

# The Failure of America's Post-Cold War Foreign Policy: From the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Guinea

by Robert L. Ostergard, Jr.

In the course of a country's history, pivotal points, or critical junctures, mark fundamental changes in that country's foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> For the United States, several events in the twentieth century proved to be major, pivotal shifts for its foreign policy. The entrance of the United States into World War I ended American international isolationism, and its victory in World War II propelled it reluctantly into the role of global leader against the communist threat. When the communist threat ceased to exist in 1990, America once again experienced another pivotal point in its foreign policy.

The focus of US foreign policy during the Cold War was based on a clear "us vs. them" dimension, with "them" clearly as the communists and their ilk. Containment of communism became the cornerstone of every administration's foreign policy during the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of "them," a new attempt was initiated to redirect American foreign policy toward a new objective. President George H. W. Bush made the first attempt at redirecting America's foreign policy by trying to create a multilateral framework of security and cooperation under the auspices of the United Nations. Bush's "New World Order" brought together a United Nations mandate and a coalition of thirty-four states to evict Saddam Hussein from Kuwait after Iraq's 1990 invasion. With a total force numbering between 500,000–600,000, the US-led coalition ousted Iraqi forces, driving them back across the Iraq-Kuwait border. The "New World Order," however, was short-lived. Its demise was due in part to the United States' inability to act effectively outside of its own national interests, as was demonstrated in Somalia shortly after the Persian Gulf War. The United Nations also contributed to the death of the "New World Order" by showing complete ineptitude in handling the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Hence, the multilateral approach that drove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait fell apart in the wake of two disastrous humanitarian interventions in Somalia and Rwanda.

The second attempt to redirect American foreign policy in the post-Cold War

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**Robert L. Ostergard, Jr.** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Nevada, Reno. The author would like to thank Shawna Sweeney for her invitation to present these ideas as part of the Toby E. Huff Lecture Series at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. He is also indebted to Matthew Tubin of the University of Pennsylvania for his critical comments and intellectual exchanges, which helped to flush out the finer details of the article.

period came when Samuel Huntington proclaimed that future conflicts would no longer be between states, but between civilizations. Huntington's thesis first appeared in 1993 in the influential policy journal *Foreign Affairs*, but at the time it was dismissed by academics, scholars, and policymakers as vague and riddled with problems.<sup>2</sup> However, policymakers in particular latched on to Huntington's culture thesis after the September 11th attacks on Washington, DC and New York City, which were perpetrated by mostly Saudi Islamic extremists. Huntington's image of a clash of civilizations was much easier to accept in the aftermath of the attacks. It provided a simple—albeit too simple—foundation from which the US could redirect its foreign policy focus to a familiar “us vs. them” view of the world. The attachment to Huntington's thesis lingered as it appeared to put a reasonable perspective on the unique situation that emerged from the September 11th attacks.

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The United States was again at war against an ideology. In the twentieth century, the US fought a hot war against Nazism and fascism, and a cold war against Marxism-Leninism. In the twenty-first century, the United States has become embroiled in a hot war against radical Islam. The threat from radical Islam is similar to that faced by US troops in their fight against Japan in World War II. The willingness of Islamic extremists to martyr themselves is reminiscent of Japanese willingness to sacrifice themselves in the name of Emperor Hirohito, whom they saw as the divine spirit of the Japanese people.<sup>3</sup> The primary difference between the two is that radical Islam is not centrally focused within a state, as fascist rule was in Japan. Radical Islam has its adherents in states (Iran) and groups (al-Qaeda, Hezbollah), as well as among individuals across the entire Islamic world. It is not just an ideology; it is a movement fueled by anti-Western resentment.

