Assessing US Military Presence in Africa, and "African Solutions for African Problems."

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Recently, Mr. Barack Obama became the first US President to establish a permanent US military presence on the African continent through AFRICOM. The official establishment of AFRICOM indicates how militarization is set to dominate US hegemonic interests globally. However, given the continent's inability to meet its millennium development goals, one questions how further militarization will promote sustainable growth. More importantly, this Realist approach by Obama also raises questions regarding African developmental objectives, and the viability of African's doing it for themselves.

Democratization of the continent has always been a predominant aspect of US Foreign policy. Both President Obama and President Bush Jr. have noted that the spread of democracy to foreign countries benefits the U.S. However, militarization seems to have played a role in this democratization process. White argues that under the Bush Administration, the term "democracy promotion" often related to efforts at regime change such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, and fewer efforts pressuring for democratic reforms that might endanger security or economic interests, including a few examples in Africa[1]. AFRICOM was launched under the Bush administration after 9/11. The Bush Administration's National Security Strategy of 2002 reflected a need for a more focused strategic approach toward the continent with a strategic priority of combating global terror. The 2006 National Security Strategy went further, identifying Africa as a high priority and "recognizing that our security depends upon partnering with Africans to strengthen fragile and failing states and bring ungoverned areas under the control of effective democracies."[2]

Obama has affirmed Bush Jr.'s view of Africa's strategic importance in numerous policy documents and policy papers. The Obama Administration's first National Security Strategy, issued in 2010, stresses the need to "embrace effective partnerships" on the continent, highlighting a number of priorities, including "access to open markets, conflict prevention, global peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and the protection of vital carbon sinks."[3] The 2011 National Military Strategy also stresses the importance of partnerships: "the Joint Force will continue to build partner capacity in Africa, focusing on critical states where the threat of terrorism could pose a threat to our homeland and interests. We will help facilitate the African Union's and the Regional Economic Communities' development of their military capacity, including the African Stand-by Force, to address the continent's many security challenges."[4]

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[1] White, Laura. What Kind of Change for Africa? US Policy in Africa Under the Obama Administration. Les Notes de IRIS. April 2010

[2] Polch, Laura. Africa Command: US Strategic Interests and the Role of US Military in Africa. Congressional Research Service. July 22, 2011

[3] Ibid

[4] Ibid

In furtherance of its military strategy on the continent, the Obama Administration's proposed budget for FY 2010 includes approximately $300 million for AFRICOM and Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP).[5] AFRICOM runs the military aspect of TSCTP through Operation Enduring Freedom- Trans Sahara (OEF-TS), whose stated goals include counterterrorism, promoting regional cooperation, and promoting democratic governance. the Obama Administration proposed increasing funding for this program from $15 million in 2009 to $20 million in 2010.   Before the existence of this command, military responsibility for Africa was divided between the headquarters for Europe, the Middle East, and the Pacific. AFRICOM established its headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany, and continued to use the already existent U.S. military presence based at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti.[6]

According to its mission statement, AFRICOM along with its partners "conducts sustained security engagement through military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities, and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy."   In evidence of that, AFRICOM was actively involved in launching the U.S. intervention in Libya. Led by its commander, General Carter Ham, coordinated the combat operations of 11 American warships and dozens of aircraft, fired 110 Tomahawk cruise missiles, and delivered 45 Joint Direct Attack Munitions to ground targets. By March 23, AFRICOM-led coalition forces had steadily expanded the no-fly zone from northwest Libya and parts of central Libya to the entire coastline. And on March 26, AFRICOM began coordinating operations to destroy armored vehicles, effectively providing close air support to rebel forces.[7]

