

## Africa in the “New, New World”

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### US Interests in Africa

The most recent iteration of the “National Security Strategy of the United States of America” couched the country’s strategic objectives in Africa largely in terms of broader development goals, rather than traditional security concerns which were emphasized in its predecessors:

The diversity and complexity of the African continent offer the United States opportunities and challenges. As African states grow their economies and strengthen their democratic institutions and governance, America will continue to embrace effective partnerships. Our economic, security, and political cooperation will be consultative and encompass global, regional, and national priorities including access to open markets, conflict prevention, global peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and the protection of vital carbon sinks. The administration will refocus its priorities on strategic interventions that can promote job creation and economic growth; combat corruption while strengthening good governance and accountability; responsibly improve the capacity of African security and rule of law sectors; and work through diplomatic dialogue to mitigate local and regional tensions before they become crises. We will also reinforce sustainable stability in key states like Nigeria and Kenya that are essential subregional linchpins.<sup>1</sup>

That this policy guidance has been received and integrated into its planning by the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), the geographic unified combatant command with responsibility for all of the continent except for Egypt,<sup>2</sup> is evident from the “posture statement” presented in 2011 by its then-new commander, General Carter F. Ham:

A prosperous and stable Africa is strategically important to the United States. An Africa that can generate and sustain broad based economic development will contribute to global growth, which is a long-standing American interest. However,

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<sup>1</sup> The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, May 1, 2010, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Prior to the October 1, 2008, standing up of AFRICOM as an independent combatant command, forty-two of Africa’s then fifty-three independent countries fell under the aegis of the US European Command (EUCOM): Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville), Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The US Central Command (CENTCOM) included within its area of responsibility (AOR) Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia, and Sudan, as well as the waters of the Red Sea and the western portions of the Indian Ocean not covered by the US Pacific Command (PACOM), which had in its AOR Comoros, Mauritius, and Madagascar, as well as the waters of the Indian Ocean, excluding those north of 5° S and west of 68° E (which fell under CENTCOM) and those west of 42° E (which were part of EUCOM’s AOR).

poverty in many parts of Africa contributes to an insidious cycle of instability, conflict, environmental degradation, and disease that erodes confidence in national institutions and governing capacity. This in turn often creates the conditions for the emergence of a wide-range of transnational security threats that can threaten the American homeland and our regional interests.

US Africa Command's programs and activities directly support American national security interests. Our vital national security interest in Africa is protecting the lives and interests of the American people by reducing threats to the homeland and abroad. We support the United States Government's (USG) five priorities in Africa: good governance, economic progress, preventing and resolving conflicts, strong public health programs, and helping our African partners develop the capacity to meet the demands of transnational challenges. In supporting these national priorities, US Africa Command focuses on preventing and resolving conflict and helping our African partners develop their own security capacity.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the emphases, unlike the 1990s when some defense planners thought that the United States could hold itself aloof from engagement on the African continent because they could "see very little traditional strategic interest in Africa" and went so far as to declare in a strategy document that "America's security interests in Africa are very limited,"<sup>4</sup> there is today a broad recognition that the country does indeed have significant national interests in Africa which require it engage the continent, its states, and its peoples, and, ultimately, these interests are such as to be capable of sustaining a long-term commitment. So what might these interests be?

First, in the context of America's counterterrorism efforts, there is the imperative of preventing of Africa's poorly governed spaces being exploited to provide facilitating environments, recruits, and eventual targets for Islamist terrorists. With the exception of the Greater Middle East, nowhere does it seem more likely than Africa that poor governance, lack of economic opportunity, political marginalization, and ethnic and religious tensions can, as the 2002 National Security Strategy put it, potentially "lead to the same ends: failed states, humanitarian disasters, and ungoverned areas that can become safe havens for terrorists."<sup>5</sup> The attacks by al-Qaeda on the US embassies in Dar es Salaam Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya, in 1998, and on an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, and, simultaneously, on an Israeli commercial airliner in 2002 only underscored the deadly reality of the terrorist threat in Africa,<sup>6</sup> as did the "rebranding" of the Algerian Islamist terrorist

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<sup>3</sup> General Carter F. Ham, USA, Commander, United States Africa Command, Statement before the Committee on the Armed Services, US House of Representatives, April 5, 2011, <http://www.africom.mil/pdfFiles/2011PostureStatement.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> US Department of Defense, Office of International Security Affairs, *United States Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa*, August 1, 1995, <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=943>.

