

# **West Africa and the United States' 'War on Terror'**

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## **Sponsors:**

OSU Center for African Studies  
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## **Project Abstract:**

West Africa is one of those regions of the world which has received US security attention in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 terrorist attack on US soil. Analysis showing the vulnerability of weak/failed states against non-state organizations such as Al Qaida, has led the US to the recognition that the Sahel region of West Africa and the oil-producing Niger-Delta zone of Nigeria could be used by terrorists as a launching pad against US interests. The vast geographical expanse of the Sahel with its little governmental infrastructure is viewed as a “no-man’s” land which might serve as a base for Islamic militants. Consequently, the US launched a \$500 million Trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Initiative, which seeks to boost the military capacity of selected West African nations to counter terrorists and the security threats which they posed.

The establishment of the US military’s Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 marks the growing importance of Africa in US security calculations. According to Robert Gates, the US Defense Secretary, the Command would “oversee security cooperation, building partnership capability, defense support to non-military missions, and, if directed, military operations on the African continent.”

Although all these represent a dramatic departure in US policy toward Africa, there has not been any systematic scholarly effort to understand the radical transformation in US/African relations in the wake of the terrorist attack on the United States. The project seeks to address the scholarly lacuna on this issue through a comprehensive and systematic study of the evolving US/Africa security partnership. This study will be conducted in two major phases. The first phase will commission leading African and American scholars and analysts to conduct research on various aspects of the war on terrorism and the consequent US military involvement in West Africa. Results of the research will then be presented by each scholar at a major conference to be held at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies at the Ohio State University. The second phase of the project will involve extensive revision of the research and the subsequent publication of the findings in two scholarly volumes.

**Project Description:**

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States of America has fundamentally altered the structure and framework of international security. Threat perceptions, both in the US and elsewhere, were substantially altered in the wake of the attack. In addition, the terrorist attack has brought about a radical re-orientation to US foreign policy. In the first place, it has led US to adopt an explicit policy of pre-emptive military strikes on peoples and entities deemed inimical to the United States and its allies. Second, the bombing of New York and Washington, DC on that fateful day provided the justification for the US-led war against the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. Third, the attack compelled the US to develop a more comprehensive global approach to the issue of terrorism. Consequently, the United States has tried to cultivate new allies in regions of the world that it had previously not considered important to its national security and politico-economic interests. The establishment of the US military's Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 marks the growing importance of Africa in US security calculations. According to Robert Gates, the US Defense Secretary, the Command would "oversee security cooperation, building partnership capability, defense support to non-military missions, and, if directed, military operations on the African continent."

West Africa is one of those regions of the world which has received US security attention in the aftermath of the terrorist attack. The US has come to the recognition that the Sahel region of West Africa and the oil-producing Niger-Delta zone of Nigeria could be used by terrorists as a launching pad against US interests. The vast geographical expanse of the Sahel with its little governmental infrastructure is viewed as a "no-man's" land which might serve as a base for Islamic militants. Consequently, the US launched a \$500 million Trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Initiative, which seeks to boost the military capacity of selected West African nations to counter terrorists and the security threats which they posed.

Similarly, the United States is deeply concerned about instability in the petroleum-producing region of the Niger-Delta. The kidnapping of oil-company employees, pilfering of crude oil and the outright sabotage of oil installations constitute the main weapons of militant insurgents in the region who are demanding greater local control and ownership of petroleum. Nigeria has seen a drastic reduction in its crude oil production as a result of the activities of the militant insurgents in the Niger Delta. For much of 2007 and 2008, the country suffered a reduction in its daily production of petroleum of as much as 300,000 barrels.

In view of the fact that the US now derives 13-14% of its crude oil imports from West, Southern and Central Africa (Nigeria, the Gambia, Angola, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao-Tome and Principe), it is easy to understand how the instability in the Niger Delta could be viewed with deep concern by the United States. The disruption in oil production and oil supply coupled with the potential of militant groups to capitalize on the economic and political grievances of the inhabitants of the region are seen as major security challenges. Given the increasing scale of US oil imports from West Africa, it is easy to understand why the US would be apprehensive about violence in the Niger Delta. Civil wars, ethnic conflicts and religious violence are among other US security concerns in West Africa. The US is also concerned about humanitarian issues such as droughts, environmental degradation, the influx of refugees and the AIDS pandemic in West Africa. While the importance of these issues cannot be ignored, the fundamental fact is that the two primary US security interests in West Africa are the Sahel region and the oil-producing Niger Delta. For the Sahel, the primary US security objective is to prevent the region from becoming a fertile terrorist ground. In the Niger Delta and other oil-producing

zones of West Africa, the fundamental US security interest lies in ensuring reliable and stable energy producers.

