



SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

Accelerating with the attacks of September 11, 2001, but extending back more than a decade, studies of the growth of Islam as a source of political mobilization have proliferated, but few have examined political Islam on the African subcontinent or broadened the approach beyond transnational terrorism. On July 9, 2004, a conference of Africa experts from academia and the U.S. foreign policymaking community convened at the United States Institute of Peace to begin an examination of this shortcoming and its foreign-policy implications.

Ambassador George Ward, director of the U.S. Institute of Peace's Professional Training Program, and Taylor Seybolt, program officer in the Institute's Grant Program, chaired conference panels. Presenters included Howard University's Sulayman Nyang, the University of Connecticut's Lucy Creevey, and George Mason University's John Paden. Additional panelists included Malik Chaka, a staff member with the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa, and Ambassador David Shinn, now at George Washington University and former ambassador to Ethiopia, and John Voll of Georgetown University. David Dickson specialist Africa organized the conference and wrote the report. Joseph Sany, an assistant in the Research and Studies Program, provided advice and assistance for the report. Paul Stares, director of Research and Studies, and Abdeslam Maghraoui, associate director for the Institute's Muslim World Initiative, supervised the drafting of the report.

The report provides a brief background on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and its policy lessons for East Africa, the Horn, Nigeria, and Senegal. A future research agenda for policy analysts and overall recommendations for United States policy conclude the report.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.

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David Dickson

Political Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa

The Need for a New Research and Diplomatic Agenda

Summary

- An understanding of the multifaceted nature of political Islam on the African subcontinent is a precondition for the formulation of an effective U.S. policy toward the region. Such a formulation would place political Islam in a historical and contemporary context.
- In East Africa, discrimination against Muslims—which began in colonial mission schools and continued in education and employment following independence—played an important role in the development of political Islam.
- The impact of Saudi-sponsored Wahabism on the radicalization of Muslims in the Horn of Africa has been mixed. Its potential impact is most acute in Ethiopia, while the radicalization of Islam in Sudan has followed its own independent path.
- Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria acquired a more pronounced political edge as the national fortunes of the governing Muslim national elite declined dramatically with the election of Olusegun Obasanjo, a born-again Christian, to the presidency in 1999. This brand of political Islam was manifested in the adoption of Islamic law in one-third of Nigeria's states and sporadic communal violence between Muslims and Christians.
- Senegal stands as an illustration of the reality that political Islam can be a constructive and regime-stabilizing force. Senegal has found a balance between a modernizing, secular state and the Muslim tradition. Democracy co-exists with a religiously encouraged grassroots social conservatism.
- The United States should expand its diplomatic presence on the African subcontinent, accompanied by the deployment of personnel conversant with local languages and Islam. Understanding local political and social dynamics is a precondition for sound U.S. policy.