Given the significance of this militarization process, it is essential to assess ability of the African leadership to not only craft effective policy documents, but take some form of leadership in ensuring the US foreign policy measures are designed to first benefit continental interests, and secondly, feasibility of AU members states effectively implement African solutions that will eliminate the need for military forces such as AFRICOM. The fact is, AFRICOM cannot be successful without the complicity of some African leaders who currently willing to actively participate in their own exploitation by outsourcing African military sovereignty to the United States. Uganda already looks to have brokered an initial deal as a US local partner in Africa, a relationship which was formalized following Uganda's key role in battling Muslim extremists in Somalia.[8] As Hennignsen indicates, whatever Uganda's actual role was, their rewards have been substantial. Obama recently sent them around $45 million in military equipment, and this will certainly be topped up annually if Uganda continues to host US troops.[9]

Given the recent military arrangement between Uganda and the United States, what then does Africa solutions for African countries really mean? According to Chris Fomunyoh the catch-all phrase of "African solutions to African problems" became part of parlance as a matter of necessity, following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda when African countries watched the international community stand by as over 800 000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred by Hutu

[5] U.S. Africa Command," http://www.africom.mil/AboutAFRICOM.asp

[6] Ibid

[7] Steven, Jonathan. AFRICOM's Libya Expedition: How Will War Change the Command Roles on the Continent. Foreign Affairs Journal. May 9, 2011

[8] Henningsen, Patrick. Obama's Great African Military Safari. October 17, 2011

[9] Ibid

extremists. Coming on the heels of the Somalia experience in which the United States sustained casualties and became unwilling to commit troops to interventions in African crisis situations, and with other world powers equally disengaged, African leaders learned the hard way that ultimately they have to resolve crises on their continent and look out for their own.[10]

The Mbeki era which marshalled in the African Renaissance concept and institutions such as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) strengthened the view that Africans were more involved in determining their own agenda. As Imraan Buccus states, Former President Thabo Mbeki led the formation of the AU precisely so that there could be pan-African solutions for African problems.[11] It is the recent shenanigans in North Africa decisively determined by the West that has brought things back in perspective as to whether African's can really talk of African solutions? Not only was the AU slow to act with Libya, but it dragged its feet regarding Egypt and was practically silent on Tunisia. This lethargic lack luster leadership questioned whether Africans really need the AU institution or should they just focus their energies on supporting institutions such as the European Union which are actually very influential on the AU due to donor funding. Furthermore, by now we should have learnt a few things from our Cold War history lessons how militarization maintained instability, de-industrialization, and instead promoted the economic access and control over our resources.

It is in this context that one argues the urgency for the AU to effectively strategize its Forum for Cooperation between Africa and China (FOCAC) partnership at the upcoming 2012 Summit to possibly examine global foreign policy challenges facing the continent, and determine a way to ensure that deterrents against the FOCAC process do not succeed. Developmental growth, not militarization provides much more sustainable options for the continent. While some including the United States may question China's economic pursuits on the continent, China over the last decade has signed a string of multibillion-dollar deals to build highways, schools, hospitals. Chinese aid to African countries has grown so much in recent years that it has already surpassed aid provided by the World Development Bank.

There is no question that Africans need a strong and effective AU that can defend their regional interests particularly at a global platform. One thing is certain for Africa is that its strategic importance in the world will continue to rise, for reasons such as resources, and markets.[12] It is well known that Africa is a fast growing supplier of fuel minerals (crude oil, gas), as well as strategic non-fuel minerals (copper, platinum, manganese, cobalt etc.) to the United States and the global community. Therefore, the is a need for a paradigm shift on the part of Africa's leadership on how it addresses AFRICOM, and how it implements agreements such as FOCAC to ensure that Africa's natural resources are exploited and managed in a manner that contributes to the eradication of poverty as well as sustainable economic growth and development.

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[10] Fomunyoh, Chris. African Solutions to African Problems: A Solution Whose Time Has Passed. *AllAfricaNews.org.* February 5, 2011

[11] Buccus Imran. African Apathy for African Problems: From Libya to Zim. Sunday Independent. April 10, 2011

[12] Beebe, Shannon. Africa: Security and Development for the 21st Century. Open Democracy: January 18, 2011