

AFRICOM

Expansion of the American Empire, or the key to African prosperity?

“America is a Nation with a mission - and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire. Our aim is a democratic peace - a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman.”- President George W. Bush.¹

Introduction

A common thread that stitches through colonial times to current day is that one nation has always stood above all others. Whether it was the Romans, the Greeks, the Persians, or the Turks, one “empire” was able to control a significant portion of global affairs. The times and tactics have certainly changed over the many years, but the idea of an “empire” has not. Few would argue that America is the new “empire”, and others would also suggest that many of America’s current foreign policy decisions are based on protecting America’s interests as opposed to acting multilaterally through agencies like the United Nations.

This paper will examine a controversial idea put forth by President Bush to implement a Unified Combatant Command post (UCC) in the continent of Africa.

AFRICOM is America’s newest UCC, and will be responsible for coordinating all military operations for all 53 nations within Africa except Egypt, and to help provide a stable environment for peaceful and economic growth.² President Bush was quoted as

¹ ‘State of the Union Address 2004’; Public Papers of President George W Bush

² Frequently Asked Questions on AFRICOM, <http://www.africom.mil/africomFAQs.asp> (September 2008)

saying just before his Presidential visit to Africa in February of 2008, with regard to AFRICOM:

I think the entire continent, and particularly West Africa benefits, where the local capacities are improved, infrastructure assistance is provided, where there is maritime safety and security, all as a way of ensuring that there is peace and stability not only in Liberia but in the region and around the world, so we do not see it in a negative way.³

Critics of AFRICOM feel that the only reason this is being implemented is to increase and secure American interests throughout Africa. Many African heads of state, have responded with trepidation because they feel that an increased military presence on the continent will further escalate tensions between nations in Africa and hinder sovereignty.

Despite the criticisms, one must look further than AFRICOM, and directly at President Bush's policy towards Africa as a whole, something many Bush proponents say has been seriously overlooked during his tenure as President.

This essay will clearly illustrate how AFRICOM is part of a three point plan (economic reform-AGOA, health reform-PEPFAR, and stabilisation-AFRICOM) put forward by the President to help the many nations of Africa escape the clutches of hopelessness and despair which has plagued the 'forgotten continent' for many years and help usher them in to the new world. American policy affirms that AFRICOM can be an extremely helpful resource for African nations if America does not bear the sole burden, there is transparency on both sides, and most importantly if Africa is willing to fully engage in a dynamic partnership with the United States to help the continent prosper.

Despite the lack of public awareness, President Bush has made Africa, a major focal point in his foreign policy. From 2000 (when President Bush assumed office) to

³ "Bush Comments Spark Debate," *Voices Of America*, Nico Colombant, 20 Feb 2008

2006, the United States doubled development assistance to Africa to \$21.5 billion dollars, in addition to quadrupling funding to the Sub-Sahara to \$5.6 billion;⁴

President Bush has also met more African heads of State than any other U.S. President has before him.⁵

In addition to providing financial assistance, the President has also emphasized several key programs to help economic growth and trade between the United States, and Africa, the main one being the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA).

AGOA, was created in 2000 under the Clinton administration, and according to the United States Government:

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) was signed into law on May 18, 2000 as Title 1 of The Trade and Development Act of 2000. The Act offers tangible incentives for African countries to continue their efforts to open their economies and build free markets.⁶

Since its inception, AGOA has been very beneficial to both parties involved. In a speech delivered to the U.S. Congress' House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Florizelle B. Liser (assistant U.S. trade representative for Africa) touted the success of AGOA.

