

Is American Policy toward Africa Increasingly Militarized?

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Good afternoon. I want to thank you for being here today. I especially want to thank American University and the Caroline and Ambassador Charles Adair Memorial Lecture series for inviting me to speak.

This lecture series is sponsored by the American Foreign Service Association, the professional organization of my particular tribe. As a Foreign Service officer, I am particularly grateful for AFSA's consistent advocacy for a professional diplomatic service.

My writ today extends to the challenges and opportunities facing American diplomacy in Africa. That's a big subject.

Despite the compelling news from Egypt, I am going to make my writ smaller. Following the practice of the State Department and the Council on Foreign Relations, I will devolve North Africa to the Middle East. So, when I say "Africa," I mean not the entire geographic continent but only sub-Saharan Africa.

That, too, is an immense subject. Nevertheless, an entry point to a conversation about diplomatic challenges and opportunities might be to talk about the view among Africans that American policy toward their continent is becoming militarized.

Accordingly, I want to ask the question, 'Is American policy toward Africa in fact militarizing?' And, if it is, why? And does it matter?

Many of my African friends feel that the U.S. approach is already dominated by (from their perspective) our misplaced security concerns.

They will acknowledge that in the past, democracy building in the context of the rule of law and with economic development were pre-eminent among our goals.

Now, their concern is that this broad focus is being replaced by a narrow emphasis on counter-terrorism.

That might be welcomed by local elites under siege from insurgencies fed by bad governance and unresolved ethnic and religious conflicts. But, it would do little to promote democracy and economic development.

Counter-terrorism certainly is a priority of the U.S. government. In Africa, does it risk overshadowing everything else?

The question is important, because if the answer is yes, then my African friends fear that the security agencies may shape U.S. policy with less focus on good governance and economic development.

What about us, we Americans? Does it matter if our African policy is increasingly shaped by the Department of Defense and the military?

From the perspective of effectively promoting American interests, I think that it does.

Fundamental change in Africa is resulting from shifts in demographics, climate change, technology, globalization, and the emergence of new power centers such as China, India, Brazil, and Korea.

Their drivers are often ambiguous and amorphous. There is no defined or consistent center of gravity, no organizing equivalent to the Cold War between East and West. Beijing, despite breathless assertions that we are "losing" Africa to China, does not play an equivalent role to that of the Soviet Union. And the concept of a War on Terror may obscure more than it illuminates, especially in Africa

There is increased competition for commerce, political influence, and access to resources across the continent. The locus of competition is often international organizations such as the WTO or the UN as much as in national capitals.

These challenges are not military. I submit they would seem to be issues and locales for diplomats, not warriors. To manage these issues requires a depth of understanding that professional diplomats can best provide. That reality can be overshadowed by an undue emphasis on counter-terrorism.

Historically, the United States did not participate in the nineteenth century scramble for Africa. We never were an African colonial power. Even after most African states became independent in the early 1960's during the Cold War, there was no significant U.S. military presence on the continent, except Roberts Field outside of Monrovia. But the focus of that installation was the Soviet Union and the Atlantic Ocean, not Africa.

Things are different, now.

The United States Africa Command, called AFRICOM, the U.S. base in Djibouti, the new drone base in Niger, and the various other U.S. airfields and facilities scattered across the continent are mostly new. Their establishment often reflects the post 9/11 cliché that "ungoverned spaces" – of which Africa has many – facilitate international terrorism. But they cannot address terrorism's roots in bad governance and elite corruption.

The African reception of this military embrace has not been warm.

Typical of much informed African opinion was a report from a South African research organization that criticized the 2008 establishment of AFRICOM, saying that it could

“become the major, at times even dominant, influence on the substance of U.S. foreign policy towards Africa... ultimately shifting the initiative away from the Department of State... [and] representing the definite militarization of U.S. foreign policy towards the continent.”

The report predicted that more U.S. military involvement would increase anti-American sentiment and encourage support for terrorism.

AFRICOM's mission is to protect and defend U.S. national security by strengthening African militaries and, when necessary, conducting operations of its own to “better [enable] Africans to address their security threats...”