In this sense, Huntington's thesis could not be sustained within policy circles. Ideologies are a byproduct of culture and regional politics. The major ideological movements of the last 200 years—liberalism, communism, socialism, fascism, and Nazism—are all Western in their origin. This time, the ideology is not Western and is based primarily on a very cultural element—religion. What made Huntington's thesis problematic was that it painted the entire Islamic world with a wide brush of radical Islam, when in reality such a brush should be extremely narrow. While radical Islam has adherents that are geographically widespread, it makes up only a small fraction of the entire Islamic world. Even so, radical Islam has helped to shape the new vision of American foreign policy, which emerged in the post-September 11th world as one that reflects the traditional “us vs. them” framework. President Bush said as much in the 2006 National Security Strategy of the United States when he noted that “America is at war. This is a wartime national security strategy required by the grave challenge we face—the rise of terrorism fueled by an aggressive ideology

of hatred and murder, fully revealed to the American people on September 11th, 2001.”<sup>4</sup>

Many of America's former Cold War foreign policymakers spent much of the post-Cold War period searching for the next enemy, or the next grand purpose, for the United States. These two objectives have now come together in the post-September 11th world in the war on terrorism through attempts to spread democracy across the globe as a means of fighting terrorism. The identification of a new enemy in terrorism, and the grand purpose of spreading democracy, have become the greatest excursions into foreign policy idealism since Woodrow Wilson declared that “the world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty.”<sup>5</sup>

### **FACING THE NEW THREAT: THE RESPONSE TO TERRORISM**

In the twentieth and the first part of the twenty-first century, state-sponsored terrorism, more so than independent terrorist groups, has been the greater threat. Groups that perpetrate terrorism are typically responding to perceived grievances they have with governments, foreign or domestic. Historically, military responses to terrorism have provided only temporary relief, mostly because terrorist groups have the ability to adapt to new security precautions and arrangements, while garnering even greater support for their causes in the face of government hostilities. But can terrorist groups be effective in achieving their objectives? One of the best indicators of success seems to be the amount of support the group receives from the general population, or what may be considered its constituency in the region in which it operates.

Historically, this issue of constituency is borne out by the rise and fall of terrorist movements in Europe. Groups such as Germany's Baader Meinhoff Gang and Italy's Red Brigade were representative of leftist terrorist groups that sought to overthrow their governments. In both cases, support within their respective populations was weak and, by the end of the Cold War, both groups were effectively neutralized. However, terrorist activities in Spain and Northern Ireland have taken a slightly different turn. In Northern Ireland, support for the Irish Republican Army's objectives did not necessarily diminish, though decline in popular support for its violent methods, which brought British government retaliations and the death of more innocent people, ultimately led to negotiations between Sinn Féin, the political arm of the IRA, and the British government.

In Spain, the same story unfolded; the Basque separatist group ETA did not lose support for its goals and objectives, though it began to lose support for the violent methods it had used. The popular resentment against the ETA began to build in 1995 with the failed assassination attempts on then future president José María Aznar and King Juan Carlos I. Popular resentment further increased in 1997 when the ETA kidnapped Partido Popular council member Miguel Ángel Blanco and killed him after the Spanish government failed to meet its demands. In response, millions of Spaniards marched in protest of the ETA's assassination of Blanco, with some

equating the ETA's tactics to those of Spain's fascist dictator Francisco Franco.<sup>6</sup> While the Basque people still supported the objectives of the ETA, they clearly rejected their methods. The lesson to be learned from these cases is that no matter how brutal the government response to the terrorists' activities, these groups either saw their demise or their effectiveness decline substantially only after support within the population, or within the terrorists' constituencies, began to waver.

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## **Populations across a number of countries sympathize with or even support terrorist groups who have targeted the United States and its allies.**

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If it is the case that terrorists' success is predicated on popular support, the United States has a major problem that has been consistently underplayed, and even ignored: populations across a number of countries sympathize with or even support terrorist groups who have targeted the United States and its allies. The current administration under George W. Bush received overwhelming international support and the American people garnered sympathy and compassion from around the world in the wake of the September 11th attacks. The US enjoyed widespread support for the retaliatory action taken against the Taliban regime that harbored al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. However, when the administration turned its attention to Iraq, international support was tepid at best.

Despite claims to the contrary, the old Iraqi regime had no involvement with the September 11th attacks, or links to al-Qaeda.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the claims that Iraq was an imminent threat to the United States were equally difficult to substantiate, given that the US and coalition partners had effectively isolated the country since the Persian Gulf War. When the Bush administration launched its war against Iraq in 2003, with significantly less international support than in the Persian Gulf War, it launched a war against an undoubtedly brutal and despicable regime.<sup>8</sup> Few, if any, will bicker over the tyrannical nature of Saddam Hussein's regime or shed a tear over its demise. However, the administration's arguments for the war were simply unfounded.

