

**UNITED STATES– SOUTH
AFRICAN RELATIONS: THE
CHALLENGE FOR AFRICOM**

BY

COLONEL JAMES R. SAGEN
United States Army

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U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Colonel James R. Sagen
United States Army

Colonel Thomas P. Reilly
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

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This project examines the barriers to United States-South African strategic cooperation in the context of both nation's interests and the existing/emerging threats and challenges. This project also examines South Africa's status as a regional economic and military superpower and the implications for broader African security cooperation. The existing barriers to effective United States-South African cooperation derive from historical legacies of the colonial period and Cold War as well as from the current foreign policies of both nations. Potential strategies for effective strategic cooperation are examined and recommendations are presented for both AFRICOM and the United States in engaging South Africa as a strategic partner in pursuit of vital national interests.

UNITED STATES –SOUTH AFRICAN RELATIONS: THE CHALLENGE FOR AFRICOM

In February 2007, the United States announced the creation of a new geographic combatant command, United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), to oversee United States military strategy on the continent. The response to this announcement, from multiple sources within Africa, appeared overwhelmingly negative and put the administration on the defense. Many African newspapers, scholars and politicians fundamentally questioned United States motivation in creating AFRICOM.

The formation of AFRICOM reflects evolving United States interest in the African Continent. Historically, the United States has had few vital interests in the region. This resulted in limited means for executing United States policy. In addition, United States military responsibilities for Africa were divided between three commands¹ that had primary focus in other regions. AFRICOM now faces the challenge of implementing a coherent military strategy for the continent.

In the aftermath of the public announcement of AFRICOM's formation, the negative reaction to the command from elements within the Republic of South Africa is of particular significance. Given the under-resourcing of United States (U.S.) policy in the continent, AFRICOM could create synergies by leveraging the capabilities of regional strategic partners in Africa. Variously described as a pivotal state, anchor state, and regional superpower, South Africa dominates the Southern African region. South Africa could be a key strategic partner with the United States. However, historical legacies, and current policies and politics present significant barriers to effective United States-South Africa strategic partnership.

During the Cold War the Southern African region was strategically important in the struggle for supremacy by the World's superpowers. Against the background of South Africa's policy of Apartheid and intransigent Portuguese colonialism, the Soviets and their Cuban allies directly supported a number of revolutionary struggles throughout the region. Since the end of the Cold War, the region has witnessed the end of Apartheid and colonialism and South Africa has enjoyed a relative degree of stability compared to the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Southern African region faces a number of existent and potential threats to stability that will present challenges to AFRICOM and United States policy. Nation-state instability, violent urban crime, crushing poverty, unemployment, and high HIV/AIDS levels are some of the most significant. While terrorism is not yet a significant issue in Southern Africa, the region has a large Muslim population and is also host to a number of armed non-state actors.

This project examines the barriers to United States-South African strategic cooperation in the context of both nations' interests and the existing and emerging threats. Potential strategies for effective strategic cooperation are examined and recommendations are presented for both AFRICOM and the United States in engaging South Africa as a strategic partner in pursuit of vital national interests.

The Reaction to AFRICOM

The sharp public response from many African newspapers, scholars, and politicians to the creation of AFRICOM underscores the challenges that the command faces. In strategic communications and messaging, the command was preempted before it could develop an effective public relations and strategic communications

strategy. In fact much of the negative response came out before AFRICOM was even officially formed.² Most of the headlines and “expert quotes” had a similar tone:

AFRICOM: Wrong for Liberia, Disastrous for Africa,”³ “Doubts deepen about acceptability of new U.S. Military command,”⁴ a “public relations catastrophe,”⁵ “African diplomats...horrified,”⁶

