AFRICOM’s Relationship to Oil, Terrorism and China

by Carmel Davis

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Abstract: Why a combatant command for Africa? I argue that AFRICOM was formed to implement the U.S. national security strategy that seeks to strengthen states and eliminate ungoverned space, as well as establish relationships with African states that offer a means to greater state stability and foster economic development. In so doing, it counters global jihadist by denying them haven among weak governments or in ungoverned areas. It protects U.S. interests in resources by helping governments become more stable. And it competes with the Chinese approach that could worsen the status quo of ineffective states and ungoverned space. Indeed, the U.S. approach of increasing state effectiveness makes African countries less susceptible to the problems that may arise from the Chinese approach and so serves China’s interests in access to natural resources.

President Bush announced the formation of the U.S. Africa Command, or AFRICOM, on February 6, 2007, and the new Unified Combatant Command (UCC) became operational on October 1, 2008. AFRICOM consolidates U.S. Defense Department activities in Africa that previously were divided among three unified commands: US Central Command (CENTCOM), US Pacific Command (PACOM), and European Command (EUCOM).

Why a combatant command for Africa? According to the Department of Defense, AFRICOM, has been created because “Africa is growing in military, strategic and economic importance in global affairs. The United States is seeking more effective ways for the department to help prevent and respond to humanitarian crises, improve cooperative efforts to stem transnational terrorism and sustain enduring efforts that contribute to African unity and bolster security on the continent.”

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This begs the question: “what is Africa’s ‘military, strategic, and economic importance’”? It is unclear how prevention and response to humanitarian crises and promotion of African unity interact with the “importance” of Africa. AFRICOM also states that it is not being formed either as an attempt to gain access to natural resources or in response to Chinese activities in Africa.2

Theresa Whelan, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for African affairs, testified in August 2007 that, “...unlike a traditional Unified Command, [AFRICOM] will focus on building African regional security and crisis response capacity. [It] will promote greater security ties between the United States and Africa, providing new opportunities to enhance our bilateral military relationships, and strengthen the capacities of Africa’s regional and sub-regional organizations.” U.S. military engagement in Africa would remain primarily focused on “building partnership capacities, conducting theater security cooperation, building important counter-terrorism skills and, as appropriate, supporting U.S. Government agencies in implementing other programs that promote regional stability.” She emphasized that AFRICOM was not formed “solely to fight terrorism, or to secure oil resources, or to discourage China.”3

Elements of AFRICOM’s structure enable support to governments and transnational institutions, and, despite its status as a combatant command, AFRICOM does not appear to have a warfighting orientation. First, AFRICOM will include “a significant number of representatives from other U.S. agencies within its staff,” including representatives from the State Department and the Agency for International Development. The Deputy Commander for Civil-Military Affairs, responsible for much of AFRICOM’s security assistance work, will be from the State Department. Second, AFRICOM does not appear to have much combat capability. In addition, where EUCOM, PACOM, and CENTCOM are—or were—oriented toward defense of allies from external threats, AFRICOM is not defending any ally against an external threat.

Moreover, a combatant command oriented towards warfighting would have little utility in Africa. The United States is unlikely to introduce forces to defend against internal threats to oil-exporting states or to replace France’s earlier role as the guarantor of stable governments in West Africa. Military forces are essentially irrelevant to counteract China’s current economic activities. Military operations against global jihadist terrorists can be executed with forces stationed elsewhere.

However, my central argument is that AFRICOM is oriented toward China, terrorism, and oil, albeit indirectly. It fosters African security in a way congenial to U.S. interests and serves to counter Chinese influence that would adversely affect the favorable environment the United States seeks to foster.

2 Ibid.
It also supports the territorial integrity of African states of thereby reducing opportunities for jihadist terrorist organizations protecting access to oil.

**Oil, Terrorism and China**

Some argue that AFRICOM is intended to protect oil, combat terrorist organizations, or to counter China. Is it? Not directly.

