

Meeting the Challenges of Strategic and Human Security Interests in US–Africa Relations, or the Orphaning of ‘Soft Power’?

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In the context of a changed global environment since the end of the cold war, Africa has assumed renewed importance in the foreign policy calculations of the USA. Moreover, the security interests of the USA and African states could be seen as converging. One of the major goals of US foreign policy is combating international terrorism, while Africa as a whole is vulnerable as a breeding ground and incubation site for international terrorists. Indeed, international terrorism thrives amidst poverty and underdevelopment, and nowhere is this more the case than in present-day Africa. What this represents for the continent is both a strategic and a human security challenge; and, given the current circumstances, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the USA and Africa should enter into wider partnerships to overcome the vulnerabilities African countries face in coping with these challenges, both strategic and human security. Unless the USA makes a concerted effort to commit substantial material, technical, and human resources in its relations with Africa, the root causes of domestic conflict and international terrorism in the African region and in the world will continue to be major impediments to political and economic development and democracy, and thus to the

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achievement of USA's vital strategic security interests and the strategic and human security of African nations.

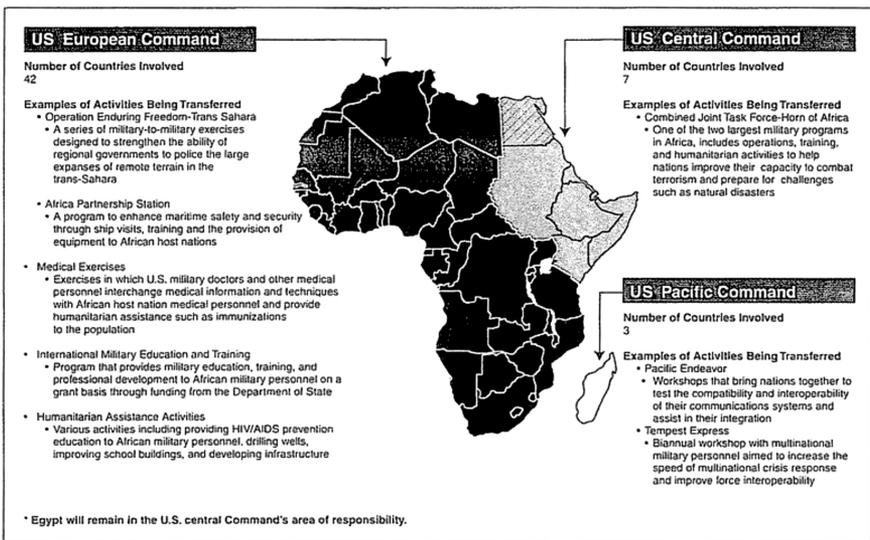
Simultaneously with the ending of the cold war — or because of its ending — academics and foreign policy advisers in the USA began to push hard for the government to emphasise and develop its capacity for 'soft power' (Nye, 1990, 1994). This was supposed to entail the USA recognising that the world has changed — and even though its own interests are perceived to be first and foremost strategic, these interests cannot be achieved by force alone. No longer was the country locked in an ideological battle with the Soviet Union and Communist China (the People's Republic of China (PRC)). To the extent that there was still global competition, the locus of this relationship had shifted to the economic and socio-political realms. In order to win new friends and regain the support and admiration of former allies, it was argued that the USA was going to have to listen more carefully than it had become accustomed to.

The argument for soft power was based on the realisation that power can be exercised in a physical way whereby one actor, because of its brute strength, dominates other actors; or it could be manifested through its superiority in terms of resource endowments. In either case, a distinction has to be made between 'hard power' and 'soft power'. 'Hard power' is defined as the ability through threats and rewards to get others to do what they otherwise would not do. On the other hand, 'soft power' is the ability to get others to do something based on their support of the goals and the attraction to the ideals of the actor exercising that power (Kohane & Nye, 1998). The logic behind the support for soft power, then, is sound. However, the question became whether superpowers, such as the USA, could in reality abandon their tendency to unilaterally pursue a certain course of action based solely on a strict understanding of what is meant by protecting the country's security interests.