Analyses of these and other stories and articles indicate a common sense of suspicion and mistrust strengthened by strong perceptions of United States self-interests. After years of neglect, why is the United States suddenly taking an interest in Africa? Answering this question, against the backdrop of colonial and cold war legacies, Journalist Ezekiel Pajibo accused the United States of abusive, incompetent, neo-colonial militarism.⁷ United States neo-colonialism, she argued, is fueled by desperate, self-serving United States interests. The United States is only concerned with securing Africa’s oil and other resources as well as countering Chinese interests. She adds that “the Bush administration endlessly beats the drums for its Global War on Terror,” a war that has little relevance for Africans. Though Pajibo is perhaps the shrillest of the voices quoted, she is not alone in her perceptions that interests in oil, China, and the “Global War on Terror” are at the heart of AFRICOM’s creation. These perceptions of United States interests, cast in a negative light, repeat in article after article.⁸

In South Africa, the negative reaction to AFRICOM went beyond published rhetoric. The South Africa Minister of Defense, Mosiuoa Lekota, took bold public stances rejecting AFRICOM on several fronts. In June and July 2007, Lekota refused to meet with the newly appointed AFRICOM Commander, General Kip Ward. This deliberate cold-shoulder toward General Ward fueled diplomatic tensions involving the United States Ambassador to South Africa.⁹ Soon after, at the behest of South Africa, the 14 nation Southern African Development Community (SADC) voted to reject any

basing of AFRICOM within member territory.¹⁰ After the vote Lekota made it clear the AFRICOM was not welcome in Southern Africa.¹¹

Significantly, the South African actions generated a different thread of analytical interpretation from a number of experts who took a different tone from the other AFRICOM critics. Far from the South Africans opposing AFRICOM on moral or anti-colonial grounds, they argued that the South Africans were moving to protect their own interests and preserve their regional superpower status. The STRATFOR website titled one article “South Africa, U.S. Dueling for Hegemony in Africa.”¹² Dr Jakkie Cilliers of the South African based Institute of Security Studies believes South Africa led the SADC move against AFRICOM, not because of any dislike of the United States, but to preserve their regional power.¹³

United States Interests in Africa

African cynicism and negative perceptions concerning U.S. interests in Africa is not without merit and reflects the history of U.S. engagement in Africa. American political leaders have not only failed to counter these perceptions, but have often validated and confirmed them. Africa was listed last in the Clinton Administration’s 1998 National Security Strategy. And in 2000, presidential candidate George W. Bush admitted Africa had little strategic importance for the United States.¹⁴ Journalist Howard French argues that the West lost interest in Africa after the Cold War and shifted money away from emerging African democracies to emerging Eastern European democracies.¹⁵ The apparent lack of vital American interests in Africa has resulted in limited means and resources for carrying out United States strategy in Africa. In the 1990’s, America shifted foreign aid away from Africa. From a military perspective, Africa

was split between three geographic combatant commanders. For the commanders of European, Pacific, and Central Commands, Africa was not high on the agenda and received limited resources for engagement.

In the late 1990's, several experts recognized the lack of interest and means backing United States strategy in Africa and also identified enduring and emerging challenges to United States strategic interests that argued for more effective United States engagement. In 1998, Daniel W. Henk, former Director of African Studies at the United States Army War College, identified 11 important if not vital interests for the United States in Africa. Henk recognized the American resources for the continent would remain limited. What limited means America did bring to the continent were not backed up by a coherent strategy. As a result the diplomatic, military, and economic elements of national power were poorly coordinated.¹⁶ Ambassador Daniel H. Simpson also recognized that limited interests and limited means handicapped United States efforts. Simpson anticipated emerging American oil and economic interests in the region and recommended the formation of a single African military command.¹⁷

The establishment of AFRICOM some 16 years after Simpson's recommendation reflects new perceptions and realities affecting American strategic interests in Africa and in the World. The impact of the 9-11 attacks and increasing globalization are two important factors. Critics of AFRICOM cynically cite growing American interest and concern over African oil, Chinese influence, and terrorist threats. But there are very real threats and challenges to American interests (and African interests) in each one of these issues. Nigeria is now the 5th largest supplier of crude oil to the United States with America receiving 22% of its supplies from Africa as a whole.¹⁸ The aggressive strategy

of China in Africa is a reality and China imports over 30% of its oil from Africa.¹⁹

