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**USAFRICOM: An Analysis of the United States Africa Command and the Forces that
Legitimize and Justify US Military Presence in Africa**

by

ALEXIS OSIFO

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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PROFESSOR PIERRE ENGLEBERT**

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Abstract

This essay analyzes the United States of America's military presence on the African continent through the US Africa Command or AFRICOM. I hope to contextualize the creation of AFRICOM by outlining the events and reasonings for establishing the military command center. Moreover, I analyze the discourses of humanitarianism and securitization on the African continent and the producers and distributors of such ideological discourses in academia, media, government and private corporations. While situating these discourses within a larger framework of colonial and imperial ventures, I plan on investigating how such ideological narratives work to legitimize and preempt military operations and presence in Africa. Finally, using Libya as a reference and case study of when claims of humanitarianism and securitization intersect and result in military action, casualties, regime change, and a worsened state of affairs for the invaded country.

Keywords: AFRICOM, Africa, humanitarianism, terrorism, Libya

**USAFRICOM: An Analysis of the United States Africa Command and the Forces that
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The destiny of the US empire is tied to that of the colonized and oppressed people around the world. The United States has siphoned resources and capital from the Third World to fuel its development. First, with the murder and displacement of indigenous people dwelling on the North American continent, then America continued to build up its nation through the trans-Atlantic slave trade—forever linking the United States of America with the African continent. Since the time by which most African nations gained their independence from European colonial powers during the mid-twentieth century, Western powers have sought to maintain a stronghold on the continent for capital accumulation and expanding the reach of their empires.

The aim of this essay is to analyze and interpret the United States of America's military presence on the African continent through the US Africa Command or AFRICOM. I hope to contextualize the creation of AFRICOM by outlining the events and reasonings for establishing the military command center while discussing previous military initiatives pre-dating AFRICOM. Moreover, I analyze the discourses of humanitarianism and securitization on the African continent and the producers and distributors of such ideological discourses in academia, media, government and private corporations. While situating these discourses within a larger framework of colonial and imperial ventures, I plan on investigating how such ideological narratives work to legitimize and preempt military operations and presence in Africa. Finally, I will be using Libya as a reference and case study of when claims of humanitarianism and securitization intersect and result in military action, causalities, regime change, and a worsened state of affairs for the invaded country.

Part I: Why is the U.S. in Africa Today—US interests, US Objectives, US Empire

After the United States emerged as the world's superpower after World War II, they expanded their military reach through command centers stationed across the globe (Campbell, 2008). Given the deep-rooted colonial histories between Africa and Europe, the US did not feel the need to intervene and left Africa in the hands of Europe as the US expanded its military reach elsewhere. "The US had delegated leadership of the [African] continent's exploitation to its former European colonisers" (Campbell, 2008). But as the European colonial powers seemingly lost a stronghold on the continent as African independence movements and anti-imperial sentiments materialized, the US made moves to ensure its own vision was salient in Africa.

"While colonialism involved one state's direct dispossession of a people's sovereignty and control of territory, the US empire strove to develop and superintend a global network of sovereign territorial nation-states integrated with and supportive of its overarching vision of order" (Boyd-Barrett & Mirrlees, 2020).

From its interventions in the political affairs of newly independent states of Africa to its reinvigorated interests in Africa after 9/11, the US gradually shifted its focus onto Africa. USA Africa Command is one of the several and most recent U.S. military command stations across the globe. Initially established on October 1, 2007 by President Bush, "AFRICOM became a new, independent, fully autonomous and operational military command on 1 October 2008" (Keenan, 2008). Previously overseen by the European Command, Pacific Command, and Central Command (Keenan, 2008), Bush's decision to consolidate military overseeing of Africa, excluding Egypt, to a singular African Command station appeared, to some people, as a revitalized interest in the continent's security post-9/11 and to others as simply an expansion of U.S. imperial power. In this part of the paper, I hope to outline the conditions that led to the creation of the African command, analyze the stated goals US African Command, and illustrate the working parts of the AFRICOM assemblage.

With the creation of AFRICOM, the US emphasized Africa's growing geopolitical importance. "U.S. strategic interests in Africa are many, including the needs to counter terrorism, secure natural resources, contain armed conflict and humanitarian crisis, retard the spread of HIV/AIDS, reduce international crime, and respond to growing Chinese influence" (McFate, 2008). The U.S. placed an extra emphasis on terrorism after events of 9/11 and many cited growing tensions and instances of terrorism in the North and East Africa. Therefore, the US emphasized counterterrorism as one of their main reasons for establishing a new military presence solely dedicated to Africa as its area of responsibility. Moreover, in May 2001, the 'Cheney Report' was published and found that American energy consumption between 1991 and 2000 had increased by 17% while domestic energy production had only risen by 2.3% (Keenan, 2008). "Competition for natural resources, and oil in particular, is a strategic concern for the United States" (McFate, 2008). As of 2022, AFRICOM commander General Stephen Townsend also noted in an address to the Senate Armed Forces Committee, the importance of African natural resources to the production of American technologies and transition to clean energy,

"Beyond its geostrategic location, Africa possesses vast untapped energy deposits, including one third of the world's mineral reserves and rare earth metals. These resources are the key supplies that America relies on to produce 21st century technologies and transition to clean energy, including mobile phones, jet engines, electric-hybrid vehicles, and missile guidance systems" (Townsend, 2022).

During discussion of a new command center, Bush presents AFRICOM as a collaboration with African leaders who will be integral to hosting the US's new command center and all of its working parts. Bush also identified AFRICOM as a "new concept" (Corey, February 2008) — one of "transformational diplomacy" that emphasizes partnership as opposed to militarization (Corey, April 2008).

Leading Up to AFRICOM: Global War on Terror and Military Initiatives

Following attacks on 9/11, the US waged war on terrorism which primarily target Afghanistan but expanded into an ongoing international military campaign. The US identified Africa as a budding region of extremism, radicalism, and terroristic activity stemming from instability and lack of development. Of course, there had been instances of terrorism in the region, especially in the 1990s in regions like Somalia, East Africa, and the Maghreb (Keenan, 2008) Counterterrorism dominated US foreign policy and was identified as the main cause for international concern in discussions for a new command center. With 9/11 at the fore-front of the American psyche, the stated goal of securing transnational threats to U.S national security seemed like a plausible reason for having a microscopic lens over “volatile” regions of the continent such as the Horn of Africa.

