

AFRICOM: Western Self-Serving Interests or African Security?

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In my view, therefore, America's Africa Command, in conceptual terms and actual implementation, is not intended to serve Africa's best interests. It is just happens that Africa has grown in geopolitical and geo-economic importance to America and her allies. Africa has been there all along.

There were, for instance, reports of how the American military, acting supposedly in partnership or cooperation with the Nigerian military, literally took over Nigerian Defense Headquarters. I know for a fact that the US military would not brook such behaviors by foreign military personnel at the Pentagon, the US Department of Defense or military complex.

It is probably important to mention that the United States already operates at least three other commands, namely, the European Command (EUCOM), Central Command, (CENTCOM) and Pacific Command (PACOM), therefore, Africa Command or (AFRICOM) will be the fourth leg of US military global spread.

America's Africa Command is instead seen as machinery for Western governments to pursue their vaunted economic, political and hegemonic hemispheric influence at the expense of Africans as well as a backdoor through which Westerners can outmaneuver rivals such as China and perhaps Russia in addition.

America's establishment of the so-called African Command (AFRICOM), should be seen for what it is: America's self-interested armada of protection for America, and her allies and not for Africa's security.

Africa has steadily and increasingly become more important by playing the role for Westerners as repository of energy resources which powers the engine-rooms of Western economies.

Additionally, America and her Western allies are in trepidation and a stampede to stem China's forays into Africa with a plethora of real investments in solid infrastructures in many African nations.

The formation of this command was made official by former president of the United States, George W. Bush on February 6, 2007. It has been controversial since, particularly among

Africans.

There is as well a lively debate by Americans in the Department of Defense, the War College, US State Department, and various Policy Foundations by policy wonks, aside from the Africans.

A major component and a key element in these debates is the fear of China. China is buoyed by her recent economic progress. China has, for more than a decade, attained major economic expansion of more than nine percent annually.

China has become exceedingly confident on the world stage. America and her Western allies are therefore deeply troubled by this state of affairs. China is seen by Western governments as a nuisance, an irritant and a competitor worth her weight in gold.

The sheer size of China, her industrial and technological ascendancy, tripled with her ability to produce with low overhead costs, empowers China like no other nation. China is as well a major financier of America's public debt, in the trillions. Sino-phobia in Western countries can also be blamed for America's sudden desire to establish military presence in Africa.

In my view, therefore, America's Africa Command, in conceptual terms and actual implementation, is not intended to serve Africa's best interests. It is just happens that Africa has grown in geopolitical and geo-economic importance to America and her allies. Africa has been there all along.

Africa suddenly has the attention of Western governments? Africa is suddenly a priority? I very much doubt it. As America and her allies are ensnared in the volatile Persian Gulf-Middle East, there is suddenly this self-serving attention being paid to the long neglected, ridiculed and forlorn Africa?

Given Africa's experience at the hands of Western governments, from the slave trade to colonialism to the hemispheric Cold War hegemonic struggles for chunks of the African continent, it should be no surprise to the United States and other Western governments that Africans view them with enlightened and sanguine suspicions. These suspicions are informed by Africa's extremely checkered history and the role of Westerners in it.

There are, in addition to African historical experiences with Westerners, the experiences of other regions and nations outside of Africa. These are such places such the Honduras, Grenada, Panama, Haiti, Dominican Republic to mention a few, where American military presence has not served the best interests of the local populations.

The collective experience of these countries in which American military presence has been parceled out and touted as being of some sort of mutual benefit for America and the host country, has turned out, in many cases, that America's interests were all she was interested in.

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other commands, namely, the European Command (EUCOM), Central Command, (CENTCOM) and Pacific Command (PACOM), therefore, Africa Command or (AFRICOM) will be the fourth leg of US military global spread.

America's Africa Command, in the circumstances, cannot be seen by Africans as an instrument for African security. America's Africa Command is instead seen as machinery for Western governments to pursue their vaunted economic, political and hegemonic hemispheric influence at the expense of Africans as well as a backdoor through which Westerners can outmaneuver rivals such as China and perhaps, Russia in addition.

Interestingly, the only interests which Westerners pursue, have ever pursued in Africa, are Western interests regardless of their protestations to the contrary; regardless of new and improved fanciful packaging.