Nation- state instability leading to weak or failing states poses significant risks for greater regional instability and providing breeding ground for terrorist cells. The 2006 National Security Strategy of the United States recognizes Africa's strategic importance:

Africa holds growing geo-strategic importance and is a high priority of this Administration. It is a place of promise and opportunity, linked to the United States by history, culture, commerce and strategic significance. Our goal is an African continent that knows liberty, peace, stability, and increasing prosperity.²⁰

Southern Africa –Emerging Challenges to United States Strategic Interests

United States recognition of the geo-strategic importance of the African continent is closely related to emerging challenges to United States interests. These challenges are set in the context of growing African oil production and the overall trend toward world economic globalization. The challenges to United States interests fall broadly into three interrelated areas: threat of Islamic terrorism/WMD proliferation, Chinese influence and competition in Africa, and the potential for regional instability due to negative social, economic, and political factors. United States resourcing of its overall African engagement strategy will probably remain relatively low compared to other American global efforts. AFRICOM will have to closely integrate other interagency efforts and fully leverage key African partners to effectively address these challenges.

In the war on terror, the United States is challenged in developing a strategy for the region. Much of the focus in Africa has been in the Horn of Africa. Southern Africa, though, is facing an increasing threat. The South African Minister of Intelligence, Ronnie Kasrils, has warned of possible al-Qaeda sleeper cells in the country.²¹ Analyst Kurt Shillinger points out that in South Africa, key factors of state weakness, years of

oppression and “a large, politically active Muslim population... create opportunities for radicalization.”²² There has also been a proliferation of foreign funded Islamic radio stations carrying the al-Qaeda message.²³ South Africa also could be attractive to terrorist cells because of its excellent communications and transportation networks.²⁴ South Africa has experienced various degrees of domestic terrorism that could affect national stability. In 2002, the white supremacist BoerMag carried out a terrorist bombing campaign before it was eliminated by the authorities.²⁵ And the Muslim vigilante group People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGD) has carried out a violent campaign against criminals elements in the Western Cape. PAGD attacks have recently spread to civilian and police targets as well.²⁶

Currently, no African nation possesses nuclear weapons, though that has not always been the case. On 24 March 1993, South African President F.W. de Klerk admitted that South Africa had possessed a small nuclear arsenal and announced that the weapons had been destroyed and the program dismantled.²⁷ Though South Africa is now a committed participant in the non-proliferation treaty, the region faces a number of challenges in controlling the spread of nuclear technology and materials. The region is a source of uranium with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia, Zambia, and South Africa exporting the mineral.²⁸ There have been allegations of uranium smuggling onto the black market by elements associated with criminal organization in South Africa.²⁹ After the fall of Apartheid, the United States was concerned that some weapons grade materials and components remained in South Africa's possession. This was coupled with the African National Congress' close relations with Iran, Libya, and North Korea.³⁰ Now, South Africa is planning to enter the commercial nuclear sector to increase

electrical generation capacity and will soon resume uranium enrichment. Recently, break-in attempts at South Africa's Pelindaba nuclear facility was foiled by security, but not before criminal elements were able to enter the facilities' main control room.³¹

Chinese influence and power is a significant challenge for American interests and policies throughout Africa. Researcher Donovan Chu argues that China is engaging in political warfare for influence and power in Africa, using the diplomatic, economic, and information elements of power in a coordinated effort to further Chinese national interests.³²

The central aim of the PRC's grand strategy is to become a global power, restructuring the world order-including the African continent-to achieve this objective.³³