Despite ongoing discourse that continued to identify Africa a breeding ground for terrorism, the African continent had not seriously displayed signs of perpetual terroristic activity that Bush asserted he was attempting to secure. And even with the conflicts that were sure to arise from former colonies attempting to build and establish nationhood, in the face of perpetual interventions from the West, the United Nations reported a decrease in armed conflicts in Africa. In 2004, the United Nations released a progress report citing decreased armed conflicts in Africa and highlighted the efforts of African leaders in both managing and preventing conflicts on the continent.

“There has been a positive trend on the continent regarding conflict prevention and management. The African regional organizations are increasingly taking the lead in conflict prevention and management. The African Union and African sub regional organizations, in particular ECOWAS, have been playing an important role in the management of conflicts in Africa, in some cases taking the lead in actual peacekeeping operations” (United Nations, 2004).

Despite the noted decrease in armed conflicts, the US emphasized the lack of operational support that the African leaders had to keep peacekeeping and security operations going and its reliance on the international community's support in building its capacity.

Thus, the US and other international actors engaged with Africa through a number of capacity-building support initiatives to counter terrorism the need for African peace and security to promote African development. Before the official creation of AFRICOM, Bush established a number of military initiatives in service of the "war on terror" and establishing forces for peace and security. Both McFate and the UN progress report address how African nations and international partners collaborated to deal with limited operational capacity: "In 2004 the G-8 introduced its Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), a multilateral program that plans to create a self-sustaining peacekeeping force of 75,000 troops, a majority of them African, by 2010. The U.S. Department of State manages GPOI, as it does the Africa Contingency Operations Training assistance (ACOTA) program, which also trains peacekeepers" (McFate, 2008). These programs emphasized African self-sustaining peacekeeping force, yet due to budget constraints the force never came to fruition (Bah & Aning, 2008).

The Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI) was one of the first regional military initiatives by America with the stated goals of counterterrorism and promotion of peace and stability in the region. Initially partnering with 4 countries in the region (Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania) in January 2004, the United States "rolled into action with the arrival in Nouakchott, capital of Mauritania, of a US 'anti-terror team' of 500 troops [...] while 400 US Rangers would be deployed into the Chad-Niger border regions" (Keenan, 2008). About a year after the formation of PSI, it was "expanded in 2005 into the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI), or as it is now known, the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP)" adding partnerships with

Nigeria, Senegal, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia (Moore & Walker, 2016). In 2007, AFRICOM absorbed control of the military component of TSCTI.

US Africa Command

After different initiatives attempts to strengthen military capacity, Bush announced the new African command on February 6, 2007 which would consolidate all of the Department of Defense's operation in Africa (Volman, 2007). Pushing forward with the image of a terror-filled continent, the US created AFRICOM with the mission as stated: "U.S. Africa Command, with partners, counters transnational threats and malign actors, strengthens security forces, and responds to crises in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity" (AFRICOM, n.d.). The mission statement highlights its determination to secure the continent against antagonistic forces—despite the U.N. reports of declining armed conflicts—with an emphasis on US national interests on the continents. US national interests that appear to work in conjunction with their African partners but in practice highlights the asymmetrical dynamic of relations between Africa and the U.S. This broad plan for engagement on the African continent led to suspicions by African leaders especially given their colonial histories with Western powers as well as the devastating invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan by the U.S. (Taguem Fah, 2010). Conversations surrounding where exactly the base of AFRICOM would be stationed circulated amongst African leaders and people. Most staunchly rejected the possibility of the command to be in their country, except for Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia who "was willing to offer a home to Africom" (Otieno, 2010). Given the staunch opposition to housing the headquarters on the continent, the US Africa Command base was stationed in Stuttgart, Germany and has remained there since its inception. Yet, even if all African nations were to embrace the idea of the command base being on their land, it would not

be necessary. The US Africa Command does not actually have to have a physical military base or even a slew of bases on the continent to achieve its mission statement. AFRICOM prides itself on its low-military presence, “lily pad” bases, and “small force footprint operations” especially when compared to the larger military forces stationed across Europe and the Middle East (Moore & Walker, 2016).

“Indeed more than anywhere else in the world the US military presence in Africa is dependent upon PMCs that perform a variety of services, from transporting and housing personnel, to shipping materials and food, to providing medical support, to conducting surveillance” (Moore & Walker, 2016).

In fact, that is what many scholars makes AFRICOM that much more difficult to track. Utilizing Moore and Walker’s conceptual understanding of AFRICOM as a geopolitical assemblage which examines the “relationships between elements and the work that is done to sustain those elements” (Moore & Walker, 2016). I will be using that concept as a way to understand AFRICOM as an assemblage of numerous working parts and relationships used to advance US empire and objectives in Africa.

“Empire is more than pushpins on a map” (Moore & Walker, 2016). With the ever-changing landscape of war and military, pinpointing a cluster of military bases across the continent, although still extremely helpful, no longer reflects the vastness of US power and influence as it once did in the past. The United States does not have to build super military bases to secure its interests on the continent—it does not even have to be headquartered there. In “The U.S.—African Command and Pan-African Resistance,” Otieno crucially posits AFRICOM as more than a physical manifestation of militarization but also a global statement of US imperial power as AFRICOM is an addition to already established US unified military command centers around the world (2010). “Africom is not so much about the creation of a massive military base as it is the idea and imperial strategy that it represents. Africom can comfortably operate from

anywhere in the globe” (Otieno, 2010). Therefore, identifying the vastness of US imperial power in order to further its interests across the globe cannot be limited to an analysis of only official military bases because in Africa. In “Tracing the US Military’s Presence in Africa,” Adam Moore and James Walker state, “Indeed US officials acknowledge operating just one base (Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti) in AFRICOM’s area of responsibility (AOR), which covers the entire continent except Egypt” (2016). Despite the US operating just one military base, Moore and Walker illustrate “the extensive use of private military contractors (PMCs, covert special operations forces (SOF) and secret facilities” used to minimize US military footprint (2016). Therefore, the USAFRICOM assemblage expands not just through the typical military apparatus but also through a diverse network of institutions and infrastructure that all work towards the promotion of the US interests in Africa.

