Surveillance Over a Zone of Conflict: Africom and the Politics of Securitisation of Africa

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Abstract

The United States of America's establishment of the Africa Command (AFRICOM) is one of the practical indications of the post-9/11 discourse of 'securitisation' of Africa under the discourse of war on terror. Within the post-9/11 Western and American thought there was a shift from seeing Africa as a humanitarian case into a new conception of Africa as a zone of conflict within which terrorists would launch their activities. Confronted with this situation, African states should act together and formulate unified foreign policy options if Africa would survive the scourge of securitisation of the continent. In this article we examine the security terrain within which AFRICOM was established and reasons why there was a push for it to be established on the African continent. We see it as part of American hegemonic drive to maintain surveillance over the continent under the guise of monitoring terrorist activity. We also raise the often ignored issue of existence of weak states that is not only used as justifications for such phenomenon as the AFRICOM as well as proliferation of private security companies, but also that inhibits and limits the African foreign policy options. The justification is that African security situation marked by poorly policed borders makes the continent a zone of conflict that has dangerous spill-over to affect the Western and American zones of comfort and peace.

Introduction

In the current securitisation discourse the interactions between the powerful nations of the North and Africa are marked by shifting politics within which the African continent is approached as a terrain of risk, fear and threat to global peace and stability. This thinking has the danger of reviving the dangerous argument of seeing Africa as offering nothing but chaos, risk and threats to the supposed 'peace zones' of North America and Europe. The open indicator of the securitisation of Africa came in the form of establishment of the United States Africa Command (USAfrican or Africom) on the 1st of October 2007. This was defined as a new unified combat command of the United States Department of Defence to be responsible for USA military operations in and military relations with fifty-three African nations in the exception of Egypt. The justification for this interventionist move was containment of terrorism.

The end of the Cold War in general and the 9/11 terrorist incident in particular had far reaching impact on global power politics and shaping of global security architecture. This article analyses how Africa has featured within this shifting global politics and in the evolving global security architecture. Since the end of the Second World War and Truman's speech of 1949, Africa featured mainly in global politics as emerging from colonialism and as part of the underdeveloped world that needed humanitarian rehabilitation. But the dynamics of the Cold War particularly the 'proxy wars' made Africa feature into East-West global security calculations and the West's drive to contain communism. It was during the Cold War that securitisation of Africa began as Soviet imperialism contended with Western imperialism in the centre of Africa in such places as Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Somalia, Congo and many other Cold War theatres of war. The securitisation partly took the form of shipments of arms of war into the African continent and partly competition between the West and East to sponsor warring factions within the continent. The liberation struggles against colonialism offered the East and the West outlets to intervene in Africa with the Soviet Union backing many African liberation movements like Movement for Popular Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in Angola, Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU in Zimbabwe, African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and many others in its bid to paint the continent red.

At the end of the Cold War securitisation of Africa took new forms characterised by proliferation of specialised private companies offering military and police services that were previously the preserve of the state. This new phenomenon developed within a terrain of the existence of very weak African states and very vulnerable African leaders. This phenomenon became also intertwined with the changing role of the state. Traditionally, the state enjoyed monopoly of the means and resources of violence and this distinguished it from other social formations. What is even more ominous is that privatisation of security happened in tandem with traditional mercenary activities taking a corporate form and fishing in the troubled waters of Africa.

Current efforts at securitisation of Africa are closely tied to the politics of weak and collapsed states in Africa particularly how the rulers of weak states have used their agency to invite private security sector into Africa for regime security purposes since the end of the Cold War (Ashley, 1988; Ashley, 1987). What has not received scholarly attention is the issue of deliberate compradorisation of some African states by their cunning leaders and the phenomenon of 'imperialism by invitation.' At the global level the present era is also characterised by intensification of 'securitization' of Africa that is, defining Africa as a security risk and a zone of conflict. This discourse came into the centre of international politics following 9/11 attacks on the twin towers in the United States of America. Within this discourse the African continent is an abode of weak, failed and collapsed states that are in turn abodes of terrorists.