To underscore its security concerns in West Africa, the United States has entered into military cooperation agreements with several countries in the region. Through training in West Africa and in US military institutions, the US is attempting to improve the capability of West African soldiers to respond to local security challenges. The United States, through such initiatives as the Civil-Military Operations Program is trying to improve the capacity of the armed forces in selected countries (Nigeria, Senegal, Chad, Mali and Mauritania) to counter “instability and extremist ideology.” The program also aims at improving civil-military coordination between mid-level officers and their middle management-level civilian counterparts.

### **Proposed Research Project:**

Although all these represent a dramatic departure in US policy toward Africa, there has not been any systematic scholarly effort to understand the radical transformation in US/African relations in the wake of the terrorist attack on the United States. This project addresses the scholarly lacuna on this issue through a comprehensive and systematic study of the evolving US/Africa security partnership. This study will be conducted in two major phases. The first phase will commission leading African and American scholars and analysts to conduct research on various aspects of the war on terrorism and the consequent US military involvement in West Africa. Results of the research will then be presented by each scholar at a major conference to be held at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies at the Ohio State University. The second phase of the project will involve extensive revision of the research and the subsequent publication of the findings in two scholarly volumes.

### **Objectives of the Project**

The objectives of the project can be delineated thus:

1. To understand how the events of September 11 have altered US-West African relations along the security spectrum.
2. To evaluate socio-economic and political strategies used by the US to cultivate the support of West African governments in its war against terrorism.
3. To analyze the responses of governments in West Africa to US overtures on security cooperation.
4. To examine the changing landscape of threat perceptions in West Africa.
5. To undertake a comprehensive evaluation of US security assistance programs in West Africa.
6. To evaluate the capability of West African militaries in carrying out the new roles which the war on terrorism has thrust upon them
7. To examine the implications of the war on terrorism for civil-military relations in West Africa.

### **The Research Questions**

The project will be undergirded by the following questions:

1. Where does West Africa stand vis-à-vis US global security interests?
2. What are the implications for West Africa as US/Africa military cooperation increases?
3. What challenges does US security concerns in West Africa pose for governments in the sub-region?
4. How does US military presence either through military training or through the US Africa Command affect the dynamics of local politics in West Africa?
5. What do West African governments consider the greatest security threats in their countries?
6. What are the long term implications for West Africa of increased US military involvement in the continent?
7. Does increased US military involvement in West Africa pose significant risks to the continent?
8. How compatible are US strategic interests with West African governments' own strategic interests?
9. What are some significant perspectives of West African military officers on US/Africa military cooperation agreements?

#### **Tentative List of Scholars and their Research Topics**

1. Kelechi Kalu (Project Director, The Ohio State University), **US/Africa Security Relations in the Twenty-First Century: Trends and Implications**
2. Pita Ogaba Agbese (University of Northern Iowa), **War on Terrorism and the Dynamics of Threat Perception in West Africa**
3. George Klay Kieh (Grand Valley State University), **Good Governance, the AU Peer Review Mechanism and the New Security Architecture in West Africa**
4. Kwesi Aning (The Kofi Anan Center for Peacekeeping Training), **The US Africa Command (AFRICOM): Issues and Perspectives**
5. Gen. Russ Howard (University of Montana), **Global Terrorism and US Security Policy Towards Africa**
6. Gen Jonah Arogbofa (Retired, Nigerian Armed Forces), **US/Africa Military Cooperation: The View of African Officers**
7. Julius Nyangoro (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), **The Trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Initiative: An Evaluation**
8. Zakaria Ousman (Consulate of Pakistan, Chad), **The African Stability Architecture: A New Vision**
9. Julius Ihonvbere (Former Special Advisor to the President of Nigeria for Policy Monitoring), **Africa and Foreign Military Cooperation Agreements: Perspectives of Activists and Politicians**
10. Sylvester Odion-Akhaine (Centre for Constitutionalism & Demilitarization, Lagos, Nigeria), **Civil-Military Relations: West Africa in the Wake of War on Terrorism.**
11. John Mbaku (Weber State University), **US/Africa Relations: The Economics of Military Cooperation**
12. Boubacar N'Diaye (The College of Wooster), **The Mauritanian Military and the War on Terrorism**
13. Abdoulaye Saine (Miami University, Ohio), **The Military and the Insecurity Architecture in West Africa**

14. Diane Orefo (National Investment Promotion Commission, Abuja), **Implications of the Niger Delta Crisis for U.S./Nigeria Security Relations**