At the turn of the new millennium, it appeared that the need to employ soft power in conjunction with hard power was being regarded as a necessity by US policy-makers. Initially the USA took halting and ill-informed steps to initiate what it termed the *African Crisis Response Initiative*. Amidst great fanfare, President George W Bush signalled that the USA now saw Africa as a region of both strategic and humanitarian interest and that America was committed to working with African leaders to achieve what was best for their people, as well as for US citizens. This effort was botched because the USA tried to implement this new policy without properly consulting with the African countries. However, it was eventually replaced in 2007 by the announcement of the creation of a new strategic military command known as AFRICOM (Ploch, 2007). High-level military strategists saw this initiative as having the main goal of 'preventive security'. This would entail a recognition that the low resource capacity of African militaries, amidst a sea of threats from international terrorists and widespread poverty and inequality, would have to enlist outside assistance in order to address

effectively their twin problems of strategic and human security. For the first time, such assistance would be a robust effort to strengthen local and national governments in Africa by helping to train and equip their own security forces, and to provide access to the US military for interventions on their behalf when necessary (Hodge, 2011, 212) (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Areas of Responsibility and Examples of Activities Being Transferred to AFRICOM from Other US Combat Commands



Source: Copyright © Corel Corporation — all rights reserved (map); US Government Accountability Office (GAO) presentation of US Department of Defense (DoD) data.

The purpose of this article is to consider current US policy towards Africa by focusing narrowly on the issues of strategic and human security interests. Beginning with the Clinton Administration and following up with the Administration of George W Bush, the USA seemed to pursue a new focused policy on Africa, a policy that had not only a military-strategic dimension but also exhibited a more humanitarian face. One author has described this approach as one featuring armed humanitarians or 'the peace corps on steroids' (Hodge, 2011). However, this would not entail the USA putting 'boots on the ground' for combat, but merely training African militaries and

supplying them with modern military equipment and intelligence so that they could operate most effectively against whatever external threats there might be. This new approach, in some respects, was dictated by the terrorist events of 11 September 2001 that were directed specifically at the internal security apparatus of the USA.

It would be misleading to assert that this was the only reason why there was a shift in US policy towards Africa. The new multifaceted engagement with Africa was initiated primarily under President Bill Clinton. Throughout his eight-year term in office, Clinton attempted to integrate Africa more fully into the global economy through trade and investment; and this, of necessity, was accompanied by policy objectives related to human security — health care, democracy, human rights, and the environment (Keller, 2006). Having been troubled by the slow response of the international community — and, in particular, of the USA itself — in reacting to the Rwandan crisis in 1994, Clinton (towards the end of his first term as President) devoted a considerable amount of time and effort in creating a new partnership between the USA and the countries of Africa.

While acknowledging other pillars of USA's recent policies towards Africa, this article concentrates on the strategic dimension. The primary argument of this piece is that, on the face of it, USA's new policy — to the extent that it claims to be committed to pursuing its own national, strategic security interests at the same time as it attempts to help African states satisfy both their military strategic and human security interests — would seem to be most appropriate. Current official rhetoric seems to suggest that the USA is no longer guided by a blind pursuit of its strategic-military interests, but instead 'soft power' is seen as an integral part of foreign-policy calculations. However, even a casual observer is struck by the fact that there continues to be a serious gap between promise (intention) and practice in US policy (Berschinski, 2007). The limited military intervention of the USA in Libya in March 2011, albeit in consultation with other countries and with the endorsement of the African Union (AU), clearly demonstrated to some critics that despite the public commitment to African human security, American involvement was driven mostly by geo-strategic interests (Schmitt, 2011). In other words, US policy continues to be dominated mainly by 'realist' thinking, rather than by a more idealistic approach. To the extent that humanitarian intervention is a motive, it still seems to be highly contingent on the military and diplomatic stakes involved (Stevenson, 2011).