It is important to highlight from this outset that the weak African state is not an innocent political formation requiring humanitarian rehabilitation. It is a dangerous phenomenon if conceptualised from a security perspective. The rulers of weak African states have engaged in all sorts of complex survival techniques that include inviting those companies that sell military skills to the highest bidder across the world into Africa. In a bid to outwit competitors in power games, leaders of weak states like Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola and many others have wilfully transformed their states into what one would term comprador regimes, that is, those regimes that did not care much about the welfare of their citizens but who served as agents of foreign interests and foreign businesses (Rodney 1982: 12-18). Closson (2006:1) conceptualised weak states in security terms as 'an arena for the operations of trans-territorial networks locked in a struggle for resources.' In weak states, sovereignty is highly contested, 'given that the weak state is an arena for local and global actors.' Sovereignty 'belongs to many and is loosely sanctioned' (Closson 2006: 1). Within this scenario, rulers of weak states are actively engaged in what Michael Doyle (1968:8-12) terms 'imperialism by invitation' in which these rulers openly invite powerful Private Military Companies like now defunct Executive Outcomes (EO) to help them deal with local rivals who might also be having their own foreign connection and backing. One broad traditional argument on weak states is that which emphasised the notion of 'First World' being complicit in the weakening of the 'Third World.'

This argument has dominated debates in the analysis of global arms sales, proxy wars waged by the superpowers during the Cold War, current economic debates regarding protectionist policies of developed countries in the agricultural sector, and international organisations and transnational corporations implicated in bribe scandals in developing countries. This approach is sympathetic to the weak states and presents these states as victims of external manipulation and ignores the dangerous agency of the leaders of these states, particularly how they invite private military forces to operate in Africa and to engage in African conflicts. Weak states cannot be studied as mere orphans of the Cold War who are falling prey and victim to the machinations of Private Military Companies (PMCs) and Private Security Companies (PSCs) and as victims of powerful global forces that deliberately sap their strength and compromise their sovereignty and stability in order to exploit such resources as minerals and oil. Robert Rotberg (2002:127) has noted that:

> *Failure and weakness can flow from a nation's geographical, physical, historical, and political circumstances, such as colonial errors and Cold War policy mistakes. More than structural or institutional weaknesses, human agency is also culpable, usually in a fatal way. Destructive decisions by individual leaders have always paved the way to state failure.*

The importance of Rotberg's argument is that it captures the often-ignored human agency and the role of such leaders as Siaka Stevens of Sierra Leone, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and Mohamed Said Barre of Somalia in the weakening of their states. These leaders were also responsible for instrumentalisation of disorder that opened the gates for private military forces to intervene in their countries. If weak states were ever victims of powerful forces that compromised their sovereignty and stability, they must be understood as willing victims presided over by weak but cunning leaders who are able to operate within complex global commercial networks for personal interests, personal gains, and regime security. Leaders of weak states are also active in supporting the process of securitisation of Africa as long as this process ensures their political survival. Other African leaders like Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe are using the discourse of terrorism to justify their authoritarianism and repression including such draconian pieces of legislation as Public Order and Security Act (POSA); Interception of Information Bill and Access to Information and Privacy Act (AIPA). The opposition forces are easily label as terrorists that deserve liquidation.

Rulers of Weak States and their Agency

Many scholars have examined how the end of the Cold War left numerous African states in very weak position, having been abandoned by the Cold War godfathers and patrons. Some of the African leaders who seemed to be managing to control and even suppress internal threats to their power because of external support were suddenly left alone bereft of internal legitimacy but also unable to eliminate or manage military challenges from armed local strong men as well as vocal civil society. During the Cold War it was very easy for weak leaders and their weak states to solicit loans, diplomatic and military support based on ideological orientation. With the end of the Cold War support for weak regimes in Africa dwindled drastically exposing many African states to conflict (Jackson, 1990; Midgal 1988; Michaels 1993 and Ayoob 1995).

The end of the Cold War inaugurated what has been popularly termed the 'third wave of democracy' characterised by some long serving Africa politicians being challenged by the civil society to democratise and the one party state regimes crumbling under challenge from those political figures riding on the democratic wave (Huntington 1993). In other parts of Africa, some countries like Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia crumbled into what became known as 'failed states' with different strong men fighting each other for power, tearing the whole state edifice into chaos and disarray.