So, AFRICOM sees itself as part of “African solutions to African problems” even if many Africans do not.

With most of AFRICOM's people in Germany, Camp Lemonier in Djibouti is the largest U.S. military presence. Since 2011, it's also been home to at least eight Predator drones and four fighter jets. It should also be noted that many of its operations are directed toward the Middle East and the Indian Ocean rather than toward Africa.

But, in February this year, the U.S. established a drone base outside the Nigerien capital Niamey. 120 members of the Air Force staff the base, which hosts two MQ-9 Reaper drones that stream live video and data, according to media reports.

Finally, the U.S. has acquired numerous other airstrips throughout the continent, with a key hub in Burkina Faso's capital of Ouagadougou. These airstrips host surveillance missions conducted by well-equipped turboprop planes disguised as civilian aircraft.

Surveillance aircraft can fly from Ouagadougou to Mali, Mauritania, and the Sahara, where they can search for jihadist fighters.

The Niamey drone base now participates in these searches as well. In fact, after two jihadist movements claimed credit for car bombs in Niger, Nigerien president Mahamadou Issoufou requested that the drones be armed. The Obama administration declined.

But, there are different ways to achieve the same goal. According to the New York Times (July 10, 2013), the unarmed drones collected intelligence information that we passed to the French. They used it to kill some 700 insurgents.

And, in March, intelligence from drones assisted with up to 200-plus French airstrikes in a single week.

AFRICOM also recently announced the creation of a rapid reaction force. This force will be stationed in Fort Carson, Colorado but will likely be forward-deployed in Africa much of the time.

AFRICOM continues its congressionally-mandated efforts against the odious Kony and his notorious Lord's Resistance Army in the African great lakes region.

Then there is training, such an important part of American military culture—as I wish it were for the Foreign Service.

A significant part of AFRICOM's stated mission is to train African militaries so they can effectively address their own problems—back to the mantra of "African solutions to African problems."

Since 1997, even before AFRICOM's establishment, the U.S. has trained and supplied non-lethal equipment to more than 215,000 African peacekeepers under an ongoing program called Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA). This program has 25 African country partners.

But training is not without its risks to democratic development.

Under a different U.S. program, called International Military Education and Training (IMET), Malian captain Amadou Sanogo trained in the United States at multiple times and locations. He then went on to lead the 2012 coup in Mali against the ostensibly civilian and democratic government of President Amadou Toumani Toure. Such an episode – and there have been others – feeds African suspicion that foreign military training leads to better coup-makers rather than better democrats.

Aside from the more conventional aspects of AFRICOM there is also a humanitarian dimension.

Its HIV/AIDS program supports prevention and treatment within African militaries. It also provides support for orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS, counseling and testing services, treatment, and more.

While I was ambassador to Nigeria, this was the most successful collaborative effort between the U.S. and Nigerian militaries.

And, we should not overlook AFRICOM's public diplomacy.

AFRICOM provides military information support teams to engage the public. It often has far more money to spend in a country than the embassy public affairs program.

What I'm concluding is that there has been a huge expansion of American military presence in Africa since 2005. That's when the Pentagon established the Trans-Saharan Counter-terrorism Initiative that was later transferred to AFRICOM.

While by no means secret, there has been remarkably little debate in the United States about this new area of military engagement.

So, my African friends seem to be correct. The U.S. military is playing a larger role than ever before, and much – if not most – of what it is doing comes back to counter-terrorism.

And I agree with them that this is not necessarily a good thing.

The story of our diplomatic engagement is different. Post 9/11, it has been anemic. Civilian high level visits are few and far between. That is probably just as well because few of our embassies in Africa have the administrative capacity to support more. Public diplomacy efforts have eroded—that celebrated USIS library in SOWETO is long gone.

The frequency of presidential visits can be an indicator of the diplomatic importance that the United States attaches to a particular part of the world.

They are rare to Africa. President George W. Bush made two tours of Africa, while President Obama so far has made only one substantial trip, visiting 3 African countries this year. In the first year of his administration he also made a brief stop in Ghana.

