

Autumn 2009 CAS Conference:
West Africa and the United States' 'War on Terror'

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West Africa is one of those regions of the world which has received US security attention in the aftermath of the September 11th 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.