The question of investigation here is how did some of the rulers of weak states try to survive in the post-Cold War environment where there was little external support? William Reno (1997: 166) noted that the most hard pressed regimes re-worked new ties with outsiders, especially Cold War clandestine commercial ties, to manage and manipulate the latter's demands, rather than succumbing to the 'failed state' paradigm. The discourse of filling the so-called capacity gap opened by the existence of weak states whose rulers needed protection from internal opponents and whose rulers could not trust the local military forces is one justification for securitisation of Africa. According to Reno (1997: 167):

> *Rulers of some weak states use creditor demands to privatise state agencies and liberalise markets as excuses to hire foreign firms that field mercenaries. These foreign soldiers serve the joint interests of foreign firms and weak states' rulers to control resources and deny them to independent strongmen.*

What this indicates is that the post-Cold War international economy has some resources that it deploys strategically in connivance with weak but cunning African leaders of weak states. It is therefore, important to theorise the concept of weak state in the context of security and how the rulers of these states manage to construct such complex networks with foreign firms, deliberately mortgaging African natural resources to these firms, while at the same time using these firms' military support to suppress political competitors and to procure weapons to sustain their weak regimes.

Thus a focus on the weak African states and their leaders as a major factor in the process of securitisation of Africa is by no means meant to ignore other factors including the realities of terrorism and the desire by dominant nations to re-order the world in their preferred fashion.

War on Terror and Securitization of Africa

The issue of weak states and contemporary global security is widely discussed but mainly in the context of the United States of America's global war against terrorism. Africa is factored into United States security analysis as a continent with the highest number of weak states conducive for terrorist operations. This point was explicitly argued by Robert I. Rotberg (2002:127) when he wrote that:

> *In the wake of September 11, the threat of terrorism has given the problem of failed nation-states immediacy and importance that transcends its previous humanitarian dimension....Although the phenomenon of state failure is not new, it has become much more relevant and worrying than ever before. In less interconnected eras, state weakness could be isolated and kept distant. Failure had fewer implications for peace and security. Now, these states pose dangers not only to themselves and their neighbours but also to peoples around the globe.*

In this argument Rotberg is joined by Francis Fukuyama (2004: 92) who wrote that 'since the end of the Cold War, weak and failing states has arguably become the single-most important problem for international order.' The Secretary of State in the United States of America, Condoleezza Rice reiterated the same thinking when she declared that nations incapable of exercising 'responsible sovereignty' have 'a spill over effect' taking the form of terrorism, weapons proliferation, and other dangers (Garfinkle 2005: 47-50). This thinking was influenced by the operations of Al Qaeda within Afghanistan (Patrick 2006: 27). Weak states are discussed in this thinking alongside with failing and failed states. Writing about the dangers posed by these types of states, Marina Ottaway and Stefan Mair (2004:1) had this to say:

> *Failing and failed state present a grave danger to international stability as well as to the well-being of their populations. Internationally, they can become safe havens for terrorist organisations, centers for trade of drugs and arms, and breeding grounds for dangerous diseases. Regionally, they can spill instability well past their borders and create a conflict dynamic affecting neighbouring countries. Domestically, they cannot provide security for their citizens or deliver essential public goods.*

This characterisation of weak, failing and failed states and the dangers they pose was made in relation to security concerns of the West who were said to be 'poorly prepared to deal with' (Ibid). The main weakness of the argument that connects weak states with global terrorism is that the security of Africa itself is not emphasised. What is emphasised is the security of the Western and American nations. This is clearly noted by Rita Abrahamsen (2005: 65-67) when she argues that Africa was being framed as a security threat to the West. Abrahamsen engaged with the crucial issue of how since 9/11 the Copenhagen School of International Relations Theory with its emphasis on security as the outcome of specific social processes like underdevelopment and poverty came into use by the West and America in its engagement with African issues. Traditionally, Africa was a humanitarian and a development problem, but after 9/11, Africa became a risk continent in a globalising world. Abrahamsen terms this the politics of securitization of Africa, concretized through 'securitizing speech acts' like British Prime Minister Tony Blair's definition of Africa as 'scar on the conscience of the world' (Abrahamsen 2005: 55-80).

Securitization as understood within the Copenhagen school of thought on security is a reference to specific speech act of framing an issue as an 'existential threat,' that requires extraordinary measures beyond the routines and norms of everyday politics. Barry Buzan, Ole Weaver and Jaap de Wilde (1997: 26) noted that the 'existential threat' is dramatised and presented as an issue of supreme priority. The example of how Americans and the British intervened militarily against Saddam Hussein was the clearest case of construction of a security threat.