However, Secretaries of State have paid more attention. While Secretary, Hillary Clinton visited 23 African countries, beating Madeleine Albright's record of 20. Colin Powell visited 12 and Condoleezza Rice only 6—but then she had Iraq and Afghanistan. So far, Secretary Kerry has made only one trip—to Ethiopia. But it's early days still.

As for foreign heads of state or government official visits to the United States: between 1993 and 2011, there were 1,236 visits from all over the world. African presidents or prime ministers made up 9% of that total with 111 visits.

During that period, out of the 49 countries in Africa, heads of state from 34 visited. But, the visit count was dominated by a select few. South African heads of state visited 14 times, those from Nigeria 11 times, and those from Ghana and Uganda were tied for 8 times each.

There are 49 U.S. embassies and consulates in Africa. That large number reflects our principle of universality – we try to maintain a formal diplomatic establishment in every country with which we have diplomatic relations.

But, most American embassies in Africa are very small, with only a handful of diplomatic personnel. Many of them are challenged to do much more than keep the doors open and provide minimal statutory consular services. Their energies are also sapped by the requirement to produce the plethora of annual reports now mandated by U.S. law.

A few embassies are larger, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Ethiopia and Kenya.

But the numbers on paper can be misleading.

When I arrived in Nigeria in 2004, about a third of the State positions were vacant.

U.S. diplomats also tend to be inexperienced. In Nigeria, there were a total of three senior officers during my tenure. And the ambassador and the DCM were two of them. Very, very few State positions were filled at grade. (By contrast, other national security agencies at the Abuja embassy were fully staffed by officers at grade.)

The classic diplomatic functions of understanding and reporting on developments in the host nation and advocating the U.S. perspective are directly impacted by personnel shortages and inexperience.

When I was ambassador in Abuja the political and economic sections were short staffed and subject to frequent vacancies. And then there were the abrupt transfers to Iraq and Afghanistan.

There is no question in my mind that our understanding of Nigeria – a complex and strategically important country – was less developed than it should have been. Other agencies at post filled some of the reporting void, but naturally from their own optic, though I tried to ride herd on it.

Similarly, the commercial function within embassies remains underdeveloped. Africa may be the continent of “lions on the move,” in the words of a 2010, McKinsey report, the next frontier of economic opportunity. And certainly more and more American investors and companies are interested in pursuing opportunities.

They should be assisted by the Foreign Commercial Service.

However, as of July 2013, there were a total of 6 commercial officers in sub-Saharan Africa, two each in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa. To be fair, there may soon be a seventh in Ghana. So, a total of seven commercial officers in the world’s new economic frontier!

And then there are visas. A visa operation does much to shape host country perception of the United States. Yet at too many of our embassies – their architecture too often resembles something out of George Orwell’s 1984 – there is a visa application line that winds around and inches forward.

Not only are there too few visa officers at post, the visa backup operations in Washington are also too understaffed to perform in an efficient way. At some African posts, there can be a wait of weeks to get a visa appointment. And if the applicant has a Muslim name and must undergo secondary vetting in Washington, the process can—and too often does—take months.

These examples should indicate that the U.S. diplomatic function in sub-Saharan Africa is not particularly robust. Nor are our assistance programs as strong as they might seem.

The total of bilateral U.S. official development assistance in 2011 was \$27.1 billion. Of this, \$9.1 billion was given to Africa, which was a new record level. So Africa received 33% of the U.S.’s official development assistance in 2011, more than any other region.

The President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief, better known as PEPFAR, is one example of a program whose budget has grown fairly consistently. It –rather than economic development or education or other humanitarian activities – now consumes by far the largest chunk of U.S. assistance to Africa.

PEPFAR has largely evolved into a medical treatment program. Upon its creation in 2004, its budget was around \$2.4 billion. It is now about \$6.63 billion. And in 2012, 22 out of the 35 countries where PEPFAR was operating were in Africa.

While the budgets for aid have increased, especially with PEPFAR, however, there has been a parallel *decrease* in numbers of staff at USAID. So this means fewer people managing a bit more money.