<sup>5</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 17, 2002, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Peter Pham, "Next Front? Evolving US-African Strategic Relations in the 'War on Terrorism' and Beyond," *Comparative Strategy* 26, no. 1 (2007): 39-54; idem, "Securing Africa," *Journal of International Security Affairs* 13 (Fall 2007): 15-24; and Peter Schraeder, "The African Dimension in US Foreign Policy in the

organization GSPC (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*, Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) as “the Organization for Jihad in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb” (“Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” AQIM)<sup>7</sup>—to say nothing of the takeover in late March 2012 of the three northernmost Malian provinces by Tuareg separatists in alliance with at least al-Qaeda-linked Islamist extremist groups<sup>8</sup>—and the ongoing activities of various militant Islamist movements in the territory of the former Somali Democratic Republic,<sup>9</sup> including al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda-linked group designated a “foreign terrorist organization” by the US State Department in early 2008, as well as the threat posed to global commerce by Somali piracy, the challenge of which have been underscored by the spike in attacks that began about the same time.<sup>10</sup>

Second, another US interest was protecting access to hydrocarbons and other strategic resources which Africa has in abundance and promoting the integration of African nations into the global economy. Early in the Bush administration, the president’s National Energy Policy Development Group, chaired by Vice President Dick Cheney, published a report which found that Africa was “expected to be one of the fastest-growing sources of oil and gas for the American market.” Nor has much changed since the inauguration of Barack Obama: the current administration’s goal is to “eliminate our current imports from the Middle East and Venezuela within ten years.”<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, if that is to happen, much of the gap between the country’s current volumes of energy consumption and the advent of technologies being developed will likely be made up by additional imports from Africa, where proved petroleum reserves have increased by 40 percent in the decade in contrast to the downward trends observed almost everywhere else.<sup>12</sup> In 2011, for example,

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Post-9/11 Era,” in *Estratégia e segurança na África austral*, ed. Manuela Franco (Lisbon: FLAD/IPRI, 2007), 171-196.

<sup>7</sup> See J. Peter Pham, “Foreign Influences and Shifting Horizons: The Ongoing Evolution of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 240-254; idem, “The Dangerous ‘Pragmatism’ of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 2, no. 1 (January-June 2011): 15-29; and Ricardo René Laremont, “Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism and Counterterrorism in the Sahel,” *African Security* 4, no. 4 (October 2011): 242-268.

<sup>8</sup> See J. Peter Pham, “The Mess in Mali,” *New Atlanticist*, April 2, 2012, [http://www.acus.org/new\\_atlanticist/mess-mali](http://www.acus.org/new_atlanticist/mess-mali).

<sup>9</sup> See idem, “Somalia: Insurgency and Legitimacy in the Context of State Collapse,” in *Victory Among People: Lessons from Countering Insurgency and Stabilising Fragile States*, ed. General Sir David Richards and Greg Mills (London: RUSI, 2011), 277-294; idem, “State Collapse, Insurgency, and Famine in the Horn of Africa: Legitimacy and the Ongoing Somali Crisis,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 2, no. 2 (July-December 2011): 153-187; and idem, “Somalia and Somaliland: State Building amid the Ruins,” in *On the Fault Line: Managing Tensions within Societies*, ed. Jeffrey Herbst, Terence McNamee, and Greg Mills (London: Profile, 2012), 67-87.

<sup>10</sup> See idem, “Anti-Piracy, Adrift,” *Journal of International Security Affairs* 18 (Spring 2010): 82-88; idem, “Putting Somali Piracy in Context,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28, no. 3 (July 2010): 325-341; and Martin N. Murphy, *Somalia: The New Barbary? Piracy and Islam in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> The White House, Energy Plan Overview, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/energy\\_and\\_environment/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/energy_and_environment/).

<sup>12</sup> BP Statistical Review of World Energy, June 2011, [http://www.bp.com/liveassets/bp\\_internet/globalbp/globalbp\\_uk\\_english/reports\\_and\\_publications/statistical\\_energy\\_review\\_2011/STAGING/local\\_assets/pdf/statistical\\_review\\_of\\_world\\_energy\\_full\\_report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.bp.com/liveassets/bp_internet/globalbp/globalbp_uk_english/reports_and_publications/statistical_energy_review_2011/STAGING/local_assets/pdf/statistical_review_of_world_energy_full_report_2011.pdf).

the United States imported 645,092,000 barrels of petroleum from African countries (15.6 percent of the 4,146,266,000 total barrels imported), a volume almost equal to the 679,649,000 barrels (16.4 percent of total imports) which came from states on the Persian Gulf.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, most of the petroleum from the Gulf of Guinea off the coast of West Africa is light or “sweet” crude, which is preferred by American refiners because it is largely free of sulfur. While production fluctuates, the significance of Africa for America’s energy security cannot be underestimated.