USA Africa Command relies on several elements to make up its military assemblage. “Facilities such as Camp Lemonnier, drone bases, and a growing network of cooperative security locations (CSLs) and logistics nodes across the continent tend to receive the greatest attention” (Moore & Walker, 2016). Because these facilities limit the need for “more boots on the ground,” it is often a less scrutinized approach than a full-frontal military force. Yet, the use of these facilities, despite limited US troops on the ground, are critical to facilitating US militarism and the expansion the US empire. In addition to these infrastructures, there are other critical elements of AFRICOM as well. “Various bureaucratic and military practices that are instrumental in “forging alignment” between US and African states and militaries, and facilitating flows of money, weapons, knowledge, people, and ideologies in the assemblage” (Moore & Walker, 2016). Features such as the US conducting military training exercises like *Flintlock* of several African militaries submerges these army personnel in operations with US objective and interests

as the primary concern. Because the face of these operations is oftentimes African, the US is able to skirt claims of US interference even though they've continually emphasized their primary goals is to maintain strategic access and influence in the region (Townsend, 2022)

AFRICOM also heralds its efforts in aiding humanitarian missions. The AFRICOM website displays its numerous initiatives of Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, in collaborate with USAID and other orgs, covering areas ranging from Disaster Relief to the COVID-19 crises and HIV/AIDS relief (AFRICOM, n.d.). Thus, broadening of the scope of military operations beyond military-related affairs and encompassing humanitarian goals within the security apparatus—whether that be a US military presence or a local African military and police presence in non-military affairs. Moreover, despite its emphasis on development—in addition to security—information about the operations and results of humanitarian efforts is scarce beyond the AFRICOM website.

“For some sections of Western capitalist classes this branding of Africa, tied to the politics of fear propagated by the US government, opens up opportunities for prosperous new business adventures” (Campbell, 2008). Another part of the AFRICOM geopolitical assemblage are the private and corporate bodies. Private mercenaries and contractors are not only utilized as a method of reducing US military “boots on the ground,” but also a lucrative business opportunity for military contractors. In this, we see how the US state and US corporations collaborate:

“The integration of these private contractors into the established military industrial complex and in fighting terrorism itself, became a highly lucrative business enterprise. At its centre were military contractors such as Haliburton; Kellog, Root and Brown; Dyncorp (amalgamating the former Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI)), Triple Canopy; Erinys ArmorGroup; and Blackwater” (Campbell, 2008).

Therefore, there is not only the benefits of developing and strengthening the US security apparatus for the state but also for corporations invested in the profits and revenue derived from such contracts. Private entities presence does not only mean private mercenaries, but also, and maybe more importantly, the weaponry and surveillance mechanisms used to collect intelligence, surveil, and conduct reconnaissance missions. In January 2020, al-Shabaab attacked one of AFRICOM's cooperative security locations (CSLs), Manda Bay, which resulted in the death of 1 US soldier and 2 US contract personnel, 3 injured US personnel and 1 injured Kenyan soldier, and destroyed over \$94 million dollars' worth of U.S. government resources, targeting mostly aircrafts (Headquarters United States Africa Command, 2020; U.S. Dept of Defense, 2022). This attack is especially unique because it is the first time that al-Shabaab targeted the US military site, as they typically target civilians. Prior to the attack, in 2019, the mission for Camp Simba, a part of CSL Manda Bay, changed from tactical to enduring operations (Zalan & Freudenthal, 2020). In the aftermath of the attack, it was revealed that the main target was Magagoni airfield, a part of CSL Manda Bay, which was a launchpad for surveillance aircraft used to supported air strikes against groups like al-Shabaab, in Somalia (Zalan & Freudenthal, 2020). The targeted aircrafts were supplied and operated by L3Harris Technologies, "a trusted prime defense contractor for top-tier U.S. and international missions" (L3Harris Corporate Headquarters, 2022). In fiscal years 2018 and 2019, L3Harris Technologies was awarded over \$1.1 billion USD by the Department of Defense of which about 69% of those awarded amounts went towards "Search, Detection, Navigation, Guidance, Aeronautical, and Nautical System and Instrument Manufacturing" (USA Spending, n.d.). Thus, this highlights of the goals of developing extensive surveillance projects in the region which has not necessarily shown to aid in the attainment of peace on the continent. The 2 contract personnel killed in the attacks worked for L3Harris

Technologies as well (Gibbons-Neff et al., 2020). In relation to the al-Shabaab attacks, “The recent threats and attacks are likely in part a reaction to the U.S. air campaign against the group,” said Tricia Bacon, a Somali specialist at American University in Washington and a former State Department counterterrorism analyst’ (Gibbons-Neff et al., 2020). Thus, the impact of an increased US military presence in conjunction with intelligence and technologies supplied by private contractors reflect negatively on the stated goals of AFRICOM and provoke questions about the nature of these military operations, their goals, and their effectiveness. Moreover, the capital interests of private contractors and their contribution to the US military presence in Africa reveal some of the ways in which surveillance, capitalism and imperialism intertwine.