Chinese efforts in Africa date back to the cold war when China supported the African liberation movements to include those in the Southern African region.³⁴ Since 2000, the Chinese have focused their efforts on African states, including South Africa, identified as "anchor states" in United States national security policy.³⁵ Chinese President Jiang Zemin traveled to South Africa in 2000 and signed the Pretoria declaration with South African President Thabo Mbeki. The declaration called for increased economic and political cooperation with the view of creating a new economic and political order.³⁶

The most significant challenge to United States interests in Africa comes from potential regional instability. In the 1990's, some experts maintained that many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were close to total economic and political collapse. Overall, genocidal civil war, famine, and infrastructure collapse were widespread. Compared to Liberia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leon, Southern Africa remained relatively stable in the 1990's. And with the end of fighting in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the region is now largely free of major conflict. Potential for instability

remains as many countries struggle with weak governance, poverty, unemployment, high rates of crime, and AIDs/HIV. Zimbabwe is now a source of regional instability with South Africa refusing to actively pressure President Robert Mugabe's regime to restore effective governance. With the Zimbabwe economy in freefall, South African business interests have been damaged and refugees have swarmed into South Africa.³⁷ Though serious political risk is unlikely in South Africa itself, the nation is challenged to meet the expectations that came on the heels of liberation.³⁸ Unemployment runs at near 40%, most people live in poverty and are threatened by crime with South Africa having one of the highest murder rates in the world.³⁹ The full impact of the AIDs/HIV pandemic, that has ravaged Southern Africa, is not yet fully understood. Possible over 20% of the South African population is HIV positive with over 300,000 deaths in 2003.⁴⁰

South Africa, Southern African Regionalism and African Unity

South Africa's importance to United States policy in Africa relates in part to South Africa's important regional roles and responsibilities. Regionalism in Southern Africa is a complex subject that transcends geography and culture. As Africa's nations gained independence, two approaches to regional cooperation dominated African politics. Some African leaders argued for African political Union. Others believed political union was impractical and argued for looser regional cooperation. President Julius Nyere of Tanzania believed the practical method was to integrate Africa in stages through regional economic groupings.⁴¹ This approach was accepted as the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) cooperation and integration strategy in 1963.⁴²

Today, the most important Southern African regional economic organization is the Southern African Development Community (SADC) with 15 member nations including

South Africa. South Africa was not always included in the construct. SADC had its origins in 1980 as the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC). SADCC was formed by an organization called the Front Line States to counter white-ruled South Africa's regional aggression and economic power. After the end of the cold war and the fall of apartheid, SADCC transitioned into SADC and accepted South Africa as a member state.⁴³

Though chartered as an economic community with the vision of regional free trade, there are important political and military aspects associated with SADC and other African economic groupings such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). As the OAU transitioned to the African Union (AU), the regional groupings were conceived as the cornerstones of full African economic union to be achieved by the year 2025.⁴⁴ In an ideal progression, economic union at the regional and continental level would facilitate eventual political union. From a military perspective, the African Union seeks to create an African stand-by force for peacekeeping and stability operations. Each of the five major regional economic organizations, to include SADC, has the charter to provide a ready brigade for the force.⁴⁵

Despite grand vision and some degree of regional economic cooperation, the process of integration faces tremendous challenges. Tariff revenues are still a major source of income for many African governments. Most African governments are not eager to give up any degree of sovereignty or to surrender national interests to the regional organizations.⁴⁶ In the case of Southern Africa, there is also the reality of gross inequality in benefits for regional integration. This is due largely to the economic, political, and military superiority of South Africa.