Taking this information altogether, it is evident that Africa is not much of a priority—except when real or alleged terrorism makes it so. And since 9/11 and especially since 2005, our military presence in Africa has expanded while our diplomatic engagement has atrophied in comparison. So the final question we have to answer is, "why"? Why has the military established a significantly stronger presence in Africa while the traditional tools of diplomacy and development have seemed to stagnate or even decline?

Broadly, I would submit, the answer to this question is the so-called "securitization" of U.S. foreign policy since 9/11. This has resulted in a huge increase in resources controlled by the Department of Defense and a relative weakening of the U.S. diplomatic services. And if the diplomatic decline is stark in Africa, it is also emblematic of what is happening elsewhere in the world.

Many in Congress consistently advocate for the military. In this area, the Congress reflects the view of the American public.

When a 2012 Gallup Poll asked about national defense, most respondents felt that it was either "not strong enough," or "about right," while only a small minority thought it was "too strong."

The diplomatic function enjoys less popular support and has less congressional interest, except in the aftermath of episodes such as Benghazi. Everybody has friends and neighbors who serve in the military; few Americans personally know Foreign Service Officers. Everybody understands the function of the military; what a diplomatic service actually does is often obscure, beyond somehow involving cookies and striped pants. And the Foreign Service still suffers from a reputation of "elitism." It is telling that the U.S. Marine Corps' reputation for elitism is a source of strength, while that of the Foreign Service weakens it.

I would like to suggest that we are seeing something of a feed-back loop, especially in Africa. If counter-terrorism is the centerpiece of our African interests, that results in the

military and the national security agencies taking the lead. Resources then flow to the military.

Parallel under resourcing means the diplomats sometimes cannot fulfill even their traditional functions. So, additional taskings and funding flows to the military. That, in turn re-enforces the military flavor of our approach to Africa.

Some of the criticism of the erosion of the diplomatic function is shared in the United States. Former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates in 2008, said, "In the campaign against terrorist networks and other extremists, we know that military force will continue to have a role. But over the long term, we cannot kill or capture our way to victory." He went on to cite the decreased budget for diplomatic operations and called the accusations that our foreign policy is increasingly militarized a "not an entirely unreasonable sentiment."

But the State Department's weaknesses do not solely stem from resource constraints. There are as well institutional shortcomings.

To state the obvious, bilateral and multilateral relations between the United States and the rest of the world need to be nurtured, cultivated, developed, and guided by skilled professionals with a deep understanding of the country or organization to which they are accredited.

But, the upper levels of Foreign Service positions are being increasingly filled by political appointees rather than professional diplomats. There has recently been an outcry over President Obama rewarding some of his biggest campaign donors with ambassadorships. While this is hardly new, it may be growing.

Political ambassadorships appear more and more to be linked to partisan fundraising. The average amount raised by each donor who received a posting was \$1.79 million as of mid-July, according to reliable media. (*The Guardian*, London 10 July, 2013).

Yet, as the president's personal representative, the ambassador has a crucial role in balancing diplomatic, security, and development equities from the perspective of fundamental U.S. interests. He or she should be trained and encouraged to use his or her presidential authority in an assertive way.

If the ambassador is prepared to lead, many of the dysfunctions associated with "securitization" can be mitigated or avoided. That also puts a premium on the appointment of ambassadors who are professional diplomats, and it requires the State Department to put greater emphasis on his or her power and responsibilities. That may sometimes require geographic bureaus to defer to the man or woman on the ground, uncomfortable though that might be.

Another source of weakness has been the refocusing of the Foreign Service toward post-conflict reconstruction in the aftermath of Iraq and Afghanistan. The Foreign

Service is thereby driven from its traditional diplomatic functions toward subordination to the Department of Defense. After all, the latter has primary responsibility in war zones and, for now, in post-conflict reconstruction.

In such environments, too often the Foreign Service is also deflected into serving as a concierge for other agencies inexperienced at operating outside the United States.