**Oil**

More than seventeen percent of U.S. oil imports came from the four African members of OPEC in 2006, of which almost sixty-nine percent came from West Africa. The United States is likely to continue to import substantial amounts of oil from Africa. The National Intelligence Council estimated in 2001 that the United States would import fifteen percent of its oil from West Africa in 2015. Africa has large reserves, and so can continue to export oil. Its 114 billion barrels of proven reserves ranks second after the Middle East’s 739 billion barrels and third if Canada’s 174 billion barrels of non-conventional oil sands are added to North American 39 billion barrels of conventional reserves. African oil would increase in importance if supply from the Middle East were to be disrupted by political shocks such as a regional war in the wake of a possible U.S. withdrawal from Iraq or a U.S. attack on Iran.

While Africa possesses substantial oil reserves, these pale in comparison with the Middle East. Africa as a whole has proven reserves approximating those of Iraq, the country with the third largest proven reserves. Africa probably has additional oil, but so does the Middle East. In any case, Africa is a marginal supplier, and world demand will be satisfied, or not, by producers in the Middle East. If a large Middle East producer leaves the market, world markets cannot look to Africa to replace the lost supply. The issue is marginal supply and price increases from disruption rather than overall supply and the possibility of substituting African for Middle Eastern oil.

African oil production is concentrated among the four members of OPEC. If AFRICOM is about oil, then it should be heavily involved in these four countries. However, even if the United States were concerned about access to the margin of world production that these four countries compose, it is not obvious that AFRICOM would make much difference. It is not as though the four are seeking security alliances against external threats. It is unclear that

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6 Oil and Gas Journal, cited by EIA, “World Proved Reserves of Oil and Natural Gas, Most Recent Estimates,” January 9, 2007 at www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/international/reserves.html.
they need help against internal threats. Oil exporters have continued to export in the middle of conflict. Finally, the notion that the United States would deploy military forces to protect African oil assets, and that accordingly protecting access to African oil reserves is a central purpose of AFRICOM, seems specious.

**Terrorism**

A second possible reason for AFRICOM might be terrorism. Global jihadist terrorist organizations—the universe of groups comprised of Al Qaeda and those affiliated with or inspired by it—have been active in Africa. Al Qaeda has been active in Africa. Osama bin Laden lived in Sudan between 1992 and 1996, and it was there that Al Qaeda was born as a terrorist organization. Al Qaeda's first major terrorist operation was the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998. Al Qaeda struck again in Kenya in 2002, bombing a discotheque and attempting to shoot down an Israeli airliner. Second, much of Al Qaeda’s leadership and capability is drawn from Africa. Ayman al-Zawahiri is Egyptian, as are a number of the senior Al Qaeda leadership. Egyptian Islamic Jihad, led by al-Zawahri, merged with Al Qaeda some time between 1998 and 2001 to form the terrorist organization we know today. Third, although the primary terrorist threat to Britain now appears to originate from its domestic Pakistani community, the main terrorist threat elsewhere in Western Europe originates from the Maghreb region of North Africa. \(^7\) The Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat announced its alliance with Al Qaeda and its renaming as “Al Qaeda in the Maghreb” in September 2006, and the “Libyan Islamic Fighting Group” apparently pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda in November 2007. The U.S. State Department asserted that the Council of Islamic Clerics (CIC, also known as the Islamic Courts Union) that came to power in Somalia in 2006 was “hijacked by al Shabaab (The Youth), a small extremist group affiliated with [Al Qaeda].”\(^8\) Somalia provided a sanctuary for several Al Qaeda operatives and affiliates until late in 2006, when Ethiopia invaded and subsequently drove the CIC from power.

The United States has conducted a number of counter-terrorism combat operations in Africa. It fired cruise missiles at Sudan in 1998 in retaliation for the embassy bombings. Concerned that remnants of Al Qaeda would flee to East Africa after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the United States formed naval Task Force 150 in early 2002 to patrol the region’s coast. The United States supported the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia that drove the

CIC from power, and it used aircraft twice and cruise missiles once to attack groups of global jihadist in Somalia in 2007.9

The United States has also provided military support to African governments. The Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa was formed in 2002 to provide military training and conduct civil-military operations. Its stated mission in 2005 was “to wage peace across the region, to deny the enemy a safe haven, to increase the capacity of host nations to provide services for their people and combat terrorism.”10 The Pan-Sahel Initiative provided training to the military forces of Chad, Niger, Mauritania, and Mali between 2002 and 2004. Its successor, the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI), added Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. Part of the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), which incorporated the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program and the Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capabilities programs in 2004, is devoted to Africa.