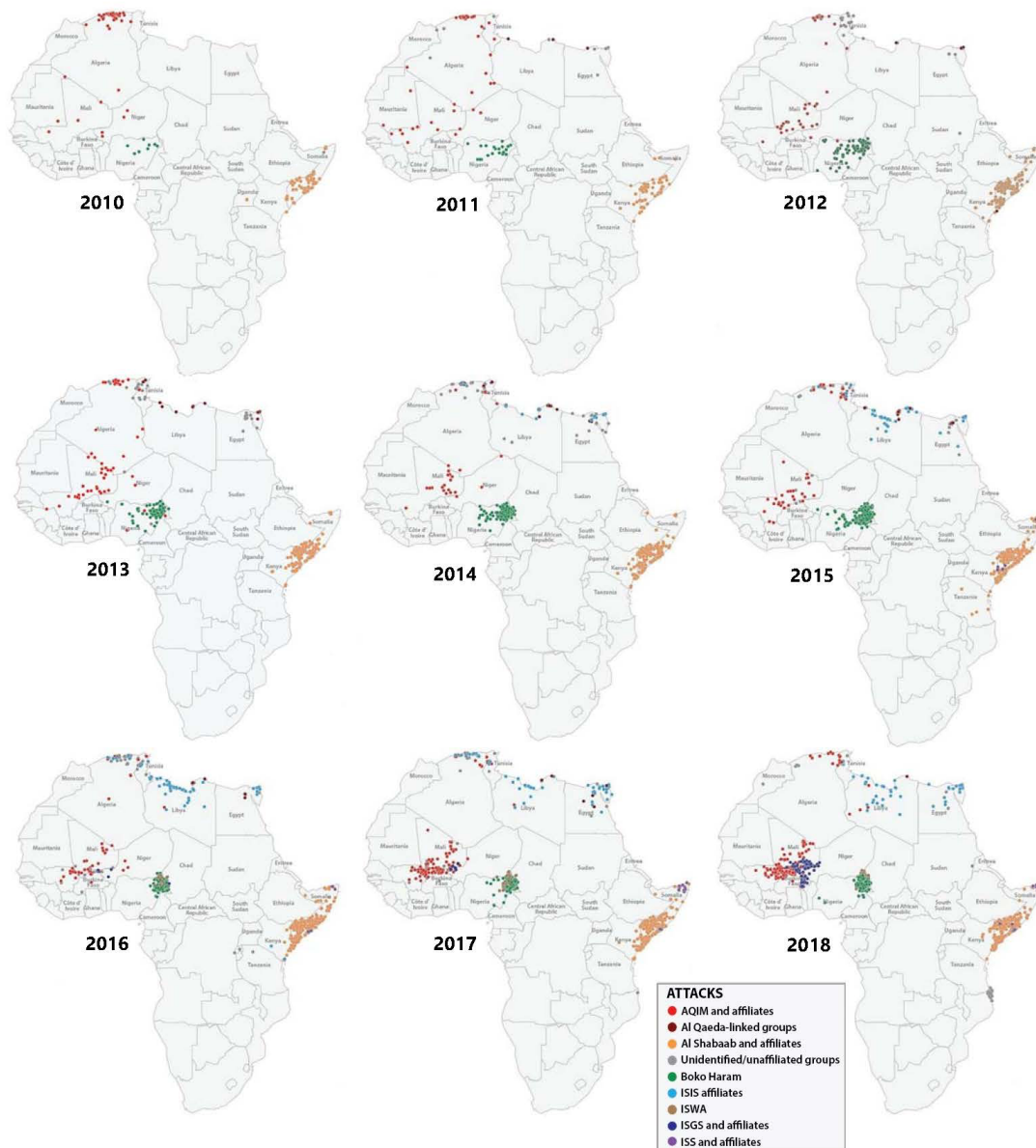
In fact, since the implementation of AFRICOM, as the US military presence increases so has the presence of Islamist terrorist groups (Turse, 2019). “The U.S. military has recently conducted 36 named operations and activities in Africa, more than any other region of the world, including the Greater Middle East” (Turse, 2019). In accordance with AFRICOM’s mission statement, they are on the continent to counter “transnational threats and malign actors, strengthens security forces, and responds to crises” yet the results of the last decade with an increased US military presence illustrates an adverse reaction, increased surveillance infrastructure, and a significant increase in terrorist activity. The Department of Defense’s research institution for African security-related topics, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, shows a plummet in key indicators of security and stability on the continent (Turse, 2019) “Overall, militant Islamist group activity in Africa has doubled since 2012 when there were 1,402 events linked to these groups. Over the past 10 years, there has been a ten-fold increase in violent events (from 288 in 2009 to 3,050 in 2018)” (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2019). Figure 1, sourced from Africa Center for Strategic Studies, illustrates the tenfold increase of militant

activity on the continent (2019). Of course, these events are extremely complex and cannot solely be linked to AFRICOM, but many have argued that the militarized approach to terrorism may have provoked “terrorist backlash and serving as a recruiting tool for extremist groups” (Turse, 2019). Despite the emphasis on a “small footprint” and “no troops on the ground” approach, AFRICOM conducted a number of targeted airstrikes with Somalia as one of the primary targets. As seen with the al-Shabaab attack on CSL Manda Bay which specifically targeted US military capabilities, the US military presence has not deterred nor prevented such groups. With hundreds of airstrikes—which increased under Trump—claiming the lives of 800 people identified as terrorists, mostly members of al-Shabab, they still maintain the top 50% of militant activities in Africa (Turse, 2019). All indicators point to the failure of the US and its African elite partners to convert on their stated mission of countering such malign actors. Moreover, such indicators also highlight the growing significance and consequence of surveillance infrastructure and aerial technology in US security apparatus which reduces the need for physical military troops on the ground. Much research highlights the military operations has not proven to actually decrease terrorism (Kattelman, 2018), and even with AFRICOM being identified as a “different” type of militarism and diplomacy, the effects remain the same as outright militarization. Despite the current state of militant groups and activities in Africa, many experts do not criticize AFRICOM’s presence and its evidenced failure to “secure” the continent over the past decade. Instead, as militant activities continue to increase, many still maintain the need to “secure” Africa from extremism and terrorism without reassessing the ways in which USAFRICOM’s presence may have contributed to the extreme increase of militant activities since its inception.

Despite reports highlighting the positive progress made by African leaders and their international supporters in reducing armed conflicts, AFRICOM was proposed as a solution. Despite the initial resistance by African leaders, scholars, and working-class people against the establishment of AFRICOM, it was created, nonetheless. Now, as AFRICOM is now an accepted feature of US foreign policy in Africa and there is evidenced failure of their mission on the continent, many experts continue to push the narrative that more militarization may be necessary to suppress terrorist activity despite their presence disproving otherwise.