On Africa the dramatization is summarised as 'terror thrives in Africa's rich ruins' and this encapsulate the Western presentation, perception and narration of anything happening in Africa in security threat terms (Abrahamsen 2005:65-70). In this discourse Africa is seen as a free trading zone for the underworld and in this way constituting itself as a threat to the Western and American zones of peace.

Huysmans (1998: 569-589) makes the point that securitization is not merely a question of representation, or a symbolic act, but has clear political implications. For instance, identifying Africa as a security issue is not an innocent practice because it changes the mode of engagement between the rich North and Africa. If approached as a security issue, Africa may encourage fear and unease, precipitating policy interventions of a more militarised and illiberal nature (Abrahamsen 2005: 68). In this discourse Africa is generally viewed like the Arabs and the Arab world—associated with terror and terrorists.

It is therefore important to avoid securitizing Africa in an endeavour to explain how the phenomenon of weak states in Africa constitute itself as an enticement for operations of PSCs and private military forces. We need to be specific on the aspects of the weak state that make it prone to invite private militaries. We need to be vigilant against falling into invoking the racist argument of referring to such states as Zimbabwe, Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as reflecting the African Hobbesian image of a state of nature, where there is no order and where citizens live in continual fear and danger of violent death.

Weak States within the Global Agenda of Securitisation of Africa

There are no casual connections between weak states and the problem of securitisation of Africa. Neither is there a casual connection between weak states and terrorism. It is complex and often hidden. But those pushing for securitisation for Africa make such casual connections in the justification of their agenda. On path ways to state weakness in Africa, Rotberg (2002: 131) argued that: 'Some rush to the brink of failure, totter at the abyss, remain fragile, but survive' adding that:

> *Weakness is endemic in many developing nations—the halfway house between strength and failure. Some weak states, such as Chad…exhibit several of the defining characteristics of failed states and yet do not fail. Others, such as Zimbabwe, may slide rapidly from comparative strength to the very edge of failure. A few…may suffer vicious, enduring civil wars without ever failing, while remaining weak and susceptible to failure* (Rotberg 2002: 131).

Rotberg (2002: 132) noted that strong states are marked by capability of controlling their territories and delivery of a high order of political goods to their citizens. According to him strong states perform well according to standard indicators such as per capita GDP, the United Nations' Human Development Index, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, and Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report. Strong states offer high level of security from political and criminal violence, ensuring political freedom and civil liberties, and create environments conducive to the growth of economic opportunities. It is within this discourse that strong states are supposed to be places or zones of peace and order.

On the other hand, failing and weak states are one and the same thing. A failed state is a shell of a policy that remains only as a mere geographic expression, with borders but without effective way to exert authority within those borders. Sub-state actors take over what was previously the preserve of the state (Rotberg 2002: 133-134). A weak state becomes a medium for the operations of trans-territorial networks locked in a struggle for resources, in which the networks replaces legitimate channels of communication (Linz and Stephan 1996).

According to the proponents of securitisation of Africa as long as weak states exist the world is at the most risk of terrorism. But securitisation of Africa is also taking the form of invitation of private military forces to operate in Africa. At the time that South African legislation against mercenaries like the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act began to bite, the founder and director of Executive Outcomes, expressed that he was not all that concerned because: 'Three other African countries have offered us a home and a big European group has even proposed buying us out' (Zarate 1998:11). This statement is very important because it means that while some African states like South Africa were busy trying to regulate and even abolish companies associated with mercenaries some African states were inviting the same mercenaries to their countries. The emergence of Lifeguard firm in Sierra Leone immediately after Executive Outcomes was legally challenged and closed in South Africa indicates that Executive Outcomes did not die it only metamorphosed and relocated into Sierra Leone and took the new name. Lifeguard was made up of many of Executive Outcomes' former employees, maintained some of its old corporate ties, and operated in its former zones (Singer 2004: 535).