Third, as noted above, it is a priority US foreign policy objective to empower Africans and other partners to cope with the myriad humanitarian challenges, both man-made and natural, which afflict the continent with seeming disproportion—not just the devastating toll which conflict, poverty, and disease, especially HIV/AIDS, exact on Africans, but the depredations of the continent’s remaining rogue regimes. While not an “interest” in the sense of classical political realism, a certain type of idealism has been part and parcel of the country’s foreign policy throughout its history.<sup>14</sup> While Africa boasts the world’s fastest rate of population growth—by 2020, the more than 900 million Africans at the dawn of the twenty-first century will number more than 1.2 billion, which is more than the combined populations of Europe and North America—the dynamic potential implicit in the demographic figures just cited is constrained by the economic and epidemiological data. The most recent edition of the United Nations Development Program’s Human Development Report determined that thirty-seven of the forty-six countries characterized by “low development” were African states.<sup>15</sup> While Sub-Saharan Africa was then home to only about one-tenth of the world’s population, 68 percent of all those living with HIV are concentrated in the region, which accounts for 70 percent of new infections. The epidemic is most severe in southern Africa, with South Africa having more people living with HIV than any other country in the world, an estimated 5.6 million.<sup>16</sup>

Although a vast body of literature has demonstrated that terrorist organizations have little in common with the poor and destitute, it nevertheless true that terrorists can exploit these socio-economic conditions to their advantage. The George W. Bush administration, working with Congress, consolidated the comprehensive trade and investment policy for Africa introduced by its predecessor in the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of 2000, which substantially lowered commercial barriers with the United States and allowed Sub-Saharan African countries to qualify for trade benefits. It also made HIV/AIDS on the continent a priority with twelve of the fifteen focus countries in the

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<sup>13</sup> US Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, US Total Crude Oil and Products Imports, April 2, 2012, [http://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/pet\\_move\\_impcus\\_a2\\_nus\\_ep00\\_im0\\_mbbbl\\_m.htm](http://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/pet_move_impcus_a2_nus_ep00_im0_mbbbl_m.htm).

<sup>14</sup> See Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2011. Sustainability and Equity: A*

*Better Future for All* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 127-130.

<sup>16</sup> Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), *World AIDS Day Report 2011. How to Get to Zero: Faster, Smarter*, Better, November 21, 2011, 7.

President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) being in Africa, including Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. With an initial five-year, fifteen billion dollar price tag, PEPFAR, announced in 2003, was the largest commitment ever by any nation for an international health initiative dedicated to a single disease—and that was before the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, by a broad bipartisan majority, passed the Tom Lantos and Henry J. Hyde United States Global Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Reauthorization Act of 2008, tripling the initiative's funding to forty-eight billion dollars over the course of its second five years. Meanwhile, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), established in 2004, is perhaps the most important innovation in bilateral foreign assistance in several decades.<sup>17</sup> The MCC's Millennium Challenge Account provides money to qualifying countries for "compact agreements" to fund specific major programs designated by the aid recipient and targeted at reducing poverty and stimulating economic growth as well as "threshold programs" to improve performance with an eye toward achieving "compact" status. Half of the forty countries worldwide that have been eligible for some MCC funding, either through the "Threshold Program" or "Compact Assistance," since the initiative's inception are in Africa.<sup>18</sup> Under the Obama administration, this signature initiative of its predecessor has received additional funding with \$1.105 billion allocated in the 2010 fiscal year, an increase of roughly 25 percent over the year before. Since then, it has received level funding of \$898.2 million in the 2011 and 2012 fiscal years, while the same amount has been requested in the budget for the 2013 fiscal year.<sup>19</sup>

### **The African Strategic Environment**

The biggest story out of Africa last year did not occupy the headlines the way dramatic revolutions in the Maghreb, civil strife in West Africa, the independence of South Sudan, famine in the Horn of Africa, piracy off the Somali coast, fraud-ridden elections in the ironically-named Democratic Republic of the Congo, and various other developments each did in turn. Rather, as *The Economist* noted in a leader at the end of 2011: "Over the past decade six of the world's ten fastest-growing countries were African. In eight of the past ten years, Africa has grown faster than East Asia, including Japan. Even allowing for the knock-on effect of the northern hemisphere's slowdown, the IMF expects Africa to grow

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<sup>17</sup> See Steven W. Hook, "Ideas and Change in US Foreign Policy: Inventing the Millennium Challenge Corporation," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4, no. 2 (April 2008): 147-167.

<sup>18</sup> African countries currently eligible for MCC "threshold" or "compact" assistance include Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. The compact with Madagascar was terminated following the overthrow of the elected president in 2009, while an "operational hold" was placed on the Malawi program in July 2011 due to then-President Bingu wa Mutharika's crackdown on political dissent. The compact with Mali was already in the process of winding down by September 17, 2012, when it was suspended following a military coup in March 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Millennium Challenge Corporation, Fiscal Year 2013 Congressional Budget Justification, February 13, 2012, <http://www.mcc.gov/documents/reports/mcc-fy2013-cbj.pdf>.



by 6 percent this year and nearly 6 percent in 2012, about the same as Asia.”<sup>20</sup> Higher prices for commodities were responsible for part of the growth spurt, but other factors were also involved, including wise choices made by African leaders and peoples regarding economic reform, the rule of law, as well as the use of new technologies—all of which encouraged significant investment in their economies.