Some of the questions addressed here are: What has been the historic relationship between the USA and African countries? What accounts for the recent shifts in US Africa policy? How convincing is the USA claim that it pursues its own national security interests, while at the same time safeguarding both the strategic and human security interests of African countries? What is the evidence in this regard? What is the current state of play? What does the future hold?

Recent Changes in US–Africa Relations

Africa has never been central to US foreign policy. During the cold war, US foreign policy-makers defined its vital national interest as fighting and containing communism wherever it might appear. In pursuit of this vital interest, a consistent axiom of US foreign policy has been that the country has ‘no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests’. This attitude can clearly be discerned in the policies of the USA towards Africa in the current era. When the USA believed it could benefit in a geo-strategic or material sense by ‘engaging’ or ‘disengaging’ with any African country, it took the necessary steps to do so (Keller, 2006). With the onset of the cold war, for example, the only significant presence the USA had in sub-Saharan Africa was in Ethiopia, but at the height of superpower tension, US interests shifted towards countering the Soviet Union’s attempt to secure a physical presence in Africa, and its key alliances therefore favoured countries surrounding pro-Soviet Ethiopia (Iyob & Keller, 2006). Beginning with the cold war, then, the USA followed a policy of ‘selective engagement’ towards Africa. It selectively engaged those countries where it felt US national interests were at stake. When the cold war ended, its policy shifted to one of ‘disengagement’, at least in the short run. However, with the recent rise and spread of what is perceived to be an international terrorist threat, the USA is once again attempting to selectively engage various African states. In the process, it must navigate the minefields caused by regional and national instability in Africa.

By the late 1980s, the Soviet Union reconsidered its pursuit of the Brezhnev Doctrine, resulting in a strategic withdrawal from supporting African client-states. Initially, the US Administration of President George H W Bush vacillated between a policy of disengagement and selective engagement with Africa. On the one hand, it allowed the State Department’s Africa Bureau to seek political solutions to African conflicts, such as in Liberia and in the Horn of Africa (HoA) region. Officially, however, most of the US efforts were aimed at promoting and supporting democratic forces throughout the continent, although relatively modest amounts of material support were devoted to such purposes. Thus, the overall thrust of the George H W Bush approach to Africa was one of selective disengagement (Rothchild & Emmanuel, 2005). One dramatic exception was the humanitarian catastrophe in Somalia. In this case, the growing concern over persistent drought and famine prompted Bush in December 1992 to send American troops to lead a humanitarian mission to Somalia authorised by the United Nations (UN). It was clear that President Bush had no intention of the USA becoming involved in nation-building in Somalia; but this was, in fact, the objective of then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In the end, the USA was dragged into the politics of the Somali crisis.

From a humanitarian perspective, this policy was a good one, but as the UN-sponsored ‘Operation Restore Hope’ proceeded politics increasingly impinged upon

an essentially humanitarian mission. For the USA, the climax of this intervention came in October 1993, less than 10 months into the Clinton Administration, when 18 US soldiers were killed in Mogadishu (Khadiagala, 2001). The immediate response of the US government was to move back into a cautious mode of disengagement. Quite soon after taking office, it became clear to the Clinton team that cold war assumptions and rationales would not work in Africa. In April 1994, the genocide in Rwanda erupted — this event highlighted the fact that the lack of a proactive Africa policy would make the USA susceptible to not being prepared to respond effectively to international crises that it would ultimately be drawn into.

From this point onwards, it was clear that the Clinton Administration was committed to a new partnership with Africa. This approach was not without some controversy within the US government, but the dominant voices were those who favoured this new direction. To show its commitment, the Administration held the first ever White House Conference on Africa in June 1994. This was the beginning of efforts to look at Africa from a broader perspective, rather than on a selective case-by-case basis. At this conference, President Clinton (1994) proclaimed that it was the policy of his Administration ‘to unleash the human potential of the people of the African continent in ways that [will] lead to a safer and more prosperous world; a better life for us [all]’. But it was not until Clinton’s second term that the ‘new partnership’ began to take real shape (Clinton, 1999). Following the untimely death of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, Clinton demonstrated that he would actively attempt to put in place the economic and trade strategy that Brown had envisioned. The President went on to launch a sweeping economic policy initiative to accelerate Africa’s integration into the global economy — the Partnership for Economic Growth and Opportunity in Africa. This approach came to involve all government agencies concerned with commerce and economic policy. However, what began as a ray of hope for Clinton’s new partnership turned into a dark shadow as many parts of Africa descended into chaos. Yet, as his Administration wound down, Clinton continued to push his African agenda.