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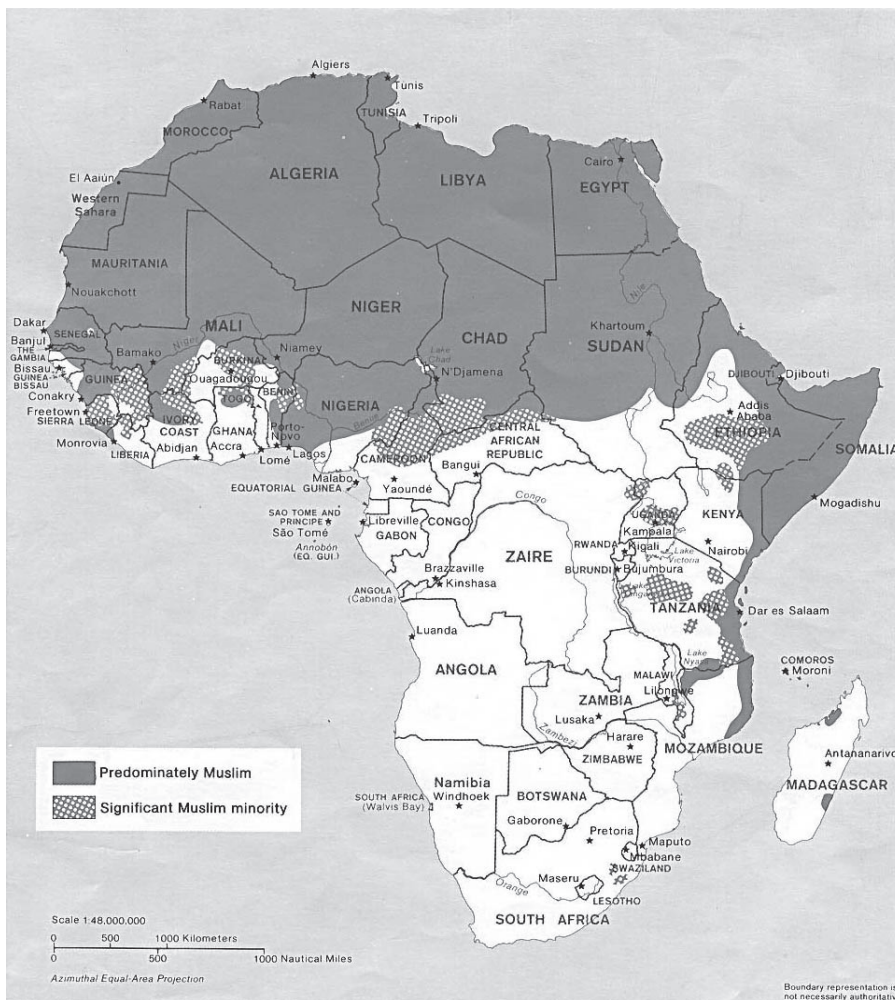
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- It is important that the United States remain neutral on matters that impinge on the religious domain. A perceived tilt toward non-Muslims would do irreparable harm to future outreach efforts to a Muslim community already suspicious of U.S. motives. This basic guideline applies to East Africa and the Horn, as well as to potentially volatile Nigeria.
- Educational and job initiatives targeted at disempowered sectors of the Muslim and non-Muslim populations should be supported. Economic opportunity can mitigate interreligious tensions.
- Active support of democratic structures, human rights, and liberalization in the governmental sector and civil society is necessary. Governmental accountability and transparency can discourage extremist-sponsored popular mobilization fostered by political marginalization.
- The establishment of a unitary U.S. military and intelligence structure for addressing military and terrorist-related issues on the subcontinent is needed. A coherent appraisal of sources of instability and necessary policy responses would follow.

Knowledge: Power for Policy

To examine the nature of political Islam on the African subcontinent and to draw lessons for United States policy, both the scholarly and policy communities must assess the phenomenon studied widely for other regions but largely neglected in Africa. Scholars and policymakers must examine the nature of political Islam in sub-Saharan Africa in order to



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Regional Muslim and Christian Populations

Approximately 140.3 million Muslims in West Sahel

Country	Total Population	Muslim Pop. in 1000s	% of Muslims	% of Christians
Benin	7,250,033	1,450	20	30
Burkina Faso	13,574,820	6,787	50	10
Chad	9,538,544	4,864	51	35
Cote d'Ivoire	17,327,724	6,064-6,931	35-40	20-30
Ghana	20,757,032	3,321	16	63
Rep. of Guinea	9,246,462	7,852	85	8
Guinea Bissau	1,368,363	615	45	5
Liberia	3,390,635	678	20	40
Mali	11,956,788	10,761	90	1
Mauritania	2,998,563	2,998	100	0
Niger	11,560,538	9,248	80	-
Nigeria	137,253,133	68,626	50	40
Senegal	10,852,147	10,201	94	5
Sierra Leone	5,883,889	3,530	60	10
Togo	5,556,812	1,111	10	20

Approximately 90.3 million Muslims in the Greater Horn of Africa

Country	Total Population	Muslim Pop. in 1000s	% of Muslims	% of Christians
Burundi	6,231,221	623	10	67
Djibouti	466,900	438	94	6
Eritrea	4,447,307	-	-	-
Ethiopia	67,851,281	30,000-33,000	45-50	35-40
Kenya	32,021,856	3,202	10	78
Rwanda	7,954,103	365	4.6	95
Somalia	8,303,601	8,303	100	0
Sudan	39,588,225	27,403	70	5
Tanzania	36,588,225	12,805	35	30
Uganda	26,404,453	4,224	16	66

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook 2004*. Online. Available: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html> (Accessed July 9, 2004.)