Africa also has the most youthful population in the world. Of the forty-six countries and territories where at least 70 percent of the population is under the age of thirty, only seven are not in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>21</sup> This population could provide both the impetus for further economic growth as well as the consolidation of democracy or it could present a threat to security by providing a potential pool of recruits for insurgents, extremists groups, or criminal networks. As one scholar put it, “if young people are left with no alternative but unemployment and poverty, they are increasingly likely to join a rebellion as an alternative way of generating an income.”<sup>22</sup>

Another welcome trend has been the settlement of a number of long-running African wars over the course of the last decade, including internal conflicts in Liberia,<sup>23</sup> Angola,<sup>24</sup> Sierra Leone,<sup>25</sup> the Democratic Republic of the Congo,<sup>26</sup> and Côte d’Ivoire,<sup>27</sup> as well as what eventually became the successful independence struggle waged by the South Sudanese against the regime North—although the ongoing tensions between Juba and Khartoum and ethnic tensions in the South highlight the fragility of many the hard-won peace.

Alongside the resolution of conflicts has been the increase in the number of at least formal democracies on the African continent. Before 1990, the nature of the regime in most African states could be characterized as one variant or another of authoritarian rule: up to

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<sup>20</sup> “Africa Rising,” *The Economist*, December 3, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/21541015>.

<sup>21</sup> See Marc Sommers, “Governance, Security and Culture: Assessing Africa’s Youth Bulge,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 5, no. 2 (2011): 292

<sup>22</sup> Henrik Urdal, “The Demographics of Political Violence: Youth Bulges, Insecurity, and Conflict,” in *Too Poor for Peace? Poverty, Conflict and Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Lael Brainard and Derek Chollet (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2007), 92.

<sup>23</sup> See J. Peter Pham, *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State* (New York: Reed Press, 2004); and idem, “Reinventing Liberia: Civil Society, Governance, and a Nation’s Post-War Recovery,” *International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law* 8, no. 2 (January 2006): 38-54.

<sup>24</sup> See Karl Maier, *Angola: Promises and Lies* (Rivonia, South Africa: W. Waterman, 2007); and W. Martin James III, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola, 1974-1990*, rev. ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> See J. Peter Pham, *Child Soldiers, Adult Interests: The Global Dimensions of the Sierra Leone Tragedy* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2005); idem, “Democracy by Force? Lessons from the Restoration of the State in Sierra Leone,” *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 6, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2005): 129-147; and idem, “A Viable Model of International Criminal Justice: The Special Court for Sierra Leone,” *New York International Law Review* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 37-109.

<sup>26</sup> See idem, “Imagining the Congo Secure and Stable,” *RUSI Journal* 153, no. 6 (December 2008): 38-43; and Gérard Prunier, *Africa’s World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of Continental Catastrophe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> See Mike McGovern, *Making War in Côte d’Ivoire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Thomas J.

Bassett, “Winning Coalition, Sore Loser: Côte d’Ivoire’s 2010 Presidential Election,” *African Affairs* 110, no. 440 (July 2011): 469-479; and Thomas J. Bassett and Scott Straus, “Defending Democracy in Côte d’Ivoire: Africa Takes a Stand,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (July-August 2011): 130-140.

that point only two members of the then Organization of African Unity (OAU), Botswana and Mauritius, could boast of having retained democratic continuously since independence. In fact, during the entire period from the end of World War II to the end of the Cold War, only *one* African leader, President Adan Abdulle Osman of Somalia (1967), had ever peacefully relinquished office following electoral defeat. Over the course of the same time frame, only three African heads of state retired voluntarily: Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal (1980), Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon (1982), and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (1985)—and Ahidjo, apparently underwent a change of heart and subsequently tried (unsuccessfully) to shoot his way back into office a year after vacating the presidency.<sup>28</sup> Less than a generation later, virtually all Sub-Saharan African states had at least tentatively opened their political systems to some form of competition and while shenanigans are still common—witness the poor organization and massive fraud in last year’s presidential election in the rather ironically Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was widely criticized by local as well as American and European observers—unabashed autocracies like Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe are now the exception rather than the rule. Part of the reason for this is the recognition by both Africans and their international partners in the United States and Europe that, as Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has argued, “developing and strengthening a democratic system is an essential component of the process of development.”<sup>29</sup> And while elections, at least in the short term, are no panacea—in fact, in a number of cases, they may exacerbate communal tensions—the growth of civil society and the empowerment of better informed citizens, aided by the power of social media, are likely to have a net positive effect.

