A Directional Evaluation of Africom and African Concerns

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Abstract
Africom which means African command is one of nine unified combatant commands of the United States Armed Forces, responsible for US military operations and military relations with fifty-three (53) African nations-an area of responsibility covering all Africa except Egypt. Right from its establishment, most African countries have taken the command with a pinch of salt. African countries express concerns as regard to the acclaimed intent of the command which is countering terrorism and enhancement of peace for the progress and development of the African continent. Rather, Africans envisaged fear of militarization, exploitation of African resources, counteraction of Chinese penetration, loss of sovereignty, destabilization, etc as the real would be consequences of the command. All these and more have been of great concern to Africans. This article used the power theory to encapsulate the whole issue. The work x-rayed these concerns and proffered that tackling poverty, corruption, political instability and dwindling resources is what Africans rather need.

Keywords: Africa, Terrorism, Command, Militarization, Sovereignty, Destabilization.

Introduction

For a long time, strategic thinking in Washington was that the United States had no compelling interests in Africa. Africa was largely unattractive, or not considered worthy enough of a clearly defined policy to warrant a bureaucratic structure to manage those interests. In short, US policy toward Africa could be characterised as benign neglect. Even so, the United States grew notably nervous whenever a rival power entered the region, as was the case when the USSR attempted to spread communist ideology on the continent in the 1960s and 1970s. For the most part, however, the United States followed a policy of selective engagement with particular African countries, and only when it believed such action would benefit the United States in a geostrategic or material way. For example, the United States supported, countenanced, or acquiesced in Zaire's Sese Seko Mobutu's excesses or South Africa's racist apartheid policies until the early 1990s, partly in an effort to contain the spread of communist influence in Southern Africa. (Georges: 2008).Indeed, far from supporting nationalists and pro-democracy movements during the struggles for independence on the continent, the United States during the cold war often aligned itself with repressive regimes.

When the United States intervened as it did in Somalia in 1993, initially on a UN-sponsored OPERATION Restore Hope exercise to halt the human catastrophe that was engulfing the failed state, the way the mission was botched led Washington to retreat once more in a cautious policy of disengagement. Then as Rwandan genocide erupted in 1994, America preferred to stay on the sidelines while some 800,000 people tragically lost their lives. In general, this misguided posture points to the lack of a proactive policy toward Africa(Edmond:2009).

Then, in 1996 the Clinton administration proposed what appeared to be the first broadly conceived economic initiative on Africa, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), eventually gaining congressional approval in 2000. Yet critics contend that AGOA and other recent US initiatives in Africa-the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), and the PRESIDENT'S Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)-upon which Bush's African legacy primarily rests, are all limited, relatively high-profile unilateral programs that have made little dent in the human security threats to the lives of millions of poverty-stricken Africansfwww.africaaction.org: 2012)

Finally came the events of September 11, 2001, and their aftermath. By 2002, a major shift away from Cold War politics was becoming discernible in Washington. Pentagon and State Department officials were beginning to identify Africa with national security interests, and the concerns centered primarily on terrorism and oil (US House of Representative Records: 2004) In 2004 Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of Defence, made the case in an address to military and government officials from forty-two African countries-strengthening institutions in Africa must be the key to defeating the scourge of global terrorism (Paul Wolfowitz: 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Power theory seeks to explain issues and events through their histories as they happen practically. The exercise of power by states toward each other is sometimes called realpolitik or just power politics (Joshua: 2011), The main proponents of the theory are Hans Morgenthau, Nicholas Spykman W. Kegley. The power theory contends that people by nature are inherently sinful and wicked: that of all peoples' evil ways, no sins are more prevalent, inexorably or dangerous than are the instinctive lust for power and desire to dominate others; that, under such

conditions international politics is a Hobbesian struggle for power-a war of all against all; that, the primary obligation of every state is to promote its national interest, which is defined as the acquisition of power; that, given the nature of the international system, it is necessary to acquire military capabilities, sufficient to deter attack by potential enemies; that, the ability to defend oneself might be augmented by acquiring allies, provided that faith is not placed in their loyalty and reliability. This exactly explains the U.S aim in the Africom. Power theory also believes that the test of self-protection can never be entrusted to international organizations or to international law and that if all states seek to maximise power, stability will result from maintaining a balance of power, lubricated by fluid alliance system (Kegley: 1991).

