

AFRICOM & U.S. militarism in Africa:

An overview from the Africa Human Security Working Group

Since 2007, when the Bush administration announced its plan to launch **AFRICOM**, a U.S. combatant command dedicated exclusively to Africa, U.S. and Africa-based organizations and individuals have sounded the alarm about increased U.S. militarism on the continent. Launched in 2008, AFRICOM is officially designed to promote a “stable and secure Africa,” through military-to-military partnerships and training and equipping programs for African militaries. However, as exemplified in the creation, advancement, and ongoing operations of this military command, it is clear that the following changes in current U.S.-Africa policy are needed...

- **Reverse the dangerous imbalance between military and civilian agencies.** While Obama claims that democracy is his administration’s priority in Africa, the imbalance within the U.S. foreign policy toolkit would say otherwise. While AFRICOM is expected to have at its disposal around \$1.4 billion for FY 2010, funds available for development and diplomacy remain paltry in comparison. Meanwhile, this imbalance encourages a dangerous blurring of the lines between military and civilian agencies. As government officials across sectors recognize the combined importance of security, diplomatic, and development instruments of foreign policy, only the military has been given the resources to take this integrated approach. AFRICOM’s structure places four-star General William “Kip” Ward at the top of a chain of command that includes State Department and USAID employees. The result has been development projects with short-term objectives implemented by military personnel, rather than trained humanitarian workers. This trend works against genuine development efforts and undermines the essential neutrality of humanitarian organizations and agencies. It also sets a poor example to African countries that already overuse the military in civilian life.
- **Prioritize long-term stability over the protection of a narrowly-defined set of national interests.** The creation of AFRICOM signaled a growing U.S. strategic interest in Africa. As nearly 25% of U.S. oil comes from the continent, and as some have identified Africa as providing potential breeding grounds for terrorists, the recipients of our military training and security assistance increasingly reflect those priorities. Though we claim that these partnerships will promote security and stability in Africa, history and recent experience have shown that strengthening the militaries of those we consider allies has the opposite effect. The last thing African people need for peace and security are stronger militaries; instead, stronger institutions, infrastructure, education, health care, and other building blocks of society should take precedence over short-term political calculations. Support for the military is rendered useless and often deleterious without a robust democracy already in place.
- **Stop the financing, training, and equipping of militaries, many of which currently have poor political and human rights records.** Time and time again, despite reports of human rights violations, acts of political repression, disregard for the rule of law, or U.S.-trained soldiers defecting or selling U.S.-provided weapons to rebel groups, the military assistance does not stop. Again, what does this do for peace, justice, and security on the continent?

Our vision is of a foreign policy that is informed by **true human security needs**, prioritizes **development and diplomacy** conducted by the **appropriate civilian agencies**, and is grounded in **true partnership** with the AU, African governments, the African diaspora, and particularly African civil society. To learn more, visit www.africahumansecurity.org