African states are also increasingly assuming ownership of and taking responsibility for security not just in Africa, but globally. In a reversal of longstanding fetishes about “noninterference” which hamstrung the OAU, the African Union (AU) has encouraged member states to participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations, both in Africa and elsewhere, as well as in the AU missions authorized by the Security Council in the Darfur region of Sudan and in Somalia. Five of the top ten contributors of military and police personnel to UN peacekeeping missions are African states: Ethiopia, Nigeria, Egypt, Rwanda, and Ghana.<sup>30</sup> Two other AU members, Uganda and Burundi, provide almost the entirety of the 10,000-strong African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

These positive trends, however, are threatened by several transnational security challenges, including violent extremism, piracy, and criminal networks, especially those involved in the drug traffic.

Violent extremism, especially of the militant Islamist variety, appears to be on the rise in Africa. Al-Qaeda’s franchise in North Africa, AQIM, has been an unintended beneficiary

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<sup>28</sup> See Larry Diamond, *Prospects for Democratic Development in Africa* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1999), 157.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Ranking of Military and Police Contributions to UN Missions, March 31, 2012, [http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2012/March12\\_2.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2012/March12_2.pdf).

of the fall of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. Buoyed by the flow of arms and fighters out of Libya, the group has in recent months initiated skirmishes with government forces in Mauritania, Mali, and Niger. More ominously, AQIM has also increased its linkages with the Polisario Front which contests Morocco's title to its southern provinces. The connection comes as no surprise given that the large numbers of idle young fighters with no prospects in camps presents the terrorist group with a ready pool of potential recruits, both for its military operations as well as the criminal activities it is increasingly involved in. Moreover, both groups exploit opportunities offered by the lack of regional cooperation occasioned the failure of the defunct subregional Arab Maghreb Union (UMA).<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, further south in Nigeria, the Boko Haram sect has proven to be more and more of a threat to the security of Africa's most populous nation,<sup>32</sup> as the attacks at the end of 2011 which led to the declaration of a state of emergency and the temporary closure of the country's borders underscored. In East Africa, al-Shabaab insurgents in Somalia are probably at their weakest point in years, thanks not only to their own strategic overreach and the consequences of the famine (which their policies exacerbated), but also the combined military pressure applied by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) force in Mogadishu as well as Kenyan and Ethiopian interventions. Nevertheless, the group may well be shifting back to asymmetric tactics like roadside bombings and suicide attacks and can potentially tap into a large and restive potential ethnic Somali population, both indigenous and refugees, within neighboring states. Even more worrisome than the threat the various Islamist militant groups in Africa pose individually is the growing evidence of links between them and what the commander of AFRICOM has characterized as a "significant threat." General Carter Ham has noted that AQIM, Boko Haram, and al-Shabaab "have very explicitly and publicly voiced an intent to target Westerners and the US specifically," adding "if left unaddressed, you could have a network that ranges from East Africa through the center" and into the Sahel.<sup>33</sup>

Although it is unlikely that any of the current batch of Islamist militants operating across the middle of the continent is remotely capable of presenting an existential threat to any African states, much less regional powers like Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya, they are fully able to cause a great deal of mischief. Counterinsurgency campaigns are, at the very least, expensive affairs which divert resources from the investments in infrastructure, education, and health which Africa's emerging economies need to make if they are position themselves to take advantage of the current growth opportunities. In many cases, the understandable reliance by governments on security measures to combat the threat posed by violent extremists brings with it the risk not only of further alienating minorities and other

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<sup>31</sup> See J. Peter Pham, "US Interests in Promoting Security across the Sahara," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 32, no. 4 (July/August 2010): 242-252.

<sup>32</sup> See idem, *Boko Haram's Evolving Threat*, Africa Center for Strategic Studies African Security Brief No. 20 (April 2012), [http://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/AfricaBriefFinal\\_20.pdf](http://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/AfricaBriefFinal_20.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Robert Burns, "AFRICOM Chief Worries about Terrorism in Africa," Associated Press, September 14, 2011, <http://www.armytimes.com/news/2011/09/ap-military-africom-chief-worries-about-terrorism-091411/>.



marginalized segments of the population, but of undermining, however unintentionally, that the fragile institutions of democracy in Africa. Moreover, even if violence can be kept far from commercial centers, it will nonetheless have a dampening effect on the confidence of investors for a region whose potential many are just beginning to discover.