Power theorists tend to treat political power as separate from, and predominant over, morality, ideology, and other social and economic aspects of life. For them, ideologies do not matter much, nor do religious or other cultural factors with which states may explain their actions. They see states with very different religions or ideologies or economic systems as quite similar in their actions with regard to national power (Morgenthau: 1985). Today power theorists share several assumptions about how international relation works. They assume that, international relations can be best (though not exclusively) explained by the choices of states operating as autonomousactors rationally pursuing their own interests in a system of sovereign states. Sometimes the power theorists framework is summarized in three propositions:-

(1) States are the most important actors (the state-centric assumption)
(2) They act as rational individuals in pursuing national interests (the unitary rational-actor assumption) and
(3) They act in the context of an international system lacking central government (the anarchy assumption).

In effect, the power theorists see the world as dominated by anarchy and power struggle; as such, it was imperative for each state to seek to defend its sovereignty and national interest. While recognising the importance of collective security mechanism, the power theorists' believe that no state would be willing to surrender its sovereignty to a nebulous international organization. This invariably legitimises the amassing of military power to deter potential belligerent nations. In its general form, the power tradition has a pessimistic view, of man and focuses on 'power' in its own right. According to this view, the international system is in constant crises-states connecting and conflicting among and against one another, leading to instabilities and wars. This was seen as 'a struggle of all against all', the objective of each State being the maximization of protection and security and indeed a conscious struggle to expand and dominate other states. According to Joseph S. Nye (2009), there are three dominant assumptions of the state-centric power school and these are : (a) that, significant relations between states exist; (b) that, states act as coherent units; and (c) that, political, military and security concerns are the dominant objectives and motivation of states. The power theory has no place for the weak. Consequently, it serves the interest of the Great powers and hence its justification in been used in this work.

Historical Background

Prior to the creation of Africom, three unified commands had divided responsibility for US military operations in Africa (United States European Command for West Africa(EUCOM), United States Central Command for East Africa(CENTCOM), and the United States Pacific

Command for Indian Ocean waters and islands off the east coast of Africa(PACOM) (US Africa Command :2008).

On 28 September, 2008 the US senate confirmed General William .E. Kip Ward as Africom's first commander. On 1st October 2008, the command separated from USEUCOM and began operating on its own as a full fledged combatant command. The territory of the command consists of ail of the African continent except Egypt, which remains under the direct responsibility of USCENTCOM, as it closely relates to the middle East.USAFRICOM also covers island countries commonly associated with Africa; Cape Verde, Sao Tome, Principe, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles(US Africa Command:2008)

The US military areas of responsibility involved were transferred from three separate US unified combatant commands. Most of Africa was transferred from three separate US unified combatant commands. Most of Africa was transferred from the United States European Command with the Horn of Africa and Sudan transferred from the United States Central Command. Responsibility for US military operations in the islands of Madagascar, the Comoros, the Seychelles and Mauritius was transferred from the United States Pacific Command.

African Concerns

In spite of the high-sounding magnanimity embodied in the public pronouncements that surrounded the creation of AFRICOM in 2007, most African leaders have not stretched out a welcoming hand. From the very beginning, scepticism, if not outright opposition, has characterised African responses throughout the continent. And even though reaction across a continent of over fifty-four nations cannot be universalized in nature and degree, the major points of contention can be explained as follows:-

Fear of Militarization

Concerns are widespread that the growth of US military presence might lead to the increased militarization of Africa. Make no mistake about it: the United States already has military bases on the continent. A full-scale military base with over twenty-five hundred personnel (said to be capable of expanding to fifty thousand troops) was established in Djibouti in 2002 to oversee and coordinate counterterrorism activities in East Africa, the Horn of Africa, Yemen, and adjacent Indian Ocean territories (US Africa Command:2008).

Two more obscure bases exist, one on the island of Diego Garcia, with airbases and stockpiles of weapons, and the other in the southern Algerian desert town of Tamanrasset. The Bush administration negotiated a series of what are known as Base Access Agreements with a number of African countries, including Gabon, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, Namibia, Sao Tome, Senegal, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zambia (US Army:2011). These agreements provide the United States with access-sometimes known as 'lily pads'-to local military bases for purposes of surveillance, combat, and other militaryoperations. The US Navy, with its huge aircraft carriers, provides mobile bases that can carry thousands of forces, equipment, and administrativecapacity.