draw lessons for effective United States policy. Political Islam, by definition, is neutral. It is any variant of Islam inspiring or serving as a vehicle for political mobilization or activity. Productive scholarship and policymaking must reject definitions that categorically treat political Islam as either a malevolent or benevolent force. Political Islam in Africa can indeed be manifested in al Qaeda-type terrorism as tragically illustrated by the horrific loss of life in the 1998 simultaneous bombings of the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania or the 2002 attack on an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa, Kenya. Another face of political Islam, however, can be found in Senegal, where Sufi brotherhoods—religious and social networks with deep historical roots—have bolstered a democratic and secular government. The ideological preconceptions of conservative traditionalists and liberal revisionists must be cast aside in achieving an understanding of political Islam in its many incarnations on a continent where challenges defy easy solutions. A new understanding can help ensure that American policy will contribute to both U.S. national interests and to the well-being of the African people.

Islam is the fastest growing religion on the African subcontinent and has a significant presence in an array of states. While mystical and often syncretic variants of Sufi Islam are evident in much of East and West Africa, the austere, illiberal Wahabi sect, coming

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out of Saudi Arabia, has found a growing audience in these regions and in the Horn. The consequent battle for the heart of African Islam constitutes an important part of the African religious landscape, with implications for both internal African politics and relations with the United States.

East Africa

Transnational terrorism demonstrated its ferocity via al Qaeda's coordinated bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar el Salaam, Tanzania on August 7, 1998. Two hundred and twenty-four lives were stolen and more than 5,000 people were injured. The United States ineffectually responded with missile attacks on an alleged al Qaeda chemical weapons factory in Sudan and a training camp in Afghanistan. These attacks only served to obscure pertinent issues.

East Africa—specifically Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda—is an appropriate starting point for a survey of the nature of political Islam in Africa and its implications for U.S. policy. Among the pertinent issues obscured by the attacks and the U.S. response was the emergence and evolution of political Islam in East Africa and across the continent.

Muslims were deeply involved in the anti-colonial nationalist movements in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. For instance, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania collaborated with Muslims in the early days of the independence movement. "On the East African coast, you find groups that clearly identify themselves with Islam, many of whom define themselves in terms of their Arab heritage. This, in turn, influences how they respond to political Islam," Sulayman Nyang observed.

Politicization of Muslims in East Africa must also be seen in terms of their status relative to the political governing elite, Malik Chaka believes. Muslims were often discriminated against in the mission schools that educated people for clerical, civil service, and teaching positions and produced the core of the emerging African middle class during the colonial period. Educational and employment discrimination continued after independence. Africans with Arabic, and usually Koranic, education were marginalized by Westernized political elites. Whether trained abroad or in Wahabi-financed schools at home, many Muslims followed a distinctive path and increasingly assumed the role of a regional underclass.

The spiritual and mystical Sufism that Muslims in the region embraced often gave way to Wahabism, especially as seeds were sown for growing tensions with the prevailing power structure. Chaka explained that political Islam became "linked to the agitation of those Africans who felt victimized by the beneficiaries of Western education." In Uganda, a pernicious variant of political Islam emerged, supported by the Sudanese, attracting remnants of deposed tyrant Idi Amin's forces. Tanzanian Muslims charged that the ostensibly secular national unity projects of the country's Catholic founding father, Julius Nyerere, were really designed to constrain Muslims, Chaka noted.

In such a changing politico-religious environment, al Qaeda found it relatively easy to build an infrastructure in the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya and along the coast—a situation that seems to have been replicated in Zanzibar, the Comoros Islands, and along the Tanzanian coast.¹ Deadly results were realized in the 1998 East African embassy attacks and, later, in assaults on an Israeli-owned hotel and a passenger plane in Mombasa, Kenya in 2002.

Economic, governance, and security challenges in East Africa provide fertile ground for the expansion of al Qaeda and its ideological allies. What is to be done?

First and most fundamentally, a U.S. presence on the ground is vital to engaging Africans and formulating policy attuned to indigenous realities. Mombasa, Kenya and Zanzibar, Tanzania are crucial examples of areas deserving an American diplomatic presence. Active outreach to Muslim communities must replace the fatalistic acceptance of the deepening radicalization of Africans in the region.

