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Obama moves ahead with AFRICOM

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cc US Army Concerned over the supply of oil to the US and a supposed need to continue the global 'War on Terror', President Barack Obama has essentially maintained the militarised approach to Africa that was the hallmark of his immediate predecessors George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, writes Daniel Volman. The escalation of AFRICOM (United States African Command) activities, argues Volman, underlines a troubling commitment to an approach based on might and dominance, one entirely at the expense of promoting sustainable economic development and democracy.

In his 11 July 2009 speech in Accra, Ghana, US President Barack Obama declared, 'America has a responsibility to advance this vision, not just with words, but with support that strengthens African capacity. When there is genocide in Darfur or terrorists in Somalia, these are not simply African problems – they are global security challenges, and they demand a global response. That is why we stand ready to partner through diplomacy, technical assistance, and logistical support, and will stand behind efforts to hold war criminals accountable. Our Africa Command is focused not on establishing a foothold in the continent, but on confronting these common challenges to advance the security of America, Africa and the world.'

And yet all the available evidence demonstrates that he is determined to continue the expansion of US military activity on the continent initiated by President Bill Clinton in the late 1990s and dramatically escalated by President George W. Bush from 2001 to 2009. While many expected the Obama administration to adopt a security policy toward Africa that would be far less militaristic and unilateral than that pursued by his predecessor, the facts show that he is in fact essentially following the same policy that has guided US military involvement in Africa for more than a decade.

The clearest indication of President Obama's intentions for AFRICOM (United States African Command) and for America's military involvement in Africa is provided by the budget requests for the 2010 financial year submitted by the Departments of State and Defense to Congress in May 2009. The State Department budget request – which includes funding for all US arms sales, military training, and other security assistance programmes – proposes major increases in funding for US arms sales to a number of African countries through the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programme. The budget proposes to increase FMF funding for sub-Saharan African countries more than 300 per cent, from just over US\$8.2 million to more than US\$25.5 million, with additional increases in funding for Maghrebi countries. Major recipients slated for increases include Chad (US\$500,000), the Democratic Republic of Congo (US\$2.5 million), Djibouti (US\$2.5 million), Ethiopia (US\$3 million), Kenya (US\$1 million), Liberia (US\$9 million), Morocco (US\$9 million), Nigeria (US\$1.4 million), South Africa (US\$800,000) and the Africa Regional Program (US\$2.8 million).

The same trend is evident in the Obama administration's request for funding for the International Military Education and Training (IMET) programme. The budget request for the IMET programme proposes to increase funding for African countries by nearly 17 per cent, from just under US\$14 million to more than US\$16 million, with additional increases for Maghrebi countries. Major recipients slated for increases include Algeria (US\$950,000), Chad (US\$400,000), the Democratic Republic of Congo (US\$500,000), Djibouti (US\$350,000), Ethiopia (US\$775,000), Equatorial Guinea (US\$40,000), Ghana (US\$850,000), Liberia (US\$525,000), Libya (US\$250,000), Mali (US\$350,000), Morocco (US\$1.9 million), Niger (US\$250,000), Nigeria (US\$1.1 million), Rwanda (US\$500,000), Senegal (US\$1.1 million), South Africa (US\$900,000) and Uganda (US\$550,000).

The Obama administration also proposes major new funding for security assistance provided through the Peacekeeping Operations programme. The 2010 financial year budget proposes to increase funding for the

Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership – from US\$15 million in the 2009 financial year to US\$20 million in 2010 – and for the East Africa Regional Strategic Initiative from US\$5 million in the 2009 financial year to US\$10 million in the 2010 financial year.

It also includes US\$42 million to continue operations in support of the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Accords (CPAs) in southern Sudan, US\$10 million to help create a professional 2,000-member armed force in Liberia, US\$21 million to continue operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo to reform the military (including the creation of rapid reaction force for the eastern Congo and the rehabilitation of the military base at Kisangani), and US\$3.6 million for the Africa Conflict Stabilization and Border Security Program, which will be used to support monitoring teams, advisory assistance, training, infrastructure enhancements, and equipment in the Great Lakes region, the Mano River region, the Horn of Africa, Chad and the Central African Republic.

And it includes US\$67 million to support the African Union mission in Somalia, along with a request for US\$96.8 million for the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). The request for the GPOI includes funding for the African Contingency Operations and Training Assistance Program (ACOTA) – which provides training and equipment to a number of African military forces to enhance their peacekeeping capabilities – and the Obama administration has requested US\$96.8 million for ACOTA activities in the 2010 financial year.