Just think about it. Africa has lain as the greenest field and fallow before the very eyes of Westerners for hundreds of years. Westerners have exploited Africa for Western benefit enough already. Africans can do without Western nations' afterthoughts. AFRICOM and the current debate about China are two sides of the same coin.

There is a renewed scramble for Africa that is motivated mostly by the search for hydrocarbons and, beyond that, an opportunity for those in the scramble to expand their global market share in this era of globalization. Africa is still their pawn, sadly! They have never been committed or dedicated to our cause or best interests.

This is the crux of the matter for Africans who have become deeply and extremely suspicious about the motives by Westerners who are pretending, permanently, to be on right side of all that is good for Africa.

Meanwhile, all through history, there has been no scintilla of truth in claims by Western governments which have pretended to be assisting Africa in some sort of altruistic, disinterested, selfless or gratuitous way.

History is the witness and it is verifiably the case that Western contacts with Africa have had most negative consequences. It began with the slave trade, then colonialism, neocolonialism, the Cold War and through all these Westerners stripped and exploited Africa for Africa's human, mineral and sundry other resources.

As a consequence, discerning Africans have gone beyond merely being wary of Westerners. Again, we should be mindful of when an umbrella seller doubles as someone who predicts daily rain fall. Africans have become more circumspect in evaluating advice offered by Westerners, in matters of continental, regional security or matters of trade and investments on the continent.

The attitudes of Westerners to Africans have been based mostly on some sorts of ad hoc policy thrusts. It is marked by the absence of a well thought-out and well reasoned substantive and significant policy position for Africa.

Be it economic, political or military-strategic, Africa has always been seen as of no strategic or national security relevance to Westerners. Recount how many Western policy papers which explicitly and implicitly state such positions abundantly. But suddenly, exigent circumstances, which are propelled solely by Western interests, are now pushing Western

governments to a waking moment of Africa's importance.

And Westerners expect Africans to be jumping for joy and dance in the streets in excitement? Should Africans be overjoyed and happily receive America's Africa Command? If past is prologue, think again.

For starters, former president of the United States George W. Bush's administration underestimated what would be Africans' reaction to the presence of America's AFRICOM. Non-Africans are too frequently presumptuous about Africans. Africans are taken for granted quite too often.

This all has smudges of condescension and it is an attitude which smacks of Western paternalistic talk-down in dealings with Africans. This is why unpleasant failure results are consequences sometimes. Herein lies the difference between the West and resurgent China in Africa. China invited African countries to Beijing, China. And together, Africans and the Chinese, created the China-Africa Cooperation Forum (CACF). This Africa-China body has met in China and in parts of Africa since its creation.

And this is the sort of partnership, the sort of friends and robust engagement which have been absent between the West and Africa. Africa, for far too long remained an inconvenient part of the world in the eyes of Western governments.

Westerners have only been in exploitation mode and Africa as the butt of their dinner jokes, bluntly put. China on the other hand is, practical, engaged and straightforward. When was the last time the United States invited African leaders together to a joint summit or conference on economic, strategic or military cooperation?

When was the last time (ever) did the United States or Western nations practice active engagements and rapprochement with African leaders the way China has demonstrated her leadership in that direction? China has excelled in action and not rhetoric and false promises.

China has over the years sent almost 20,000 medical doctors into many nations on the African continent. Beyond that, China has given loans, guaranteed loans for infrastructure development for African nations. China has been engaged, as well, in the direct creation of public infrastructure in some African nations.

Railways, refineries and sundry public works are abundant evidence which is already on the ground in different parts of Africa and these, it must be said, tell you where China stands.

Africans are tired of profound platitudinous proclamations by Western governments. China in a short span of time has proven its worthiness to Africans, through its actions.

Westerners are alarmed, understandably so, because it is becoming obvious to the Africans that there are tremendous differences between hundreds of years of words by Western governments compared with the the recent Chinese presence. China does not seek to dictate leadership choices to Africans.

China is not dictating to Africans a mode of government as in presidential or parliamentary systems. China is not interested in meddling in the internal affairs of Africans. That is how it should be!

