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U.S. Security Engagement in Africa

By William M. Bellamy

- **Despite significant recent gains, Africa's security environment remains fragile with a wide array of ongoing and emerging threats placing great strains on already overburdened governments.**
- **United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa have realized some success in recent years, especially when they have involved direct support from members of the Security Council.**
- **Much more cohesive interagency coordination under strong White House direction is required if the United States is to contribute to Africa's sustained stability given the region's persistent conditions of poverty, inequality, and weak governance.**

HIGHLIGHTS

THREATS OLD AND NEW

A significant development in Africa over the past decade has been the generalized lessening of violent conflict. Revitalized, expanded international peacekeeping, bolstered by a newly launched African Union (AU) determination to tackle security challenges, has reinforced this trend.

In most cases, however, progress made in peacemaking remains fragile and tentative. More often, rebellions and insurgencies have been contained by negotiated agreements that have not been followed by meaningful political accommodations and other forms of compliance. It is thus far too soon to assume that African states have found permanent solutions to the political rivalries and governance problems that lie at the root of most recent conflicts. A reminder of the difficulties facing peacekeeping operations can be seen in the ongoing disintegration of Somalia, which now rates as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, the rebellion and repression in Darfur that continue to generate international outrage, and the prospect of a renewed north-south civil war in Sudan, where a referendum on secession is scheduled for 2011.

The 9/11 attacks also awakened U.S. officials to Africa's broader vulnerabilities. With its porous borders, ungoverned spaces, societal tensions, and law enforcement shortcomings, Africa appeared to offer ideal territory in which terrorist or criminal organizations could seek refuge, acquire and stockpile weapons, recruit members, conduct training, and plan operations without much fear of official interference. Many observers also consider Africa potentially vulnerable to Islamist extremism. More Muslims live in Africa than in the Middle East. Where they live in communities undermined by poverty, unemployment, and a sense of exclusion and official

neglect (a situation that applies to many non-Muslim communities in Africa as well), it is arguable that they are prey to extremist messages and eventually to terrorist recruitment.

Thus, chronic weaknesses that had previously attracted the attention mainly of humanitarians and development experts—poverty, joblessness, disease, illiteracy, corruption, and weak governance—were discovered to have new strategic importance. This situation fed a tendency to conflate all forms of U.S. assistance to Africa—security, developmental, and humanitarian—with overriding counterterrorism objectives.

Less spectacular but equally important will be a host of new and less conventional security challenges. Piracy is dramatically up in African waters, threatening commerce and disrupting humanitarian assistance operations. A growing number of African states are becoming important transit points for narcotics serving European markets, though the drug bosses and networks controlling this trade are rarely African. Other criminal activities, including illegal fishing, human trafficking, and grand scale theft of oil in the Niger Delta, have expanded markedly, threatening to destabilize already fragile governments.

Official corruption remains an important contributing factor to the spread of criminal activities in Africa. Yet even when governments are determined to combat criminal influences, profound institutional deficiencies often prevent effective action. Africa has the lowest percentage of police officers (180 per 100,000 population) and judges per capita of any global region. And the effects of these problems do not remain localized: the United Nations (UN) Office of Drugs and Crime estimates that 58 percent of fraudulent insurance claims in the United States are made by Nigerians.

Adding to this litany is the uncharted danger that the worsening global financial crisis will reverse the strong economic growth that Africa has realized in recent years. Shortages of affordable food and fuel, intensified competition for diminishing natural resources such as water, and dislocations caused by environmental stress and climate change seem certain to bring more pressure to bear on already overburdened African governments.

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PEACEKEEPING SUCCESSES

In recent years, the United Nations has quietly improved the effectiveness of its conventional peacekeeping operations in Africa. The first turnaround was in Sierra Leone where, despite initial humiliation at the hands of rag-tag Revolutionary United Front militias, a credible UN force was deployed to contested areas of the country by mid-2001. Large UN peacekeeping operations also scaled up in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2001, in Liberia in 2003, and in Côte d'Ivoire in 2004. All were Chapter VII missions authorizing the use of force. All were generally "successful" in that they either checked violence, helped establish conditions in which conflict could be contained, or contributed to postconflict stabilization.