Despite this blizzard of initiatives, actual U.S. presence and expenditures are small. The only place where U.S. forces are based is Djibouti, where there are 1,800 soldiers. Security assistance to African countries totaled less than $250 million in 2006, the cost of hours of operations in Iraq.11 TSCTI requested $16.75 million for 2007 while GPOI, a global program, requested $102 million. Two raids by aircraft and some cruise missiles do not a major operations front against terrorist organizations make.

There are terrorists and other military problems in Africa. There is clearly a global jihadist problem in Africa, but it is almost entirely confined to the Maghreb. There is little evidence to indicate a significant presence of global jihadists in the Horn region, including Somalia.12 There are jihadists with local objectives in Maghreb countries (and Al Qaeda in the Maghreb may actually be primarily focused on local rather than global objectives) and Egypt. Ungoverned spaces exist in the Sahel and barely governed spaces in the Horn. These areas might be attractive to global jihadists as refuges, and they may attack Western interests because they are close by. However, the absence of effective governance allows the United States to strike them more easily than if they

were protected by a weak government able to protest. Also the absence of communications links reduces the attractiveness of these areas. There are local terrorist organizations, exemplified by Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in Nigeria, and insurgencies competing with state authority through large areas of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). However, the National Intelligence Council assesses that SSA “is unlikely to become a major supplier of international terrorists due to the profound differences between Islam practiced in [SSA] and the Middle East.”

These issues are not addressed by the presence of major combat forces commanded by AFRICOM. U.S. soldiers are unlikely to add much to the ability of Algeria, say, to defeat terrorists. U.S. forces are unlikely to prevent Africans in the Maghreb from committing terrorist attacks in Europe. They cannot themselves control the ungoverned spaces of the Sahel, bring peace to West Africa, or defeat MEND.

China

A third possible reason for AFRICOM denied by the Bush administration is to counter China. China has a number of economic and political interests in Africa, and these interests have been the subject of concerned comment within the political advocacy community.

Economically, China has become a major trading partner of Africa’s. In fact, Africa’s exports to China have grown from less than $5 billion in 2000 to almost $29 billion in 2006. During this time, oil and gas accounted for sixty-two percent of Africa’s exports to China, and minerals and metals accounted for another thirteen percent. Africa imported almost $27 billion from China, of which forty-five percent was manufactured products and thirty-one percent was machinery and transport equipment. China received almost one-third of its oil imports from Africa in the first five months of 2006, and Angola surpassed Saudi Arabia as the largest source of China’s oil imports in early 2006.

China’s foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa is also growing substantially. China’s flow of FDI was $16.1 billion in 2006, up from $5.5 billion in 2004, and its stock was $73.3 billion. Of this, $392 million was invested in Africa in 2005, up from $317 million in 2004, and its stock of FDI in 2005 was almost $1.6 billion. Official figures may understate Chinese outward FDI. Chinese outward FDI may have been as much as $900 million in 2004. Chinese FDI in Africa was directed to a small number of resource

producers. Sudan was among the top ten recipients worldwide in 2005 and Sudan and Nigeria were among the top ten in 2004. Sudan was by far the largest recipient in 2004, receiving almost three times as much as Nigeria, the second.  

While growing rapidly, these remain miniscule when placed in context. First, trade is small from the perspective of China. Africa’s $29 billion of exports to China in 2006 was about 3.3 percent of China’s $880 billion of imports. Trade is small from the perspective of Africa’s aggregate exports: while ten percent of Africa’s exports are destined for China, the rest of Asia accounts for an additional seventeen percent of Africa’s exports, the EU thirty-two percent, and the United States twenty-nine. Trade is small from the world’s perspective. While Africa’s exports are increasing, world trade has increased rapidly since the mid-1940s. Africa’s share of world exports has declined from over seven percent after World War II to less than two percent in 2004. Second, China’s FDI flow and stock is small: its flow is comparable to that of Ireland, and its stock is less than that of Austria, Brazil, or Finland. Whether China’s FDI in Africa was less than $392 million or $900 million, the larger point is that Chinese FDI in Africa is small. In terms of Chinese FDI, $392 million was about 3.2 percent of China’s overall FDI. It was far behind Chinese FDI in Asia (54 percent in 2004, 35.7 percent in 2005) or Latin America (32.1 percent in 2004, 52.7 percent in 2005). In terms of African inward FDI, China’s FDI at $392 million was about 1.2 percent of African inward FDI of $32.9 billion, and its stock of $1.6 billion was about six-tenths of one percent of Africa’s stock of inward FDI of almost $266 billion.