Exploitation of Africa's Oil Resources

Africa has been gaining increased importance as oil -producing region. The Gulf of Guinea, for example, sits atop one of the world's largest untapped oil reserves. It was estimated at the time AFRICOM was created that Sub-Saharan Africa provided 15% of US oil supplies, a figure that

was anticipated to rise to over 25% by 2015 (US military:2007), according to the US National Intelligence Council. The major producers are expected to be Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Southern Sudan, Gabon, Ghana, and Nigeria. Nigeria by itself accounted for 10% of US oil supplies and has overtaken Saudi Arabia as the third-largest exporter of crude oil to the United States. Furthermore, oil production in Africa supports more than 100, 000 jobs for Americans-mostly from Texas, Louisiana, and California (Goldwyn: 2010). To many observers, then, AFRICOM is all about oil, not terrorism or national security. Oil also, of course, represents significant and in some cases critical revenues in an income-short continent.

A further twist has been introduced into the African oil scene within the last decade with China's entry into the oil race. China has not only been developing oil platforms in the Gulf of Guinea but has engaged in an aggressive effort to secure African oil supplies, which has caused some uneasiness among Pentagon and State Department officials. The opinion among many observers is that terrorism is a facade for the underlying motivation of accessing Africa's oil resources. It is abundantly clear that the United States does not have an effective energy policy to meet its insatiable demand and that AFRICOM could be one way of resolving the US oil dependence or quagmire. It has not been forgotten that the Iraqi invasion and occupation were similarly justified on the grounds of combating terrorism, even though the real motivation might well have been oil. Yet, the US invasion of Iraqi has failed to fill America's oil needs. Now, could AFRICOM potentially be the next instrument of hegemonic aggression?

What was the political justification for the creation of AFRICOM? Critics argue that what led to the creation of AFRICOM was that the Bush administration needed friendly African regimes-particularly those with substantial oil resources-to act as surrogates for its war on terror, but since it had difficulty in getting Congress and the Pentagon to provide the required funding; creating AFRICOM would enable the administration to argue to Congress that Africa was important to US national security. Further, some legislators may have been growing uneasy, if not alarmed, at China's increasing influence in Africa and its expanding efforts at gaining access to the continent's resources, especially oil (Daniel: 2007).

Counteracting Chinese Penetration

Furthermore, it has been suggested that part of AFRICOM's unstated goal is not only to boost American oil supplies but also to counteract Chinese business penetration in Africa. Visits to Africa by former Chinese President Hu Jintao in 2006 and 2007 were aimed at forging new ties and levels of cooperation intended to boost businesses and expand markets for Chinese companies and products. The resurgence of Sino-African relations was cemented by a landmark Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-African Cooperation in 2006, which resolved to bring about massive tariff cuts, seek debt exemptions, and double aid to Africa over a three-year period (Daniel, 2007), Speaking in Tanzania during his 2007 visit, President Jintao emphasized that his government's goal was to increase assistance to Africa, cut debts owed by African countries, expand trade and investment, and strengthen practical cooperation with Africa. While these issues may not embrace all the points of contention, they do capture the most vocal points in African opposition to AFRICOM.

Reinvigoration of Cold War

There is widespread fear that an increased US military presence in Africa might bring back the Cold War era, when Africa became a pawn in East-West imperial designs. Critics therefore see

in increased militarization another potential Cold war build-up. They readily recall a period when Washington's relationship with Africa was driven by a misguided policy of propping up dictators who were friendly toward the West to counteract the spread of communist influence, a policy that often led to political destabilization, especially because the governance institutions that many African nations had inherited from colonialism were still fragile. Unfortunately, the United States has not erased this tainted record of aligning itself with and protecting unpopular African regimes that were supportive of American interests to counter USSR penetration.

The Colonial Legacy

Indeed, a longer history of distrust derives from the legacy of the West's relationship with Africa, going back centuries (Picard and Terry: 2009). Many in Africa recall vestiges of slavery and colonialism and a 600-year history in which the West drained Africa of its human capacity through slavery, and natural resources through colonialism, all the way to a perception of postcolonial exploitation of financial resources through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs).As Peter Egom, a research fellow at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, warned, *If America is setting up a protective umbrella over Africa to protect those who have raped Africa, it cannot last (Dulue Mbachu, 2012).