Second, the United States cannot win hearts and minds simply on the basis of sophisticated public diplomacy. Economic and resource commitments are crucial to this effort. The African Growth and Opportunity Act, with its promise of job creation; the Millennium Challenge Account, and AIDS funding are a start. In addition, active Wahabi educational programs must be offset by support for educational programs fostering tolerance. Job opportunities must be promoted for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The continued socio-economic marginalization of Muslims can, in some circumstances, contribute to extremism. Economic assistance packages should address this.

Third, even earnest economic efforts will come to naught without encouraging and ultimately institutionalizing good governance in East Africa. Chaka pointed out that the United States must “counsel African states to practice good governance and have policies which are inclusive rather than exclusive because divisions based on religion are ultimately not in the American interest. There are dark forces which will use them and mobilize forces against the United States.” The Tanzanian elections scheduled for late 2005 are a prime opportunity. The United States should support international observers and pay special attention to electoral developments in heavily Muslim Zanzibar, where elections in 1995 and 2000 lacked credibility.

Diplomatic, economic, and political initiatives of the United States government in East Africa must be coordinated to avert instability and the growth of terrorist cells in the region.

The Horn of Africa

In strict geographic terms the Horn of Africa is defined as Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan. In mainstream political science terms the Horn is also defined by the disorder and state breakdown that provide fuel for the most virulent forms of political Islamic radicalism and terrorist activity. A survey of Islam in the Horn illustrates that Somalia and Djibouti are overwhelmingly Muslim, while a little less than three-quarters of the Sudan and roughly half of Ethiopia and Eritrea are Muslim. Ambassador David Shinn explained that Islamic movements challenged Ethiopian Christian hegemony in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and created obstacles to British rule in Somaliland in the early twentieth century. The Muslim League in Eritrea, following World War II, and the Muslim-dominated Eritrean Liberation Front, in the early 1960s, both agitated against Ethiopian rule.

Wahabism has had mixed success in radicalizing Muslims in the Horn. In Ethiopia, Wahabis have been connected to reported mosque burnings, thereby introducing intra-Islamic divisions into an already volatile ethno-religious mix. In Somalia, the fundamentalist al Ittihad al Islami evolved from Wahabi roots. Al Ittihad is a self-described Salafist group, however; Salafists seek a return to Muslim orthodoxy of yore. In 2001, al Ittihad was designated a terrorist group by the United States government. Although Somalia has served as a transit route for terrorists—most visibly al Qaeda—the depth of its involvement with terrorists is ironically constrained by the very disorder seen as a classical setting for terrorism; it has almost no legitimate terrorist targets, and terrorists themselves can be subject to extortion in a largely lawless setting.² Hostility from indigenous religious authorities has impeded the growth of Wahabism in Djibouti.

Political Islam—independent of Wahabism—has deep historical roots in Sudan. In line with this long tradition, Hassan al-Turabi created the National Islamic Front in 1985. It was transformed later into the Popular National Congress, but al-Turabi’s political maneuverings, as traced by Shinn, ultimately culminated in his assumption of the role of speaker of the National Assembly and power broker in an Islamic fundamentalist government. Later, al-Turabi would fall from political grace.

Meanwhile, Sudan served as a base for Osama bin Laden from 1991 to 1996, and in the eyes of some, as an epicenter for international terrorism. Sudan publicly renounced

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terrorism against the backdrop of a long-running civil war and engaged in revitalized efforts to normalize relations with the West beginning in 2000 and accelerating after September 11, 2001. These developments should not hide a complicating factor. Radical Islam, as exhibited in the Popular National Congress, remains a potent force in the Sudan, Shinn cautioned.

The multifarious problems of the Horn defy easy solutions. Experienced Africa experts have identified promising measures to address the growth of the most insidious variants of radical political Islam, while also bettering the lives of the Horn's people.

First, Shinn asserts, a serious effort should be made to train a new pool of U.S. Foreign Service officers for diplomatic service in the Horn who are conversant in Arabic, indigenous languages, and the regionally specific intricacies of Islam. Until now, only Khartoum, Sudan has had such a corps, leaving a glaring void of knowledge and analysis in an area of growing significance to the United States. This oversight is compounded by reluctance on the part of foreign service officers with Arabic and Islamic training to serve in Africa. A change in the culture and incentive system of the State Department can rectify this problem.