Nonetheless, China has “punched above its weight,” when compared to its actual trade and FDI. First, until recently, it prevented the UN from imposing sanctions on Sudan for mass killings in Darfur. Second, China provides African countries an alternative source of funding that imposes far fewer conditions than the OECD countries and the Bretton Woods institutions. Third, significant interaction between African and Chinese political elites has occurred. The Forum on China and Africa Cooperation in 2006 was attended by representatives from 48 African countries, including 43 heads of state. The African Development Bank held its annual meeting in Shanghai in 2007. President Hu Jintao toured three countries in 2006 and eight in February 2007, Premier Wen Jiabao visited seven countries in 2006, and Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing visited six countries in 2006 and seven in January 2007.

18 Chinese imports are from World Bank Development Indicators at www.worldbank.org.
19 Harry Broadman, *Africa’s Silk Road*, p. 11.
20 Leonard K. Cheng and Zihui Ma, “China’s Outward FDI.”
However, it is not obvious that a U.S. military command, even one oriented toward building state capacity rather than warfighting, can act as a counter to Chinese economic and political activities. Provision of aid with reduced conditionality is an alternative available to the United States. Finally, the United States is certainly capable of increasing its political profile by sending its leadership on tours and inviting African leaders to the country.

African Governance and U.S. National Security Strategy

Africa is plagued by political instability, as well as weak and failed states. The Political Instability Task Force (PITF) found that SSA “has suffered more political instability than any other part of the world. In fact, Africa’s contribution to the incidence of instability worldwide far exceeds its weight in the global system.” PITF also found that the prevalence of instability was also high among Muslim countries, including those in North Africa. Using PITF methodology and 2004 data, three of the four African members of OPEC are at risk of political instability while other major oil producers are not. Only Libya is probably stable.

Other assessments paint a similar picture. The World Bank Governance Indicators assess voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. The first decile in each of these measures is dominated by African countries. The Center for Global Development measured state capacity among low-income countries in terms of security, provision of services, and maintenance of legitimacy. Defining a failed state as one “losing the battle on all three dimensions,” it found nine failed states, of which seven (Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan) were in Africa. Weak states were deficient in one or two dimensions. The Center found 19 of the 31 countries that suffered a security gap were in Africa. Twenty-nine of the 44 countries in the bottom three quintiles of the capacity gap were in Africa, including 11 of the bottom 14. Twenty-five of the bottom three quintiles of the legitimacy gap were in Africa, including half of the bottom 14.

23 Ibid., p. 64. The report found that there was, consistent with global trends at the time, a sharp decline of countries in crisis in the mid-1990s. “By 2002, the prevalence of instability among Muslim countries was about as low as it had been in 50 years.” This report used data through 2002.
At this point, it is useful to distinguish between countries and states. Countries are territorial areas, lines on a map, recognized by other countries. A state is an organization with a comparative advantage in violence that exchanges protection for revenue.\textsuperscript{27} In the developed world, the writ of the state extends across the territory of the country. In the less developed world, the writ of the state may not. A state internationally recognized as the government of a country may be inefficient, even corrupt, and it may face challengers who seek to replace it, either in an area or even in the capital city, where it might hope to be recognized as the government of a country. “Weak” states are countries in which the state internationally recognized as the government has poor capacity to exchange protection for revenue, and what capacity they have does not extend across the territory of the country they are internationally recognized as governing. The frontier, where the state can provide protection in exchange for revenue, may fall short of the territorial boundaries of the country.