The war on terrorism that the US launched in 2001 has become the new cause célèbre of American foreign policy, predicated on the notion that terrorism can be identified and militarily defeated. It seems that the ultimate victory in the war on terrorism would be the installation of democratic regimes able to suppress the growth of terrorism, but this new foreign policy objective is based on a misguided assumption, tainted by a major contradiction in America's foreign policy that dates back to the end of World War II.

## **AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE PERCEIVED HYPOCRISY**

The misguided assumption underlying American foreign policy is that the war on terrorism can be won through militarily actions alone. This assumption is rooted in the celebratory rhetoric that followed in the wake of the Cold War. While communism and the threat it posed could be easily identified, the war on terrorism

has no clearly defined enemy. Therefore, it does not fit squarely into the rubric of a military solution, especially one imposed by an outside power.

Terrorism is first and foremost a problem of governance, either in response to government policy or as an act of government policy. In this sense, the major contradiction in America's post-World War II foreign policy has been that while the US government has been willing to espouse Wilson's liberal vision to make the world safe for democracy, it has done so only as a matter of convenience to America's national interest. American support for brutal dictatorships that committed crimes or terrorist acts against their own people came all too easily. American foreign policy spoke of the liberal agenda for the world, but succumbed to the *realpolitik* of America's national interests. The liberal rhetoric could not be practiced in the face of America's immediate and short-term security concerns. The end result has been that people around the world perceive a hypocrisy in America's foreign policy—the language of liberal democracy contradicted by actions meant to secure America's national security interests. That historical contradiction has now crossed paths with the war on terrorism.

The most stunning and recent example of this foreign policy contradiction came in the 2006 State of the Union address, when President Bush scolded the American people, saying that “America is addicted to oil, which is often imported from unstable parts of the world.”<sup>9</sup> Implicitly, the administration was placing the problems in the Middle East on the consumption of oil by the American people; blaming the American people for their addiction to oil is like blaming a drug addict for the addiction without mention of the peddler or cartel that supplies the drugs. What the President forgot to tell the American people is that their addiction was aided and abetted by decades of foreign policies that have enabled that addiction. There is no doubt the president diagnosed the problem correctly in substance, if not in form. However, no state has truly been immune to the addiction to oil; after all, the Pacific theater in World War II erupted partly as a result for the quest for oil. The US addiction to oil is one of the most dangerous diseases this country has faced.

The war that George Bush never launched was a war against these contradictions and hypocrisies, a war that every administration back to Harry Truman's has never waged. This is what is partially at the root of America's foreign policy failures today. If the old saying that politics makes strange bedfellows is true, then there could be no stranger bedfellows than the leaders of the free world perpetually welcoming and befriending some of the most tyrannical dictators throughout the world, particularly those in oil rich countries of the Muslim world. Through both direct and passive support, the US has been, at times, a partner in repression and a supporter of those that have oppressed their people. Every president since Roosevelt has considered oil a strategic resource that drives America's national security, a policy that always has been a short-term, unsustainable proposition simply transferred from one administration to the next. That proposition has created an unhealthy and imbalanced strategic relationship between the United States and its oil suppliers.

## **How is it possible to champion liberal principles such as freedom and democracy while providing unquestioned support for tyranny?**

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During the post–World War II period, the oil relationship that dominated much of US foreign policy with Middle Eastern states embodied a Jekyll and Hyde complex. The United States has had a strong, friendly relationship with many of the Muslim monarchs and dictators of the Middle East who, at the same time, have been less than friendly to their own people. The people who lived under repressive rule saw the United States as an accomplice because of its unwavering support for their monarchs and dictators. But perhaps more importantly, these people saw an unmatched level of hypocrisy on the part of the United States. How is it possible to champion liberal principles such as freedom and democracy while providing unquestioned support for tyranny? A case in point is the US relationship with Iran.

Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union vied for influence over Iran in the immediate aftermath of World War II. In 1941, Britain and the Soviet Union forced the ruler, Reza Shah, from power and installed his son, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, as ruler. However, a nationalist movement led by Muhammad Mossadegh attempted to drive the Shah from power in 1953. In doing so, Mossadegh threatened to nationalize Iran's oil production, threatening Western oil interests in the country. Shortly afterwards, Mossadegh's opponents, with the help of the United States, overthrew his government, reinstalling the Shah as absolute ruler in Iran. The Shah's return translated into tremendous benefits for the West that included large arms sales and the training of Iran's secret police, the SAVAK. The Shah grew increasingly autocratic, using the SAVAK to crush his opponents while plundering the country's oil wealth. Dissent grew at all levels of Iranian society as the Shah allied himself more closely with pro-Western interests.<sup>10</sup>

The Shah's October 1971 celebration of the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian monarchy symbolically marked the turning point for the Shah's rule. More than \$200 million was spent to bring dignitaries from around the world for the celebration. The week long celebration was marked with a feast prepared by French caterers, which included over 25,000 bottles of wine. The celebration represented the high point of excess and insensitivity toward his impoverished people while showing a complete disregard for Iran's Islamic heritage. The bloody suppression of dissenters ushered in a new period of terror and intolerance of dissent within Iran.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the growing social unrest and the Shah's brutal crackdown on dissent in Iran, the US did not waiver in its complete support for the Shah. On June 24, 1973, President Richard Nixon welcomed Iran's monarch, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, to the United States "...as not only an old friend, as a progressive leader of your own people, [but] also as a world statesman of the first rank."<sup>12</sup> In a toast to the Shah and Empress of Iran on May 15, 1975, President Gerald Ford told the audience, "the present period will be seen by historians as a very major milestone in Iran's ancient and very glorious history. The leader whose vision and dynamism has brought Iran



to this stage, His Imperial Majesty, is clearly one of the great men of his generation, of his country, and of the world.”<sup>13</sup> On a state visit to the United States on November 15, 1977, the Shah of Iran received President Jimmy Carter’s praise for maintaining a “strong, stable and progressive Iran” under his leadership.<sup>14</sup>

President Carter, the champion of human rights in US foreign policy, would be the last US president to express his public support for the Shah. Two major social forces opposed to the Shah’s rule would change Iran’s history dramatically. Shia Muslims were outraged by the Shah’s attempt to sidestep Iran’s Muslim heritage in seeking a rebirth of the old Persian Empire (symbolically represented by the 1971 celebration). They joined forces with students and other progressives angered by the Shah’s autocratic, corrupt, and tyrannical rule to oust him in the 1979 Iranian Revolution. That revolution paved the way for a radical Islamic regime to come to power. While the United States did not bring the Islamic regime to power, it was certainly responsible for condoning the Shah’s policies, supplying him with the weapons to make those policies possible, and providing him with large aid packages and unconditional support. The social unrest combined with US support for the Shah proved to be a “perfect storm” that converged into a massive social uprising against the brutal monarchy. The Iranian people blamed the United States for prolonging the regime, providing weaponry for its brutal policies, and for harboring and protecting the Shah after he was ousted in the revolution.

Such policies are still in practice today around the Middle East and in parts of the developing world. The American oil addiction, like any addiction, has an impact on others besides the addict. When the United States supports repressive regimes in the name of strategic oil acquisitions, it is supporting the brutality that is being imposed upon people around the Middle East. Terrorist groups that target the US and the monarchies of the Middle East get their support from populations who see the United States as the friend of the oppressors. Terrorism against state interests is supported, and even succeeds, in these areas because terrorism has been used in the past by the states themselves. Thus the populations of these regions are more likely to see terrorism as their only voice.

## **THE NEW FRONTIER IN AMERICA’S FOREIGN POLICY: WEST AFRICA**

Recently, there has been a growing realization that the United States’ relationship with Middle East monarchs is becoming untenable and that alternative sources of oil must be sought. If the United States is going to remain politically, economically, and militarily competitive, conventional wisdom dictates there must be a search for new sources of petroleum. The alternative sources of petroleum that have emerged are predominantly in Central Asia and West Africa, two regions that prior to September 11th had little strategic value to the United States. In the case of Africa, ironically, the disappearance of the Soviet threat after the Cold War marked the beginning of the United States’ diplomatic departure from the continent. Within three years of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Bureau of African Affairs in the US State Department lost seventy positions; consulates in Kenya, Cameroon, and Nigeria were also scheduled