Furthermore, the Obama administration's budget request for International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) programmes contains US\$24 million for Sudan to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Accords in southern Sudan and to assist programmes to stabilise Darfur by providing technical assistance and training for southern Sudan's criminal justice sector and law enforcement institutions as well as contributing to UN civilian police and formed police units in southern Sudan and Darfur. It also includes funds for police reforms in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); for training, infrastructure, and equipment for police units in Liberia; to operate the American-run International Law Academy in Gaborone, Botswana; and to create a Regional Security Training Center for West, Central and North Africa.

And the Obama administration is also asking for funding to be provided through the INCLE programs for the first time to provide security assistance to countries participating in the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Nigeria. Major recipients slated for increases include Algeria (US\$970,000), Cape Verde (US\$2 million), the Democratic Republic of Congo (US\$1.7 million), Ethiopia (US\$500,000), Gambia (US\$450,000), Ghana (US\$500,000), Guinea-Bissau (US\$3 million), Liberia (US\$8 million), Morocco (US\$2 million), Nigeria (US\$2 million), Sierra Leone (US\$250,000), Sudan (US\$24 million), Uganda (US\$385,000), and the Africa Regional Program (US\$4.5 million).

The Obama administration also proposes to increase funding for counterterrorism programmes. These include the Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program – which provides training to countries throughout the world – the Terrorist Interdiction Program/Personal Identification, Secure Comparison, and Evaluation System Program – which supports identification and watch listing systems to 18 countries (including Kenya) – the Counterterrorism Financing Program, which helps partner countries throughout the world stop the flow of money to terrorists – and the Counterterrorism Engagement Program, which is intended to strengthen ties with key political leaders throughout the world and 'build political will at senior levels in partner nations for shared counterterrorism challenges'. The Obama administration's budget request requests increased funding for Kenya (from US\$5 million in the 2009 financial year to US\$8 million in the 2010 financial year), for South Africa (a new programme for US\$1 million), and the Africa Regional programme (from almost US\$15 million in the 2009 financial year to more than US\$20 million in the 2010 financial year).

The Obama administration proposed 2010 budget for the Department of Defense requests US\$278 million in operation and maintenance funds to cover the cost of AFRICOM operations and Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership operations at the AFRICOM headquarters in Stuttgart,

Germany. The administration is also requesting US\$263 million to provide additional manpower, airlift and communications support to AFRICOM. In addition, the administration is requesting US\$60 million to fund CJTF-HOA operations in the 2010 financial year and US\$249 million to pay for the operation of the 500-acre base at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti and for facilities modifications, along with US\$41.8 for major base improvement construction projects.

The administration has requested some US\$400 million for Global Train and Equip (Section 1206) programmes, some US\$200 million for Security and Stabilization Assistance (Section 1207) programmes, and some US\$1 million for the Combatant Commander's Initiative Fund. This money will be used primarily in Iraq and Afghanistan to pay for emergency training and equipment, the services of personnel from the State Department and humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi and Afghani armed forces, but it will be available for the use of AFRICOM as well.

The administration's budget request also contains US\$1.9 billion to buy three littoral combat ships and another US\$373 million to buy two joint high speed vessels, ships that will play a crucial role in US Navy operations off the coast of Africa. In addition, the administration has requested US\$10.5 million to pay for naval deployments in west and central Africa in the 2010 financial year and another US\$10 million for naval operations in east Africa.

When Secretary of State Hillary Clinton travelled to Nigeria during her tour of Africa in August 2009, she met with Ojo Maduekwe, the foreign minister, and Godwin Abbe, the new minister of defence. In her remarks after the meeting, she was asked what the US government intended to do to help the Nigerian government establish stability and security in the Niger Delta. 'Well, the defence minister was present at the second larger meeting that the foreign minister convened,' she said, 'and he had some very specific suggestions as to how the United States could assist the Nigerian government in their efforts, which we think are very promising, to try to bring peace and stability to the Niger Delta. We will be following up on those. There is nothing that has been decided. But we have a very good working relationship between our two militaries. So I will be talking with my counterpart, the secretary of defense, and we will, through our joint efforts, through our bi-national commission mechanism, determine what Nigeria would want from us for help, because we know this is an internal matter, we know this is up to the Nigerian people and their government to resolve, and then look to see how we would offer that assistance.' Thus, in addition to the security assistance programmes in the budget request for the 2010 financial year, the Obama administration is now considering providing even more military support to the Nigerian government for use in the Niger Delta if the current amnesty programme collapses, as many analysts expect, and the government resumes military operations against insurgent forces in this vital oil-producing region (which produces 10 per cent of America's total oil imports).