Sierra Leone is one example of a comprador state whereby in the face of extreme state weakness, the leaders of this West African country invited Executive Outcomes. The initial deployment of this private military outfit was to secure the capital city and the mineral areas that were falling into the hands of rebels. Since the arrival of Executive Outcomes forces in the country, the leaders of Sierra Leone found themselves heavily dependent upon shared interests with foreign businesses. This entailed accounting and the state being transformed into an agent of foreign imperatives. Michael Doyle (1986) coined the concept of 'imperialism by invitation' with specific reference to a situation in which leaders of weak states recruit or invite outside help to deal with local rivals. William Reno (1997: 182) writes that:

As in the era of formal imperialism, partnerships with foreigners centralised power in the hands of the collaborating faction that controlled the distribution of economic opportunity.

All this happens as the leaders of weak states use a foreign partnership to compensate for the lack of great-power patronage (Reno: 1997:227). In the period 1995-1996, the Sierra Leonean government depended entirely upon private military forces provided by Executive Outcomes as the rebel movement (Revolutionary United Front -RUF) that was fighting against the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF), were encroaching the capital city. The fact that after clearing the rebels out of the diamonds fields, the beleaguered Sierra Leonean government signed out huge diamond concessions to the foreign private firms aligned to Executive Outcomes like Branch Energy, forced Herbert M. Howe (1998: 318) to consider Executive Outcomes in terms of a 're-colonising force.' This is how he put it: 'Recolonisation' involves highly advantageous concessions, support for pro-EO politicians, and the permanent retention of foreign security personnel' (Howe 1998: 318).

In January 1996, the International Crisis Group (ICG) sent a mission to Sierra Leone and the mission unearthed a myriad of complicated links between security firms, mining houses, and mining concessions (Harker 1998: 2). The mission even concluded that the crisis in Sierra Leone was not the 'rebel war' but weak governance and economic mismanagement punctuated by complex involvement of PMCs. Sandline International, a big private security company was involved in the conflict that pitted President Kabbah against the rebels. It provided weapons and skills to the forces loyal to Kabbah who had been ousted by his own military in May 1997 (Harker 1998: 2). Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams in their recent Country Report on Sierra Leone noted that:

While the recent conflict (1991-2002) provides the immediate context for the expansion of private security provision, the use of private security has a long history in Sierra Leone. As early as 1936 the Sierra Leone Selection Trust, a De Beers subsidiary, was allowed to field a private 'security force' of 35 armed men to patrol its diamond concession in the Kono area. Much later, in April 1995, the Strasser government hired the South African Executive Outcomes to fight the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), an arrangement that was continued by President Kabbah until January 1997. Both the extraction of Sierra Leone's mineral wealth and the survival of its elite have thus historically been crucially dependent on the involvement of international private security actors, a relationship which continues, albeit in different ways, in the current post-conflict situation.

In Sierra Leone alone over 30 different PSCs have been operating there according Sierra Leonean Office of National Security (ONS), a government agency responsible for the private security sector. The companies include Mount Everest which is the largest employing approximately 1 600, followed by Pentagon with over a thousand guards, Hughes Security with 800 and many others (Abrahamsen and Williams Report n.d).

The example of Sierra Leone indicates how rulers of weak states use apparent weakness as a political resource, standing on its head the Weberian notion that state viability is proportional to its claim on a monopoly of violence (Reno: 1997: 184). The Sierra Leonean leaders privatised violence and accumulation of wealth to reliable foreigners, and contracting out the task of disciplining wayward politicians and social groups. As long as weak states and their weak leaders continue to accommodate foreign financiers and fighters as an alternative security measure for their power, then it becomes very hard for Africa to speak with one voice on issues of regulation of the private security sector. Private security sector is very vital to the security of leaders of weak states. Leaders of weak states use more reliable foreign mining firms and foreign private mercenary armies to marginalise threatening strong men.

William Reno (1997, 1998, and 2000), has ably demonstrated how leaders of Angola and Sierra Leone have made use of private military forces to collect revenue, defend territory, and conduct diplomacy with other states. The use of private security forces by rulers of weak states forms what Reno (1998: 9) terms 'regime innovations for managing' internal threats. This background is important in understanding why African leaders are not speaking one language vis-à-vis the establishment of AFRICOM. Liberia has accepted to accommodate the phenomenon whereas other countries like South Africa vehemently reject it.