Figure 1

AFRICA'S ACTIVE MILITANT ISLAMIST GROUPS



Notes from source: “Compiled by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Group designations are intended for informational purposes only and should not be considered official. Due to the fluid nature of many groups, affiliations may change.”

Part II: Legitimizing Forces of Empire

“This armaments culture connects the barons of Wall Street and financialization of the world economy to the arms manufacturers, the media and image managers, information and communication managers, military entrepreneurs, defense contractors, congressional representatives, policy entrepreneurs, university funding, and humanitarian experts. In this way modern imperialism represents itself in racialized forms that are represented to the citizens of imperialist states as agencies for doing good or “aiding Africa.”” (Campbell 2015).

Now that I have contextualized the establishment of AFRICOM, the following section of this essay will investigate discourses of humanitarianism as an essential feature of US military expansion and intervention in Africa. This section of the essay interrogates some of the many justifications for militarized US relations with Africa such as counterterrorism, development, and securitization. Moreover, analyzing how these discourses and similar discourses have been used to justify colonial and imperial ventures in Africa. I argue that government entities, media, scholars, “experts” on Africa, and NGOs are all essential in setting the social and political scene for the US to “justifiably” establish military presences in Africa in the name of humanitarianism. I investigate the ways in which US corporations, the academy, military, and media often work in conjunction to produce and distribute the ideological frameworks used to legitimize the expansion of US empire on the African continent. Analyzing AFRICOM within the long colonial and imperial relationship—as more than an aberration of 9/11—between the West and Africa is important for how to categorize and evaluate the power dynamics of such a military “partnership.”

Terrorism and Counter Terrorism

The crafting of ideology was essential to legitimize the militarization of US relations with Africa through AFRICOM—using the “Global War on Terror” as the banner by which further military insertion in Africa was necessary. Part of this crafting was creating the legal and

political frameworks needed to organize the anti-terrorist state. The declaration of war (Public Law 107-40), passed by Congress after September 11, 2001 attacks, which authorizes the use of military force states:

“authorizes the President to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations, or persons” (Daschle, 2001; Chandler, 2019).

Thus, such a declaration authorizes the President to use *all necessary and appropriate force* against any actors, state and non-state, that *he* determines were involved in 9/11 acts in order to *prevent any future acts of terrorism* against the US. The declaration asserts that the President is able to determine who is and who isn't a terrorist and is authorized to kill that person if they are identified as such. Moreover, this declaration gives the President authority to act against such actors to prevent further acts of terrorism. “The institutional framework organizes and defines a terrorist threat, even as it sanctions the [military] commander's actions” (Chandler, 2019). By defining the violence of the state as legitimate in comparison to the illegitimate violence of the “terrorist,” the legal framework acts as one of the main “techniques of power arranged to make war legal” (Chandler, 2019). “The declaration of war made by Congress relies on the backdrop of international terrorism to justify the use of military force; the action of the state is assembled by its negative counterpart” (Chandler, 2019). Because of the power structure in which the state has the power to define terrorism and by extension anti-terrorism, they are able to both legitimize and justify any type of violence conducted in the name of counterterrorism.

“The peoples of Africa (within the continent and outside it) were special targets of the terrorist image-making” (Campbell, 2008). While African countries actively resisted European colonial rule and African American leaders fought against US oppression during the twentieth

century, the white imagination painted Black people who resisted colonial rule, imperialism, and oppression as the terror. A key example was during the South African apartheid and the armed struggle to end apartheid. The ANC (African National Congress), since its founding in 1912, worked to end South African apartheid through non-violent means (Waxman, 2018). The ANC's nonviolent strategy shifted to utilize violence as a means to end apartheid in 1960 when the Sharpeville Massacre occurred. During the Sharpeville Massacre, the police killed 69 people during a mass gathering of approximately 5,000 to 10,000 South Africans at a police station to protest pass laws. Despite the police being responsible for the death of dozens of people, the South African government cracked down on anti-apartheid activists including Nelson Mandela and led to the banning of ANC as an illegal organization (Waxman, 2018). The onus of violence was placed on the protesters for simply gathering and on anti-apartheid organizations for organizing the gatherings: "Their attitude was summed up by the statement of Lieutenant Colonel Pienaar that "the Native mentality does not allow them to gather for a peaceful demonstration. For them to gather means violence." (Reeves, 2007). This is revelatory of the white power arrangements that have always determined legitimate and illegitimate violence often placing the onus of violence on Black African people for simply embodying Blackness. According to such power arrangements, Black South Africans gathering is violence but the police force killing those Black South Africans is legitimate and justified because they are neutralizing an identified threat. In an interview during his time in prison, Mandela stated "The armed struggle [with the authorities] was forced on us by the government" (Waxman, 2018). Black South African armed struggle in retaliation to state-sanctioned violence against Black South Africans was regarded as terrorism by the US. In 1988, the Department of Defense identified the ANC as a regional terrorist group. "From this record it is clear that at every

instance of African agency—to break from colonial forms of plunder—the US was willing and ready to intervene on the side of the colonisers” (Campbell, 2008). By identifying African leaders and organizations like Mandela and the ANC as a threat, a terror, the dominant colonial structures were able to create a foundation for which all means of violence was justified in securing this “threat.”

Thus, because the dominant hegemonic structure of the US is able to both define and construct who and what is terror(ism), *any* actor that opposes the dominant structure can easily be identified as such. “It is of no consequence that the scope of state violence far exceeds that of “terrorists”; rather, the former defends the state and international order while the latter disturbs its function” (Chandler, 2019). This is not to question the violent nature of terroristic events on the African continent today, but to contextualize the image of the terrorist and how discourses and legal framework shift the onus of violence onto certain actors and not others. If any other actor, state or non-state, committed half of the atrocities committed by the United States and its European counterparts via their militaries and police forces, they would, without question, be labeled something far worse than a terrorist. And so, I call into question the discourse and prioritization of the Global War on Terrorism in places like Africa, how the war on terrorism is used to sanction military operational violence on the continent, and who has the authority to define and identify terrorist actors. Because just as the US waged war on terrorism, they, too, were committing human rights abuses and torturous war crimes in places like Abu Gharib (Campbell, 2008). So, who is the United States of America to wage such a war?