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UN operations were most successful where they were effectively "sponsored" by members of the Security Council willing to unilaterally deploy resources in support of them. Thus, the United Kingdom military presence in Sierra Leone, French military activities in Côte d'Ivoire, and strong U.S. backing for the UN operation in Liberia all appear to have worked to create a more permissive operating environment for international peacekeeping forces.

This was also a period in which the newly formed African Union legitimized for the first time the principle of collective armed intervention under AU auspices to restore peace or rectify egregious violations of human rights or humanitarian law. A new Peace and Security Council was established to oversee peace support operations, institute sanctions, and facilitate humanitarian action. Armed intervention capabilities were to be provided by five

standby brigades, one in each African subregion, supplemented by a continent-wide reserve force of observers, police, and civilian personnel.

Consistent with this new regional thinking, the AU launched several peace support operations after 2000. A small, 1-year deployment to Burundi provided some measure of security following a ceasefire in 2003, although it failed to achieve its main objective of disarming rebels and facilitating political dialogue. AU missions to embattled Darfur and Somalia were far more ambitious and less successful.

While security gains are visible and encouraging across Africa, they are fragile. In many places, the underlying causes and drivers of conflict have not changed. Improvements in UN peacekeeping are encouraging, as is AU willingness to shoulder more responsibility. But a deficit of real African peacekeeping capacity remains. UN peace operations appear at their upper limit in Africa, and globally: close to 90,000 UN peacekeeping personnel are today committed to 16 UN operations worldwide. Some 70 percent of those personnel are in Africa for seven operations. Serious uncertainty persists regarding Africa's capacity to respond to the next big crisis. The growing gap between expectations and demands placed on peace operations argues strongly for a broad reassessment of UN peacekeeping in Africa and a new strategy for easing current excess commitments. It also argues for renewed multilateral thinking on how to assist the African Union to sustain confidence and enthusiasm for playing an active operational role in ending conflicts on the continent.

U.S. SECURITY ENGAGEMENT

The United States has significantly enlarged its security engagement in Africa in recent years. This includes a U.S. military base in Djibouti, active counterterror programs, support for a massive expansion of UN peace operations, and the launch of the U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM). By explicitly designating security resources to Africa and consistently meeting its assessed obligations to UN peacekeeping, the United States has helped put African peacekeeping on more solid footing than at any time in the recent past. Yet this security enlargement has not been effectively integrated with U.S. diplomatic and long-term developmental aims. Indeed, stark tensions persist across these three domains.

Traditional security assistance and counterterrorism programs do not adequately address many of Africa's emerging security challenges. Lawlessness and escalating crime, for example, are not security trends that U.S. or African militaries can be expected to resolve. Nor are there traditional security assistance solutions to the chronic instability that affects many parts of Africa due to persistent conditions of poverty, inequality, and governance failures. Within the U.S. Government, the State Department's Bureau of

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International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INL) is charged with combating international drug trafficking and organized crime, money laundering, human trafficking, and building the capacity of partner nation law enforcement and criminal justice systems. However, the $34 million that INL commits to Africa annually is clearly too little to qualify as a coherent program of nonmilitary capacity-building.

More vigorous, better resourced diplomacy will be essential to an effective U.S. response to Africa's security challenges. Well-targeted and sustained assistance programs are likewise needed. But the United States will be called upon to move beyond traditional remedies. Too often, U.S. interventions have been reactive and compartmentalized, a weakness typified by post-9/11 counterterrorism programs in Africa and by almost all forms of nonmilitary security assistance. To adequately address increasingly complex security challenges in Africa, the United States will need to be more anticipatory in its actions and more coherent in bringing civilian and military resources to bear. Without improvement in interagency planning and execution, stronger State Department leadership, and more forceful and effective White House oversight, the impact of greater U.S. engagement on African security issues will likely be limited.

