

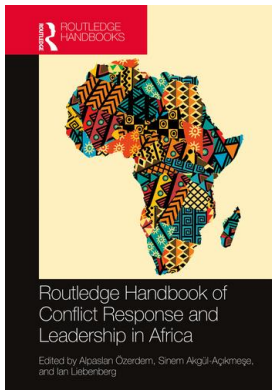
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### **The Role of the United States as a Global Power in Responding to Violent Conflicts in Africa**

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# THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES AS A GLOBAL POWER IN RESPONDING TO VIOLENT CONFLICTS IN AFRICA

*Festus Kofi Aubyn*

## Introduction

The United States (US) is described by the former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as “the world’s indispensable nation” (Dobbs and Goshko, 1996). This description is due to America’s superior economic power, military strength, intelligence capabilities, geopolitical influence, innovative technology, diplomatic corps, and cultural dominance, which makes the US the most powerful state in the international system (Chomsky, 2007; Thompson, 2011). For Scheffer et al. (2016, p. 7), it is the diversity of this toolbox and the ability to bring different instruments to bear depending on the circumstances that define America’s global leadership and foreign policy strengths. However, America’s global power is measured not only by its hard and soft power but also by its central position in the global security architecture. Thus, as the country that led global efforts to establish the international liberal institutions, norms, values, and rules, it relies on the current international order born in the ashes of the Second World War to project its global leadership influence. Although many Americans see the international order as either obsolete or too restrictive of US interests, the US still relies on it to help protect and advance its interests (Scheffer et al., 2016). As a result, for more than seven decades, the US has defended the international institutions and rules that it helped to create by leading in the provision of global public goods to ensure order and stability in the international system (Brown, 2004, p. 7; Grossman, 2018).

Consequently, since 1945, America has taken on the role of a self-appointed world policeman, leading global security by investing resources in multilateral institutions such as the UN and in war-torn countries worldwide, including Africa, to promote peace and stability. Nonetheless, its leadership role as an exporter of peace and stability is disputed by some scholars, including Dyer (2004), Mamdani (2005), and Chomsky (2007), who rather see America as an exporter of violence. Chomsky (2007, pp. 11–17), for instance, describes how America has totally overlooked its own values of democracy and human rights since 1945 by supporting regimes responsible for mass human rights abuses in countries such as El Salvador, Cambodia, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, and Indonesia as well as its direct military interventions in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In Africa, such sentiments and criticisms about the US’s leadership role in responding to conflicts also exist. For some decades now, the value of US leadership in facilitating the resolution of conflicts has come under increasing scrutiny. A substantial number of

Africans feel that the US has historically failed to act decisively to resolve conflicts and build sustainable peace in conflict-affected countries (USIP, 1994).

The Rwandan genocide and the Somali conflict in the 1990s are often cited as classic examples of situations where the US failed as a global leader to act or mobilize international consensus to protect life and property because it had no strategic stakes under threat (Aning, 2001). A more recent example is Libya, a cauldron of turmoil and Islamic radicalism after the Barak Obama administration led the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military intervention in 2011 to overthrow Muammar Qaddafi (Carpenter, 2017). Nevertheless, it is also instructive to note that despite the criticisms, the US has also played important roles in resolving conflicts in Namibia, South Africa, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Liberia, and Mozambique (USIP, 1994). Indeed, it is no secret that some African countries and institutions have also benefited from various supports and initiatives by the US government through the US African Command (AFRICOM) in military training and equipment programmes, education and professionalization initiatives, and law enforcement assistance. In essence, America has had a chequered history of interventionism in Africa.

This chapter argues that the US has unavoidably intervened in African conflicts purposely to secure its economic and geopolitical interests rather than any altruistic motive to promote peace and stability as a responsible global power. Over the past seven decades, both Democratic and Republic administrations have understood that American security and prosperity at home are intrinsically linked to economic and political health abroad. As a result, almost all the US–Africa strategies implemented by successive US administrations since the demise of the Cold War have targeted threats to American lives and national interests. For instance, President Bill Clinton’s Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25) in 1994 decreed that “the United States would not intervene in any future crisis situation in Africa unless American interests were directly threatened”. Following the September 11 attacks, the George W. Bush Administration also embraced the realist logic of fear of terrorism and self-interest in its African policy (Tieku, 2012). Likewise, the Trump Administration also stated that all aid to Africa, whether for security, humanitarian, or development needs, will be used to advance US interests (Bolton, 2018).