Another indication of the Obama administration's intentions are provided by its decision to expand US military involvement in Somalia as well as its decision to continue the Bush administration's policy of unilateral military attacks against alleged al-Qaeda operatives in that country. In June 2009, a senior State Department official (presumed to have been Assistant Secretary of State Johnnie Carson) revealed that the Obama administration had initiated a programme of indirect military support for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia (the internationally recognised government of the country, although it only exercises control over a small part of the capital, Mogadishu) and a few other towns in the southern part of the country).

According to the official, the US government was providing funding to the TFG to finance weapons purchases and had also asked the governments of Uganda and Burundi, which have deployed troops to Mogadishu under an African Union mandate to protect the TFG, to transfer weaponry from their own stockpiles to the armed forces of the TFG in exchange for promises that the US government would reimburse them. In addition, the US government made its base in Djibouti available to other governments for them to provide military training to the armed forces of the TFG.

During her visit to Kenya in August 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the US government would 'continue to provide equipment and training to the TFG', stating 'very early in the administration, I made the decision,

which the president supported, to accelerate and provide aid to the TFG'. She went on to declare that al-Shabaab, the Islamist insurgent group fighting to overthrow the TFG, was 'a terrorist group with links to al-Qaeda and other foreign military networks' and that they 'see Somalia as a future haven for global terrorism'. 'There is no doubt', Secretary Clinton stated 'that al-Shabaab wants to obtain control over Somalia to use it as a base from which to influence and even infiltrate surrounding countries and launch attacks against countries far and near.' Thus, 'if al-Shabaab were to obtain a haven in Somalia, which would then attract al-Qaeda and other terrorist actors, it would be a threat to the United States.'

The US government arranged for the delivery of an initial supply of approximately 40 tonnes of small arms and ammunition worth approximately US\$10 million to the TFG between May and August of 2009 from the stockpiles of the African Union peacekeeping force, along with between US\$1 million and US\$2 million in cash to the TFG to finance its own arms purchase, and the delivery of another 40 tonnes of small arms and ammunition over the following months. A number of other governments – including Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and France – are also reported to have sent military personnel to the US base in Djibouti to provide military training to TFG troops.

According to a report by the Associated Press, American officials 'say the US military is not conducting the training and will not put any forces in Somalia'. Other countries were conducting the training, the Associated Press reported, because 'the [Obama] administration is making a concerted effort to avoid putting any American footprint in Somalia, which would risk alienating allies and add to charges by Islamic extremists of a Western takeover.' However, it has since become clear that most of the arms and training has been transferred to al-Shabaab, either by Islamic militants who had infiltrated the TFG military forces or as a result of the sale of the weapons and ammunition on the black market.

Then, in August, US Special Forces troops attacked and killed Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, an alleged al-Qaeda operative who was accused of being involved in the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998 as well as other al-Qaeda operations in east Africa. The US Special Forces troops carried out the attack from onboard several helicopters that had been launched from a US Navy warship off the Somali coast, using machine guns and automatic assault rifles to strafe a convoy of four-wheel drive vehicles carrying Nabhan and his retinue. Following the initial assault, the helicopters landed so that their troops could seize Nabhan's body for positive identification. It is likely that the Obama administration will conduct further military operations in Somalia since, in the words of Vice Admiral Robert Moeller, the deputy commander of AFRICOM, 'the threat posed by al-Shabaab is something that we pay very, very close attention to.'

And in October 2009, the Obama administration announced a major new security assistance package for Mali that was delivered on 20 October 2009. The package – valued at US\$4.5 to US\$5 million (2.3 billion CFA) and which includes 37 Land Cruiser pickup trucks, communication equipment, replacement parts, clothing and other individual equipment – is intended to enhance Mali's ability to transport and communicate with internal security (counter-insurgency) units throughout the country and control its borders. The security assistance package is officially known as the 'Counter Terrorism Train and Equip' (CTTE) programme. Although ostensibly intended to help Mali deal with potential threats from AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), it is more likely to be used against Tuareg insurgent forces.

In addition, between April and June of 2009, 300 US Special Forces personnel were deployed to Mali to train Malian military forces at three local bases and, according to Lt Col Louis Sombora, deputy commander of Mali's 33rd Parachute Regiment (which was the recipient of the new US military aid package), more than 95 per cent of his soldiers have received US military training. And in early November 2009, US Air Force Brigadier General Michael W. Callan, vice commander of the US Air Force Africa (the Air Force contingent based in Europe and dedicated to AFRICOM), visited Mali along with other US military personnel in order to inspect local military forces (including the 33rd Parachute Regiment) and tour local military facilities. According to Lt Col Marshall Mantiply, defense attaché at the US Embassy in Bamako, 'we are working with the Mali ministry of defence on a ten-year plan' to enhance the

country's military capabilities.