Liser stated that AGOA imports totalled over \$44 billion in 2006.⁷ This was over five times the level of AGOA imports in 2001, but it was pointed out the bulk of this figure was due to increased oil imports from Africa. However, value-added products such as apparel, footwear, automobile parts, and processed agricultural items have risen from

⁴ Anthony B. Kim and Brett D. Schaefer, *President Bush's Trip To Africa: Solidifying U.S. partnerships with the region*, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Africa/wm1817.cfm> (February 15, 2008)

⁵ Anthony B. Kim and Brett D. Schaefer, *President Bush's Trip To Africa: Solidifying U.S. partnerships with the region*, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Africa/wm1817.cfm> (February 15, 2008)

⁶ African Growth Opportunity Act Information, <http://www.agoa.info/> (September 2008)

⁷ Liser, Florizelle B., Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Africa Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "Beyond Oil & Gas: African Growth and Opportunity Act's Benefits to Africa", Presented to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, Washington D.C., July 12, 2007

\$1.4 billion in 2001 to \$3.2 billion in 2006.⁸ AGOA has also served as a vehicle to strengthen and improve political landscapes, workers rights, reduce poverty and improve overall economic stability because each country has to meet a criterion to trade under AGOA. Countries who fail to meet or maintain these requirements will no longer be entitled to trade under AGOA, thus missing out on the benefits it provides to its nation and people. During the address, Liser spoke of several such instances:

The Central African Republic lost its eligibility in 2004 following a coup d'etat; Eritrea lost its eligibility in 2004 for its shortcomings on economic reform and human rights; and Cote d'Ivoire was terminated in 2005 for lack of progress on political and economic reforms. Our hope and expectation is that these and other countries currently not found eligible will strive to create conditions so that they may be positively reconsidered. A number of formerly ineligible countries did exactly that: Liberia and Mauritania addressed the problems we raised during the eligibility review process, made significant economic and political reforms in response to our concerns, and are now AGOA beneficiary countries.⁹

This is promising news going forward with relations between Africa and the United States, because it addresses two major issues which are open market trading, and a move towards political stability.

However, President Bush's lasting legacy in the eyes of many Africans may be the creation of the President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). This was an initiative set forth by the President in 2003 to be proactive in the fight against AIDS which was, and still is ravaging many parts of Africa. In his 2003 State of the Union

⁸ Liser, Florizelle B., Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Africa Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "Beyond Oil & Gas: African Growth and Opportunity Act's Benefits to Africa", Presented to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, Washington D.C., July 12, 2007

⁹ Liser, Florizelle B., Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Africa Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "Beyond Oil & Gas: African Growth and Opportunity Act's Benefits to Africa", Presented to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, Washington D.C., July 12, 2007

Address President Bush specifically mentioned the crisis facing Africa, but also expressed hope and promise for the future:

AIDS can be prevented. Anti-retroviral drugs can extend life for many years. And the cost of those drugs has dropped from \$12,000 a year to under \$300 a year, which places a tremendous possibility within our grasp. Ladies and gentlemen, seldom has history offered a greater opportunity to do so much for so many. We have confronted, and will continue to confront, HIV/AIDS in our own country. And to meet a severe and urgent crisis abroad, tonight I propose the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, a work of mercy beyond all current international efforts to help the people of Africa...

I ask the Congress to commit \$15 billion over the next five years, including nearly \$10 billion in new money, to turn the tide against AIDS in the most afflicted nations of Africa and the Caribbean.¹⁰

These were not idle words, and empty promises, the President and Congress have delivered. The current PEPFAR policy expires this year, and Bush has urged Congress to double the amount of funding from \$15 billion, to \$30 billion. Most importantly though is the fact the results have been very promising. Since PEPFAR has been implemented, the number of people receiving support treatment in Africa has increased from 50,000 in 2003, to 1.7 million people today. New infections have decreased by over 7 million, plus a concentrated effort for providing care to orphans and young children (ages 2-10) has had a profound impact on curbing the disease.¹¹

President Bush has been a champion for major economic and health reform in Africa. He has addressed two major crises facing the African people, and his initiatives are beginning to show effective results.

