story of peacemaking, partnership, and economic development. Instead, it became a subplot in a story of war, casualties, and the remaking of old African leaders. ■