South Africa as a Regional Power

South Africa has variously been described as a regional superpower,⁴⁷ pivotal state,⁴⁸ and anchor state. To a large extent, South Africa's regional power has been the most significant factor shaping Southern African regionalism. During the height of the Cold War, South Africa carried out an aggressive campaign to destabilize the states supporting the Southern African liberation movements. At the same time all of Southern Africa was dominated by South Africa's labor markets, manufacturing strength, and transportation infrastructure.⁴⁹ After the fall of Apartheid, South Africa was freed from international economic sanctions and joined with its former African enemies in a number of economic cooperation organizations.⁵⁰

South Africa's economic power remains undiminished, if not enhanced, since the end of the Cold War. South Africa possesses powerful advantages in geographic location, manufacturing expertise, transportation infrastructure, and economic capital. The statistics vividly backup the assertion of regional superpower status. In 2004, South Africa's total imports and exports in dollar amount exceeded the combined total of all other SADC members combined by almost a factor of two.⁵¹ South Africa has 50% of the regions paved roads⁵² and produces 50% of the regions electricity.⁵³ Yet South Africa has less than 25% of the population of the region.⁵⁴

South Africa's regional dominance has been analyzed in the context of pivotal state or anchoring state concept. Chase et al and Cochran⁵⁵ present three key points about pivotal states in general and South Africa specifically. First, South Africa is able to affect regional and international stability through its economic dominance. This includes significant influence of global commodity markets.⁵⁶ Second, the critical threat to regional and global security comes from internal instability within key pivotal states.⁵⁷

And third, given the limited means and resources available for United States policy, South Africa, as a pivotal regional power, should be the focus of United States economic, diplomatic, and intelligence effort.⁵⁸

Strategic Partnership and the South African Armed Forces

As AFRICOM seeks to build stronger military to military partnerships with key African nations, the emerging roles and capabilities of the South African National Defense Force could be a key point of leverage for the United States. Though South African military power is today a shadow of what it was in the 1980's,⁵⁹ the South African armed forces remain the most capable and professional military in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁶⁰

The roles and missions for the most capable armies in the African are evolving to meet two trends. First, the Western powers and the United Nations are no longer viewed as solutions to Africa's security, stability, and peacekeeping challenges. The United States withdrawal from Somalia, and United Nations ineffectiveness in Rwanda and Sudan, are one part of this. The western nations have also withdrawn from the United Nations peacekeeping role as their armies shift focus to the Global War on Terror and campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶¹ These new realities help drive the second trend, "Africa's new experiments in collective security."⁶²

The key component of the African collective security effort is the creation of an African Union military standby force.⁶³ Built around five regional brigades, the force is to achieve full rapid response capability by the year 2010.⁶⁴ However, there are huge challenges to the concept. Only the ECOWAS and SADC brigades have even minimal capability⁶⁵ and the force is completely lacking in strategic and operational lift and

logistics capacity.⁶⁶ A significant portion of the SADC Brigade will be provided by South Africa to include the brigade headquarters, a parachute battalion, a motorized battalion, an artillery battalion and other supporting branches to include the base hospital in Pretoria.⁶⁷

As well as the force commitment to the SADC brigade, South Africa has deployed forces in support of numerous peacekeeping operations to the extent that signs of over-commitment are evident.⁶⁸ The challenges faced by the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) in meeting regional peacekeeping commitments reflect the post-apartheid political climate and the end of the Cold War. At the height of the Cold War the South African Defense force (SADF) possessed an active force of over 100,000 personnel backed by 500,000 reservists and a robust arms industry. With the end of the liberation struggle, South Africa looked for a “peace dividend” much as did the West after the Cold War. Besides taking large cuts in defense spending and troop strength, the South African Defense Force faced the challenges of integrating the armed elements of the liberations movements and homeland armies, a process that in itself was costly and affected readiness and professionalism.⁶⁹ Between 1989 and 1994, South African defense spending was reduced by 50%, personnel cut to 93,000 and new equipment procurement came to a standstill.⁷⁰

South Africa is now redressing the deficiencies in capability caused by years of underfunding. The South African “Military Vision 2020” is an ambitious transformation and procurement project aiming to restore expeditionary capability to the South African National Defense Force.⁷¹ However, given the conditions of underdevelopment, poverty, and unemployment afflicting much of the population, there remains significant domestic

political opposition to increased defense spending within South Africa.⁷² With the evident “reemergence of the military instrument in South Africa’s foreign policy” the conflict between security demands and budget constraints is significant.⁷³

The Challenges of Strategic Cooperation – United States and South Africa

With the enduring and emerging challenges to American interests in Africa and given the critical regional role of South Africa, effective strategic partnership with South Africa could be an important element of United States African policy. However, historical legacies, and current policies and politics within both countries present significant barriers to effective strategic partnership. From AFRICOM’s perspective many of these factors degrade the ability to engage with the SANDF and degrade the ability to build regional defense and security capacity.