In 2006, then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that Foreign Service officers must partner more directly with the military in what she called, "transformational diplomacy." And from 2003 to 2008, more than 2,000 members of the Foreign Service volunteered to serve in Iraq or Afghanistan.

More than a little of this focus on "transformational diplomacy" was at the expense of our already understaffed African missions.

But, at the end of the day, the relative growth of the military when compared to traditional diplomacy comes back to one, principal thing: resource constraints.

Even before the sequestration, one of the main consequences of these resource constraints was diplomatic personnel shortages.

A 2008 report from the American Academy of Diplomacy concluded that, the ability of the Foreign Service to fulfill its mission is "hobbled by a human capital crisis." As a result, the military often must assume the burden because it does have the people and the funding.

But, lacking the necessary experience and knowledge, the military cannot fulfill these roles as well as career diplomats or USAID development professionals can.

The American Academy of Diplomacy report states that, in 2008, there was a State Department shortfall of about 2,400 officers for core diplomacy and training. It recommended rectifying this lack by 2014. However, in this era of sequestration, achieving that goal will be a challenge.

If diplomats and development professionals cannot take the time to constantly improve themselves and keep up with the changing global context, then the State Department and USAID will be under-skilled. We badly need to follow the example of our military colleagues who are constantly involved in professional training throughout their careers.

The lack of resources within the State Department and USAID may be one of the biggest obstacles to diplomacy today, but it is hard not to conclude that it is also indicative of a current climate in which diplomacy and development are simply less important than the military when it comes to foreign policy. This was a perspective appropriate to the nineteenth century. It no longer is.

Now that I've spent all this time outlining the problems, I don't want to leave you without any possible solution. First and foremost, we need to develop a new consensus on what the role of diplomats should be. We also need a new consensus on the role of USAID. AFSA has been doing yeoman service in keeping both issues on the table.

For example, if we need to have Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT's) and other fixtures of "transformative diplomacy," how should they be staffed, and by whom? To achieve a new consensus on what diplomats and development professionals do, there must be a conversation in which nothing is off the table. More talk, you might say. Yes. That is the only way to explore the issues and reach an agreement on a way forward. And yes, it will take time.

Based on my experience, I hope the discussion would include the following issues

- First, whether diplomats should be involved in post-conflict reconstruction or whether we need to create an entirely new service to do this? Or should we significantly strengthen USAID so it can assume this burden?
- Second, should the consular function be a separate service?
- Third, should recruitment, training, and promotion systems within the Foreign Service differ according to function?
- And, fourth, there should probably also be a re-examination of the current primacy of administrative and interpersonal skills over language and area expertise in the Foreign Service. That conversation should include ambassadorial appointments.

I have no illusions that such a conversation would be conclusive—or quick. So it is important to have some short-term goals as well, such as:

- The State Department and USAID must do a better job of building trust with Congress and improving their own relationship with each other. This will require leadership from the top.
- We must implement better personnel and training policies. Here, we largely know what to do. It is a matter of implementing and paying for broadly accepted recommendations.
- And, most importantly, we must expand the diplomatic function. We need more Foreign Service officers. That is also going to require money. The administration will need to make recruitment and examination a high priority to secure the necessary funding. It is not impossible. Secretary Powell did so during President Bush's first administration, and Secretary Clinton also had some success.

These would be important first steps toward a better balance in Africa and elsewhere around the world between the diplomatic and military functions. This is a major opportunity and challenge for American diplomacy, and not just in Africa.

Let me conclude by returning to the questions I posed more than half an hour ago.

First, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that American policy toward Africa is militarizing and is increasingly driven by counter-terrorism.

Second, I submit that the fundamental changes underway in Africa are ambiguous, amorphous, and best understood and responded to by diplomats and development professionals.

Third, our diplomatic assets are anemic. That willy-nilly means that taskings and resources flow to DOD and the military – because they do have the necessary resources.

Finally, we need a new consensus on what the role of diplomats and development professionals should be. And significant structural changes in the Foreign Service are probably necessary, involving recruitment, training and even promotion precepts. And, there needs to be a rethink about the role of political appointee ambassadors.

Thank you.