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## **It has been easier for policymakers to seek alternative sources of oil, rather than alternative resources.**

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Now, not only are new embassies being opened in West Africa, they are being accompanied by military advisors and the possibility of a permanent US military base. For the past few years, US military officials have focused on ways in which the Gulf of Guinea can be secured from piracy and terrorist attacks. The Gulf of Guinea, experts believe, has the largest deep-water, offshore oil reserves in the world.<sup>16</sup> The states that surround the Gulf of Guinea on the west coast of Africa include Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Cameroon, Angola, and the Republic of the Congo. While the present administration has vigorously denied any movement toward building a permanent US presence in the region, all the signs seem to point in the other direction.

Beginning shortly after the September 11th attacks, the US government and private military companies began visiting parts of West Africa to set the framework for an onslaught of American investment, including approximately \$5 billion invested in Equatorial Guinea alone.<sup>17</sup> In a 2002 report, the US National Intelligence Council predicted that by 2015 no less than 25 percent of US oil imports would come from the Gulf of Guinea, compared to roughly 15–17 percent now.<sup>18</sup> As such, recent trade agreements between the United States and African states have improved the conditions under which oil imports come to the US, leading some to claim that the trade pacts were essentially aimed at increasing the flow of crude oil from West Africa.<sup>19</sup> Trade flows between the United States and Africa have been dominated by oil; in 2000 about 68 percent of US imports from Africa were oil products, and 40 percent of the oil imports were duty free under either the Generalized Systems of Preference or the African Growth and Opportunity Act.<sup>20</sup> Those numbers have been projected to climb in the coming years.

Given the prevailing economic and political conditions in the post–September 11th environment, it has been easier for policymakers to seek alternative sources of oil, rather than alternative resources. Partly driving that decision are American consulting and lobbying firms that have made strong moves to represent the Gulf of Guinea states and their interests. Amongst them include former Oklahoma congressman, JC Watts, who led several delegations to Abuja, Nigeria to investigate the oil industry there and elsewhere in the Gulf of Guinea Region. Watts now heads The JC Watts Companies, which lobbies on behalf of petroleum interests in the Gulf of Guinea. Other Washington insiders include Calvin Humphrey, former assistant secretary for International Affairs at the Energy Department; Andrew Young, former UN ambassador; Walter Carrigan, former US ambassador to Nigeria; Walter Kansteiner, former assistant secretary of state for African Affairs; Brent Scowcroft, national security advisor to the first President Bush; and Whitney Schneidman, deputy assistant secretary of state for African Affairs during the Clinton



administration.<sup>21</sup>

Additional movements toward a regional security pact to protect these investments in the Gulf of Guinea have included military assistance. In July 2004, deputy commander of United States forces in Europe, Charles Wald, traveled to Nigeria for high-level talks with Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo on establishing a program named African Coastal Security, with its primary objective being the protection of the Gulf of Guinea. Substantively, the African Coastal Plan would simply exchange oil for military assistance on the part of the United States.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, since 2003, the US military has been advising the government of Sao Tome on how to restructure its military and to protect the country's coasts. In February 2004, the US Trade Development Agency financed the first studies on constructing a deep-water port in Sao Tome. The only purpose such a port could have would be to accommodate large oil tankers, as Sao Tome does not export large amounts of any other commodity.<sup>23</sup> Rumors have also persisted, though denied by the United States government, that the US is either in the negotiating or planning stages for a permanent military base in the Gulf of Guinea, most likely in Sao Tome.<sup>24</sup>

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### **West Africa may indeed turn out to be nothing more than a distant manifestation of today's Middle East.**

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The prospect of oil wealth has already begun to have disastrous political consequences for some of these West African countries. Nigeria, which has experienced political violence since its independence from Great Britain, has recently confronted political violence related to its oil refining in the Niger Delta region. The most recent attacks in the oil-rich Niger Delta provoked outrage from the Abuja government, which expressed its concern for the growing instability in the region while blaming the United States for being slow to assist in protecting the area. Nigeria's Vice President Atiku Abubakar noted that negotiations with the United States for assistance did not "appear to be moving as fast as the situation is unfolding."<sup>25</sup> As a result, in 2005, Nigeria signed an \$800 million deal to supply PetroChina with 30,000 barrels-a-day of oil, and the Chinese have agreed to supply the Nigerians with military equipment needed to fight rebels in the Delta region.<sup>26</sup> However, Nigeria's instability problems in the Delta region, primarily related to the poverty and inequality caused by corruption in the government and oil industry, may be the least of the country's problems.