In a 1993, a year prior to his election to the presidency, Nelson Mandela presented key principles for South Africa’s future foreign policy.⁷⁴ Mandela envisioned South Africa moving away from its status as an international pariah and joining the global community as a champion of human dignity and diversity. He recognized the critical importance of the United Nations and identified a fundamental imbalance in the world order prejudicial to the interests of the developing world. Though often sharing common interests with the United States, South Africa’s commitment to championing the interests of developing nations and global rebalancing, often put the two nations on fundamentally opposing foreign policy courses.

The impact of United States policies in Southern Africa during the Cold War and during the period of apartheid has a legacy that is difficult to overcome. The current generation of South African politicians understands that the United States supported the

minority white regime for Cold War expediencies.⁷⁵ In contrast, the “Communist block “ and Third World non-aligned nations, working through the United Nations and on the battlefield, directly supported the South African liberation movements. It is telling that Castro, Qahdaffi, and Arafat were prominent guests at Mandela’s inauguration.⁷⁶

This historical legacy strongly carries over into current South African foreign policy. South Africa’s membership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) serves as the foundation of its foreign policy and drives its aggressive agenda in the United Nations.⁷⁷ South Africa is seeking to rebalance the United Nations away from the developed Western world and more to the favor of the developing world.⁷⁸ And, South Africa retains strong bilateral ties with Cuba, Libya, North Korea, Iran, and the Palestinian movements.

South Africa has recently assumed a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and has used that seat in attempts to block what it views as United States and Western powers attempts to strong-arm smaller developing nations.⁷⁹ South Africa has strongly supported Security Council reform that proposes adding additional permanent Security Council seats (with full veto) for developing nations, to include at least two for the African Union.⁸⁰ South Africa has recently taken stands on key issues in direct challenge to United States policy. South Africa voted against condemning Myanmar for human rights violations in January 2007.⁸¹ And South Africa opposes United States sanctions on Iran related to Iran’s nuclear program.⁸² South Africa supports the right of Iran and other developing nations to develop commercial nuclear energy sources.⁸³ It is not incidental that South Africa is itself moving ahead with

commercial nuclear energy and also gets 40% of its oil from Iran.⁸⁴ South African actions in the United Nations are consistent with its global rebalancing agenda.

South Africa's strong economic and diplomatic ties with China have already been referenced. China also has observer status in, and supports, the Non-Aligned Movement. If Chinese strategy aims at increasing Chinese influence in Africa at the expense of United States influence, then Chinese-South African alignment on a host of foreign policy issues poses a double challenge for the United States in execution of engagement and foreign policy in Africa. Both South Africa and China strive to rebalance global power away from the West and China holds a permanent seat in the Security Council.

United States-South African relations have also been affected by recent shifts in United States foreign policy. Under the Clinton administration, United States-South African relations were relatively strong. President Clinton and President Mandela had a good personal rapport and established formal bilateral frameworks for joint cooperation. Under the leadership of Vice-President Gore and Thabo Mbeki, the Bi-National Commission was established in 1995 to strengthen bilateral ties.⁸⁵ The Bush Administration's approach to foreign policy has not enjoyed much support from South Africa. Disagreement over a number of foreign policy issues resulted in Washington formally ending the Bi-National Commission.⁸⁶ South Africa has opposed United States policy in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and has denied United States warships access to South African harbors.⁸⁷ In 2004, United States-South African military to military engagement and aid was suspended over South Africa's refusal to support international court immunity for United States military personnel.⁸⁸