Second, military and anti-terrorist assistance should continue to the Horn, combined with a consciousness of human rights realities. It is naive to forswear military assistance to countries in the Horn that must battle terrorism while transnational groups such as al Qaeda use military means. However, such assistance must be linked to sound human rights practices and the protection of marginalized groups. Since 2002, the United States has deployed 1,800 troops to Djibouti as part of the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa, designed to thwart terrorists in Somalia, Kenya, Yemen, and elsewhere in the region. In mid-2003 the Bush administration committed itself to an additional \$100 million to address terrorism in the Horn and East Africa; two-thirds of these funds are marked for military support.³ These initiatives are legitimate, but Shinn warned that they may alienate the very constituencies that the United States and the West need to continue the global War on Terror, particularly if regional states do not adhere scrupulously to human rights standards.

To achieve tangible long-term success in the Horn and reduce the ranks of terror recruits, Western countries must reach ordinary Muslims and non-Muslims by improving health care systems, combating HIV-AIDS, financing secular schools, and boosting agriculture. "It would be particularly helpful," argued Shinn, "if wealthy Arab countries joined development efforts in the Horn and Africa at large without linking their aid to support for a fundamentalist philosophy. This will require some very frank talk with the Saudis and others."

The United States will need a carefully considered re-engagement plan to build a new relationship with strategically located Somalia once a central government emerges with at least rudimentary influence in most parts of the country. The formal emergence of a largely impotent central government in the latter part of 2004 following clan-based negotiations does not yet appear to meet this criterion.⁴ Before an effective national government emerges, informal contacts can and should be cultivated with local authorities, including clan leaders and both religious and secular leaders in the larger civil society.⁵ Such contacts provide insight into political patterns and lay the groundwork for more extensive and formal contacts in the future.

In the meantime, U.S. relations with Sudan remain in flux. The consummation of a peace deal in January 2005 between the central government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army inspires hope for improved relations. The United States holds out the possibility that the agreement will open the door for an accommodation with rebels in the troubled Darfur region, where government complicity in genocide is alleged.⁶ A comprehensive peace throughout Sudan will enhance U.S.-Sudan ties and accelerate Sudan's reintegration into the mainstream international community.

The U.S. approach to the Horn of Africa must be multidimensional, with integrated and robust use of the varied instruments of statecraft. One such instrument requires

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American efforts to enlist support from European, African, and Muslim state and nonstate actors in promoting stability and prosperity.

Nigeria

Nigeria is currently experiencing increasingly volatile relations between its Islamic and Christian communities. Destabilization of this strategically crucial West African state would ripple through the region and beyond if precipitated by new confrontations among politicized Muslims and Christians. Economic distress only exacerbates the danger.

Nigeria must be seen in the regional context of the West Africa region, where roughly 140 million Muslims live. West Africa is home to three pro-Western democracies: Senegal, Mali, and Niger. Further, the region could account for up to a quarter of U.S. oil imports by 2015. Although there are only small pockets of support for terrorism regionally, al Qaeda has taken advantage of the region's interlocking conflicts and cases of state breakdown to acquire funds through local diamond purchases.⁷

Nigeria has the largest population in Africa and is the seventh largest oil producer in the world. Nigeria has maintained a reputation as a regional peacekeeper in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and elsewhere. Yet it has a fragile internal political order.

Nigeria's population is almost evenly split between predominately northern Muslims and predominately southern Christians. Religious and ethnic divisions raise the prospect of further conflict. Prior to the emergence of a legitimate democratic government at the end of the 1990s, Nigeria had experienced ethnic tension, civil war, and frequent military coups. Its oil wealth was mismanaged, leading to a precipitous decline in living standards for the average Nigerian. Expectations rose with President Olesegun Obasanjo's election in 1999, but subsequent ethnic unrest in Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta region, rising religious tensions, and a lack of discernible improvement in the economy soon cast a cloud over the democratic experiment. More than 10,000 deaths were recorded from ethnic and religious conflicts since the election. Yet even this high number does not adequately describe the tenuous nature of the country's governing institutions.

Political Islam has played an important role in the evolution of Nigeria's polity, but it must be assessed in terms of the daunting political and economic challenges facing the country.