These consecutive policy directives suggest that local conflict dynamics and African concerns are partially or not considered in the US–Africa policy formulation and implementation process. Intervening in African conflict is only based on US instrumental rationality of pursuing its interest, perhaps maintaining unrestricted access to markets, energy supplies, and strategic resources. In that regard, the US has not acted as a ‘good’ leader in altruistically helping solve the continent’s problems. Rather, it has exhibited the traits of a ‘bad’ leader because it seeks its own ‘good’ or selfish interests instead of the general ‘good’ or welfare of the African continent (Winston and Patterson, 2006, p. 12). According to Donaldson and Davis (1991), one of the essential qualities of a good leader is one who has an enlightened self-interest, which is a philosophy stating that persons who act to further the interests of others ultimately serve their own self-interest. Therefore, as Reich (2017) pointed out, any leader who cannot endure the costs to achieve collective benefits by casting aside its own short-term interests in favour of a longer-term outlook is not a good leader. Arguably, this description fits well with the US role in responding to conflicts in Africa. Under President Donald Trump, countering the rapidly expanding financial and political influence of China and Russia took the centre stage in US–Africa strategy.

Given the increasing threat of terrorism, violent extremism, and the complex nature of contemporary conflicts, it is imperative for the US to genuinely support African and multilateral efforts to promote peace and stability on the continent. It has a distinct responsibility to exercise its power of influence as a global hegemon to shape other states’ attitudes and behaviours to resolve conflicts in Africa. Against this backdrop, this chapter critically interrogates the United

States's role as a global power in responding to violent conflicts in Africa and how it can pursue long-term strategic objectives to promote peace and stability on the continent. The chapter begins with a historical trajectory of US security engagement in Africa and how this has changed over time with the changing regimes to respond to the continent's violent conflicts. The next section examines why African security matters to the United States. The subsequent sections assess the US role in responding to violent conflicts in Africa at the continental, regional, and national levels. Based on the shortfalls of its engagements, the conclusion details how the United States can pursue long-term strategic objectives that sustainably address African conflicts.

### **Historicizing US–Africa relations**

America's footprint on the African continent has been well documented. According to Nyang (2005), the relationship between these two geographical zones dates back to the period of the slave trade and the Cold War. The transatlantic slave trade that existed from the 16th to the 19th centuries connected the two regions – enslaved African slaves were transported to the Americas (the 'New World') (Klein and Klein, 1999; Segal, 1995). From that period in history until the end of the Second World War, the US paid little attention to events in Africa. Oyebadé (2014) posits that the US did not pursue an active policy towards Africa as it did toward Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Africa continued to remain inconsequential in US foreign relations until the Cold War period from the 1950s to the 1990s. During this period, the US valued its African relations because, as Tiekü (2012) argues, the continent provided a locale for its ideological rivalry for world hegemony against the Soviet Union. According to Ohaegbulam (1992), the newly independent African countries were viewed by US political leaders as vulnerable to Soviet ideological expansion. Hence, the US supported African governments or insurgency groups that supported its fight against the Soviets and communism, which subsequently led to the destabilization of some African countries like Angola (NSC, 1960). Economic and military assistance was provided to key US allies such as Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC]), Ethiopia, and anti-communist rebel organizations like the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) (Lawson, 2007; Clough, 1992). Hesketh (2016) in his work *Cold War, Congo, Mobutu and U.S. Foreign Policy* showed how America and France supported Mobutu Sese Seko, the leader of Zaire, despite his authoritarian tendencies due to his role in providing the stability needed to stem the spread of communism in Africa. But while the Cold War anti-communist policy logic largely defined US engagement with Africa, there were a few exceptions. According to Aning and Aubyn (2013), Washington also contributed to ending apartheid in South Africa and provided humanitarian assistance to victims of the Biafran civil war in the 1960s and the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s.

The demise of the Cold War provided the US unprecedented opportunities but also obstacles in the pursuance of its interest in Africa. Without a clear enemy to target, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the communist system presented a challenge for US leaders to develop policies for a "New World Order" of greater international cooperation for world peace and human development (Franke, 2007). However, many US policymakers saw Africa as insignificant to US strategic interests. Therefore, in a bid to connect African issues to US strategic interests, the administration of President George H. W. Bush undertook a comprehensive review of US policy towards Africa. The review's outcome led to the issuance of a presidential directive known as the National Security Review 30: American Policy towards Africa in the 1990s (NSR 30) (NSC, 1992; Aning, 2001). The presidential directive concluded that Africa offered both "significant opportunities for and obstacles to U.S. interests". To advance US national interests, the directive called for "constructive engagement" by promoting peaceful change and

the resolution of conflict, democracy, and improved governance, sustainable development, and resolution of transnational issues in Africa.