Despite a decrease in the number of incidents in 2011, Somali piracy remains a problem off the east coast of Africa. The marauders have both adapted their tactics to respond to the increased military pressure from the multinational naval forces deployed to protect shipping in the Gulf of Aden and extended the geographical reach of their operations as far south as the Mozambique Channel and as far east as Gujarati Coast of India.<sup>34</sup> Although it receives considerably less attention, it is actually the growing number of pirate attacks in the Gulf of Guinea, off the coast of Nigeria and its neighbors, that presents the more direct threat to the economic security of America and its transatlantic partners.<sup>35</sup> Nigeria alone had seventy piracy incidents in 2011 (up from fifty-two the year before); the former included the successful hijacking no fewer than fourteen tankers.

Increasing flows of narcotics through West Africa is also a growing concern as the region has become the preferred transit hub for South American cocaine destined for the European market.<sup>36</sup> Not only does the narcotics trade bring new resources to extremists and criminals—to say nothing of the growing nexus between the two groups—but it undermines governments, turning corrupt regimes into crime-driven enterprises. In addition to corruption, which itself discourages the type of foreign direct investment countries in the region need to grow their economies, the drug trade also undermines development by making its potentially fabulous short-term monetary gains that much more attractive than longer-term commitments to more productive enterprises. As a result, while a very small number of people will actually get richer, the vast majority of the population is rendered even poorer, increasing already massive inequalities and, ultimately, heightening social tensions. Furthermore, there is evidence that transit hubs quickly become destinations in and of themselves as drug consumption spreads to local communities and crime increases and addicts desperately try to feed their habits. The cumulative effect of all this is vicious circle that can permanently cripple the prospects of some West African countries, if it has not already done so—the December 2011 attempt in Guinea-Bissau by a naval chief who has been designated a “drug kingpin” by the United States being a case in point.

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<sup>34</sup> See J. Peter Pham, “Beyond the Water’s Edge: Learning from the Somali Piracy Challenge,” *Journal of*

*International Peace Operations* 6, no. 2 (September/October 2010): 10-11; idem, “The Failed State and Regional Dimensions of Somali Piracy,” in *The International Response to Somali Piracy: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Bibi van Ginkel and Frans-Paul van der Putten (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2010), 31-4; and James Kraska, *Contemporary Maritime Piracy: International Law, Strategy, and Diplomacy at Sea* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> See idem, “West African Piracy: Symptom, Causes, and Responses,” in *Global Challenge, Regional Responses: Forging a Common Response to Maritime Piracy—Selected Briefing Papers*, ed. Stephen Brannon and Taufiq Rahim (Dubai: Dubai School of Government, 2011), 29-32.

<sup>36</sup> See Stephen Ellis, “West Africa’s International Drug Trade,” *African Affairs* 108, no. 431 (April 2009): 171-196.

## AFRICOM's Assumptions

It has been five years since the creation of the US Africa Command was announced.<sup>37</sup> AFRICOM's mission, in its most recent reiteration, is to protect and defend “the national security interests of the United States by strengthening the defense capabilities of African states and regional organizations” and, when directed, to conduct “military operations, in order to deter and defeat transnational threats and to provide a security environment conducive to good governance and development.”<sup>38</sup> What, then, are the assumptions implicit in the adaption of such a vehicle to these objectives?

First, the very existence of AFRICOM assumes that by superseding of an antiquated structural framework inherited from times when the continent was barely factored into America's strategic calculus, the various bilateral and multilateral military-to-military relationships would be better managed and the myriad security assistance programs already in place would benefit from more focused attention and advocacy.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, the resources the command requires if it is to do even this much have not been readily forthcoming—and that was before the fiscal austerity. In fact, AFRICOM's commander acknowledged earlier this year that “due to the vast challenges and opportunities on the continent, as well as current fiscal realities, we have prioritized regions in Africa to better focus our exercises, operations, and security cooperation activities.”<sup>40</sup>

Second, even were it not for the current stretched force capacities of the US armed forces, AFRICOM is premised on the notion that what should be built up is local capabilities so that African states can manage their own security challenges. This means that, without prejudice to preparedness for kinetic operations, defense intelligence activities, and other functions, the command will necessarily privilege military training with partner nations, working with Africans to build their regional security and crisis response capacity. The difficulty with this doctrinal premise, however, is that the starting point of many African countries insofar as security capabilities are concerned, is relatively low, even if “compared to other national institutions in most of these countries, the military is well organized and adequately funded.”<sup>41</sup> Moreover, with the exception of the continent's handful of natural

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<sup>37</sup> See J. Peter Pham, “America's New Africa Command: Paradigm Shift or Step Backwards?” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 15, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2008): 257-272; and “AFRICOM from Bush to Obama,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (April 2011): 107-124.

<sup>38</sup> Headquarters, US Africa Command, 2011 Mission Statement and Commander's Intent, August 2011, <http://www.africom.mil/pdfFiles/2011%20Commander's%20Intent.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> See J. Peter Pham, “Been There, Already Doing That: America's Ongoing Security Engagement in Africa,”

*Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 1 (April 2009): 72-78.