As a major oil producer with a large Muslim population—about 50 percent of the total population—Nigeria has been on the periphery of the new war on terrorism. Recent clashes between Islamic and Christian communities have heightened tensions in the country. Islamic extremists are rumored to be operating primarily in northern Nigeria. Such rumors are not surprising and their truth may be more than either the United States or Nigeria wish to believe. Just prior to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Osama bin Laden, in an address to the Iraqi people, called

upon Muslim populations to rise up against oppressive regimes associated with the United States: "We also stress to true Muslims that...they must motivate and mobilize the umma to liberate themselves from their enslavement to these oppressive, tyrannical, apostate ruling regimes who are supported by America, and to establish God's rule on earth. The areas most in need of liberation are Jordan, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen."<sup>27</sup> If conditions in Nigeria continue to deteriorate, it will become increasingly likely that Islamic extremism generated both inside and outside the country will become an increasingly important factor in Nigeria's long-standing conflict between Muslims and Christians.<sup>28</sup>

While corruption and civil conflict are endemic in Nigeria, other Gulf of Guinea countries have similar problems, which are now being exacerbated by their newfound potential for oil wealth. In July 2003, forces in Sao Tome stopped an attempted military coup against President Menezes. An agreement signed with the rebels shortly afterward included provisions to manage the country's oil wealth. In Equatorial Guinea, one of the primary targets of US training and investment, the 2004 US State Department Report on Human Rights has said that

*The Government human rights record remained poor, and the Government continued to commit serious abuses. Citizens do not have the ability to change their government peacefully. Security forces committed numerous abuses, including torture, beating, and other physical abuse of prisoners and suspects, which at times resulted in deaths. Prisoners often were tortured to coerce confessions....Members of the security forces generally committed abuses with impunity. Security forces used arbitrary arrest, detention, and incommunicado detention. Foreigners with legal standing were arbitrarily harassed, detained, and deported. The judicial system repeatedly failed to ensure due process....Discrimination against ethnic minorities, particularly the Bubi ethnic group and foreigners continued. The government restricted labor rights. Child labor persisted and forced prison labor was used. The Government passed an anti-trafficking law during the year, but trafficking in persons continued, largely unchecked by the government.*<sup>29</sup>

Echoing the State Department's Report, the Office of the Press Secretary released a Presidential announcement on September 10, 2004, stating that under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, "... Sudan, Venezuela and Equatorial Guinea ... failed to make significant efforts [to stop human trafficking], and are thus subject to sanctions, [but] the President has determined that certain assistance for these three countries would promote the purposes of the Act or is otherwise in the national interest of the United States."<sup>30</sup>

What all three of these countries have in common is that they are, or are becoming, significant players in oil production. Venezuela has long been a supplier of crude oil to the United States. Sudan has long been suspected of having significant oil reserves.<sup>31</sup> As a result, the Chinese government has actively funded the exploration of Sudan's oil fields, building roads and bridges and community housing in the region. The Sudanese government for its part has used these Chinese built roads and bridges as a much more efficient method to ethnically cleanse the regions where oil exploration has been occurring. Equatorial Guinea is considered one of the

fastest growing producers of oil in West Africa, which has led to a willingness in the US administration to turn a blind eye to its human trafficking problem. Such malignant disregard of abuses, as noted earlier, has been a basic premise of US foreign policy for decades. In general, Equatorial Guinea's government is probably best summarized by Geoffrey Wood who referred to it as a "criminal state."<sup>32</sup> Of course, it is not just the United States that is involved in the move toward African oil; other countries including Russia, China, and even Saudi Arabia and South Korea have already invested millions of dollars into exploration rights in West Africa. Such heavy stakes and special interests make Africa the frontier in the new geo-strategic re-alignments that the scramble for oil is creating among the major global powers.