The rhetoric on Africa of the new Administration of President George W Bush was not much different from that of the Clinton Administration, but it was clear that Bush had a much narrower view of US national security interests than did his predecessor. A policy document developed by the Bush Administration (2003) stated:

In Africa, promise and opportunity sit side by side with disease, war, and desperate poverty. This threatens both a core value of the USA — preserving human dignity — and our strategic priority — combating global terror. American interests and American principles, therefore, lead in the same direction: we will work with others for an African continent that lives in liberty, peace, and growing prosperity.

In other words, in the view of the Bush Administration realist principles were paramount, but some moral considerations might serve those interests and therefore should be pursued. For example, prior to a visit to Africa late in his Administration, President Bush announced a US\$15bn package to tackle the African HIV/AIDS pandemic, and in 2004 the Administration inaugurated the US\$1bn millennium challenge account (MCA). The MCA was intended to increase US foreign aid to Africa by 50 per cent over the next three years; and the countries selected to benefit from the account will be those that meet certain economic and political criteria.¹

In the area of strategic security, there emerged under President George W Bush a commitment to addressing the strategic interests of the USA in combating international terrorism by contributing to the strengthening of Africa's military and intelligence capabilities. Even though the USA had considered some parts of Africa to be major sources of international terrorism for more than a decade, its efforts to combat terrorist activities were not galvanised until after the 11 September 2001 (9/11) events. In 2002, demonstrating its resolve to develop partnerships with the countries of Africa and to assist them in developing the capacity to fight terrorism in the region, the USA created the Combined Joint Task Force-HoA (CJTF-HoA), today headquartered in Djibouti. This represented a major shift in US policy, since until that time relations with Djibouti had been minimal (England, 2002).² A military base was established for American personnel at Camp Lemonier near the Djibouti International Airport and some 1800 troops are now based there; an additional 400 task-force troops are aboard the *USS Mount Whitney*, a so-called 'Fighting Command Ship', anchored in the Gulf of Aden. The mission of the CJTF-HoA is to gather intelligence on an on-going basis and to deter, pre-empt and disable terrorist threats from wherever they may emanate in the region. Presently, the most serious threats would seem to be found in Somalia, Kenya, and Yemen (on the Arabian Peninsula). And in June 2003, President Bush announced a US\$100mn package of counter-terrorism measures that were to be disbursed over a 15-month period — half of these funds were for coastal security programmes and other border security measures, including those in Africa (Smith, 2004).³

CJTF-HoA personnel have been involved throughout various parts of Africa, operating as liaisons to governments and their security establishments. American military personnel work closely with counterparts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Senegal, Ethiopia, Kenya, Eritrea, and Djibouti, providing assistance ranging from infrastructure development to psychological counselling to counter-terrorism training.⁴ At any one time, there is some 1000 American troops conducting training, security assistance and other temporary assignments on the continent. In Kenya, for example, support has been provided under the State Department's Anti-Terrorism Assistance programme, which has been in place for more than two decades. This is a law enforcement programme that includes detection and disabling of explosive devices, post-blast

investigation, VIP protection, crisis management exercises, and hostage negotiations (Fisher-Thompson, 2004). In addition to training, the CJTF-HoA's work involves information-sharing; in the case of Ethiopia, information shared relates to the 'long porous border that exists between Ethiopia and Somalia to assist in locating potential places where terrorists may or may not attempt to cross' (UNIRIN, 2003, 1). Co-operation with Djibouti grows in part out of USA's concerns about a threat from the activities of *al-Ittihad*, a terrorist group based in Somalia. Most recently, in the DRC (which lies outside the HoA), AFRICOM has engaged in providing psychological counselling to Congolese troops in an effort to reduce and prevent incidents of rape and other sexually related crimes committed by soldiers (Vandiver, 2011). Clearly, the USA is now unable to ignore a new reality that emphasises the garnering of local and regional support for what it calls the 'war on terror', and the need to acquire more reliable energy sources that would lessen its dependence on its traditional, Middle Eastern oil-producing allies.