¹⁰ 'State of the Union Address 2003'; Public Papers of President George W Bush

¹¹ The White House (May 30, 2007). "Fact Sheet: President Bush announces five year, \$30 billion HIV/AIDS plan". Press Release. Retrieved on September 2, 2008.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/05/20070530-5.html>

Arguably the largest problem facing Africa is war, violence and genocide. Roman military writer Flavius Vegetius ominously scribed: “*qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum*”¹² which translates to “He who desires peace must prepare for war”

Sudan, Darfur, Rwanda and Somalia have all left terrifying emotional scars and irreparable damage to these countries on many different levels. Despite the positive effects of AGOA and PEPFAR, these horrific conflicts have limited, and in some cases virtually eliminated any chance of hope and prosperity. One of the main objectives of AFRICOM is to “achieve a more stable environment in which political and economic growth can take place.”¹³ Part of this stability will be achieved through a military presence.

Many critics of AFRICOM believe that an increased military presence in Africa will lead to increased tensions, and rifts in sovereignty. However, AFRICOM has stated that:

Unlike traditional Unified Commands, Africa Command will focus on war prevention rather than war-fighting...

The establishment of U.S. Africa Command does not directly result in changes to U.S. deployments. AFRICOM does not expand the U.S. Defense Department's mission. Instead, the command will focus on gaining more efficiency and effectiveness from existing U.S. resources.¹⁴

A look at AFRICOM’s website shows that the hot button issues are political and economic stability, health, education, non-military assistance, and overall social improvement.

¹² N.S. Gil, *Prepare For War-Latin Quote from Vegetius*, <http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/warfareconflictarmor/f/PrepareforWar.htm> (September 2008)

¹³ Frequently Asked Questions on AFRICOM, <http://www.africom.mil/africomFAQs.asp> (September 2008)

¹⁴ Frequently Asked Questions on AFRICOM, <http://www.africom.mil/africomFAQs.asp> (September 2008)

Opponents of AFRICOM think it's just a matter of time before the other shoe drops and the militarization of Africa increases. This seems to be the overwhelming criticism of AFRICOM, yet President Bush has publically stated:

I know there's rumours in Ghana, 'All Bush is coming to do is try to convince you to put a big military base here,' that's baloney. Or as we say in Texas, that's bull. I want to dispel the notion that all of a sudden America is bringing all kinds of military to Africa.¹⁵

Texas slang aside, it seems AFRICOM has been misunderstood. This was publically acknowledged by the person who is currently in charge of the operation General William 'Kip' Ward. In response to the charges that Africans believe this is a strategic military move on the part of the United States: "When I deliver that message in those terms to Africans, and I say that it is not about establishing large bases in Africa, it is not about bringing in large numbers of troops to Africa to do things, they say: 'OK, OK, why didn't you say that first?'"¹⁶

This initial misconception has caused African nations to be resistant to AFRICOM. However, once these misconceptions were clarified, twenty three different African ambassadors have expressed a deep interest and support of the objectives and initiatives set forth by AFRICOM.¹⁷

Those opposed to AFRICOM, believe that the United States and their military will become quickly entangled in African politics, and over-assert their power which will in turn lead to an escalation in tensions and possibly armed conflicts. However, through crises such as Somalia, Sudan, Darfur, and Rwanda it showed that the African Military

¹⁵ "U.S. not seeking military power in Africa", *Mail and Guardian online*, Jennifer Loven, 21 February 2008

¹⁶ "U.S. Africom chief admits role was understood", *Reuters Africa*, Mark Trevelyan, 18 February 2008

¹⁷ AFRICOM HELPS PARTNERS CONFRONT STABILITY CHALLENGES :[1]. (2007, November 15). US Fed News Service, Including US State News, Retrieved September 9, 2008, from Academic Research Library database. (Document ID: 1384188571).

which was intended to protect the civilians, and help stabilize the situation were severely overwhelmed. The United States were sharply criticized for their slow reaction time to all of the aforementioned situations. But one must wonder, if the United States had a central command post located within Africa, could some of these problems been dealt with much more expediently? There is still civil war, genocide and conflict throughout parts of Africa, and since the United States has the largest military in the world, it seems like it would be beneficial for the respective governments of Africa to be able to draw on these resources in a rapid manner and work multilaterally to help with these situations.

