

Africa: what the United States is promoting

NEW YORK: President Clinton has just put the finishing touches on his "new" policy for Africa by appointing the Rev. Jesse Jackson special envoy for the promotion of democracy in Africa. But before Jackson can start, he must understand what exactly he is promoting.

During her 1997 African tour, Hillary Rodham Clinton complimented the transition of so many African nations towards democracy, and pledged that US policy would be to support freedom and peace in Africa. However, if you scratch the surface, a starkly different picture emerges.

The Clinton administration is violating the first commandment of pro-democracy groups in Africa — Thou shalt not provide assistance to the independent and often corrupt armed forces of our nations.

The statistics are striking. Of the more than 3,400 African officers trained in the US International Military Education and Training programme in 1991-1995, 69 per cent were from nations under authoritari-

an rule. Eighty-one per cent of those trainees were in nations whose armed forces wield substantial political and economic power independent of a civilian government. The US training gives the armed forces of developing nations significant new skills that have been used to repress dissent.

Similar training is provided on the ground in Africa through the United States' joint combat exercise programmes. Again, the statistics show the preponderance of US combat training in Africa is with authoritarian regimes (55 per cent) or armed forces independent of civilian control (71 per cent).

A perfect example of the mindless expansion of these exercises is that the United States quickly began to engage in training the Rwandan military after the Tutsi takeover. US officials admit that some of these US-trained troops may have "inadvertently" been used in Laurent Kabila's rebellion in Zaire, now Congo.

This is the same Kabila who is rejecting the pleas from the United States to allow human rights investigators into areas under his control.

On top of everything, a new Africa Crisis Response Initiative has been established that would accept only nations that "have military establishments that accept the supremacy of democratic civilian government," according to a July 7 State Department paper on the programme. US special forces are training African troops that could respond to a crisis that threatened the stability of a nation or region, like the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

However, according to John Christiansen, the Crisis Response deputy coordinator, "minimum military efficiency" is now the entry standard instead of civilian rule. Only one of the seven nations slated to be trained can be qualified as a democracy. The fears of misuse of Crisis Response-equipped aid trained troops came true almost immediately, as

the first troops trained under the programme in Uganda were immediately sent to use their new skills in a counter-insurgency war against rebel forces.

Charlie Snyder, the deputy head of the Africa Bureau at the State Department, defended the continued involvement with dictators on the African continent at a recent panel discussion. What did he call this policy? "Constructive engagement." Ironically, this is the same term the Reagan administration used to justify its continued engagement with the apartheid South African government in the 1980s.

The use of the term "constructive engagement" shows the Clinton administration's myopia towards Africa. Officials continue to claim that the only way to get abusive armed forces to make the transition to democracy is to train them to be more effective militaries. There is scant evidence to back this up. Somalia, Rwanda, Zaire? Which one of these nations has armed forces more

of civilian rule and human rights because of our "constructive engagement"?

If Jackson truly wants to help promote democracy in Africa, then he should begin by speaking to the leaders of the organizations fighting for democracy and human rights in their nations. These people will tell him that the military must be removed from the political process. Military and government officials must be held accountable for their abuses of power. The press must be free. Women must be given increased access to political participation. Economic opportunity must be increased in both urban and rural areas so everyone feels the benefit of democracy. In all, we must understand that democracy in Africa should be supported by, not imported from, the United States.

A "new" policy for Africa is possible if our government looks to promote the good of the people of that continent, not its leaders. A code of conduct on military

assistance, such as the one sponsored by Reps Cynthia McKinney and Dana Rohrabacher and Sen John Kerry, that would prohibit any US assistance to governments that are undemocratic, abuse the human rights of their people would be an excellent start.

This is the kind of engagement that would be truly constructive, not only for Africans, but for Americans as well. The end of constructive engagement in South Africa brought a new strategic, economic and political partner for America. Continued constructive engagement in Rwanda has brought more strife, instability and suffering to the nations in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Which one would you say worked better?—*Dawn/LAT-WP News Service (c) Newsday.*

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