AFRICOM and African Security

The United States Africa Command is one of ten established unified combatant commands of the United States Department of Defense (DOD) with a central focus on the African continent. The US Africa Command, which is also known as AFRICOM or USAFRICOM was formally established in October 2008 following extensive deliberations resulting from a resolution by the US government to institute a command specifically for Africa. While the continent had previously been under the auspices of the European Command (EUCOM), Pacific Command (PACOM) and Central Command (CENTCOM) predominantly as a peripheral area of importance, the increasing strategic geo-political and economic significance of Africa to the US induced the need to develop an exclusive unified command.

Among America's key tactical interests include the undertaking to curb global terrorism, the procurement of natural resources which are vital to its politico-economic stability (primarily oil), the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS, the aversion of conflict and humanitarian crises, as well the competitive struggle for influence with China in Africa, a nation which rivals the American presence on the continent (McFate, 2008:12). In addition to the above foreign policy directives, the US government has also cited fundamental mutual interests with the continent as a significant motive in the establishment of AFRICOM. In a speech by President Bush on 7 February 2007, in an announcement of the establishment of the unit, these shared concerns include 'development, health, education, democracy and economic growth' on the continent (USAfrican Command, 2007). At present, AFRICOM is engaged with 53 African states, excluding Egypt, on the basis of the above-mentioned strategic areas (Blanche, 2009:46).

The responses from the African continent have raised various concerns regarding the nature of future relations between the former and the US following the creation of the Command. Among the issues emerging from the continent, the most critical has been the possibility of militarized foreign relations between the US and Africa; an inclination which emerges from the primacy of AFRICOM as a component of the DOD, thereby overriding other above-mentioned policy areas.

Uncertainty with AFRICOM's Objectives

Although the United States has highlighted mutual interests in the establishment of AFRICOM, the Command has generally been met with resistance from a majority of the African states. By and large, most countries have expressed their reservations about AFRICOM by rejecting the DOD's request to set up headquarters and auxiliary bases on their soil. The hostility primarily emerges from a widespread sense of skepticism regarding the US governments' actual intentions in setting up the Command. The negative attitude prevailing across much of the continent was articulated by then South African Defense Minister Mosiuoa Lekota, in a statement which contains undertones of the likely undesirable security implications of creating regional headquarters. Lekota argued that if there was to be an influx of armed forces into one or other of the African countries, that might affect the relations between the sister countries and not encourage an atmosphere and a sense of security (*Mail & Guardian*, 29.08.07).

The "uncertainty" which Lekota alludes to has been reiterated by other prominent African as well as US officials. Former Rwandan general secretary of the Defense Ministry Frank Rusagara, has similarly expressed a level of discontent with the objectives of the Command, citing the lack of clear information about the nature of AFRICOM's engagement with the continent (McFate, 2008:18). In the same way, senior officials of the American Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs of the House Oversight Committee conveyed displeasure at AFRICOM's alleged interests of the latter in the continent.

Contrary to the above-mentioned policy guidelines of AFRICOM, the Subcommittee argues that the American government has overriding economic and geo-political goals which trump the humanitarian and mutual health, democratic, educational and developmental goals (Blanche, 2009:46). According to the Committee, these primary aims include the American need to secure the access to, and procurement of oil from Africa, as well as counteracting China's growing influence on the continent in terms of oil and mineral resources, as well as curbing terrorism (Blanche, 2009:46). Most importantly, the uncertainty across the continent regarding the institution of a base for AFRICOM emerges from the militarized foreign policy which the US is seemingly adopting towards the continent through the Command.

AFRICOM and Continental Security: The African Fears

The level of uncertainty and unease which prevails regarding the DOD's AFRICOM mission appears to be informed by the nature of past military engagement with the continent. Historically, the US military involvement in Africa has been informed by unilateral foreign policy efforts which have undermined the level of security for various states. For example, during the Cold War, the US army supported and sponsored regimes which served their anti-communist interests, even when the states were unpopular, corrupt or aggressive. In line with this argument, it has been stated that during the Cold War era, the US utilized proxy military tactics against any state that maintained or developed relations with China and the Soviet Union, 'while aligning closer to anti-Communist African despots who were anti-democratic and had horrendous human rights records' (Okumu, 2007:8). The nature of this Cold War engagement, in retrospect, may have influenced the perspective adopted by African leaders with respect to the new Command as a military pursuit which may serve the selective interests of the US at the expense of the continents security.