Northern Nigeria's largely Muslim Hausa-Fulani people have long-standing transnational connections to Middle Eastern centers of learning and West African Sufi brotherhoods. British colonialism bolstered northern Nigeria's control by political Islamists, Sulayman Nyang observed. In exchange for support of British rule, Ahmadu Bello was able to insist "on the teaching and practice of Islam in this region." Traditional Islamic clans coalesced into a northern party that effectively excluded Westernized intellectuals and secularized non-Muslims.

The resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria following independence was influenced by an infusion of Saudi-educated religious scholars who challenged less austere versions of Islam. That Islamic fundamentalism acquired a more pronounced political edge as the national fortunes of the governing Muslim national elite declined dramatically with the election of President Obasanjo, a born-again Christian from the south. After playing a major, often dominant, role in the government and military for almost forty years, northern Muslims felt sidelined. Among the reasons for these feelings was Obasanjo's removal of politicized military officers, who were disproportionately Muslim.⁸

John Paden described how, in the context of a northern Muslim political decline, a gubernatorial candidate in Zamfara state, running on a platform of restoring *sharia*, or Islamic law, won a resounding victory. Very quickly, *sharia* was introduced in an additional eleven of Nigeria's thirty-six states. Paden stressed that *sharia* offered the prospect of law and order to the Muslim masses outraged at how their children "were being

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seduced by siren calls of easy money and lax morals.” To the governing elite, however, the spread of *sharia* was also a byproduct of Nigerian Muslims’ desire to reassert their political prerogative in response to what they feared was a newfound southern Christian political hegemony. In contrast, many Christians in predominately Muslim and mixed religious states view *sharia* as an alien religious and cultural imposition designed to delegitimize both their religion and political standing. The Nigerian electoral process, Paden pointed out, with its mandated requirement for cross-religious and cross-regional alliances, prevented *sharia* from achieving a formal national platform, yet it remains a potential source of religious and cultural tension and is symptomatic of the depth of national religious divisions. Fears of looming communal religious violence in Nigeria became a reality in February and May of 2000 in Kaduna City, with at least 2,000 deaths, and again in Kaduna in 2002, when a newspaper printed a story deemed an affront to the Prophet Mohammed. Kano and Sokoto states, and the cities of Jos, Baluchi, and Yelwa, have similarly experienced religious violence.

It may be premature to characterize clashes between Nigerian police and religious students in Yobe state in early 2003 and between security forces and Islamic militants in September 2004 as opening skirmishes in a battle with transnational Islamic-inspired terrorism, but the conditions for just such a battle may develop.⁹ Growing economic and political marginalization, political mobilization of alienated youth and the intelligentsia, and the injection of extremist Islamic ideologies into the body politic are ingredients in a volatile recipe. Nigerian history is littered with precedents for the use of violence to settle political scores, and those with an interest in Nigeria’s success cannot remain sanguine about recent examples and potential hot spots of violence in the country.

Paden’s formula for a sophisticated U.S. response to Nigeria’s complex array of issues echoed familiar approaches with some new elements. First, Washington must end its policy of neglect toward Nigeria. State failure there will reverberate well beyond Nigeria’s borders. A start, Paden asserted, includes full staffing of the embassy in Abuja with knowledgeable indigenous-language speakers and reconsidering the closure of consulates in Kano and Kaduna states in the north. Northern Nigerians, in particular, have borne the brunt of apparent U.S. indifference. The United States must back up its expectations that the Nigerian army promote regional stability by offering real training opportunities. Announcing a timetable to restore military training programs, contingent on achievement of human rights benchmarks, would be helpful.

Second, the United States should support interreligious dialogue without taking a stance on Nigeria’s religious division. To Paden, the “key to bilateral relations between the United States and Nigeria is to ‘do no harm.’ It is imperative that the U.S. remain neutral on matters that impinge on the religious domain.” A perceived tilt toward non-Muslims would do irreparable harm to future outreach efforts to a Muslim community already suspicious of U.S. motives. “The United States should resist the temptation to lecture Nigerian Muslims on *sharia* law,” Paden contended. Instead, the United States should encourage Nigerian-centered solutions, which may include involvement by its supreme court in reviewing decisions reached by the *sharia* courts. Also, the United States should not overreact to Nigerian religious fringe groups but, rather, support conflict resolution by traditional leaders. Indeed, U.S. policy toward Nigeria should promote Nigerian solutions for Nigerian problems. The United States should tap its own strengths in terms of human and institutional resources and avoid patronizing the Nigerians on religious issues.