In fact, Africans have not forgotten that missionary activities in the name of beneficence and philanthropy preceded colonization. To paraphrase Bishop Desmond Tutu, when the missionaries came, they had the Bible and we had the land; now they have the land and we have the Bible. The colonial legacy echoes military occupation, suppression of fundamental rights, and economic exploitation-all justified by theories of philanthropic engagement and development.

Fear of Loss of Sovereignty

After half a century of independence, the last thing African nations want is the prospect of losing their sovereignty, something that they must closely guard. Africans are uncomfortable with anything that threatens their sovereignty. AFRICOM projects the power of the worlds remaining super-power into a post-September 11 world.

Fear of Destabilization

While the United States considers Western Africa as a potential alternative source of oil to the Middle East, Nigeria, Africa's leading oil producer, has been beset by periodic political volatility and instability in its oil-rich Delta region, which, according to some estimates, have led to a 25% reduction in production. Angered by decades of neglect and destruction of their livelihood at the hands of the oil conglomerates and corruption by their own Nigerian political leaders, unemployed and disaffected local Delta dissidents have waged an insurgency since 2004, resorting to violence, sabotage, and kidnappings of foreigners associated with the oil companies. With American oil giants ExxonMobil and Chevron responsible for nearly half of Nigeria's oil output, local residents fear that they could be the target of US military intervention by way of AFRICOM, a concern expressed by Jomo Gbomo, a spokesman for the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the leading armed group in the delta (West Africa Correspondent: 2008).

Contravening AU **Conventions**
The presence of AFRICOM on African soil, in the eyes of a number of African states, amount to a breach of the African Union's pact on non-aggression, which is enshrined in neutrality.

History of the Military in Africa
National security appears to mean different things to the United States and African nations. Since independence in the 1950s and 1960s, African armies have rarely had to repel foreign invaders. Even though foreign agents may be complicit in some conflicts, most African crises arise from domestic issues-for example, Burundi, Chad, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Hence, the primary responsibility of African armies has been not to defend the nation from external aggression but to protect ruling regimes and, unfortunately in some cases, keep them in power for life.

Associations with American Bases Elsewhere
The experience of the American presence in places such as the Philippines has shown that instead of development and economic growth, American bases have engendered an atmosphere of instability, uneven development, sex crimes, and a culture of dependency. The major US base on the African continent is located in Djibouti. Evidence exists of US Special Forces operating in Somalia, Mali, Chad, and Sudan, among other countries.

A wrong Approach/ Flawed Assumptions
Many critics simply contend that the United States is employing the wrong approaches if African development were indeed a major goal of AFRICOM. Why should they be using the military to promote development when they already have institutions within the US government that are better capable and more acceptable? NGOs are equally concerned that their humanitarian programs could be stigmatized by links or association with the military.

The fundamental problems with AFRICOM are that it is premised on flawed assumptions, was instituted with little consultation, and has been poorly articulated. No open dialogue about it took place to engage civil society and the African citizenry at large. Nor was there a clear definition of AFRICOM's relationship with continental organizations such as the AU or regional structures such as ECOWAS and SADC. The operating assumption was that what was good in Washington's eyes should be good for people in Algiers, Nairobi, Dakar, Lagos, Kinshasa, and Johannesburg. If AFRICOM is really meant for Africans, why were they not actively brought into the consultation processes before its creation but rather AFRICOM was presented to them as a fait accompli.

AFRICOM, according to Washington, is designed to bring about peace and security, economic growth, democracy, and development in Africa. These goals are commendable, but the concept was unilateral in origin and its attachment to military frameworks leaves many people nervous. In the view of many analysts, AFRICOM would destabilise an already fragile continent and region, which would be forced to engage with US interests on military terms (Michele, 2007). For this reason, a number of observers have objected that it does not seem to make sense to tie up military development with development issues (Scott, 2008).