SIX U.S. PRIORITIES FOR AFRICA

Create an Updated, Baseline Assessment of U.S. Security Interests in Africa. During the

Cold War, some strategists considered access to Rhodesia's and South Africa's mineral resources vital to U.S. interests. Today, some experts assign the same importance to West Africa's oil. After 9/11, Africa emerged as a potential hotbed of international terrorist activity. That perception has shifted significantly in recent years to a more focused and realistic appreciation of actual terrorist threats. At the same time, new nonconventional threats have proliferated, and UN peace operations and the aspirations of the African Union have become critical components of security in Africa. Some argue

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that China's enormous commercial and diplomatic investment in Africa will inevitably set off both a scramble by outside powers for access and influence in sub-Saharan Africa and a strategic rivalry with the United States.

Others see areas of convergence in U.S. and Chinese interests in Africa and argue for greater collaboration with China in enhancing African peacekeeping capacity, for example, or strengthening maritime security. Above all, the United States needs a clear-sighted consensus on the security stakes in Africa today, one that is realistic and encompasses new threats and links between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa. It should include an appraisal of UN and AU peace operations and multilateral strategies for easing current overstretched conditions. If one concludes that Africa's strategic importance in coming years will be linked less to the threats of war or terrorism than to questions of socioeconomic advancement and effective governance, then enhancing African security will inevitably be a more complex undertaking involving major nonmilitary and developmental components.

Balance and Integrate Military and Civilian Initiatives in Africa under Stronger White House Direction. A striking feature of U.S. global engagement in recent years has been the steady growth of authority, responsibilities, and resources of the U.S. military as civilian diplomatic and development capacities have declined. Initial resistance to USAFRICOM from African governments and development partners stemmed in part from the concern that a large and well-resourced command would inevitably overshadow and "militarize" U.S. diplomatic and development programs across the continent. The Obama administration will need to address these fears and ensure that U.S. policy in Africa is carefully balanced among defense, diplomacy, and development. The administration will need a policy framework in which resources and capabilities across the U.S. Government are identified and brought to bear in coordinated fashion.

Complex security situations in individual countries and subregions are an emerging reality in Africa. It is not hard to envision a scenario in which multiple African governments must cope simultaneously with crises as diverse as increased urban lawlessness, resource depletion and unrest in rural areas, the intrusions of international narcotics and organized crime syndicates, and chaotic refugee flows from neighboring conflict zones. In such circumstances, the United Sates cannot afford a dispersal of the authorities and resources needed to mount an effective response. American policymakers should create an ongoing interagency coordination effort (State, Defense, and the U.S. Agency for International Development) at the regional level, under firm White House guidance, to pursue the highest regional priorities.

Develop a More Coherent Approach to Combating Terrorism in Africa. At present, the threat of international terrorists originating or operating in sub-Saharan Africa is limited. Policies should acknowledge and reflect this reality rather than continue to routinely depict sub-Saharan Africa as a zone of high terrorist risk and critical concern. Where active international terrorist threats do exist—as in the Horn—the most effective U.S. countermeasures will involve working closely with local partners who share U.S. strategic goals. Among the most common mistakes made by U.S. planners is to assume that a robust American

military presence is both a reassurance to friendly governments and a deterrent to extremists and potential terrorists. In fact, many friendly African governments regard a large and visible U.S. military presence as a handicap and potential magnet for both domestic political opponents and terrorists in search of high-value targets in an otherwise target-poor environment. Both Defense and State should devote more attention to correctly calibrating the size and visibility of the U.S. security presence in African host nations.

As a matter of policy, military operations to engage individual terrorists or small groups should be undertaken only when more discreet means fail and after consideration of the implications of such actions on other aspects of U.S. policy. The lack of a clear chain of command has been a persistent problem with U.S. counterterrorism policy in Africa. Among the highest priorities should be to clarify the respective authorities of Defense and State, and specifically of the regional combatant commander, other relevant combatant commands, and U.S. Ambassadors in Africa with respect to theater counterterror policy and programs. As matters now stand, considerable uncertainty exists in the field, among civilian and military authorities alike, over respective responsibilities in this area.

Take a Hard-nosed Look at Traditional Military Assistance Programs. Despite years of effort and hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance from the United States, most African militaries today are only marginally more professional and more capable of operating in peacekeeping roles than they were 10 years ago. Some militaries have regressed over the same period. The net effect is that while African states continue to contribute forces to UN peacekeeping operations at a high rate, these forces remain less well trained, equipped, and led than most U.S. observers hoped when peacekeeping assistance programs began in earnest. The AU remains far from the goal of security self-sufficiency.