Third, the United States can best assist Nigeria economically—via debt relief, for example—through its influence in international financial institutions. This assistance is imperative in light of the magnitude of the Nigeria’s economic crisis, a state of affairs reinforcing ethnic and religious divisions. Strengthening the Nigerian educational system should also be a priority, acknowledging the potential destabilization of a surge of undereducated and disenfranchised young people.

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Fourth, Nigeria can either be a beacon for the expansion of liberal democracy on the continent or a catalyst for decline. Paden observed that for the former to be the case, the United States must support Nigeria’s federal system “so that local communities have more of a stake in the mediation of disputes and economic development.”

Senegal

Senegal is a vivid illustration that political Islam can be a constructive and regime-stabilizing force in a country of almost 11 million people, 94 percent of whom are Muslim. Lucy Creevey noted that Senegal has found a “balance between a modernizing and secular state and the Muslim tradition.”

The cordiality between the Senegalese state and Muslim leaders is rooted in the colonial period. The French, fearing *jihad*, deferred to these leaders on religious affairs in exchange for acceptance of French control of administrative matters, such as taxation.

In the postindependence period and beyond, Creevey explained, Senegal’s Sufi groups became pillars for the governing authorities, turning out the vote and extending religious sanction to secular heads of state. Governing leaders, in turn, paid allegiance to groups within the Sufi brotherhoods. Creevey added that President Abdoulaye Wade, for instance, has “declared himself a Mouride, a politically active reform group within the Hizbut Tarquiyyah brotherhood”; he expresses his loyalty to the Mouride leader. The Sufi brotherhoods have become less overt in their expression of political sympathies over the years, yet they maintain an instrumental role by encouraging popular support for the government.

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Muslim Groups in Senegal

Sufi Brotherhoods	Tidjaniyya
	Muridiyya
	Quadriyya
	Layenne
Politically Active Reform Groups within Brotherhoods	Hizbut Tarquiyyah (Mouride)
	Moustarchidine wal (Tidjani)
	Moustarchidati (Tidjani)
Islamist Groups	Jamatou Ibadou Rahmane
	Associations des Etudiants de l’Universite de Dakar
	Organisation pour l’Action Islamique

Source: Lucy Creevey, “Muslim Leaders and Politics in Senegal in 2004” (paper presented at the conference on “Political Islam on the African Subcontinent: Lessons for U.S. Policy,” July 9, 2004, United States Institute of Peace, Washington D.C.).

Senegal is home to a minority of radical Islamist groups and militants who were inspired by the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The leaders of these groups are mostly individuals schooled in Arab countries and critical of Westernization. While they remain a minority, their opposition to U.S. policy in the Middle East and to the secularization of the country’s family code is shared by the Sufi brotherhoods. Only 40 percent of Muslim leaders believe that Senegal should be governed by *sharia*; this is a small number relative to many other Muslim states. Moderation within the Senegalese polity and balance between traditional Islam and secularism remains the norm, so it is wise for the United States to continue its noninvolvement in Senegal’s internal religious debate. More assertive involvement would only delegitimize prudent voices within the religious establishment.

The United States should instead seek to strengthen Senegal’s economy through bilateral and multilateral aid and support its democratic institutions. The future of the

The Senegalese model should remain a quiet testimony to the potential for states willing to reconcile the best in the Islamic tradition with the requirements of modern state building. Its merits must be identified, weighed, and selectively adopted by states on their own volition based on their peculiar historical and contemporary circumstances.

Senegalese secular–religious balance will likely be more profoundly affected by the soundness of its economy and the viability of its political institutions than by the rhetorical barbs of a radical Islamic minority.

Senegal may be a model for political modernity on the continent, but in a state proud of its Islamic traditions it is best that this model not be trumpeted by an America whose standing is low in the Islamic world. The Senegalese model should remain a quiet testimony to the potential for states willing to reconcile the best in the Islamic tradition with the requirements of modern state building. Its merits must be identified, weighed, and selectively adopted by states on their own volition based on their peculiar historical and contemporary circumstances.

Looking Forward: Research and Policy Strategies

If there is an overriding lesson to be gleaned from a survey of political Islam on the African subcontinent, it is that current, conventional U.S. policies toward the region neither maximize the American national interest nor do justice to Africans in their quest for stability, prosperity, and independent religious and cultural identities. A more sophisticated understanding of political Islam should be a precondition for policy formulation. In this spirit, certain policy and conceptual questions surface and beg further analysis.