Consequently, the US played an active leadership role in the negotiations surrounding South Africa's withdrawal from Namibia and Cuba's withdrawal from Angola. It promoted conflict resolution in the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa. But as usual, the motives and incentives behind these interventions were mostly based on self-interests. In Angola, the US contributed to the country's destabilization by providing covert aid to UNITA and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) to launch an attack against the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola before acting as a peacemaker. Through the policy of 'constructive engagement' crafted by Ronald Reagan's Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs from 1981 to 1989, Chester Crocker, the US sought the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola in return for Namibian independence and the maintenance of South African hegemony in the region (Crocker, Hampson and Aall, 2011). In 1992, President George H. W. Bush responded to the humanitarian crisis in Somalia by launching Operation RESTORE HOPE (Unified Task Force [UNITAF]), which was later transformed to the United Nations Operations in Somalia II (UNOSOM II) in 1993. After the Black Hawk Down incident in Somalia where 18 US Rangers were killed in Mogadishu, President Bill Clinton's Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25) in 1994 decreed that the US would not intervene in any future crisis situation in Africa unless American interests were directly threatened (Daalder, 1996). From then onwards, US–Africa relations fluctuated between utter neglect and half-hearted efforts to promote peace, democracy, and economic reforms (Tieku, 2012). The sluggish effort to stop the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and to end the civil war in Liberia in the mid-1990s were clear consequences of the PDD-25. Thankfully, the horrors of the Rwandan genocide and the subsequent crises in Burundi led to a partial reversal of this policy. The US did not directly engage militarily in Africa but rather shifted towards developing African countries' capacities to undertake peace operations under the guise of 'African solutions to African problems', a notion that Aning, Jaye, and Atuobi (2008) view as a convenient alibi for US inaction. In other words, the US abdicated its leadership role of facilitating global efforts to address African conflicts by partially disengaging from the continent.

Since the dawn of the 21st century, transnational terrorism has introduced a new dimension into US–Africa relations. Africa has become an arena in the so-called Global War on Terror following the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. US relations with Africa in the post 9/11 period have largely been influenced by the increased dependence on African oil and countering the threat of international terrorism and the rapidly expanding financial and political influence of China and Russia on the continent. However, much of the 'terrorist' actions by the US were/are caused by unilateral military interventions in other countries and acts of violence against communities suspected to be hosting terrorists.

### **Why does Africa's security matter to the US?**

Some misconception exists among a section of the American public and policymakers that Africa is irrelevant to US national security. To Harris (2017), this is a harmful myth that needs to be dispelled. Indeed, Africa's strategic importance has been reiterated by a number of top US government officials in different forums and national security policies. For instance, former National Security Advisor Ambassador John Bolton noted during his speech at the Heritage Foundation in 2018 that "lasting stability, prosperity, independence and security of the African continent is in the national security interest of the United States" (Bolton, 2018). Similarly, former President Barack Obama underscored Africa's strategic importance during his address to

the Ghanaian Parliament on 11 July 2009 when he stated that “the 21st century will be shaped by what happens not just in Rome or Moscow or Washington, but by what happens in Accra, as well” (Obama, 2009; US Government, 2012). Obama saw Africa as part of an increasingly interconnected world in which, as Immanuel Kant noted, whatever happens anywhere is felt everywhere (Tieku, 2012).

Generally, Africa matters to the US for three main reasons. First, armed conflicts and terrorism in Africa directly or indirectly threaten US interests on the continent. These interests range from the safety of US citizens to the protection of US strategic assets and businesses on the continent. Most of these interests are threatened by conflicts, political instability, and the activities of terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam waal Muslimeen (JNIM), Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and Boko Haram in Nigeria, all of whom are anti-American or anti-Western (Aning, Abdallah and Aubyn, 2017). These groups often threaten US interests both at home and abroad. Therefore, ties with Africa are needed to deal with these threats to secure American interests on the continent that have come under threat (Harris, 2017). In other words, America’s leadership in Africa through investment in peace and security advances its own interests at home and abroad.