Today, the USA finds itself supporting ruling elites who are manipulating American strategic interests in order to enhance their own objectives related to domestic as well as regional security. For example, the HoA, as a point of geo-strategic significance for US national interests during the cold war, has gained renewed importance; rather, it has attained an important economic dimension with the development of Sudanese oil resources, and there is fear that global terrorists could close off access to new sources of energy. It is this convergence and divergence of domestic, regional and international interests that has led to the formulation of policies that may well engender more conflict. Therefore, the result may be policies inimical to USA's quest for secure access to energy sources and the elimination of a new threat of international terrorism. Nowadays, 'terrorists' in the HoA and elsewhere on the continent have taken the place previously occupied by the so-called 'communist threat'.⁵ This has prompted the passage of anti-terrorist legislation in African countries and the issuing of public pronouncements by their leaders that they are willing partners in the global 'war on terror'. Since 9/11, the USA has also increased its delivery of technical and military assistance to its allies in the HoA predicated upon their 'willingness' to sign on to the American strategic priority of 'combating global terror' (Bush Administration, 2003).

Although some Africans might grant the urgency of the terrorist threat and the necessity that lay behind the alliances created during the 2001–2005 period, they nonetheless have expressed some doubts. For example, how is US assistance to African regimes being utilised to 'combat global terror'? What, in fact, is the nexus between American aid to incumbent regimes and the security of both states and societies in the region? Does the shift in US policy — from the emphasis on democratisation and development (1992–2000) to a focus on the securitisation of strategic resources such as 'oil' and the enhancement of the capacity of anti-terrorist forces (2001–2005)

— signify a relapse to cold war priorities of ensuring the stability and security of allied regimes?

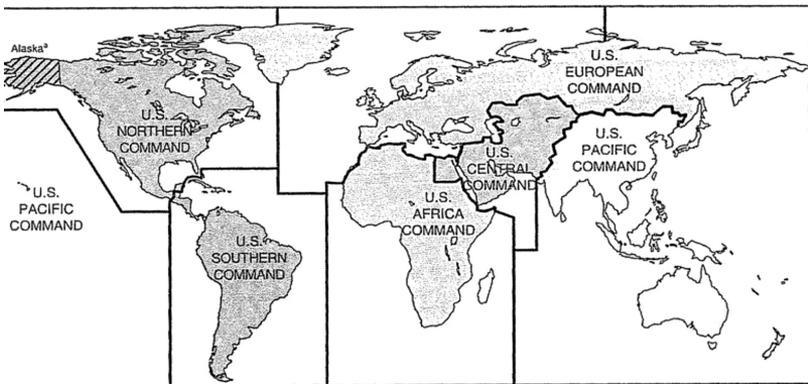
In sum, given the eruption of new and old conflicts which threaten to engulf various African regions in humanitarian crises as well as political imbroglios, American engagement — diplomatic, humanitarian, or economic — appears to be unavoidable. This has led the USA to take an important next step in US–Africa relations: the creation of the US military’s Africa Command (AFRICOM). What, until now, did this policy decision entail, and how significant is it or does it have the potential to be?