Donor assistance has not always helped this process. Donors seldom effectively coordinate their security assistance to African states, and often pitch it to meet their own localized security concerns rather than the longer term needs of recipient states. To improve and integrate U.S. security assistance in Africa, overall responsibility for security assistance programs should rest with the State Department, with USAFRICOM brought into the planning process at the outset and given substantial responsibility for the co-design and implementation of military-to-military capacity-building. More emphasis needs to be placed on strengthening institutions and capabilities in African militaries rather than simply imparting mission-specific skill sets. Better criteria should be developed for assessing the effectiveness of assistance programs, and less use should be made of U.S. private sector contracts. Finally, renewed efforts should be made to harmonize U.S. assistance with those of other major donors, notably the United Kingdom, France, and other European Union states.

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Develop Clear Strategies to Address the Rapidly Growing Importance of Nonmilitary Security Needs in Africa. Weak or nonexistent laws, inadequate police forces, shortages of trained prosecutors and judges, and pervasive corruption render many African states nearly defenseless against rising domestic and international crime. While African militaries are generally better organized and better resourced than civilian providers of security, tasking them to perform law enforcement duties is not a viable strategy. A top priority for U.S. Africa policy should be to develop a clear interagency consensus, under the shared leadership of the INL and the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, on priorities and modalities for delivering nonmilitary security assistance in a more predictable, measurable and sustained manner.

Better Define the USAFRICOM Mission and Configuration. Despite significant progress under USAFRICOM commander General William Ward's leadership, misgivings persist in Africa and internationally about the command's role. To improve both USAFRICOM's reputation and effectiveness, the United States should:

◆ Determine (and emphasize publicly) that the USAFRICOM core mission is cooperation with African partner states in traditional areas of security assistance—and that the command's greatest comparative advantage will be its ability to cooperate in a more coherent, effective, better resourced, and sustainable fashion. At the same time, the administration should not downplay the USAFRICOM status as a combatant command. The likelihood of the command conducting combat operations in Africa may be remote, but this capability and potential role should not be dismissed or disguised.

◆ Single out maritime security cooperation as a special USAFRICOM priority. The importance of offshore oil and gas production in West Africa is well known. Of increasing international concern are piracy, grand-scale oil theft schemes, narcotics shipments, human trafficking, and illegal immigration in Africa's mostly unpoliced coastal waters. Unchecked illegal fishing threatens the livelihoods of millions of Africans, as does severe environmental degradation in many maritime zones. African governments are beginning to confront these challenges, although maintaining navies and coast guards is still a low military priority for most of them. Many African states would welcome US AFRICOM programs to improve maritime surveillance and enforcement capabilities. By helping to restore physical security, USAFRICOM could become an enabler of more broadly based "human security" initiatives in coastal Africa

◆ Increase both budgetary and personnel support for State Department security assistance programs in Africa. Just as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has urged that more resources be made available to the State Department for stabilization and reconstruction missions worldwide, so too should USAFRICOM call for a doubling of the roughly $250 to $300 million that the State Department now spends annually on security programs in Africa. Increases in Foreign Military Financing, the International Military and Education Training program, and peacekeeping operations funding should be used to fund USAFRICOM engagement initiatives.

◆ Connect USAFRICOM priorities more directly to UN and AU peacekeeping in Africa. The AU now has an organizing structure through which all international partners can coordinate. Moreover, with the UN present in virtually every corner of Africa, often in a security-building or peacekeeping capacity, it will be impossible for USAFRICOM to operate for long without intersecting in some way with UN activities. Whatever its operational shortcomings, the UN and its specialized agencies command respect and support from almost every African government and from all levels of African society. To the extent that USAFRICOM is perceived as supportive of UN security and peacekeeping missions, international acceptance of the command will grow.

This Africa Security Brief was synthesized from Ambassador Bellamy's "Africa Policy: Recommendations for the Obama Administration," in *U.S. Africa Policy Beyond the Bush Years: Critical Challenges for the Obama Administration* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009).

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