## CONCLUSION

Some time ago, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency James Woolsey stated that the basic problem the United States has had in the Middle East relates to its treatment of the countries in the region as its personal gas station and the people like gas station attendants: "...we convinced many people there that we did not give a damn about the people in the region and that we cared principally about its oil; that it was a filling station for our large sport utility vehicles."<sup>33</sup> It would seem that the only lessons that we have learned in the past fifty years of dealing with the Middle East is that we need a new gas station because the old one is now in a bad neighborhood. While the Pentagon, the CIA, and other intelligence agencies see West Africa as removed from the political violence that has rocked the Middle East, it should be a sober reminder that Africa's post-colonial history is wracked with unrest and instability.

Africa, already plagued by civil unrest, military coups, endemic corruption, ethnic conflict, and even genocide, is a bubbling caldron of political problems. Oil and the promises of oil are not going to make the region any more stable; in fact, it will only serve to further destabilize the region. In the long term, as oil becomes the trump card in Africa, the United States will increasingly be looked upon as a source of instability and chaos on a continent that is already wracked with monumental problems. If the chickens have come home to roost in the Middle East, new chickens are being hatched in West Africa. A few years, or decades, will tell if the search for alternative sources of oil was a better choice than the search for alternative sources of energy.

Ultimately, the failure of American foreign policy is rooted in the imagining of the national interest in only short-term stretches; nothing represents this more clearly than the petroleum problem each administration since World War II has faced. The United States, at this pivotal point in its history, is faced with the choice of either maintaining its failed policy of continually seeking and securing new petroleum supplies, or turning to a longer-term foreign policy conception that would favor extricating itself from this cycle. In the end, the transition from a Middle Eastern oil supply to either one that is diversified across countries or focused primarily in Western Africa is still nothing more than a reflection of decades of failed energy

policy, driven by short-term gains, and passed from one administration to the next. West Africa may indeed turn out to be nothing more than a distant manifestation of today's Middle East.

The United States should not take that chance. A foreign policy centered on securing supplies of petroleum is unsustainable, costly, and deadly for all involved. The United States should do what it has done best for over two centuries: innovate and develop new technologies, which will ultimately decrease its overall dependence on petroleum. While pressures from lobbying groups in Washington may make this a difficult political choice for the president and members of Congress, the greater challenge could become justifying American soldiers coming home in body bags—this time from West Africa.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a good discussion of the critical junctures issue see: G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22–49. For the immediate, major critiques of Huntington's thesis, see: "Responses to Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations?'," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 4 (1993): 2–27.

<sup>3</sup> As Herbert Bix noted "Kamikaze attacks on Allied warships and troop transports were an entirely different threat, however, a real and dangerous one. They were a kind of weapon Americans, Australians, and Britons simply could not understand, and for that reason found all the more disturbing. Hirohito, however, clearly understood the rhetoric of sacrifice, and he may have hoped that the kamikaze tactic would prove militarily effective." See: Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 482.

<sup>4</sup> United States Government, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," The White House, 2006, Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>, (Accessed May 22, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Andrews et al. (ed.) *The Columbia World of Quotations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> For an account of these events see Marlise Simons, "Spain Turns on Rebels with Outrage," *The New York Times*, July 15 1997; "Million Join March Against Basque Terrorism in Spain," 1997. *New York Times*, July 15, Late Edition (east Coast). <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed February 12, 2006); Peiyin Patty Li, "Will it Hold? The ETA Ceasefire in Spain," *Harvard International Review*, Winter 1998/9, 10–11.

<sup>7</sup> Dana Milbank and Walter Pincus, "Al Qaeda- Hussein Link Dismissed," *The Washington Post*, July 17, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Troop support has become a significant issue in the debates on why stability did not come to Iraq after the invasion. Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki argued before the invasion that hundreds of thousands of troops would be needed in the post-invasion operations to secure Iraq and to bring stability to the country. That argument led to an early retirement for General Shinseki, who lost favor with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his Deputy Paul Wolfowitz. Others, including L. Paul Bremer, former administrator of the US-led occupation in Iraq, have said that the lack of troop support was a major mistake in the Iraq campaign. See Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2004), 34–56; Micheal O'Hanlon, "Speaking the Truth," *The Washington Post*, May 3, 2005; Robin Wright and Thomas E. Ricks, "Bremer Criticizes Troop Levels; Ex-Overseer of Iraq Says U.S. Effort Was Hampered Early On," *The Washington Post*, October, 5 2004.