The US Africa Command: Promise and Prospects

In October 2007, the USA announced the creation of a military command dedicated exclusively to Africa. Until that time, three regional commands shared responsibility for US security interests in Africa: European Command was responsible for North, West, Central, and Southern Africa; Central Command covered Egypt, East Africa, and the Horn; and the Pacific Command was responsible for the Indian Ocean island states off the African coast. At the time of its creation, Africa Command (AFRICOM) was hailed by its supporters as ‘the military’s first “smart-power command”’ (Schmitt, 2011). This new command was now on par with the three already in existence (Hanson, 2007) (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Proposed Areas of Responsibility for Geographic US Combat Commands as at 30 September 2008



Source: USGAO presentation of USDoD data.

Currently, AFRICOM is headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany. Although there was some initial discussion about possibly moving its headquarters to the African continent by 2011, this option no longer seems to be on the table. Instead, there were some in Washington circles who favoured headquartering AFRICOM in the USA itself, either in South Carolina or Georgia (Bengali, 2008).⁶ Despite the fact that the USA claims to be interested in providing African countries with ready access to much-needed military training and other assistance — and also economic, social, and political support — many Africans see this as merely an effort, on the one hand, to counter the growing presence of China (PRC), India, and Brazil on the continent and, on the other hand, to serve US national interests in countering international terrorism, while at the same time securing access to Africa's rich mineral resources, including oil. The most vocal critics claim to fear a militarisation of the continent that could lead to disastrous consequences as has occurred in Iraq (Gordon, 2007). Moreover, American actions were seen by some as no more than a 'stealth operation' designed to establish total US military control over the continent (Schmitt, 2011). Rather than lead to genuine democracy and development, critics say, the USA wants to militarise diplomacy and development.

The USA has countered by stating that AFRICOM will not only improve security in Africa, but also promote development, health care, education, democracy, and economic growth. It is claimed that AFRICOM will have the non-military mission of working with civil society in order to improve social conditions (Berschinski, 2007). In other words, AFRICOM is viewed by advocates as an important element in USA's renewed efforts to project its 'soft power' in the world (Nye, 2004).⁷ It is, however, important to note that AFRICOM, in its ideal form, is not supposed to be exclusively a military agency, but rather an inter-agency institution. In addition to assigned military staff members, it also includes civilian employees: presently, it has approximately 2000 assigned personnel, including military, civilian, contractor, and host-nation employees. About 1500 work at the Africa Command's main headquarters in Stuttgart; others are assigned to sub-headquarters in the USA and the UK. There are also a small number of AFRICOM personnel posted at US embassies and diplomatic missions in Africa to co-ordinate US Defense Department programmes within the host country (AFRICOM-2, 2011).

AFRICOM was the first regional command to integrate advisers and experts from other US government agencies from its inception. As of 2010, it had four Senior Foreign Service officers in key positions, as well as more than 30 personnel from 13 US government departments and agencies — for example, the US Department of State, the US Department of the Treasury, the US Department of Commerce, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) — serving in leadership, management, and staff positions. A senior career State Department official serves as the deputy to the commander for civil-military activities. The USA, in its efforts to sell AFRICOM

not only to African leaders but also to the American Congress, claims that it will develop into a centre for a broad-based, multi-agency approach designed to achieve not only military but also developmental and political objectives — for example, strengthening civil society, and encouraging democratic development. The ultimate objective is for AFRICOM to function more efficiently in peace-keeping, humanitarian relief, and disaster response on the continent (Kruzel, 2007).

However, evidence seems to belie AFRICOM's commitment to the non-military component of its efforts. Whatever attempts at development there might be seem to be led by efforts to strengthen the military and intelligence-gathering capacities of African militaries, rather than impacting Africa's developmental challenges (health care, food security, education, and poverty alleviation) directly (Moyo, 2009).⁸ Indeed, it is clear that AFRICOM is not equipped or adequately funded to address these challenges. Consequently, African elites and the general population do not see the non-military value of AFRICOM. Clearly, African doubts about AFRICOM have existed from the beginning and have not diminished over time. Despite African suspicions in its first two years or more of operation, AFRICOM was gaining a modicum of trust among the leaders of some African countries. But this progress was thoroughly shattered by American support for military intervention in the Libyan crisis in early 2011. The public justification for the USA taking the initiative in establishing a no-fly zone over Libya in March 2011 was to protect that country's civilian population from the gross violation of human rights by their brutal dictator, Muammar Gaddafi. The USA claimed that it was doing this in concert with allies from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa and that it had the UN, Arab League, and AU support. President Barack Obama made it clear that USA's involvement would be limited and of short duration and, subsequently, whatever military operations would continue would be conducted by a coalition of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and Middle Eastern countries. Moreover, the UN mandate was emphatic that the objective of the operation was not 'regime change', but merely the safeguarding of the basic human rights of the Libyan people.