Second, economic and geostrategic political interests connect African issues with US interests. US political influence on the continent has diminished significantly due to the deepening relationship between African countries and other international actors. China is on top of the list. Other actors such as Russia and the European Union have also strengthened their economic and political ties with the continent (Banks et al., 2013). The increasing political influence by China, Russia, and other global competitors due to the deepening ties with Africa is putting the US at risk of losing its dominant political influence for the first time since the end of the Cold War. For instance, China–Africa relations have rapidly developed since the institution of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 (Aubyn, 2013). The FOCAC meetings have provided opportunities for the Chinese and African governments and businesses to strengthen their political ties and economic cooperation. It has also promoted diplomatic relations, trade, and investments in infrastructure, energy, and the oil sectors in Africa (Aubyn, 2013). Russia, another major competitor of the US in Africa, is also gradually establishing a foothold on the continent, particularly in North Africa with vast oil resources. In Libya, Russia is alleged to be supporting the Libyan militia leader, Khalifa Haftar, who opposes the country’s internationally recognized and US-supported government with military equipment (Trtworld, 2019). Equally, in Tunisia, Russia supports the government with satellite imagery of terrorist groups in the Maghreb to help foil a series of terrorist plots (Friend, 2018). Given the region’s proximity to Europe and vast oil resources, Russian involvement in North Africa warrants US attention aside from the threat of Islamist militancy. In sum, these economic and political needs inevitably draw the US to Africa.

Lastly, the US presence in Africa is key to securing access to natural resources that have significant military and commercial uses. The US and its allies depend on Africa for mineral products such as platinum from South Africa and Zimbabwe (for automotive and aerospace applications); iridium from South Africa (for electronics, including in aircraft engines and satellites); tantalum from Rwanda, DRC, and Nigeria (for jet engines, missile, and global positioning systems); and tourmaline from Nigeria, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, and Malawi (for aerospace and ballistic purposes). The Democratic Republic of Congo, which is engulfed in conflict since the 1990s, produces an estimated one-fifth of the world’s tantalum used by companies in the US and other Western countries. Moreover, oil supply from African countries such as Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, and Equatorial Guinea is vital to US energy security. Any disruption in African oil supply and mineral imports due to political instability and terrorism will undoubtedly

affect US oil prices and the price of manufactured goods from oil-importing nations. To maintain its access to key mineral products and oil supply and prevent being locked out of markets for these essential mineral products makes Africa a sine qua non to the US.

### **US roles in addressing African conflicts**

Since the aftermath of the Second World War, the US has taken on the mantle of global leadership in responding to violent conflicts beyond its borders; sometimes in collaboration with its allies and through multilateral institutions such as the UN. For several decades, the US has led global efforts to address violent conflicts in Africa to promote peace and stability albeit with some limitations. This leadership is evident in the various investments and assistance programs at the continental and regional levels of the African Union (AU) and its Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and at the national level of member states. This section examines US security engagement in Africa at two levels, namely, continental/regional level initiatives (with the AU and its RECs) and national level initiatives (with individual African countries).

### ***Continental and regional level engagements***

The AU has become an important point of contact for external actors fostering partnerships on a continent-to-continent basis and continent-to-country basis to promote peace and stability in Africa. Among these various partnerships, the AU–US relationship remains highly significant. For more than a decade, the US has partnered with the AU to advance peace and security on the continent. Hentz (2004, p. 29) opines that the American argument that Africa needs to take responsibility for itself in the post–Cold War era led to some form of moderate support for the Organization of African Unity (OAU). However, the recognition of the AU as an international organization by President George W. Bush in 2005, allowing it to open an office in Washington, D.C., and the subsequent establishment of the US Mission to the AU (USAU) in December 2006 opened a new chapter in the AU–US partnership (Cook and Husted, 2016, p. 16; US Mission to the African Union, 2019a). It signified a renewed commitment to the African continent and a paradigm shift in terms of how the US engaged Africa in the past, mostly centred on the containment of security situations and humanitarian crises on a bilateral basis.

Nonetheless, some analysts saw the creation of the USAU as a response to the increasing influence of China in Africa and investment in the AU following the establishment of the FOCAC meetings in 2000, which subsequently manifested in the Chinese-funded \$200m (£127m) AU ultra-modern headquarters in Ethiopia (BBC, 2012). According to Taylor (2004), the FOCAC meeting was/is part of Beijing's overall strategy to overhaul the global order and advance China's traditional hostility towards the domination of the overweening power of the US, which is seen as detrimental to the autonomy and sovereignty of China and the developing world. Therefore, to counter China's threat and reaffirm its commitment to African security and regional institutions as a responsible global leader, the USAU was born. The US also sees the AU as a key interlocutor through which the US can advance its own national interests and policy objectives.