<sup>9</sup> The Presidency of the United States, State of the Union Address, Washington D.C., 2006

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Iran's historical relationship with the West, see: John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 103–17; for a discussion of the Soviet perspective of its immediate post-World War II relationship with Iran, see: Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–73* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974), 426–30; for a discussion of US covert operations and economic interests in Iran, see: Thomas G. Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 104–5.

<sup>12</sup> "Nixon and Shah Exchange Praise, Confer in Oval Office," *The New York Times*, July 25, 1973.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Lawrence (ed), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, (London: Verso, 2005), 183.

<sup>14</sup> "Carter Lauds Shah on his Leadership," *The New York Times*, November 16, 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Marguerite Michaels, "Retreat from Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 1 (1993/1994): 93–109.

<sup>16</sup> "Oil Giants Eye African Prospects," BBC News, May 20, 2003; Neil Ford, "Oil Money Begins to Flow

In," *African Business*, June 2003, 40–41.

<sup>17</sup> Pádraig Carmody, "Transforming Globalization and Security: Africa and America Post-9/11," *Africa Today*, (Fall 2005): 99.

<sup>18</sup> National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future With Nongovernment Experts*, 2002. The US Department of Energy estimates US imports of crude oil from West Africa at roughly six percent of US total imports; however, the discrepancy with the NIC estimates may evolve from different accounting methods and categories. US Department of Energy data are available from the Energy Information Administration, <http://www.cia.doe.gov/emeu/international/oiltrade.html> (Accessed February 6, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> "By-Passing OPEC in West Africa," *African Energy Intelligence*, February 13, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "Republican Lobbyists in Gulf of Guinea," *African Energy Intelligence*, September 22, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> "Protecting Oil Fields," *African Energy Intelligence*, July 21, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> In this regard, Sao Tome and Principe have made a remarkable transformation from a country that exports mainly cocoa to a potential West African petro-power. For an excellent discussion on this transformation, see: Jedrzej George Frynas, Geoffrey Wood, Ricardo M S Soares de Oliveira, "Business and politics in Sao Tome e Principe: From cocoa monoculture to petro-state," *African Affairs* (Jan. 2003): 51–80.

<sup>24</sup> With regard to the use of Sao Tome as a military base, the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies has recommended through its African Oil Policy Initiative Group (AOPIG) that the US create a new military command in West Africa, similar to that which exists in South Korea, to protect US oil interest. See: Stephen Ellis, "Briefing: West Africa and Its Oil," *African Affairs*, Jan. 2003, 135–138.

<sup>25</sup> Dino Mahtano, "Nigeria turns to China for Defense Aid," *Financial Times*, February 27, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Lawrence (ed), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, (London: Verso, 2005), 183. The transformation of Sao Tome and Principe to an oil producer also had to overcome off shore drilling and territorial water disputes with Nigeria. For a discussion of the potential joint development arrangements in the area, see: Hurst Groves, "Offshore Oil and Gas Resources: Economics, Politics and the Rule of Law in the Nigeria-Sao Tome E Principe Joint Development Zone," *Journal of International Affairs* 59, no. 1 (Fall 2005).

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion on the impact of religion on the Nigerian state, see: Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: the crisis of religious politics and secular ideologies*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> United States Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2004, Washington D.C., 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Office of the Press Secretary, Statement by the Press Secretary, Washington D.C., 2004.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of this, see: Ricardo Rene Laremont and Robert L. Ostergard, Jr., "Ethnic Grievance or Material Greed," in *Borders, Nationalism, and the African State*, ed. Ricardo Rene Laremont (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Wood, "Business and Politics in a Criminal State: The Case of Equatorial Guinea," *African Affairs* 103, no. 413 (2004): 547–567.

<sup>33</sup> R James Woolsey, "At War for Freedom," *The World Today*, August/September 2003, 6.

