

Hillary Clinton seeks to strengthen US imperialism's position in Africa

By [Ann Talbot](#)

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US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 11-day tour of Africa took in seven countries across the continent. Following on from President Obama's trip to Ghana, her visit highlights his administration's intention to strengthen the US position in Africa against the challenge of its rivals.

"It's where his blood comes from," she said, echoing Obama's words in Ghana when he drew attention to his African ancestry. In what has become a mantra, she ignored the effects of centuries of depredation and looting and blamed Africa's present impoverished condition on the lack of "good governance." She made no acknowledgement of the US role in establishing the corrupt regimes that govern Africa today. Nor did she refer to the part that US-based companies play in feeding the Swiss bank accounts of African politicians and generals.

She condemned rape as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and offered a token \$17 million for its victims when she visited Goma in the eastern DRC. But the situation women and girls face today is the direct result of the decision of the US government to covertly back the Ugandan and Rwandan invasion of the DRC in 1998, which entirely destabilized this mineral rich region. It was a war which claimed some 5.4 million lives and displaced millions more.

The leaders of Uganda and Rwanda were among those designated as African Renaissance leaders by President Bill Clinton. Their proxies have been responsible for carrying out the very atrocities which she condemned. Similar atrocities have been carried out by the DRC Army, which is backed by the United Nations and the US.

Washington continues to support regimes that commit atrocities against civilians. In Kenya, Clinton met with Somali President Sheikh Sharif Ahmed and pledged to provide more military aid and training to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Hundred of thousands of civilians are currently in refugee camps stretching along the road outside Mogadishu or in neighbouring Kenya because the city has been shelled in the government's conflict with the Islamic insurgents of al Shabaab.

This is currently the biggest humanitarian crisis in Africa. The response of the Obama regime has been to step up support to the TFG and to pour more weapons into the region. The objective of US foreign policy is to gain control over the strategically vital Horn of Africa, around which run some of the worlds' major sea routes.

What was not mentioned on Clinton's Africa trip was the new US military command for Africa—Africom—established under the Bush administration. Previously US military

operations in Africa were divided between the Middle East and the European commands. The decision to establish a separate African command represented an intensification of US strategic interest in Africa.

Currently, Africom's headquarters are in Germany. The intention is to find a base on the African continent, but the Bush administration could not persuade any African country to offer facilities. No African regime felt it could risk such a close association with the US military, after the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. Clinton could not raise such a politically sensitive issue publicly. In conjunction with her visit, however, Africom was carrying out a programme of activities, including the visit of the guided missile destroyer USS Arleigh Burke to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and a seminar on "health and security" in Lusaka, Zambia.

A recent internal report from the State Department's Office of the Inspector General highlighted the difference in funding for diplomatic activities in Africa and those of Africom. "The military deals in resources that the State Department can only dream about," the report said. One military information support team was funded to the tune of \$600,000 for a project in Somalia, while a State Department team had only \$30,000. The report concluded that some of their responsibilities should be handed over to the military.

This militarization of US foreign policy in Africa reflects America's inability to deal with the growing rivalry it faces by economic means alone. China has just surpassed the US to become Africa's main trading partner. America's trade with Africa was worth \$104 billion in 2008, a 28 percent increase, but China's trade with Africa was worth \$107 billion, a tenfold increase over the last decade.

In addition, President Medvedev of Russia recently visited Angola and secured a number of lucrative contracts for Russian firms. What are often referred to as the BRICSA countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—which are the largest of the emerging economies— are increasingly prepared to work together despite the rivalries between them.

In response, the US has shown that it can still use the power it wields through international financial institutions, such as the IMF and the UN Security Council, to bring African governments to heel. The Democratic Republic of Congo recently signed a \$9 billion deal under which China has agreed to build a series of major infrastructural projects in return for mineral concessions. But the IMF has warned that if the deal goes through, it will have to review the debt relief the DRC was promised.

Clinton was particularly critical of the Kenyan government and threatened to use the US position on the UN Security Council to refer leading Kenyan politicians and businessmen to the International Criminal Court over post-election violence that resulted in the deaths of 1,500 people. Her remarks about Obama's ancestry were made in Kenya. She told university students that the message she brought on aid was tough, but "also lovingly presented."

In Nigeria, which unlike Kenya is one of the main African producers of oil, her call for good governance was more modestly presented. And Liberia received the most favourable treatment of all. It has been granted \$1.2 billion in debt relief, unlike the DRC or Ivory Coast. Yet President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia has just admitted that she supported the regime of Charles Taylor, who is currently on trial at The Hague for war crimes. The

corruption for which Liberia was noted under Taylor has continued under Sirleaf. Members of her government are said to have benefited from the Liberian flag of convenience shipping registry and from kickbacks offered by India's Tata Steel and South Africa's Delta Mines Consolidated. She has escaped censure because she has shown herself to be one of the most servile supporters of Washington's policy in Africa. Since the US Marines invaded Liberia in 2003 to overthrow the Taylor regime, the country has effectively been an American colony.

Clinton's trip included discussion of the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) with African businessmen. AGOA was supposed to open up the US market to a range of Africa products. This has not happened to any significant extent. However, there is a growing interest in African agricultural land as a result of rising food prices and the potential demand for bio-fuels. South Korea and Saudi Arabia have both bought large tracts.

It was in South Africa that Clinton stressed the potential benefits of AGOA, since South Africa's trade is the most diverse. She hopes to use the prospect of greater access to the American market to open up a rift between South Africa and the other emerging economies. Clinton stressed that South Africa "is uniquely positioned to advance its own economic trajectory and to propel economic growth on the African continent as a whole," so long as the Zuma government sticks to free market policies.

Despite the carrot she dangled for Zuma, the reality is that oil remains the primary US trade concern. The US market is not about to rescue the South African economy from the doldrums. Some 80 percent of America's trade with Africa is accounted for by oil. The recent increase in the value of that trade is largely due to the increase in the price of oil. Overall, US oil imports from Africa have nearly doubled since 2002. In 2006, 22 percent of all crude oil imports to the US came from Africa, more than from the Middle East.

For this reason, Clinton was positively effusive when she came to Angola, where the dos Santos regime holds the country in a firm grip. As Nigeria has become more unstable, so the significance of Angola for US oil supplies has increased. In June of this year it surpassed Nigeria as Africa's largest petroleum producer. Angola now supplies more oil to China than Saudi Arabia does.

Last year the economy of this former Cold War battleground grew by 27 percent, almost entirely as a result of oil. Oil exports make up more than 90 percent of the Angolan government's revenues. At 555,000 barrels a day, Angola is currently the sixth-largest exporter of crude oil to the US, providing seven percent of its energy imports. Some two thirds of the Angolan population live on less than \$2 a day.

Clinton's visit was an attempt to use an assumed popularity of Obama in Africa to recover from the disastrous years of the Bush regime. But the change in the occupant of the White House does not mean a change in policy toward Africa. The domination of Africa remains a priority, and the Obama administration is seeking to develop the political, economic and military means to achieve its strategic goal.

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