South Africa also does not fully endorse the United States concept of “Global War on Terror”. The West’s message of a global Islamic terrorist threat is seen in the context of South Africa’s own liberation struggle with full understanding that one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.⁸⁹ Mistrust of American intentions in this regard fueled much of the criticism in the African press over the initiation of AFRICOM. Many African’s believe that focus on international terrorism pulls world attention and resources away from Africa’s real problems; poverty, crime, AIDS, and regional political instability. Terrorism is not viewed as a fundamental threat to the interests of South Africa.⁹⁰

In light of South Africa’s commitment to leading resistance to global imbalances of power, and South Africa’s dominant role economically and politically in the Southern African Region, it is natural for South Africa to guard its prerogatives with regard to the United States. The creation of AFRICOM and renewed United States interest in Africa represent fundamental challenges to South African foreign policy and regional power. A number of experts, already referenced, have argued that South Africa’s motivation for rejecting cooperation with AFRICOM stems from a balance of power dynamic. They argue that South Africa views AFRICOM as a threat to South Africa’s regional influence. This dynamic will further challenge development of South Africa-United States strategic partnership and undermine AFRICOM-SANDF military to military cooperation.

AFRICOM and South Africa – Strategies for Engagement

The Challenges facing the AFRICOM Commander in developing a coherent military strategy throughout the continent are immense. Given the historic lack of vital United States interests and the continued limited means available, AFRICOM and other United States government agencies must ensure unity of United States interagency

effort. That interagency effort must be coupled with effective regional strategic partnerships. Both the interagency effort and potential partnerships must be based on a strategy focused on growing American interests and emerging threats in the region.

A coherent United States policy with AFRICOM firmly imbedded in a coordinated interagency process needs to recognize and build on several key realities. First, the interagency effort must recognize the challenges to United States interests in Africa with a common holistic view. AFRICOM/Department of Defense, State Department, and the United States Agency for International Development must approach the complex challenges in the Southern African region with a common vision and strategy. Continued United States government agency stove-piped efforts are unacceptable and put United States strategy and policy at risk. Second, the United States interagency effort must fully recognize the importance and potential (as well as the challenges) of the regional economic organizations. In particular the critical role that SADC could play in regional and continental peacekeeping. Bilateral relations, state-to-state, will always be important, but the potential economic, political and security benefits that effective regional integration provide cannot be overlooked. As a cornerstone of its regional and continental policy, the United States should support and champion SADC and equivalent organizations in their economic, political, and security growth. Third, the United States must fully recognize that the importance of South Africa as regional power transcends the current international political differences between the two countries.

Given the significant divergence between many policies of the United States and South Africa, and considering that South Africa has already rejected AFRICOM basing out of hand, an easy course of action would be to reject South Africa as a partner in the

region. Some United States officials have already suggested this in unquestionable strong terms.⁹¹ However, outright rejection of South Africa as a potential strategic partner would not be in the long term interests of either nation. Historically South Africa has demonstrated unquestioned capability to forge independent, domestic and regional policy in the context of its regional power status. The United States on the other hand comes to the table with limited strategic leverage in the region coupled with limited means. Even limited strategic partnership with South Africa could significantly enhance United States means and support United States interests in Southern Africa and the rest of the continent.

The barriers to cooperation that currently exist in United States-South Africa foreign relations are not insurmountable. But, as already stated, all elements of national power need to be closely coordinated. AFRICOM, though, is now in the spotlight and for better or worse the command will be perceived to represent United States interests in Africa in a way no other agency has. The interagency composition of AFRICOM is crucial to successful policy in Africa and will be critical to successfully engaging with South Africa.