<sup>40</sup> General Carter F. Ham, USA, Commander, United States Africa Command, Statement before the Committee on the Armed Services, US House of Representatives, February 29, 2012, <http://www.africom.mil/fetchBinary.asp?pdfID=20120301102747>.

<sup>41</sup> Robert E. Gribbin, “Implementing AFRICOM: Tread Carefully,” *Foreign Service Journal* 85, no. 5 (May 2008): 27.

resource-rich, low population-density countries like Angola, most of America's would-be partners are constrained by lack of the financial wherewithal to upgrade their capabilities to meet even short-term priorities. It is a vicious cycle in which many are trapped: security is a prerequisite for development and development is a preventative for insecurity, yet these states lack the basic means to pay for the security that would facilitate the stability and economic growth that would, in turn, generate the revenues for the governments.

Third, AFRICOM's overall objectives are focused on the nexus between security as a prerequisite for development and development as preventative for insecurity.<sup>42</sup> As operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown, while achieving security is a precondition for development, without noteworthy progress on the latter the former is at best illusory. Hence, as the Pentagon has formally recognized, "stability operations," are now a "core US military mission" which ought to "be given priority comparable to combat operations" and defined as "military and civilian activities conducted across the spectrum from peace to conflict to establish or maintain order in states and regions" with the short-term goal of providing the local populace with security, essential services, and meeting its humanitarian needs and the long-term objective of helping to "develop indigenous capacity for securing essential services, a viable market economy, rule of law, democratic institutions, and a robust civil society."<sup>43</sup>

Translated into other terms, the security objectives of Americans and Africans cannot ultimately be achieved and sustained unless alongside the investment in building security there is an investment in developing the infrastructure, legal and physical, that will facilitate for the emergence of both effective governance and prosperity-bringing markets. However, because the global and domestic fiscal crises combined with the bitter partisan divide have created a political climate within the United States where the sort of major increases in foreign aid which promised by President Obama during his 2008 presidential campaign are simply not politically viable, the administration will need to look for creative ways to encourage the private sector to be more engaged with efforts to develop and modernize Africa's infrastructure, including financing facilities such as the relatively modest amounts currently available through the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the Export-Import (Exim) Bank of the United States, and tax incentives, which might prove particularly attractive insofar as they do not require direct public expenditures.

Fourth, working with African nations to build their security and crisis response capacity means that AFRICOM will necessarily not just enhance bilateral military relationships, but it must also strengthen the capacities of Africa's regional and subregional organizations. A point entry for the United States will definitely be to support the well-articulated desire of African leaders themselves to enhance their own joint capacity to deal with the

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<sup>42</sup> See Sean McFate, "US Africa Command: A New Strategic Paradigm?" *Military Review* 88, no. 1 (January/February 2008): 10-21.

<sup>43</sup> US Department of Defense, *Directive 3000.05 on the Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations*, November 28, 2005, 2.

continent's myriad security challenges. Thus the thinking behind the creation of AFRICOM presumed adequate resources both to assist in African capacity-building and to deploy more uniformed US personnel to collaborate in training missions and other similar activities.

Moreover, given both the historical caprice of the frontiers of many African states<sup>44</sup> and the current desire of many African governments and people to work through continent-wide and regional frameworks, the United States in general and the Africa Command in particular would do well to place a premium on support for and engagement with the African Union, subregional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and Africa's specialized multilateral institutions like the African Development Bank and the Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa (MOWCA), recognizing that Africans must take the lead. American security initiatives in Africa need to be multilateral as well as bilateral. For example, along the increasingly strategic Gulf of Guinea, it would seem to make very little sense to be building up the maritime domain awareness capabilities of littoral states with very short coastlines like Togo (fifty-six kilometers) and Benin (121 kilometers) when a cooperative, subregional coast guard would probably better serve the national interests of the individual countries. The assumption, of course, is that, all pan-Africanist rhetoric aside, these multilateral institutions actually have not only the capacity to engage on security issues, but also the institutional wherewithal and political capital to do so. It also assumes that, unlike the recent past, the United States manages to sustain its support of African peacekeeping training programs rather than switching from one initiative to the next.<sup>45</sup>

The question in the post-Afghanistan, post-Iraq, post-Arab spring, unpredictable and financially constrained "new, new world" is: How do these assumptions hold up? And while there has been in recent years a greater appreciation of the strategic importance of Africa, both for the United States and for the international system, have realistic goals for America's engagement—to say nothing of the grand strategy and tools for it—even been adequately defined?<sup>46</sup>

## **A EUCOM "Option"?**

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<sup>44</sup> See J. Peter Pham, "African Constitutionalism: Forging New Models for Multi-Ethnic Governance and Self-Determination," in *Africa: Mapping New Boundaries in International Law*, ed. Jeremy I. Levitt (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2008), 183-203; idem, "Legitimacy, Justice, and the Future of Africa," *Human Rights & Human Welfare* 5 (2005): 31-49; idem, "Do Not Resuscitate," *The National Interest* 94 (March/April 2008): 21-25; and idem, review essay of *Africa: Unity, Sovereignty, and Sorrow*, by Pierre Englebert, *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 208-214.