Another key criticism is the idea that the United States is establishing AFRICOM to protect their own interests, and maintain a stronghold over the oil resources specifically against China. However, if there is instability and unrest in countries which hold oil reserves, it's a situation in which no one wins. Theresa Whelan, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs spoke directly about this situation:

Some people believe that we are establishing AFRICOM solely to fight terrorism or to secure oil resources or to discourage China. This is not true. Natural resources represent Africa's current and future wealth, but in an open-market environment, many benefit. Ironically, the U.S., China, and other countries share a common interest — that of a secure environment in Africa, and that's AFRICOM's objective. AFRICOM is about helping Africans build greater capacity to assure their own security.¹⁸

While AFRICOM endures more criticism than support from the international community, almost everyone can agree upon the central idea that the continent is in dire need of help. The criticisms levied against AFRICOM are very knee-jerk and broad. (The idea that a military base will lead to a surge in militarization on America's behalf or

¹⁸ Brainwave R. Mumba, Sr., *What is AFRICOM and Why Zambia?*, <http://zambianchronicle.com/2007/09/03/what-is-africom-why-zambia/> (September 2008)

America is using AFRICOM as a power-play against China) However, the continent is rife with corruption at governmental levels, famine and disease, inadequate basic infrastructure, war and violence. Critics are quick to cry foul with AFRICOM saying it's a detriment to the continent, yet Africa as a whole simply cannot be self-sustaining at this point on many important societal levels. Africa is still very dependant on foreign aid and U.N. support, yet critics of AFRICOM believe that America should stay out of African political affairs and let the respective heads of state handle their own business. In theory this would be an ideal solution, but many of the African nations are plagued by corrupt and oppressive leaders who only care about their own personal gain. The citizens that make up these countries feel the effects because they simply do not have any means or support to voice their concerns. People can argue that AFRICOM is unnecessary, yet the alternative is much worse. The international community has simply been reactive to the hardships of Africa and it cannot continue any longer. International aid programs such as UNICEF, WFP, Red Cross and many others are making tremendous efforts in dealing with food and health related issues. But major changes need to take place at governmental levels and this is where a program like AFRICOM can help deliver where foreign aid can't.

Conclusion

This paper has illustrated how AFRICOM will benefit the 'forgotten continent' as opposed to hindering it. President Bush has clearly been proactive with his policies towards Africa, and specifically AGOA along with PEPFAR have flourished and benefited the African people a great deal. These programs have succeeded because there was a mutual partnership, and both sides have worked bilaterally with both interests at

heart. This shows that AFRICOM can be an invaluable tool for the continent because it's the first major step in providing stability, something that Africa as a whole must have for them to prosper in the twenty first century. Critics feel a military presence will inevitably equate to increased conflict and more lives lost. However, that argument is stated without any evidence to support it, and therefore, does not hold any weight. Human aid, training, infrastructure improvements, education, and war prevention are the main objectives of AFRICOM. A prosperous Africa benefits everyone, not just the United States.

Is AFRICOM the expansion of the American "empire" or is it a tool used to exercise hegemonic influence? It's too early to tell as AFRICOM is in its infancy, so its effects cannot be measured, but it would seem to be the latter because the main objective of AFRICOM is to promote peace and stability. This message has been consistent from the President to all of the integral figures involved with AFRICOM. In addition, it has been clearly stated that the United States will not be deploying any new troops in the future unless a situation arose in which it was needed.

The idea of having such a massive central resource is beneficial to many African nations. If both parties can co-exist and work in unison, then AFRICOM can greatly benefit both sides, and more importantly act as a bridge to connect Africa to the modern world on many levels.

AFRICOM has the possibility of being a major catalyst for growth, positive change and prosperity on the continent. Criticisms are understandable, particularly those raised by African heads of state who oppose a permanent American military presence. But in the final analysis, America must take the lead, for these leaders have failed to do so. If the nations of Africa can join with the United States and the international

community in a common effort for peace and stability, then the continent where life began, can become a place where it prospers. ¹⁹

¹⁹ For a first hand account of AFRICOM please refer to Appendix A' and Appendix B'