By mid-2011, the Libyan military operation continued, and many of the actions of coalition forces seemed to belie the stated primacy of humanitarianism in the intervention. Some even noted that this was clear evidence that the public diplomacy of AFRICOM's stated mission had been set aside in favour of re-elevating USA's hard power involvement in combat. Instead, it seemed that the ultimate aim of this intervention was indeed 'regime change'. Critics of US involvement in the exercise pointed to this as clear evidence that the real intention of AFRICOM and the USA was more strategic and military than being an effort to restore the peace and security of the Libyan people. As the conflict dragged on, there was more and more talk in international circles about the need for ground troops to be deployed to ensure peace and security in Libya, and to

establish a peace-keeping buffer between that country's dictatorial regime and the general population. As much as the USA attempted to insulate itself from that discussion, it could not. Whether or not American troops were actually deployed on the ground, the USA would no doubt be dragged, or wilfully enter, into support for this shift in objective.

Even before the Libyan operation, US Congressional critics claimed that there was no evidence that the military can satisfy its need to be concerned with American strategic security interests, while simultaneously co-operating with African partners to address their most pressing non-strategic security interests. In a 2008 Congressional hearing, one Congress person stated that 'it looks like [AFRICOM is] going over there to protect oil and fight terrorists, the same misguided way that we fought terrorists in other places'; another remarked that 'it sounds like AFRICOM is establishing a process that's in search of a problem' (Tucker, 2008). Other critics have been concerned that AFRICOM, by attempting to fulfil a diplomatic as well as a humanitarian mission, would be infringing on the territory of such other agencies as the State Department and the US Department of Agriculture. In addition to the problem of poor inter-agency co-ordination, in the process of implementing AFRICOM, resources which might go to other non-military foreign assistance would have to be diverted (LeVan, 2010). One report to Congress suggests that between 2010 and 2015 AFRICOM will cost US \$4bn, and this excludes many of the other current military programmes in Africa, which cost several billion dollars more per annum. Another source claims that the USA spends approximately 30 times more on military operations globally than it does on diplomacy and development. Moreover, the Pentagon commands more than 20 per cent of USA's foreign assistance budget, as compared to 40 per cent that goes to USAID (Tucker, 2008).

Despite obvious problems of co-ordination and implementation, the official line of the State Department is that AFRICOM, once it is fully operational, would help advance US interests in Africa (as they relate to development and democracy). In addition, seconding foreign-service officers to AFRICOM will help ensure that the Department of Defense no longer has a very narrow military vision (Gribbin, 2008). As of the beginning of 2011, however, AFRICOM has yet to live up to its promise of helping to ease Africa's problems of human security, including democratisation. What is more, the Obama Administration has not clearly articulated human rights, let alone human security, in Africa as a centrepiece of its foreign policy. Most of the resources and personnel devoted to AFRICOM's activities are for military purposes. In that respect, AFRICOM does not have a clear diplomatic or development identity — and what image there is, is projected mainly by its military assets and activities. This problem is further compounded by the enormous bureaucratic presence of the USA, as represented in other non-military agencies; they all continue to pursue their own individual agendas, and

this situation is not expected to change. If anything, what seems more likely is that the USA will have increased its military presence on the African continent for what is, in reality, mostly for strategic purposes, while at the same time continuing to 'pay lip service' to African human security.