<sup>45</sup> See A. Sarjoh Bah and Kwesi Aning, "US Peace Operations Policy in Africa: From ACRI to AFRICOM," *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 1 (February 2008): 118-132.

<sup>46</sup> See J. Peter Pham, "The United States Africa Command: The Strategic Assumptions," in *African Security and the Africa Command: Viewpoints on the US Role in Africa*, ed. Terry Buss, Joseph Adjaye, Donald Goldstein, and Louis Picard (Pittsburgh: Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies, University of Pittsburgh/Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2011), 57-74.

Irrespective of how the grand strategic questions are answered, it has been suggested that, given the current fiscal constraints, the Africa Command might be operationally folded back into the European Command, possibly as a subordinate command. Historically, most of the current AFRICOM area of responsibility had belonged to EUCOM. Moreover, certain efficiencies might be achieved with shared workforce and other assets. In fact, it is pointed out that a number of components are already shared between the two commands. For example, the commander, US Naval Forces Europe (NAVEUR), has from the establishment of AFRICOM been “dual-hatted” as the commander, US Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF), while in early 2011, it was announced that the 17<sup>th</sup> Air Force (Air Forces Africa, AFAFRICA) would be deactivated for budgetary reasons and its functions entrusted to US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE).<sup>47</sup>

Whatever merits this proposal may have from the point of view of defense budgeting, planning, logistics, and operations, it could not be characterized as anything other than extremely shortsighted from the strategic perspective of US diplomatic and geopolitical interests in a region that is home to six of the world’s fastest growing economies in the last decade and whose importance is only likely to continue to grow. Moreover, given the controversy in Africa surrounding the initial establishment of AFRICOM and the political risks taken by partners who welcomed the command,<sup>48</sup> a reversal on the part of the United States would have significant deleterious impact on US interests, to say nothing of perceptions of American constancy and then reliability of the United States as a strategic partner on the part of African government officials and opinion leaders—all this at a time when a number of emerging powers are also busy renewing old ties and forging new links with Africa, relations which will undoubtedly alter the strategic context of the continent for the United States and its traditional European allies.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

The birth of AFRICOM was not easy. To many Africans with memories of liberation struggles still fresh in their minds, the very idea smacked of a neocolonial effort to dominate the continent anew. While this resistance has been largely overcome thanks to the efforts of the command’s first head, General William ‘Kip’ Ward, to dialogue with leaders and other stakeholders across the continent as well as the results which African governments and citizens have seen for themselves through the various engagements that have been carried out by AFRICOM personnel since 2007 that the new institution was not what they feared it to be, but rather it was both a continuation of already existent security engagements and the opportunity to enhance them in their own interests, sustaining the initiative may yet prove even more challenging.

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<sup>47</sup> See Bruce Rolfsen, “Cost-cutting Prompts Massive Reorganization,” *Air Force Times*, January 30, 2011, <http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2011/01/air-force-massive-reorganization-013011w/>.

<sup>48</sup> See James J.F. Forest and Rebecca Crispin, “AFRICOM: Troubled Infancy, Promising Future,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 1 (April 2009): 5-27.

<sup>49</sup> See J. Peter Pham, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights, Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives, March 29, 2012, <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/112/HHRG-112-FA16-WState-PhamP-20120329.pdf>.



Nevertheless, the growing interest of China, India,<sup>50</sup> Russia,<sup>51</sup> and other countries in Africa ought to signal to US policymakers that Africa is no longer a place where conflict and humanitarian sentiments are the exclusive drivers of engagement, but rather a land of opportunity where the burgeoning potential for mutual benefit forms the basis for true partnerships. What is needed is committed, consistent, and sustained engagement to promote long-term American interests—economic, political, and, most definitely, defense and security.

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<sup>50</sup> See idem, *India in Africa: Implications of an Emerging Power for AFRICOM and US Strategy*, Strategic Studies Institute Monograph (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 2011); also see idem, “Inde-Afrique, un mariage discret.” *Alternatives Internationales* 53 (December 2011): 10-13.

<sup>51</sup> See idem, “Back to Africa: Russia’s African Engagement,” in *Africa and the New World Era: From Humanitarianism to a Strategic View*, ed. Jack Mangala (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 71-83.