Security, Development, and Underdevelopment

Moreover, in its fight against terror, the US cited a lack of development as an essential feature of budding terrorism on the African continent. Much literature (Dept of International

Development, 2005) has made a connection between poverty and terrorism, and thus, asserted the role of developmental aid in securing the continent from terrorism. As such, agendas of development and security in Africa's "fragile states" are deeply intertwined and often indistinguishable with "the interpretation of poverty and underdevelopment as dangerous" (Keenan, 2008). Numerous foreign policy experts, in defense of the new US Africa Command, noted Africa's "failure to develop despite decades of dedicated resources" because of a lack of emphasis on both security and development (McFate, 2008). Firstly, attributing the underdevelopment of Africa to a lack of security and development focused aid from international bodies without acknowledging the centrality of colonialism and capital extraction to said underdevelopment is ahistorical.

"The developed and underdeveloped parts of the present capitalist section of the world have been in continuous contact for four and a half centuries. The contention here is that over that period, Africa helped to develop Western Europe in the same proportion as Western Europe helped to underdevelop Africa" (Rodney, 2018/1972).

As Rodney exemplified in his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, the development of Europe is necessitated on the underdevelopment of Africa because of the flows of natural resources and human beings used to construct the "developed" world. Moreover, Western nations responsible for a central part of Africa's underdevelopment define and determine the conditions of underdevelopment, failed statehood, and fragile states while identifying them as threats to international security (Dept of International Development, 2005). Features of fragile statehood are measured and determined by international organizations like the World Bank (Dept of International Development), which has had an extensive history of imposing its own development methods on African nations—leaving many countries indebted (Campbell, 2015). "U.S. treasury officials and agents who control the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank dictated "restructuring" interventions into the internal affairs of

supposedly sovereign nations.” (Campbell, 2015). “Under the guise of giving out development aid in the form of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), IFIs [international financial institutions] imposed neoliberal polices of privatization, deregulation, and the liberalization of trade upon nation-states in the Global South” (Boyd-Barrett & Mirrlees, 2020). Such determinations—made by the colonial and Western bodies that provoked underdevelopment on the continent—about the status of African countries form the basis for international engagement in these “fragile” regions and encourage efforts to securitize the continent. Therefore, underdevelopment cannot simply vanish through securitization and developmental aid that international sectors deem necessary without decolonizing the extractive foundations of economies of Africa that work to benefit other nations and African elites first.

Attempts by the US and other nations to use the military to coerce the type of development that they deem fit should be criticized. Despite the US’s attempts to remedy the image of US military in Africa by emphasizing AFRICOM as a military partnership with African partners as opposed to a militarization of Africa, the US clearly works to assert its leading role on operations in AFRICOM’s affairs. Even AFRICOM commander Gen. Stephen Townsend admits that part of building these military “partnerships” entails a partner who is willing to bend to the will of the U.S.

“We do those same missions across Africa every day, the first one being maintaining America's strategic access and influence," he said. "That's the number one task that we're doing. So, when the United States calls and needs something at 2 in the morning some night in the future, our African partners say, 'Yes.'” (Garamone, 2022)

Despite the emphasize on partnerships, AFRICOM Commander Stephen Townsend’s own words highlight the asymmetrical relationship between the US and its African partners. The US utilizes AFRICOM to solidify its “strategic access and influence” to the continent while having African leaders operating under said influence. “Paradoxically, the solutions recommended by the US

state and its development industry to the problems of development work to maintain as opposed to challenge an unequal power relationship between the core and peripheral countries” (Boyd-Barrett & Mirrlees, 2020). Even in its supposed attempts to have Africans as equal partners, paternalism reveals itself in the language used to describe the military “partnerships” that AFRICOM cultivates. Moreover, some scholars of African security and development, in defense of AFRICOM, even assert what they believe the continent needs to develop. “To be sure, what the continent needs are roads and schools, not more arms. But the reality is that development cannot happen in the absence of security; a reliable electric grid, for instance, means little when the specter of attack from rebel groups is a real one” (Warner, 2011). Again, Western scholars reinforce the imbalance of power in which one can dictate and determine what is necessary for an *entire* continent of over 1 billion people to achieve and sustain development. Thus, the point is not that AFRICOM needs to be more development-minded as opposed to security-minded as many scholars argue. The point is many intrusions by the US and other Western nations in African affairs has historically revealed itself to be beneficial to the US and Western nations first. Any contemporary forms of US and Africa relations—especially, military relationships—should be critiqued through the historical lenses of colonialism, imperialism, and paternalism. Such asymmetrical power dynamics—especially ones so essential to both Western and African development and lack thereof—do not evaporate from current affairs simply because one asserts that they are no longer relevant.

Ecological Ramifications

With the consequences of climate change looming over the globe, Africans remain one of the most vulnerable groups. Despite being the least responsible for global greenhouse gases, “climate change will bring about an increased incidence of extreme weather events,” food and

water insecurity, internal displacement, and mass migration (ten Have, 2008; Lioko, 2022). In his recent address about AFRICOM and the “growing strategic importance of Africa”, Commander Gen. Townsend, discussed the ways in which climate change can impact the security of Africa: “Climate change serves as a risk accelerant especially when coupled with other persistent fragility factors [...] these issues will have profound negative repercussions on the security environment” (2022). Thus, by framing climate change and its impacts on the continent as a security issue, Townsend asserts the need for a force like AFRICOM to manage the crisis.

“The impact of climate change in Africa can best be addressed by strategic investments in adaptation and resilience, focusing on land and water resources, sustainable and clean power, empowering local leaders to advance community-based approaches to climate adaptation, and other areas where our development partners so expertly lead” (Townsend, 2022).

