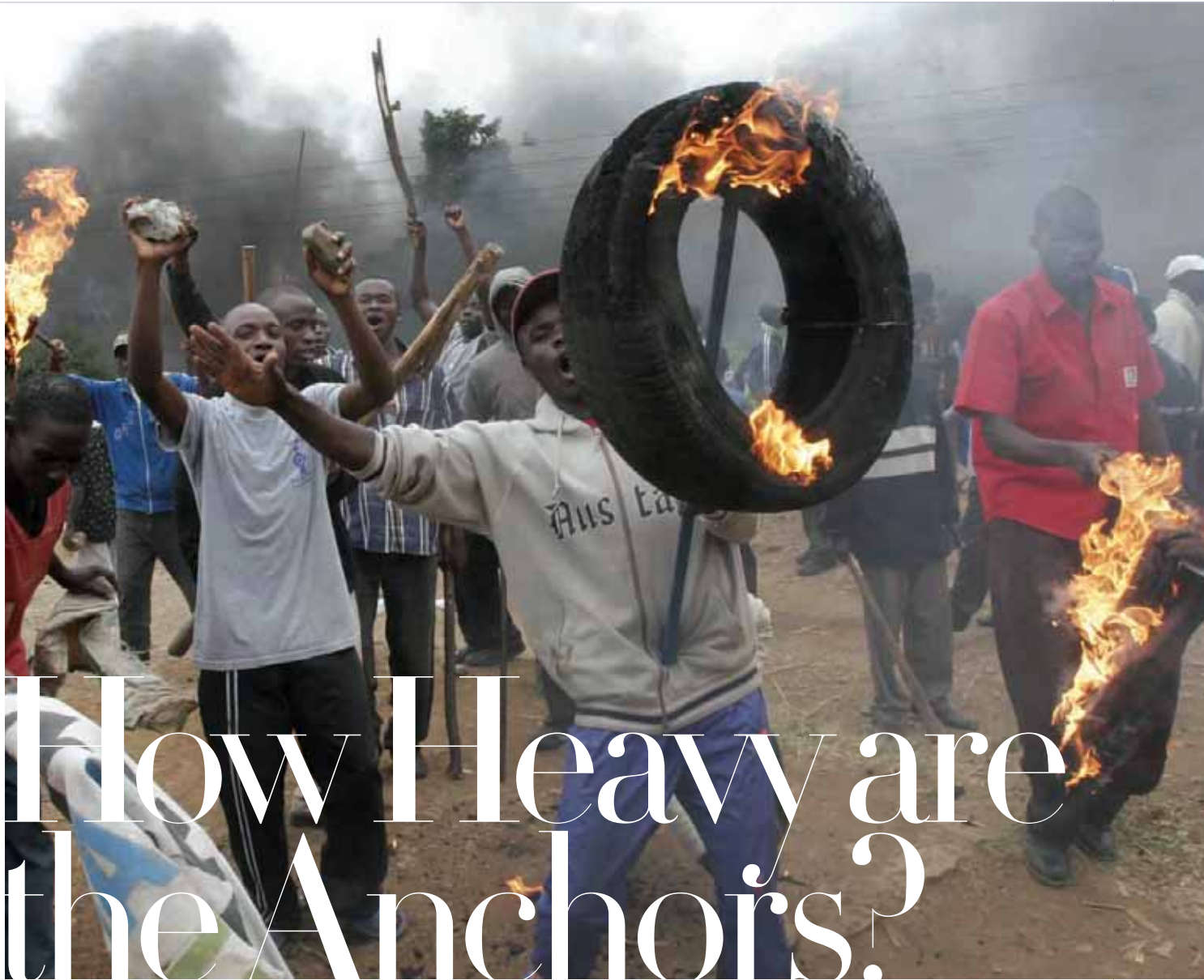


CHOOSING STRATEGIC AFRICAN PARTNERSHIPS

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How Heavy are the Anchors?

A televised post-election crisis in Kenya demands a government response, but where are the west's partners in Africa and what are the strategic interests? And as several more states prepare to vote, which are the ones to watch?

KENYA'S ONGOING POLITICAL crisis, following presidential and parliamentary elections, is a reminder not to become complacent about African politics. It had been hoped that Kenya's institutions were strong enough to deter significant electoral fraud and that its political class was sufficiently visionary to avoid the conflict that has paralysed the country since the turn of the year.

Kenya shows that assumptions must be tested and that Africa, as elsewhere, will throw up surprises. This is a good time to reflect on trends in Africa, especially as new foreign policy thinking is emerging in Washington to be offered to whoever moves into the White House.

Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office is revisiting its strategic priorities too, reducing

the policy goals from ten to four: counter-terrorism, conflict prevention, linking politics to economics – especially climate change – and supporting a strong international system. A new international relations and development ministerial sub-committee has also been formed, and met for the first time on January 15. These changes are likely to last until the next election, in a year or two's time.

For the United States and Britain, maintaining consistent democracy and human rights values when challenged by counter-terrorism and trade interests, is a major threat to real policy coherence. Messy elections, such as those in Kenya or in Nigeria last year, pose uncomfortable new realities which demand policy makers' response.

REGIONAL HUBS

What are the implications for Africa? Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa have been the regional hubs for British- and US-Africa policy for some time. They are seen as anchor states in their regions and also chosen for their size and location. Ethiopia has become increasingly important too because of counter terrorism and its hosting of the African Union. Egypt has for many years been the key strategic partner in north Africa for similar reasons and because it provides a home for the Arab League.

Of the US presidential elections contenders, only the Democratic Party frontrunners, Barack Obama – whose father is Kenyan – and Hilary Clinton – who has an Africa link through the Clinton Foundation – have shown an interest in the continent. There has been little sign of engagement from the Republican Party, apart from Darfur and preaching sexual abstinence as a response to HIV.

President George Bush's current policy would be likely to continue under the Republicans, driven mainly by maintaining allies in the 'war' on terror, or where corporate America has significant interests such as oil and gas. The US gets up to a fifth of its oil from Africa and this is increasing. It is noticeable that over the course of the Bush administration, none of America's four most important African allies – Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria – has succeeded in holding a credible election.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

Over the last few years US-Africa policy has increasingly been dominated by the Pentagon, even though its Africa budget is much less than

that of the US State Department and foreign aid organisations. Tied to this is the development of the new Africa Command (Africom) which is scheduled to become fully operational in October. Announced last year, the concept has been modified, not least because of budget constraints and the widespread ambivalence or circumspection about it in Africa. Probably only when a new president takes office, will there be greater clarity on how Africom will role out beyond its current German base in Stuttgart.

A dedicated US military command analysing Africa – except Egypt which still falls under Central Command – is not unwelcome. Africa merits analysis on its own, rather than divided as an appendix to Europe, the Middle East – Central Command – and even the Pacific Command. What is not needed there are French-style military bases, and it is likely that Africom will remain based in Stuttgart for the foreseeable future, but it may have outreach offices in key regions. The US is also increasing its naval activity, with permanent patrolling in the Bight of Benin up fifty percent on 2006.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown will retain a policy that remains strongly humanitarian in vision, building on his long-standing interest in African development. For example, this year will see a British push in support of the Millennium Development Goals. Brown is also trying to get French backing for innovative financing mechanisms to boost aid flows.

PRESIDENTIAL CHOICES

Despite these continental initiatives, it is increasingly clear that geographical political analysis is still crucial. Britain regards Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa as key regional anchor states, with hub embassies or high commissions. Kenya and Ethiopia join this list, although their continental punch is less. Each faces unique challenges to future stability, but what does this mean in practice?

South Africa is regarded by London as a key partner and what happens there has serious implications for British policy. South Africa's fourth general election since the advent of democracy is just a year away. The choice of Jacob Zuma for the presidency of the African National Congress (ANC) by sixty percent over President Thabo Mbeki is highly significant, and he is on course to be the ANC's next presidential candidate.

The contest was divisive and Zuma faces a new trial on charges of corruption and money-





laundering later this year. If he is convicted this could bar him from the presidential race. Zuma is now trying to consolidate his position, and Mbeki risks becoming a lame duck for the rest of his presidency. South Africa will be inward looking until after the election, with impacts on its regional and continental diplomacy.

MISREAD

Zuma's victory may, however, encourage President Robert Mugabe to press ahead with Zimbabwe's presidential and parliamentary polls scheduled for next month. The hope remains that after another election victory, a post-Mugabe transition will really commence. Zuma's wing of the ANC, supported by the trade unions, has been a vocal critic of Mbeki's softly, softly stance towards Mugabe and demanded a much harder line.

Mugabe may want to secure what he perceives as his successful legacy by retiring before a Zuma presidency begins. Britain's Brown will make new efforts to engage South Africa to push for change in the run-up to these elections. This probably reflects a British misreading of what South Africa can, or is willing to, deliver.

This misreading of South Africa's capabilities goes beyond Zimbabwe. Take the closures of British diplomatic missions in Lesotho and Swaziland in 2005. The assumption in London had been that both could close for cost-saving

reasons because Pretoria would do the heavy lifting in Maseru and Mbabane, including on human rights and governance challenges.