Africans are now children of the West! Chinese goods are all over the United States. Chinese products are known by Westerners and Africans alike to be cheap and to fulfill the intended utility.

China is not known to hold Chinese products over and above products made in Africa. Western nations have done just that for decades, for instance, Schnapps was held up in Nigeria as superior to local brew, which is now almost extinct.

And this is the practice of the West across the board. And yet some people wonder why African farmers and manufacturers can not compete against Western multinationals? For that, we recommend, "Life and Debt of Jamaica" the negative impact upon developing nations' productive capacities occasioned by dumpings by Western nations.

And furthermore, on matters of impositions, quite unlike the West which imposed English, French or Portuguese, etc., so far, China is not known to be force-feeding Africans any Cantonese and/or Mandarin.

Western contact with Africa began by imposing Christianity as the "civilized" non-primitive and superior religion. China, unlike the West which exulted the Christian faith over every and any of Africa's religions, China has not preached any religion to Africans.

China has given loans to African nations. China has guaranteed loans to African nations for public projects and sundry public infrastructures. Western nations on the other hand, have always led African nations to the World Bank and/or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through which Western nations put punishing strictures upon developing nations in Africa and Latin America, etc.

These strictures, which are well coordinated, act to stifle development in Africa and elsewhere. You the reader must have heard of something called the Structural Adjustment Program or SAP. It ruined many nations in Africa and Latin America and ruined millions of lives elsewhere.

China has given loans, guaranteed loans to some African nations. China has also speedily executed some key projects in some African nations they go busily like acts and voila.

End results or outcomes are seen by the Africans. China has, in loan grants and loan guarantees, been acting for some African nations the way the United States acted on behalf of Israel when the US single-handedly made a \$10 billion loan guarantee for Israel in one single year.

And this excludes the \$5 billion yearly financial aid to Israel with no strings attached, with no meddling and interference with Israel domestic and foreign policies.

The amount of US foreign aid to all of the 53 countries in Africa during the last ten years is less than \$10 billion. This despite the presence of over 900 million people in Africa and this despite the recognition that the need in Africa is greater than in Israel with her 5 million in population.

Africans are tired of ostentatious pledges and promises which are never fulfilled and never redeemed. China is a suitable alternative and a welcome change.

On matters of repressive and undemocratic governments in Africa, Western nations are

friends to Hosni Mubarak of Egypt with his notoriously repressive government.

He is a man who has been president for about thirty years. Most Western nations had dealings with Mobutu Sese Seku, a tyrant and dictator, who was as corrupt as corruption itself. Western nations have historically been strange-bedfellows with the world's worst dictators and tyrannical, brutal leaders.

The West has perennially been in marriages of convenience with political leaders of other nations, particularly leaders who do not pursue the interests of local electorates, but rather selfish personal interests of select individuals and the West winks and nods so long as Western interests are amply protected.

The West practices permanent Expediency, with an uppercase E. And frequently it is counterproductive and chickens come home to roost. Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, etc., are historical examples. Expediency can never be a good substitute for a thorough policy which contemplates and anticipates long-term outcomes and consequences.

Western nations seem to have no issues with governments in [the Middle East], that is, regarding the abject absence of democracy and human rights, women's rights, in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Emirates.

And yet, the West lectures us about how China has been uninterested in Africans' progress through forms of government.

And that China deals with repressive African governments. And how China is willing to deal with some corrupt officials. Swiss banks are notorious for being safe havens for the prodigiously corrupt and criminal looters who pillage and plunder and not banks in Beijing or Shanghai.

Western nations serve as harbors for fleeing thieves and their families. Western nations serve as their refuge and hospitals and choice places to acquire sumptuous opulence, mansions and investments, and squander resources stolen from Africa. Show me a mansion in China which belongs to an African rogue. China actually executes corrupt officials by firing squad.

It should be obvious to even the undiscerning that Western nations excel in hypocrisy and double standards. The only things of importance to hypocrites are usually their self-serving sanctimonious sermons which serve their self-interests.

Discerning Africans already know those who are friends and partners to Africa. Africans do not need Western nations' preachment of the West as being holier than thou in comparison to China. And someday Africans and peoples of African descent will rise up upon seeing the difference.

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