To ensure that the relationship is anchored on a strong foundation, the US and the AU signed a US\$5.8 million multi-year Assistance Agreement on 3 August 2010 to further the US foreign assistance objectives on peace and security, democracy and governance, economic development, and economic opportunity (US Mission to the African Union, 2019b; Ghoorhoo, 2019). Since then, the US and the AU have held high-level bilateral meetings alternating between Washington and Addis Ababa to review the progress of implementing these four pillars of cooperation

(African Union, 2018; Cook and Husted, 2016). In 2013, President Obama met with AUC Chairperson Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma of South Africa and in 2015 addressed the African Union at its headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, becoming the first US President to do so (Cook and Husted, 2016, p. 16). However, the Trump Administration's engagement with the AU was limited.

Specifically, in peace and security, US roles have traditionally covered financial, logistics, and technical assistance to the AU peacekeeping missions, mediation, preventive diplomacy, and institutional capacity-building process. Between 2007 and 2010, the US provided US\$258 million to support the AU mandate implementation mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (US Mission to the African Union, 2019b). Subsequently, the US has committed more than \$1 billion in support of AMISOM and its troop contributors with equipment, logistics, advisory, and training support. The AU Mission in the Central African Republic and Central Africa (MISAC) also received \$100 million from the US (US Mission to the African Union, 2019b). Given the AU's limited financial capacity, the US's financial assistance has helped stabilize conflict situations on the continent. The support to AMISOM, which complements the assistance by other international partners, partly accounts for the significant degrading of Al-Shabaab from most of its formerly held territory, including Mogadishu. But aside from AMISOM and MISAC, the US is also a key partner to ongoing missions in the Sahel region and the Lake Chad Basin such as the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram and the G5 Sahel Force to prevent the spread of terrorism, violent extremism, and radicalization. The US Africa Command (US AFRICOM) provides in-kind support and financial assistance to these operations. To further build the human resource capacity to tackle the threat, an annual Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) week has been instituted since 2017 to bring together African CVE practitioners from over 20 countries to collaborate, share best practices, and build powerful partnerships (USAU, 2018). The CVE initiatives have led to creating a network of transcontinental actors fully equipped with the requisite knowledge and expertise to tackle the threats.

At the institutional level, the US is complementing other external actors' efforts to strengthen the mechanisms established by the AU in its peace and security architecture to address conflicts on the continent. Besides building the African Standby Force (ASF), the US is also providing technical assistance in the implementation of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) to anticipate and prevent conflicts on the continent. For example, US AFRICOM provides multinational training for AU staff and African peacekeepers to build their capacity on regional security and cross-cutting issues. These capacity-building initiatives focus on combating terrorism and violent extremism, curbing illicit arms and financial flows, conflict prevention, counter-IED training, women, peace, and security initiatives, and legal training (US AFRICOM, 2019b). At the AU Commission, the US has deployed full-time peace and security advisors and planners to support the AU Peace Support Operations Division in different areas, including the drafting of AU logistic documents, continent-wide standards for antiterrorism legislation, law enforcement forensic standards, and border crossing security standards (US Mission to the African Union, 2019b; Cook and Husted, 2016). The US is also working with the AU to address maritime and border security challenges and to mitigate trafficking in arms and drugs fed into conflict dynamics on the continent (Gberie, 2016, p. 4). In the case of Somalia, the US is helping to fight piracy to enable the country to regain stability, eliminate terrorism, and respond to the humanitarian needs of its people by building counter-piracy institutions and ensuring that pirate ringleaders are brought to justice for crimes committed through international cooperation and action at sea (U.S. Department of State, 2017). Nonetheless, the incidence of piracy continues to be recorded along the coast of Somalia. The country's government remains weak because the efforts to address the problem's root causes have been limited.



The RECs are not left out in the US foray into African peace and security. The US has equally increased its engagement with the RECs, which are recognized as the building blocks of the African Union to better deliver on their respective mandates. In November 2015, for instance, the US Government, represented by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) West Africa Regional Mission, signed a multi-year Development Agreement with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) up to US \$221 million over five years, 2015–2019 (ECOWAS, 2018). The agreement covered support in the strengthening of democratic institutions, enhancing economic growth, trade, investment, and peace and security in West Africa. Similarly, the US has developed a cordial relationship with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in the area of peace and security.

