

CNO Africa Advisory Conference

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In April 2010, the Chief of Naval Operations convened a meeting of senior military, civilian, academic, business and policy professionals at the Center for Naval Analyses to discuss challenges and opportunities for African security and development. This report provides an overview of perspectives and recommendations that emerged during that discussion.

There is a notable degree of international competition for influence, access, resources, etc., in Africa. China is faring better than the U.S. in many countries because the Chinese “listen to African partners, and then supply what Africans ask for” without asking for much in return. There are other countries engaged with Africa, especially the emerging nations of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China). The US has the opportunity to use upcoming bilateral engagement opportunities with such countries as India, China, Japan, and Brazil to discuss Africa and seek areas of collaboration. Engagement—with both BRIC countries and African countries, more broadly—should occur via Department of State (DoS), Department of Defense (DoD), and along Track II channels to get maximum value.

The idea of “human security” is likely to be appealing to many Africans. The African governments that have undergone some degree of democratization are more likely to find the concept of human security appealing than are authoritarian regimes. Foundations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are likely to find the idea of human security highly appealing and may be willing to work with the military on these issues. This does not mean that state-centric security concerns do not exist. They do (in cases such as Sudan, Kenya, Somalia), but there is room for human security, too.

It is not necessarily clear to all why “failed states” in Africa are of direct consequence to the interests of the US Government. It will be important to articulate the secondary impacts—such as effects on other key countries in a region, or impacts on markets or resource access—in order to find relevance in some policy circles and the public debate.

Partner Capacity Building for African militaries appears to be finding some notable, albeit limited, traction. There are signs of improvement in some security forces in the region, especially in the area of military professionalism. However, there is notable underdevelopment in the capability and capacity in the civilian side of African governments. African partners may be unable or unwilling to expand civil capabilities and capacities. It will be difficult to promote security and development in the absence of greater civilian capability and capacity.

A persistent challenge for US Commanders with responsibility for conducting capacity building in Africa is in identifying potentially relevant capabilities from joint providers and resourcing the requirements for capacity building activities. There is no Department of Defense “playbook” for developing and executing partner capacity building, and no easy way to request novel, regionally appropriate, and dynamic joint force packages for capacity building. It could be beneficial to pursue the development of a common partner capacity building “construct” within DoD in order to enable force employers, force providers, and those responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of capacity building efforts to develop an integrated approach, standardized processes and a common tool kit. A construct that also integrates the unique contributions of participants across the inter-agency can help leverage US Government (USG)

capabilities and capacities, and harmonize the employment of a wider array of skills, authorities and resources.

In a related matter, there is a basic inequity between military and civilians in many African countries. Often, the military has access to resources and perks not available to the general public or even the civilian side of the government. If the US is seen as promoting the further development of the military, without any commensurate benefits to others in society, this could exacerbate social tensions.

The participants generally agreed with and supported the national, DoS, DoD and AFRICOM objectives for Africa. There was an extended discussion of the value of—and arguably a recommendation for—including “partnership” as a US objective. It was also noted that partnership should also be considered an important aspect of the “means” to achieve a range of US objectives.

As Westerners, we still struggle to present any ideas to Africans—no matter how good they are—as anything but “our” own. In so doing, we give an impression of being ethnocentric and unreceptive to the ideas of others. In so doing, we introduce communications stumbling blocks whenever we engage with Africans on new ideas. We need to think differently (i.e., with greater cultural sensitivity) and speak differently when we engage Africans. Our ideas must be in “their” terms if they are to be welcomed. We need to better communicate the positives of Africa; we often default to the doom and gloom, which is an unfair representation and offends most Africans.

On interagency coordination, the consensus was that the process remains “tortuous and inconclusive.” A new strategy is needed at the national level to improve interagency efforts. Lessons could be learned from four sources: AFRICOM frameworks and TSC plans, interagency coordination regarding APS, interagency coordination as represented within US Embassies around the world, and cross functional coordination and integrated planning in the corporate world.

The U.S. should pursue a “Whole of Nation” approach to Africa. No single agency will be able to lead a successful, comprehensive and sustained effort. Moreover, the USG needs to think more broadly about the tools available to advance American and African interests. Public sector, private sector, and non-governmental actors can all help advance the common aspirations of America and the nations of Africa.

We need to understand that as Westerners, we tend to plan and make decisions along a pyramidal system. African decision-making is often more appropriately characterized by “circles of influence.” When confronted with this difference, we tend to see discontent and disconnect, when actually we are simply observing a different process. This difference does not indicate a lack of engagement on a topic by potential African partners.

If the U.S. is going to make significant steps forward in implementing our Africa strategy, we need to gain more influence with three regional powers: South Africa, Angola, and Nigeria. Participants characterized varied experiences and disparate trends in our relationships with these countries, but all recognized the importance of improving cooperation (especially expanding partner governments’ willingness to cooperate) with these states. Since efforts to en-

gage and influence these countries directly have not been very effective, it is worthwhile to consider indirect or oblique approaches, such as engaging these countries through regional organizations may be a more effective way of building more cooperative relationships.

There is strong support for the U.S. moving from bilateral to multilateral approaches to promoting security and development in Africa. Multilateral approaches are preferred because they extend the effectiveness of limited engagement resources, and promote greater cooperation between African states. Over time, multilateral approaches could become a means to engage and bolster regional African efforts such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the South Africa Development Community (SADC).

In addition to seeking indirect and multinational avenues for engaging African countries, the U.S. should also seek partners for collaborative approaches to engaging African countries. For example, Brazil is already engaged in Africa and could be a valuable partner for the U.S. in the region. Brazil shares many common interests with African countries, including trade and combating the flow of narcotics. Unlike many of our European partners, Brazil does not have a colonial legacy in Africa and therefore may be a more welcomed partner.

Maritime security overlaps well with emerging African desires to work multilaterally. Maritime security is seen by many as a shared interest that drives regional cooperation. Many African littoral countries face the common challenges of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, narco-trafficking and resource theft. Since the sea is a relatively “low visibility venue” for collaboration, maritime security activities also avoid some of the political difficulties of other forms of multilateral cooperation. US Navy and Coast Guard activities in the AFRICOM AOR may provide a useful and regionally palatable means (both because they address African areas of concern and because maritime collaboration can be relatively low visibility) through which to expand cooperation and coordination over time. Success enjoyed through multi-national maritime activities could become a pillar of broader ranging cooperation between nations ashore.

Measuring effects and/or impacts of our engagement efforts remains difficult. The US military appears to be getting better at planning 5-10 years out, thanks in large part to the efforts of AFRICOM, but we do not do well at measuring long term trends. Economic costs associated with piracy, fuel bunkering, and lost fishing profits are potentially useful ways to represent maritime security contributions to supporting economic prosperity may be the kind of indicators that are of interest to potential African partners. If we can find ways to effectively assess the costs of maritime insecurity, we may be able to engage African partners in ways that help them appreciate the potential value of maritime security.

Inspirational cases and anecdotes can be useful in communicating with African audiences. The story of Sierra Leone’s capture of an illegal Chinese fishing vessel is an example of that kind of message that can resonate well among African governments. US Navy senior leadership needs to make a sustained case for the importance of maritime security with partners and especially within the interagency. Over time, the appreciation of the significance of maritime security can be superseded in the minds of policy makers and the general public by other “flavors of the day”. If the US Navy leadership does not continue to carry the message of the enduring importance of maritime security, the US may find itself in a self-induced state of *sea-blindness*.

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