Although Lesotho's economy looks promising, its political outlook is clouded by ongoing disputes between the governing Lesotho Congress of Democracy under Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili and the All Basotho Convention over the conduct of elections last February. Regional diplomatic efforts to persuade the Convention to accept the Congress victory are continuing, but there is widespread concern that the aggrieved party might resort to street protests that would repeat the chaos that occurred in the late 1990s and resulted in a clumsy South African-led military intervention.

Swaziland is equally worrying, as King Mswati III ignores domestic and international calls for reform. There are disagreements about the electoral system that will be used for polling scheduled for this year. Elections in Swaziland are currently held without political parties and with candidates approved by traditional chiefs.

Talks last year quickly collapsed over this and the government ignored calls by the now-non-resident, Pretoria-based British High Commissioner, Paul Boateng, for the introduction of political parties. The government's refusal to reform has resulted in a growing radicalisation of several opposition bodies and the trade unions. The outlook for Swazi citizens is bleak because of drought, food

Letter

Sir, Anne Wittman's article *When Something Must Be Done: Human Intervention in a Global Age* in the January edition of *The World Today*, sets out the considerations relating to the responsibility to protect in a reasonably coherent way. But it manages completely to overlook three rather salient developments:

- That then-United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, a body containing representatives of all regions of the world, in December 2004, advanced the responsibility to protect as in certain circumstances overriding national sovereignty.
- That, in March 2005, Annan, in his paper *In Larger Freedom* also endorsed that view and commended it to member states.

- And in September 2005 the UN summit accepted that view by consensus.

These are surely three rather fundamental omissions. The problem the international community faces now is not therefore whether the responsibility to protect exists as a legitimate concept. It clearly has since September 2005. The problem is to apply it. And that, as we can see in Darfur, is a lot more difficult.

David Hannay,
House of Lords,
London

shortages and rising unemployment.

Lesotho and Swaziland may be small states with no support constituency in London. But they do fulfil two of the Foreign Office's strategic priorities in conflict prevention and aligning political aims to economic realities. Not having a permanent presence weakens Britain's ability to influence the deteriorating situation.

COURT CONTESTS

Nigeria is strategic for America and Britain because of its size and as a major global supplier of oil. London and Washington supported former President Olusegun Obasanjo but are cautious about his more ascetic successor Umaru Yar'Adua. Both countries are assisting in tracking down stolen assets and offering advice on the continuing crisis in the Niger Delta.

Reverberations of the disputed elections last April will dominate Nigerian politics this year. Five state governorship polls have already been overturned by tribunals and several more are contested in court. The biggest legal battle will be between Yar'Adua and his two presidential opponents, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar and former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari. Both opposition candidates have submitted detailed complaints to the Appeal Court and called for a re-run. The hearing starts soon and if the judges decide to invalidate the vote, Nigeria will suffer renewed uncertainty and instability.

There are signs that despite clear evidence of electoral fraud, many Nigerians are cautiously willing to give Yar'Adua time to deliver on his reform promises, including support for an investigation of grand corruption cases in Obasanjo's era. Within weeks of coming to power Yar'Adua presided over the cancellation of several questionable contracts signed by outgoing state governments.

As in South Africa, Yar'Adua will now focus on domestic issues, rather than the multiple foreign affairs initiatives that were such a hallmark of his over-bearing predecessor. This is by no means bad for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), given Nigeria mishandled its mediation efforts in Côte d'Ivoire in 2006, for example.

Elections are clearly important political moments that constantly surprise. Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria demonstrate that polling can provide a catalyst for further change but can also be very divisive. This is no great surprise, but it shows why external actors such as Britain need periodically to review their assumptions on who their natural partners are and what key values and interests they share.

Maintaining the capacity to understand and engage with the complex politics of individual African countries is a key issue. Nigeria is a good example of the paradox. Yar'Adua emerged in a highly suspect electoral cycle, but could become one of Nigeria's greatest reformists. African politics is never simple.



Key Africa Elections To Watch

ANGOLA	National Assembly – September 5 and 6
GHANA	Presidential, National Assembly – December
GUINEA	National Assembly – December
MAURITIUS	Presidential – May
RWANDA	Chamber of Deputies – September
SWAZILAND	House of Assembly – October
ZIMBABWE	Presidential, National Assembly, Senate – March

Angola's long-awaited legislative elections in September are significant. These are the first since 1992 and will mark the end of a lengthy post-conflict transition. Also scheduled for this year are much-delayed polls in **Côte d'Ivoire**. The registration of voters, especially in the north, and the disarmament of rebels and militias are behind schedule but successful voting would also mark a new beginning.

Ghana's elections are vitally important. If they pass off successfully, the country's democratic foundations will be deepened. Legislative voting scheduled in **Equatorial Guinea** and assembly polling in **Swaziland** will be little more than window dressing. The **Zimbabwe** results are probably predetermined, but could mark the formal start of a post-Mugabe transition.