Nevertheless, there is much more potential scope for an enhanced and expanded cooperation between the US and the AU on addressing the root causes of violent conflicts and security threats. The Trump presidency affected most of the Bush and Obama administrations' advances to improve cooperation with the AU due to the limited strategic engagements. For example, the US–Africa relations nosedived in 2018 following President Trump's "shithole countries" in Africa comment that triggered widespread outrage across the continent. The visit of US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to Ethiopia two months after the unfortunate comment did little to improve the US–AU/RECs relationship. Support for the AU and its RECs' peace efforts diminished significantly. For the past four years, America has not demonstrated leadership either directly or indirectly through multilateral institutions in finding solutions to violent conflicts on the continent (Schneidman, 2020).

### ***National-level initiatives***

US security assistance to individual African states involves direct military/special operations and various activities, including military training and equipment programmes, intelligence support, education, and professionalization initiatives. Djibouti currently hosts the largest American base on the continent known as Camp Lemonnier, with several other military facilities sprawled across many other African nations. Camp Lemonnier is the command post of US AFRICOM on the continent, hosting thousands of US soldiers, special forces, intelligence units, sailors, Air Force squadrons, and Marines. The camp and the other military facilities on the continent serve as the staging areas for the growing array of special joint force operations in Somalia, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Lake Chad Basin, military exercises, and other security cooperation activities with African countries. Most of the drone strikes against al-Shabab training camps in Somalia are launched from Camp Lemonnier. The Obama administration also established a drone base inside Cameroon to counter the threat posed by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. The base carries out surveillance missions and gathers detailed information about Boko Haram's movements, bomb-making factories, and camps and shares the information with the MNJTF (Hammer, 2016). The sharing of some intelligence information with countries in the LCB has immensely helped in degrading Boko Haram's capabilities and recapturing formally held territories. Nevertheless, the operation's secretive nature has raised some concerns of transparency and accountability of US actions in the region (Thurston, 2016).

Many African militaries in countries such as Uganda, Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad, Ethiopia, and Kenya have also benefited immensely from US military training and exercises, equipment, intelligence, and special operations forces capabilities to respond to crises and fight conflicts. There are also US drone bases and surveillance facilities in Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Uganda as part of the broader efforts to combat terrorism. The US is helping to train and equip peacekeepers from over 20 African countries through US AFRICOM. Through the Africa

Deployment Assistance Partnership Team (ADAPT), which builds the deployment capacity for African militaries, many Training Centres in Communication (TCCs) in Africa have been able to deploy to AMISOM and the UN Mission in Sudan (UMISS) (US AFRICOM, 2019a). The Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), the International Military Education and Training (IMET), and the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership (APRRP) programmes have also provided targeted capacity-building efforts for African countries such as Ghana, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda, leading to rapid deployments to both AU and UN peace operations (US AFRICOM, 2019c). There is also United Accord Command Post Exercise (CPX) by AFRICOM, which is designed to enhance the US and African partner nations' capabilities and interoperability within the framework of MINUSMA (US AFRICOM, 2017).

In terms of US military and special operations in Africa, Libya and Somalia stand out due to the prolonged counterterrorism efforts in both countries. First, the US has been involved in international efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of state collapse, transition efforts, and the resolution of the Libyan conflict since the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) led the intervention to overthrow Muammar al Qadhafi in 2011. The US initiatives have focused on addressing humanitarian, governance, and development concerns, as well as issues about abuses of migrants, trafficked through Libya, and violations of the law of armed conflict by Libyan armed groups and foreign militaries (Blanchard, 2020, p. 21). The US has also undertaken periodic military airstrikes in coordination with the Government of National Accord (GNA) forces to end the Islamic State's control of central and western Libya. For example, in September 2019, AFRICOM conducted a series of airstrikes on Islamic States targets in southern Libya, killing more than 40 suspected terrorists (Blanchard, 2020, p. 24). However, America faces strong opposition from the Russian-backed Libyan National Army (LNA) movement in eastern Libya led by Khalifa Haftar. As a result, the US counterterrorism cooperation, stabilization, and transition assistance remain limited in LNA-controlled areas. Moreover, little progress was made toward achieving durable political reconciliation in the country.

On the whole, the US has failed to demonstrate leadership in bringing together all the interested parties outside Libya such as Egypt, Turkey, France, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Italy, and China to build international consensus to support the Libyan parties to find a lasting solution to the conflict. It is instructive to note that one of the essential qualities of a global leader is to ensure international order by facilitating international cooperation to address global peace and security threats. However, the US has failed to exercise that leadership in Libya.