In addition, an examination of AFRICOM's professed raison d'etre reveals further flaws in its assumptions about security. The core rationalization of AFRICOM is premised on the belief that

increased American military presence would contain the spread of radicalism sympathetic to al-Qaeda and thereby promote America's security in the face of terrorism. This notion is fundamentally flawed. American military presence would grow radical militants rather than the other way around. That the vast majority of African Muslims are attracted to radical ideologies against the United States has not been proven. On the contrary, it has often been questioned, why should ordinary Africans welcome an American presence that will create African targets for extremists where none existed? (Wafula:, 2007).

The real threat to Africans is not terrorism but everyday problems such as urban and state violence, poverty, hunger, and disease. Africa is being terrorised by hunger, disease (HIV/AIDS, malaria, etc), lack of basics, oppressive laws, bad leadership, poor govanance, unfair terms of international trade, foreign debt, conditionalities of international financial institutions, etc (Wafula, 2007), not terrorism as seen through Washington's eyes.

Human Security, Not National Security

What people need, then, is human security, not national security. Thus, in a broad sense, human security denotes a condition in which basic needs are met and in which there is reasonable expectation that protection will be afforded to the vulnerable. Security entails physical safety, respect for human dignity, and the ability to participate meaningfully in the life of one's community. Issues impinging on human security may also include the high cost of commodity prices, state repression, environmental degradation, and diseases-factors that affect daily lives. These are the core needs of men and women from below.

Human security thus represents a broad, holistic, people-centered approach to advancing the human condition. AFRICOM, in contrast, represents a narrower, state-centered perspective driven by national interests. Social justice, rather than order, is the driving motivation of human security. In sum, human security is geared toward social transformation and equality. Thus, what ordinary citizens in Africa need is human security, not national security, as espoused by AFRICOM. Human security, unlike national security, is people-centered, not state-centered.

Conclusion

If the United States is truly committed to Africa's welfare, then AFRICOM faces a development conundrum. Yes, Africa has enormous development needs, and the United States has neglected Africa for too long. But should US forces do the development work? Would the militarization of humanitarian assistance be acceptable to Africans? 'We do not permit our military to train our own police and law enforcement personnel and do economic development work in the US,' it has been critiqued. 'Why do we believe this should be done by our military in Africa? (David, 2011). The primary responsibility for development programs in Africa should rest with US Agency for International Development (USAID), not the Department of Defense.

In a sense, the whole debate over African development and who should dictate its pursuit echoes questions of ownership and agency. Who should control the mantle of development in Africa, Africans or Americans? Don't Africans have the right to self-determination? This is a sensitive issue in some African circles where people feel that the AFRICOM approach is a slap in the face of a continent that has only recently emerged from centuries of Western domination and exploitation in the form of enslavement and colonialism.

Some critics go as far as to disparage AFRICOM as betokening American unilateralism. How does the United States unilaterally and arrogantly choose to carve the world into its own military commands? What would happen if China also decided to create its own African command? Would this not lead to conflict on the continent? The crux of the matter is that if it looks like a duck and sounds like a duck, it is a duck. Washington's denials about the militarization of Africa notwithstanding, if AFRICOM looks like an imperial military design, then Africans have to be wary about its implications for their sovereignty. So far, the Pentagon has failed to allay the concerns of African leaders. And if the security of states is dependent on whether its citizens feel secure, then AFRICOM has very little relevance for the everyday needs of millions of Africans whose real security concerns center on poverty, disease,personal safety, and human misery. AFRICOM's narrowly defined and military-driven form of security does not go to the heart of the security concerns that underlie the everyday realities of Africans.

Indeed, for millions of Africans, their real worlds are often fraught with a multitude of dangers. Their personal security is constantly at risk. They are faced with or caught in perennial civil conflicts, which often destabilize their societies and endanger millions as refugees or internally displaced persons. Even when conflicts are seemingly over, post-conflict recovery is often constrained by local and global economic conditions that severely impinge on their lives. Africans live in countries where governments operate under weakened legitimacies or, in some cases, where there are no governments at all, or where their political leaders either consciously create fear in order to maintain their hold on power or embezzle funds without accountability. Slums abound across the continent, and poverty is rampant. These conditions, not Islamist extremism, create terror for them. Until the United States seriously engages the structural causes that lead to these conditions, AFRICOM will have little relevance for the daily lives of the people from below in Africa.

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