The African security situation on the continent has also been undermined by the US's counterterrorism endeavours, as well as the efforts to protect the much-needed oil resources. In 2006, in an attempt to fend off terrorists from harbouring within Somalia's Islamic-led state, the American government is stated to have covertly organized the overthrow of the former's government with the assistance of Ethiopia (Blanche, 2009:46). Although Somalia has historically been relatively unstable, by toppling the longest standing government in the state, the level of security and political stability has been significantly undermined by the American involvement. Moreover, the establishment of a DOD military base in Djibouti, from which the invasion of Somalia was coordinated, has added to the undermined security in the region, particularly due to the reason that through AFRICOM, the US government intends to institute 12 such bases by 2012 (Gberie, 2007:42).

These bases have also been poised to play a role in protecting the US' interests in the oil production in states such as Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Angola and Gabon. American energy security needs have urged the government to exert influence in the above states through military presence. This objective has been met by the apparent militarization of the American foreign policy on the continent through the institution of AFRICOM. For instance, in addition to proposed plans to shore up maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea for the protection of US oil supplies and exploration, the threat to the supplies from the Niger Delta has indicated that AFRICOM may intend to intervene (Okumu, 2007:11). In the case of the latter, the involvement of the US in an already fragile conflict zone may exacerbate the dire security situation in the Delta.

Among African states there is a general lack of consensus on the advantages and disadvantages of the introduction of AFRICOM onto African soil. For example while the majority of African states, have firmly rejected the establishment of its headquarters in the continent, Libya has not agreed with others (Gberie, 2007:41). Such a development may serve to generate a sense of discord between African states. According to Wafula Okumu, the Head, African Security Analysis Programme for the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa, disharmony regarding the development of an AFRICOM base may endorse the militarization of US-African relations, while undermining multilateral relations (Okumu, 2007:9). It has also been stated that the presence of American troops in various states may compromise the continents Non-Aggression Pact, which prohibits, among other actions, the hosting of foreign army bases in Africa (Okumu, 2007:9).

Moreover, it has also been mentioned by key political figures in Africa as well as in the US, in light of the considerable level of competition on the continent from states such as China, that the introduction of AFRICOM bases on the continent may engender geo-political and military concerns regarding the establishment of bases by other foreign actors. This uncertainty is reiterated in a question posed by the Libyan Ambassador to South Africa:

> *How can the U.S. divide the world up into its own military commands? Wasn't that for the United Nations to do? What would happen if China also decided to create its Africa command? Would this not lead to conflict on the continent*? (Okumu, 2007:5)

Similar sentiment has been expressed by John Tierney, a Massachusetts Democrat, in asking, 'What would be the reaction in Washington if China or Russia established a military 'outpost' in Africa?'(Blanche, 2009: 46).

Conclusion

The phenomenon of securitisation of Africa is complex involving changing perceptions of the continent from a humanitarian and development category to a zone of conflict where terrorists hide. This is a concern of the West and America that are trying to portray their territories as zones of peace that are only put at risk by those areas that have no strong security architecture like Africa. It is within this changing Western and American global security discourse that the establishment of AFRICOM must be understood alongside the earlier phenomenon of proliferation and growth of private security sector together with pockets of mercenarism. The African state which like all other state had enjoyed some degree of control over the means and resources of violence is now directly challenged not only by the proliferation and growth of private security sector but by the overt move by the American government to keep close military surveillance over the whole African continent via establishment of combat command centres. The phenomenon of weak, collapsed and failed states has been used as the justification for such dangerous securitisation of Africa. Underneath the desire to monitor the movement of terrorists there is the more sinister and long-standing Western and American hegemonic strategy to access strategic resources like oil. Leaders of weak states who are pre-occupied with their regime security play a central role in the complex process of securitisation of the African continent. At one level they are quick to embrace the discourse of terrorism in their bid to delegitimize their political competitors as terrorists. At another level they are prone to supporting the agenda of securitisation of the continent as long as they receive protection for their regimes in the process.

All this has implications for foreign policy options of African states with some weaker and even stronger ones like Libya not acting in concert with others on the presence of AFRICOM in Africa. South Africa as one of the stronger African states has tried to mobilise the region (Southern Africa Development Community-SADC) to resist the establishment of AFRICOM on the African continent. The only option available for Africa is to speak and act with one voice on AFRICOM.

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