Similarly, despite the use of military power and political means to contain and degrade Al-Shabaab in Somalia, the US has only achieved limited operational and tactical successes without altering the strategic terrain (Williams, 2020). Historically, Somalia's counterterrorism operations began in the 1990s with the search for prominent figures associated with Al-Qaeda and those responsible for attacking the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. Over the years, apart from providing training, equipment, and funding to AMISOM and the Somali National Army (SNA), and bilateral support to Somalia's neighbours including Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya, the US has conducted military operations in the form of airstrikes, drone strikes, and ground raids against Al-Shabaab militants. In particular, the Trump Administration significantly increased the US military activity in Somalia to achieve a decisive military victory. However, critics of the US policy in Somalia blame its interventions for turning Al-Shabaab from a small extremist faction into a powerful insurgency and strengthening its propaganda machine and recruitment base (Williams, 2020). Other critics also call for military disengagement from Somalia and focus on achieving political reconciliation between Somalia's main conflict parties. Thus the country needs grassroots-led political reconciliation and reforms to promote good governance instead of predominantly unilateral military operations. Amnesty International (2019b)

has also raised concerns about civilian deaths and casualties resulting from the drone strikes, leading to local disaffection for the US presence in the country. The bottom line is that the US approach to Somalia has been unsuccessful as Al-Shabaab militants continue to carry out attacks against Somalis and international actors.

### **Pitfalls of US–Africa security engagements**

Admittedly, while the roles of the US in Africa have contributed to addressing Africa's security conundrums, there are some pitfalls. One of the significant issues that have occupied the US–Africa security engagement is the fight against terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab militants, Boko Haram, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam waal Muslimeen (JNIM), the Libyan Islamist Fighting Group (LIFG), Ansarul Islam and Ansar Sharia operating in countries such as Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Somalia and Kenya Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso (International Crisis Group, 2016; CSIS, 2017). These groups create instability, creating a continental dilemma that threatens the larger African political, social, and economic security (Campbell, 2014). In Somalia, Al-Shabaab continues to carry out violent attacks and hold territories despite the counterterrorism operations by the Somalia National Army (SNA), African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and the US AFRICOM. However, in the efforts to combat terrorism, the US has fostered close partnerships with some of Africa's most repressive authoritarian regimes (Allen, 2016).

An example is a Cameroonian government led by President Paul Biya, who has been in power for more than three decades. Cameroon's drone base somehow solidifies America's alliance with President Biya, who is regarded as autocratic with poor human rights records. The relationship with Biya undermines US global leadership in the preservation of international norms, principles, and values such as freedom of speech and expression, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and human rights, which the Cameroonian President has blatantly flouted, especially with his handling of the Ambazonia conflict involving Cameroon Anglophone areas and the Francophone-dominated government (Human Right Watch, 2018).

Moreover, US financial and technical assistance to regimes in Djibouti, Uganda, Chad, and Mauritania within the broader framework of combating Islamist terrorists has also aroused many criticisms. Most of these regimes do not share America's core values and are seen as autocratic regimes that use US assistance to repress and commit human rights abuses against innocent protesters, opposition groups, and media personnel who criticize their policies in the name of fighting extremism (Powell, 2018). The apparent disregard for countries' democratic credentials that receive US support shows the self-centred nature of US policies towards Africa. It also does not offer effective leadership in terms of the US's failure to encourage respect for international norms, values, and principles. For instance, in Chad, French and US assistance has helped create an elite ethnic militia that serves as a praetorian guard with a terrible human rights record. Egypt, a longtime ally and counterterrorism partner of the US, according to Aziz (2018), illustrates how a Middle Eastern state uses counterterrorism to violate human rights and civil liberties. In a nutshell, US-supported counterterrorism in Africa is helping to undermine the promotion of human rights and boost some repressive regimes to consolidate their powers under the pretext of countering insurgencies.

The surge in US drone strikes in Libya, Niger, and Somalia has also received a lot of backlash due to the risk it poses to civilians. The US has conducted several airstrikes and drone strikes to destroy Al-Shabaab in Somalia and the ISIS stronghold in Libya with scant accountability and transparency. Hundreds of civilians are reportedly killed in drone strikes and opaque military operations (New America, 2020). In Somalia, for instance, the Trump Administration faced

increasing scrutiny over the US presence because civilian deaths as a result of the drone strikes have been obscured (Felter, 2019). A report by Amnesty International in 2019 found out that at least 14 civilians were killed in just five of the more than 70 airstrikes carried out in 2017 in the Lower Shabelle region controlled by Al-Shabaab in Somalia (Amnesty International, 2019a).