Townsend suggests that AFRICOM can offer their assistance in continuing to secure the continent by addressing the pertinent issue of climate change. Townsend illustrates the manners in which this military command can contribute to the mitigation of climate change; yet, Townsend never addresses the ways in which the US and its military are one of the largest polluters and contributors to the climate change crisis that affects Africa and the rest of the world today (Belcher et al., 2019). The US has not made significant progress in reducing its own contributions to the impending climate crisis. Thus, Townsend asserting the US’s possible role in alleviating climate crisis in Africa while omitting the US’s role as one of the main causes of this “risk accelerant” serves the U.S. and hurts the African people. The US cannot solve the environmental crisis in Africa that they not only contributed to but continue to be implicated in.

Subjectivity in Scholarship

It is important to re-evaluate how we consider discourses, research, and ideologies set forth by institutions like the government, academia, corporations, media, and other Western

organizations in their assessments of the Global South. Such institutions operate under unique forms of subjectivity as they were foundational parts of constructing Western civilization as we know it today. Such actors work to craft and push forth ideas of Western nations as the bearers of freedom and development—although history indicates otherwise. Moreover, such language reveals that intrusion in another country’s affairs is justified with the “right” backing from the producers and distributors of imperial propaganda.

Because these institutions are so often used to prop up the expansion of US empire, research about AFRICOM is dominated by institutions with ideological commitments to the United States and private corporations. As witnessed through my own research process about USAFRICOM, much of the research and literature is produced by scholars funded, indirectly or directly, by the Army, DOD, Congress, and a series of corporations. “Many scholars rely upon government and corporate grants for research projects, attempt to curry favor with official sources, and reproduce dominant ideological imperatives.” As such, it’s critical to emphasize the fact that academia aids in the production of ideologies that reinforce hegemony (Boyd-Barrett & Mirrlees, 2020). The International Stability Operations Association, formerly known as “The IPOA [International Peace Operations Association], which acts as a front for over 42 private military enterprises, seeks to influence the intellectual discussion on peace by publishing *The Journal of International Peace Operations*” (Campbell, 2008). Formerly known as IPOA, the association is now ISOA—replacing the “P” (peace) with “S” (stability). On their website, they state “ISOA leads studies in Stability Operations worldwide and on major issues identified by our members. ISOA produces white papers to impact decisions of key government policy makers” (ISOA, n.d.). The industry leader in private “stability operations” in Africa asserts their role in the production of materials used to influence policy decisions. Moreover, CSIS or the

Center of Strategic & International Studies, a research institution dedicated to defining the future of national security, has offered commentary, press releases, and reports on AFRICOM since its inception. As of 2019, the government contributed to 29% of their revenue of \$42.8 million dollars while corporate grants and contributions allotted 30% to the revenue total (CSIS, n.d.). Other institutions like The Africa Center, which even I used as a source for information on this topic, is a research institution “the U.S. Department of Defense established and funded by Congress for the study of security issues relating to Africa and serving as a forum for bilateral and multilateral research, communication, training, and exchange of ideas involving military and civilian participants” (Africa Center, n.d.). Thus, I acknowledge the importance of research on Africa, but I challenge the subjectivity of such research in service to the state and corporations.

Of course, these are only examples of the numerous producers of knowledge on African security and peace. But institutions funded by corporate and government entities that are directly implicated in African securitization affairs maintain a heavy presence when researching academic databases and Google Scholar. And if such intellectual production preserves the commitments of US corporations and government in their discussions of the Africa continent, then history has already shown the possible outcomes for the African people—and neither possible outcomes entails ‘peace and security.’ Although research on African security and peace are dominated by specific characters, grassroots organizations like The Black Alliance for Peace, Black Agenda Report, and All-African People’s Revolutionary Party (A-APRP) concentrate their efforts in “opposing the U.S. war agenda,” providing a platform for the Black Left, and continuing the Pan Africanist politic.

Part III: Where Humanitarianism and Military Force Collide—The Case of Libya

For much of this paper, I have contextualized the creation of the US Africa Command and the discourses and frameworks that were utilized and continue to justify its existence. The following section of the paper offers a brief analysis of the 2011 US and NATO intervention in Libya to exemplify the use of these “legitimizing forces” to justify a military incursion. I use Libya because it is one of the more contemporary examples of the conjunction of Western military force and the propaganda machines that enable, legitimize, and justify them. I analyze the discourse surrounding intervention and resulting casualties and political instability. How is humanitarian intervention judged when it does not produce humanitarian results?

In the midst of regional unrest, known as the Arab Spring, Libya gradually plunged into civil unrest raising international concern. On February 21, 2011, the BBC reported: “Witnesses say warplanes have fired on protesters in the city” (Forte, 2012). On February 23, 2011, Amnesty International called for an immediate arms embargo and assets freeze against Libya (Amnesty International, 2011). Despite a media campaign that claimed Gaddafi was bombing his own people, “the Pentagon stated categorically that it could not confirm these stories” (Campbell, 2013). On March 1st during a Pentagon press conference, when asked if they had evidence of Gaddafi firing on his own people from the air, “U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates replied, “We’ve seen the press reports, but we have no confirmation of that.” Backing him up was Admiral Mullen: “That’s correct. We’ve seen no confirmation whatsoever” (Forte, 2012). Yet, on March 17, 2011, the UN passed the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 (Responsibility to Protect or R2P) and two days later, a multi-state NATO-led coalition began a military intervention in Libya (Knipp, 2021). Despite efforts by the AU to solve the conflict diplomatically as opposed to militarily and Libya’s government’s announcement of an

“immediate ceasefire” (Al Jazeera, 2011), Western governments refused to engage nor mediate concessionary dialogues with Libyan governments. “However untrustworthy Qaddafi may be, he decided, the very next day the Resolution was enacted, an immediate ceasefire in conformity with Article 1 and proposed, after President Zuma’s [President of South Africa and Head of AU high level panel] bid to solve the crisis by negotiation, a political dialogue in line with Article 2.” (Cheikh, 2013). Yet, numerous Western elites and leaders ranging from Hilary Clinton to David Cameron refused to accept verbal ceasefires without actions on the ground. “Not only the world leading imperial elites made no ceasefire proposal of their own but also they fixed preconditions which took no account of the fact that Article 1 of the UN Security Council Resolution did not, of course, place the burden of a complete ceasefire exclusively on Qaddafi [sic]” (Cheikh, 2013). As such, despite the emphasis of humanitarianism and the need to protect civilians, alternative solutions like engaging in cease-fire discussions—as proposed by the AU—were rejected by NTC and NATO in favor of military intervention. President Obama stated, “Let me be clear, these terms are not negotiable ... If Gaddafi does not comply ... the resolution will be enforced through military action” (Al Jazeera, 2011). Moreover, this hard line of non-negotiation in which the West wields its international military and political might over Libya left little room for Libya’s government to operate and led to an intense escalation of military intervention.