The newly released AFRICOM Vision presents a framework for African engagement and demonstrates an understanding of the barriers, challenges, and threats for United States policy.⁹² The AFRICOM commander understands the imperative “Do No Harm” in the context of United States African engagement. It is the second guiding principle within the vision. The third principle is to “Build Partnerships.” “To build mutual trust, respect, and confidence and to listen.” These principles are critical to United States policy in Africa. Building a partnership with South Africa will

require strategic patience. The United States must recognize that barriers to effective cooperation with South Africa reflect the legacy of past relationships reflected in current foreign policy. Strategic patience and commitment to do no harm are the first steps towards AFRICOM-South African engagement.

In the aftermath of the “public relations nightmare”⁹³ following the standup of AFRICOM, General Ward and Ms. Whelens (Assistant Secretary of Defense for Africa) went on a public relations campaign to address the negative perceptions and sell the AFRICOM concept. Successful strategic communications are important to the AFRICOM effort but ultimately is must be “Deeds before Words.” The skepticism and perceptions of many Africans will not allow AFRICOM to say one thing but do another. This is an aspect of “do no harm” that the United States must understand. China promises Africa very little, but constantly delivers tangible goods and services at limited or no costs.

AFRICOM should focus its Southern African military-to-military engagement effort in two supporting axis: the South African National Defense Force and the SADC Standby Brigade. Given the current state of the two countries’ military and foreign policy cooperation this will also require the full effort of the interagency, backed by strategic patience. The framework for effective military cooperation already exists and should be sustained and expanded as opportunity presents. The Military, Education and Training (IMET) program, and the African Crises Response Initiative are two examples of existing programs.

South African participation in the United States’ International Military, Education and Training (IMET) program is an important goal. This could include habitual

attendance of senior South African officers at a United States senior service collages. This attendance could be reciprocal on the part of the United States. Further, Dr. Steve Metz recommends that the United States supply an instructor to the South African staff collage.⁹⁴ These would be significant steps in strengthening military to military ties.

The United States African Crises Response Initiative (ACRI) is a key initiative aimed toward enhancing African peacekeeping capabilities. South Africa refused to participate in ACRI. Recently, the ACRI program has had to compete with higher United States defense priorities in the “Global War on Terror.” AFRICOM should do a top-to-bottom review of ACRI and if necessary transform the program to better fit overall security strategy and interagency effort in the region. South Africa might be better as a partner in the program vice a target of the program. Existing South African education and training facilities could be leveraged along with United States capabilities. The current location of SADC’s peacekeeping training facility in Zimbabwe is problematic given current conditions in that country. Regardless of Zimbabwean policies, AFRICOM should seek every opportunity to support the SADC training program as a matter of higher policy.

The creation of AFRICOM also provides the opportunity to strengthen the existing exercise programs formerly coordinated by EUCOM and CENTCOM. AFRICOM should seek every opportunity to integrate ACRI type training engagement with current and future unified exercises. The ultimate goal of these exercises, as well as all other programs, should be to increase the expeditionary capabilities of the SANDF and of the SADC Standby brigade. As AFRICOM builds trust and relationships with South Africa

and other key SADC nations, the command should focus resources to address key deficiencies in the Standby Brigade's logistics and power projection capabilities.

The United States and AFRICOM should fully coordinate policy and strategic effort with allied partners in Africa, particularly the British and French. Both these countries have ongoing training and engagement activities throughout Africa. The British, in particular, have strong engagement activities across the spectrum of national power throughout Southern Africa.

The complex internal and external challenges to United States interests in Africa are not just the challenges of one nation. Ultimately the interests of our allies, of South Africa, and of all African people hinge upon positive economic development and a stable and secure environment. To this end, it will require the coordinated efforts of the United States interagency, Allied partners, and key African strategic partners to successfully address the critical challenges to African stability and security. Despite the initial negative reaction within Africa and the existing barriers to cooperation, AFRICOM is superbly positioned and organized to play a leading role in coordinating and supporting this global effort.

Endnotes

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