Some critics also charge the US-backed NATO intervention in 2011 as responsible for the current state of chaos and instability in Libya. Libya has descended into civil conflict with a resulting power vacuum, which terrorist groups like ISIS have exploited. Comparing Libya before the NATO intervention and today's situation show that the 2011 operation was a failure because it has left the country deeply unstable. Although the intervention was purely for regime change, the US and its NATO allies failed to plan for the consequences. The intervention has been described as President Obama's worst mistake (Tierney, 2016).

Lastly, although the security assistance to African countries has offered marginal progress in addressing the continent's peace and security challenges, they cannot simply overcome what is ultimately a political problem linked to national identity, state legitimacy, bad governance, and distribution of resources (Powell, 2018; Aning and Aubyn, 2018). Merely improving African militaries' operational capacities does little to change the political problem that the US has failed to provide leadership through its regional and bilateral engagements. For example, the leading causes of conflicts in the Sahel region and the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) region are direct products of political and economic marginalization, endemic corruption, and repression of peripheral communities and not the infiltration and expansion of jihadists groups such as Boko Haram, JNIM, and ISGS (Walker, 2012; Aning, Abdallah and Aubyn, 2017). Terrorism and violent extremism are not useful lenses for understanding violence in the Sahel and LCB, nor is counterterrorism a proper policy response. Viewing conflicts in these regions as part of a global 'war on terror' is tantamount to failure in addressing the core dynamics of the problem, which is deeply rooted in the countries' political governance and societal dynamics. Governance reforms and restructuring state–society relations offer the best approach to address these deep-rooted problems.

## **Conclusion**

For seven decades, the United States has led the creation of a multifaceted international liberal order, organized around security cooperation, economic openness, multilateral institutions, and democratic solidarity. As the initiator of this international order, the US has provided hegemonic leadership by fostering alliances, cooperation, and championing liberal values and norms to produce peace and prosperity globally and particularly in Africa.

As part of America's strategic objective of promoting the liberal international order to pursue its geopolitical and economic interest, the US has intervened in various contemporary Africa conflicts in countries such as Mali, Somalia, Libya, Nigeria, Niger, and Egypt. Its interventions have mostly comprised direct military engagement and security assistance to the AU/RECs and individual African countries. At the AU/RECs level, US assistance has covered the provision of financial, logistics, and technical assistance to AU peacekeeping missions, mediation and preventive diplomacy, and institutional capacity-building processes. US security assistance has involved a range of activities at the bilateral level, including military training and equipment programmes, as well as education and professionalization initiatives, to address conflicts and terrorism. The US has also played a leading role in international institutions such as the UN to promote multilateral cooperation to handle Africa's conflict situations. The US has undertaken all these interventions and others to express its global leadership in the provision of collective goods to promote international security.

However, the US leadership role in addressing African conflicts and security threats has suffered some legitimacy and credibility problems. First of all, in an attempt to combat terrorism, the US has rather emboldened some of Africa's most repressive authoritarian regimes in Cameroon, Chad, and Uganda. Such support for repressive regimes rather prolongs wars, increases instability, and sows fertile ground for conflicts. Although these repressive regimes go contrary to American values and the norms and rules of the liberal order, the US still provides security assistance to them. This shows the self-seeking nature of America's aid. In addition, the lack of accountability and transparency surrounding US drone strikes and opaque military operations in Somalia, Niger, Burkina Faso, Lake Chad Basin, and Libya and its resulting civilian casualties has received a lot of public backlash. Lastly, in Libya, the US has failed to exercise effective leadership following the chaos it created with its NATO allies. There is yet to be an international consensus amongst the different external and internal actors to find a lasting solution to the crisis, making the country deeply unstable. The general picture of US leadership in Africa suggests that it has not remained committed to protecting its own liberal values, norms, and rules and has failed to use its resources and influence to respond effectively to conflicts.

Moving forward, it is imperative to note that investing more in political governance and economic reforms that result in the restructuring of state–society relations, national unity, state legitimacy, and equitable distribution of national resources is the surest way of addressing the multitude of conflicts confronting the African continent. Therefore, the US should begin to adjust to the reality of the inevitable rise of peer-competitors, such as China and Russia. Moreover, the US should provide leadership through a grand strategy of 'deep engagement', which focuses on addressing the root causes of conflicts and support to local and regional peacebuilding entities and active civil society and media that hold governments accountable and transparent.

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