The aid package to Mali is just the latest instance of America's growing military involvement in the Sahel region. In his testimony before the Senate subcommittee on Africa hearing on 'Counter-terrorism in the Sahel' on 17 November 2009, Secretary of State for Africa Johnnie Carson identified Mali – along with Algeria and Mauritania – as one of the 'key countries' in the region for the US counterterrorism strategy. 'We believe that our work with Mali to support more professional units capable of improving the security environment in the country will have future benefits if they are sustained', he stated.

It is clear, therefore, that President Barack Obama has decided to follow the path marked out for AFRICOM by the Clinton and Bush administrations, based on the use of military force to ensure that America can satisfy its continuing addiction to oil and to deal with the threat posed by al-Qaeda and other Islamist extremist groups, rather than to chart a new path passed on a partnership with the people of Africa and other countries that have a stake on the continent (including China) to promote sustainable economic development, democracy and human rights in Africa and a global energy order based on the use of clean, safe and renewable resources.

This is the consequence of two factors. To begin with, President Obama genuinely believes in the strategy of the global 'War on Terror' and thinks that Africa must be a central battlefield in America's military campaign against al-Qaeda and other Islamist extremist groups. Many analysts believe that terrorism does not constitute a significant threat to America's national security interests and that it would be far more effective to treat terrorism as a crime and to reduce the threat of terrorism by employing traditional law enforcement techniques. But, as demonstrated by the president's decision to escalate US military operations in Afghanistan, Somalia and Mali, the Obama administration is determined to use military force instead, despite the fact that – as US military analysts argue – this only helps to strengthen terrorist groups and jeopardises other US security interests.

And with regard to America's growing dependence on African oil supplies, President Obama understands the danger of relying upon the importation of a vital resource from unstable countries ruled by repressive, undemocratic regimes and the necessity of reducing America's reliance on the use of oil and other non-renewable sources of energy. But, for understandable reasons, he has concluded that there is simply very little that he can do to achieve this goal during the limited time that he will be in office. He knows that it will take at least several decades to make the radical changes that will be necessary to develop alternative sources of energy, particularly to fuel cars and other means of transportation (if this is even technically feasible). And he knows that – in the meantime – public support for his presidency and for his party depends on the continued supply of reliable and relatively inexpensive supplies of gas and other petroleum-based energy to the American people, more than any other single factor. In the event of a substantial disruption in the supply of oil from Nigeria or any other major African supplier, he realises that he will be under irresistible political pressure to employ the only instrument that he has at his disposal – US military forces – to try to keep Africa's oil flowing.

Professional military officers also know that the repressive, undemocratic regimes upon which the United States relies to maintain oil production are likely to fail and that they are almost certain to find themselves sent into combat in Africa – whether they like it or not – if this leads to a major disruption of oil exports, and are already working on plans for direct military intervention in Africa. Thus, in May 2008, the Army Training and Doctrine Command, the Special Operations Command, and the Joint Forces Command conducted a war game scenario for Nigeria during war game exercise that it conducts each year at the US Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

The scenario – set in the hypothetical year 2013 – was designed to test the ability of the United States to respond to a crisis in Nigeria in which the Nigerian government fragments and rival factions within the Nigerian military begin fighting for control of the Niger Delta, creating so much violence and chaos that it would be impossible to continue oil production. The participants concluded that there was little the United States could do to bring about a peaceful

resolution of the conflict and that, in the end, they would probably be ordered to send up to 20,000 American troops into the Niger Delta in what the participants clearly recognised would be a futile attempt to get the oil flowing again. The fact that the participants in the Nigerian war games decided to go public with this information suggests that they believe that this scenario is likely to become a reality in the near future and that their only hope of avoiding this is to tell the public in the hope that this will prevent the order from being issued.

But the professional military officers who would actually have to lead their troops into Africa are not the only people who understand that America's reliance on the military to solve the energy dilemma and the threat of terrorism is a dangerous mistake. Members of the US Congress are also increasingly sceptical about this strategy and are beginning to give AFRICOM the critical scrutiny it deserves. Moreover, a number of concerned organisations and individuals in the United States and in Africa came together in August 2006 to create the Resist AFRICOM campaign in order to educate the American people about AFRICOM and to mobilise public and congressional opposition to the new command. **The Resist AFRICOM campaign*** will continue to press the Obama administration to abandon its plan for AFRICOM and to pursue a policy toward Africa based on a genuine partnership with the people of Africa, international cooperation, democracy, human rights and sustainable economic development.

* <http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1552/t/5717/signUp.jsp?key=3094>

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