Even with admitted violence by Gaddafi’s government against protesters/rebel forces, the magnitude of violence has not been evidenced to be “genocidal” despite media claims and reports which claimed an impending massacre by Gaddafi’s forces. Yet, after the deployment of forces, President Obama and UK prime minister David Cameron and French President Nicolas Sarkozy claimed victory in halting “the advance of Gaddafi’s forces” and saving “tens of thousands of lives” from “the bloodbath that [Gaddafi] had promised to inflict on the besieged

city of Benghazi” (Obama, et al., 2011; Forte, 2012). The swiftness of international response was, in part, because of the calls of impending genocide by Gaddafi on Benghazi. “Yet, French jets bombed a retreating column, but what we saw was a very short column of 14 tanks, 20 armored personnel carriers, some trucks and ambulances” which, according to *Slouching Towards Sirte* author, Maximilian Forte, could not have possibly destroyed the city of Benghazi with a population of nearly 700,000 people (2012). During the uprising in Benghazi, “Amnesty International found that no more than 110 people had been killed during the protests (including pro-government people)” (Forte 2012). As such the claims of genocidal massacre by air and ground, which were considered the pretexts for interventions, are mostly unsubstantiated. Non-state actors like the media work as an essential distributor of information and narratives used to legitimize intervention by the state. Under claims of humanitarianism, the West was able to not only frame Gaddafi as a madman who needed to be deposed but were also able to present themselves as saviors and their intervention as necessary.

Notably, although NATO coalition forces spearheaded majority of the intervention operations, AFRICOM led the initial coalition to enforce the UN Council Resolution 1973 through Operation Odyssey Dawn (Garamone, 2011). After Muammar Gaddafi was killed on “October 20, 2011, as a result of NATO airstrike and allied/rebel forces on the ground,” steady US military relations increased in Libya (Forte, 2012). AFRICOM took control over the rebuilding and training of Libya’s national army, border security, and created a task force, “Joint Task Force Odyssey Guard” to assume control of post conflict operations in Libya (Forte, 2012). Despite the transitional government not yet being democratically elected, AFRICOM formed a military partnership with the transitional regime (Forte, 2012) to aid in re-building process and engage with a partner they previously had little strategic access to while Gaddafi was in office.

As of 2020, AFRICOM worked to support the Libyan government with ongoing conflict amongst factions stemming from instability from the NATO intervention and civil war—with the same line of counterterrorism:

“U.S. Africa Command provided the security that enabled this important Department of State engagement with Prime Minister Sarraj,” said Townsend. “The current violence fuels the potential risk of terrorism and prolongs human suffering. Foreign military interference in Libya is not welcome, nor helpful” (U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs, 2020).

Ironically, now that the US has established military partnership with Libyan governments post-Gaddafi, “foreign military interference” is now decried as unhelpful. In the aftermath of lingering conflicts between the Libyan government and armed groups stemming directly from the initial 2011 intervention, the US *now* emphasizes “the imperative for an immediate ceasefire and end to offensive combat operations by all parties” (U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs, 2020).

Official casualties from the conflict and intervention have been reported from a number of sources on either side of the conflict, yet independent sources of the death and injury count have yet to be made available. Libya has been plagued with internal conflicts and divisions since the deposing and killing of Muammar Gaddafi. As the US and NATO allies seemingly fulfilled their roles in avoiding reports of impending genocide by Gaddafi and “saving tens of thousands of lives,” the same line of thought was mostly abandoned once Gaddafi was killed. Even when civilians continued to be killed and displaced after the murder of Gaddafi and numerous factions vying for power, there were no calls for humanitarian military intervention. When numerous reports of Black Africans being targeted, detained, and tortured because of claims that labeled them as Pro-Gaddafi mercenaries in the aftermath of the NATO invasion (Forte, 2012), there were no calls for humanitarian military intervention. The point is not that (more) intervention is

necessary, but to highlight the contradictions between the reality of the situation and the West's actions and purported claims. Despite the impact of the invasion, President Barack Obama called the intervention his worst mistake—not because of the intervention itself—but because of a lack of planning for the aftermath (BBC News, 2016). He still believed that he was ideologically justified because of the commitments to R2P and humanitarianism. “Rather than the protection of civilians that key R2P advocates applauded as the defining feature of the intervention in Libya, what we have seen is a wide range of systemic and recurring actions that demonstrate the exact opposite of civilian being protected” (Forte, 2012). The reality is that Libyans are not better off for the NATO intervention—claiming “humanitarianism” as the primary justification for such an intervention does not change the reality.

“To say that this intervention can then be “humanitarian” is to speak the language of the liberal ideology that has dominated the world system since the so-called end of the Cold War. Humanitarianism—and its correlate of protection—speaks the language of “civilization” (democracy, human rights, free enterprise) and opposes itself to “savagery” (dictatorship, terrorism, command economies). Humanitarianism is thus built on a mode of categorizing the world, of producing the kinds of nomenclature that are pre-determined to justify the ambitions and fears of the dominant powers. The mythology of Western humanitarianism—great at producing symbols and ideals, almost never realized as actual facts on the ground—is one that promises salvation (liberation, protection, democratization)” (Forte, 2012).

Conclusion

Much of this thesis works to analyze the ways in which state and non-state actors collaborate towards building support and legitimization for US military interventions in other regions of the world. We cannot underestimate the vast array of actors implicated in the expansion of US empire. Libya was just one of many examples of this collaboration of actors. USAFRICOM stands as just one branch of an expansive US empire.

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