Conclusion

The Obama Administration has yet to articulate a clear holistic Africa policy and, most often, it emphasises trade and investment rather than helping Africa to meet its human security challenges. To the extent that AFRICOM is visible on the continent, it is represented in its training and advisory functions for African militaries.⁹ This is true even when one considers the kinds of non-military activities the US military might be involved in, such as health care, infrastructural development and maintenance, and transportation. Even then, AFRICOM continues to be viewed with distrust and suspicion, as being misguided (Zezeza, 2009). Human and political rights are mentioned, if at all, only as an afterthought.¹⁰

Despite all the public pronouncements that the Libyan intervention is motivated by a concern for African human rights, the reality seems to point more in the strategic-security direction. There is no reason to expect that this will change in the near future. The most that can be hoped for in the short run is that African governments are able to increase their capacity to provide security for their own countries in the face of the growing international terrorist threat. To the extent that AFRICOM might help them improve their strategic-security capabilities, this would be a positive development. Certainly, there is a risk that these new capabilities could serve to strengthen the hand of African autocrats against their own people. Supporters of AFRICOM emphasise that in the process of training African militaries, these forces are learning to appreciate their subordination to civilian authority. But, again, there are no guarantees that this will indeed be the case.

Notes

¹ In March 2002, at an international aid conference in Monterey, Mexico, President George Bush proposed the MCA. According to Bush, the criteria for MCA grants would reward those countries that root out corruption, respect human rights, adhere to the rule of law, invest in better health care, better schools, and have more open markets and sustainable budget policies.

² To establish this relationship, the USA invested US\$8.7mn.

³ The US campaign against international terrorism in Africa recently opened a new front in the Sahel, a region that military officials fear could become the next base for Al-Qaeda. Special operations forces are training military units from Mauritania to the Horn of Africa, and providing them with pick-up trucks, radios, and global-positioning equipment.

- ⁴ Significantly, such a close relationship has not developed in the collapsed state of Somalia. The reason given is that there is no viable government there.
- ⁵ Even the National Islamic Front-ruled Sudan turned over 'terrorists' associated more with the ideological rivalry of the two superpowers during the twentieth century, while enabling the new generation of 'global terrorists' to slip through its security network and seek asylum outside the continent.
- ⁶ Some African countries such as Liberia, Botswana, Ethiopia, and Morocco had initially expressed a willingness to host AFRICOM but, generally, throughout the continent the announcement of its creation has been greeted with doubt and suspicion.
- ⁷ Nye (2004, x) describes 'soft power' as '... [the] ability to get what you want by attractions rather than through coercion or payments ... when ... policies are seen as legitimate, ... soft power is enhanced'.
- ⁸ Africa's development problems are enormous. For example, the average African earns less than US\$1 per day, making the continent the poorest region in the world. Between 1981 and 2002 the number of Africans living in poverty increased to almost 50 per cent. Also, it is estimated that by 2005, the African adult literacy rate had plummeted to below the 1980 level. All of this must be considered in the context of the serious health challenges facing African countries, as represented in the HIV/AIDS pandemic, malaria, and tuberculosis. According to the World Food Programme, in 23 African nations between 10 and 34 per cent of the total population can be classified as 'undernourished' – and an additional 10 countries have 35 per cent or more of their population in this range.
- ⁹ It is interesting to note that in a statement by the Assistant Secretary of State Carson (2010) before the US House of Representatives Sub-Committee on Africa he spoke at length about USA's commitment to development and human rights, but he did not mention the role of AFRICOM in these efforts at all.
- ¹⁰ For example, in East Africa the military wing of AFRICOM is primarily concerned with 'civil-military relations', or relationships between the military and the general populace. Generally, it is not involved in addressing Africa's most pressing human security problem on par with strategic-security concerns (see Carson, 2010). See also, the comments of the AFRICOM Commander, General William (Kip) Ward, before the US Senate Armed Services Committee: 'Our role ... is not to do diplomacy, but to assure ourselves, as best we can, that those activities that we perform in the defence arena are as supportive of those other two legs of the triad [diplomacy and development] ...' (AFRICOM, 2010, 37).

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