- What are the politically active sectors of the Muslim population on the African subcontinent? How is their activity manifested?
- What is the nexus between Islam, ethnicity, and class in selective African cases?
- Is the conventional dichotomy between moderate and radical Islamists on the subcontinent appropriate? If not, what categorization should be substituted?
- To what extent are radical transnational Islamic movements influencing indigenous variants of African Islam? To what extent are they operating independently on the subcontinent?
- How can dialogue and understanding be fostered between the United States and representatives of Islam on the subcontinent in both government and in the broader civil society?
- To what extent does U.S. policy in the Muslim world outside of Africa shape perceptions of the United States in the region?
- How does U.S. policy toward Islam on the subcontinent fit into its global policy, including the War on Terror?

Greater understanding of the nuances of political Islam is a prerequisite to the delineation of preliminary policy recommendations toward Islamic areas of the African subcontinent.

- The United States should formulate and implement a coherent and integrated African and antiterrorist policy incorporating the diplomatic, economic, and military instruments of statecraft. Africa's peripheral status in the hierarchy of American foreign policy priorities must be altered.
- The United States should expand its diplomatic presence in the subcontinent, accompanied by the deployment of personnel conversant with local languages and Islam. Arbitrary bureaucratic distinctions between North African and sub-Saharan divisions in the State Department and elsewhere must be discarded to facilitate such expansion. The importance of sub-Saharan African appointments must be reinforced.
- The United States should also encourage greater investments in all facets of economic development and the promotion of enhanced investment and trade ties, building upon the Millennium Challenge Account and the African Growth and Opportunity Act. Educational and job initiatives targeted at disempowered sectors of the Muslim and non-Muslim populations must be supported.

- The active support of democratic structures, human rights, and liberalization in the governmental sector and civil society must be a central pillar in U.S. policy toward the region. A linkage must be made between state behavior in this realm and assistance.
- There should be outreach to Muslim leaders and opinion makers in the governmental and nongovernmental sectors, as well as to students.
- The United States should adopt a laissez-faire approach to matters of mosque and state, as well as to matters of church and state, which are better left to Africans to address. Support for interfaith dialogue remains a worthy pursuit, however.
- The United States should establish a unitary military and intelligence structure for addressing military and terrorist-related issues on the subcontinent.
- The United States should also deny financial resource networks to al Qaeda and other radical groups through participation in multilateral arrangements such as the “Kimberly Process” for labeling diamonds and removing unauthorized diamonds from circulation.

There can be no illusion that U.S. policy on the African subcontinent can be dramatically and quickly altered. Nor can the damage rendered by the pervasive perception that the United States is hostile toward global Islamic interests be erased in the near term. Qualified, informed staff on the ground; advice on and monitoring issues of governance and human rights; and substantive gestures of goodwill in military training, social development, and economic assistance are the crucial components in the U.S. diplomatic arsenal that should be deployed on the African continent. Steps can be taken to incrementally establish the foundation for a more constructive and beneficial relationship between the United States and members of the Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Africa.

NOTES

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2. Ken Menkhaus, *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism*. Adelphi Paper 364 (New York: Oxford University Press, March 2004), 66–75.
3. Lyman and Morrison, “The Terrorist Threat in Africa,” 77.
4. “Ex-Soldier Chosen as Somali President,” *Washington Post*, October 10, 2004, A17.
5. Menkhaus, *Somalia*, 83–84.
6. Wangui Kanina, “Sudanese Leaders, Southern Rebels Finish Peace Deal,” *Washington Post*, January 1, 2005, A1; Colum Lynch, “UN Official Blames Sudan For Violence,” *Washington Post*, May 8, 2004, A11; Glenn Kessler and Colum Lynch, “U.S. Calls Killings in Sudan Genocide,” *Washington Post*, September 10, 2004, A1; and Colum Lynch, “U.S., Europe Debate Venue for Darfur Trials,” *Washington Post*, January 21, 2005, A11.
7. Lyman and Morrison, “The Terrorist Threat in Africa,” 83–84.
8. *Ibid.*, 79.
9. *Washington Post*, September 25, 2004, A18.

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