The territorial extension of the writ of the state governing a country is a temporal process. In Western Europe, it took time for the state to move from what Charles Tilly characterized as a “protection racket” to the welfare state of the last half-century in which the holders of the state’s authority are replaced in democratic processes. By enhancing domestic stability, there is a democratic peace in which war is extraordinarily unlikely, and state-led investment (e.g., education) is made and property rights are enforced leading to economic growth. This establishes a reinforcing circle of prosperity and peace that allows for extraction and a strengthened welfare state.\textsuperscript{28} The process of independence in Africa did not foster this virtuous circle. Instead, some states have focused on extraction for personal enrichment and protection. Some states recognized as governing countries have had less interest in extending their writs over the complete territories because it was beyond the frontier where there was a positive return on their effort.

Africa might thus be seen as a vast territory, parts of which are controlled by states internationally recognized as countries. The state’s control may not extend much past the capital city and the core economic area(s), which may be in the capital city and, perhaps, areas where resources are extracted.\textsuperscript{29}

The positive intention of U.S. policy in Africa is to extend the frontier of the state to the territorial boundary of the country, and to enhance regional and

\textsuperscript{27} This definition is based on Douglass C. North, \textit{Structure and Change in Economic History} (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 21. I use North because he problematizes territory and legitimacy, elements assumed by Weber. Use of Weber would make it difficult to call existing organizations “states.”


\textsuperscript{29} NIC, “Mapping Sub-Saharan Africa’s Future.”
internal security by encouraging democratic regimes. According to the 2006 *National Security Strategy*, the “United States recognizes that [its] security depends upon partnering with Africans to strengthen fragile and failing states and bring ungoverned areas under the control of effective democracies.” Encouragement of democratic regimes is a key element of U.S. policy. The *National Security Strategy* opens:

It is the policy of the United States to seek and support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. In the world today, the fundamental character of regimes matters as much as the distribution of power among them. The goal of our statecraft is to help create a world of democratic, well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system. This is the best way to provide security for the American people.\(^{30}\)

The expectation is that a world populated by democratic states—effectively governing their territories—will best provide a secure, congenial environment for the United States.

AFRICOM is a mechanism that advances this agenda in several ways. As a military organization, it can seek out ways to cooperate with African militaries. It can train and equip African forces to expand state authority into ungoverned areas and so extend the frontier of the state to the territorial boundaries of the country. It does so by “providing revenue” in the form of training and equipment that gives extension of state power a positive return. Second, it can foster professionalism in military forces. This encourages military subordination to legitimate civilian authority making states less fearful of coups, and it can make militaries less likely to engage in coups. It can also reduce military involvement in repression and so encourage government by positive inducement rather than compulsion. Military-to-military contact can help the United States induce respect for human rights. Third, the significant presence of other U.S. government organizations within the structure of AFRICOM can potentially integrate U.S. government efforts. Much of the current U.S. military effort in Africa is funded through the State Department; the presence of State Department representatives in AFRICOM can increase the responsiveness of the U.S. effort to local conditions.

AFRICOM is only one part of the U.S. government’s engagement in Africa, but it occurs at the critical point of military-to-military contact. It will be African militaries that extend the frontier of protection. How those militaries interact with populations will affect whether populations integrate with governments in ways that promote stability or instability.

Positively, U.S. policy is to strengthen the internationally recognized state and extend its writ to the territorial extent of the country. More broadly, the United States is encouraging Africa in ways that create an environment congenial to U.S. interests. Rather than ungoverned space and unstable governments, the

United States seeks states in the model of the developed world, states that govern all, or at least most of the territorial space of their country.

**China’s Approach**

If the positive purpose of AFRICOM is promoting an environment congenial to the United States, the negative purpose is to counter the emergence of a Chinese-led order inimical to U.S. interests. Where the U.S. approach is to trade, encourage economic development, and mold African states in ways that extend the frontier of government authority and promote stability, China’s approach is to truck and barter and its official policy is not to “interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.” Where the U.S. approach changes Africa, China’s approach is to support the status quo. The result is a competition between the United States and China in which African countries can choose which best serves their interests.

Much of China’s economic relationship with Africa is about Chinese investment in infrastructure and extractive industries and importation of commodities, as well as Chinese exports of light manufactures and machinery. Eighty-five percent of Africa’s exports to China were comprised of petroleum, metals, and agricultural raw materials. Africa’s imports from China are mostly manufactured goods, some capital goods, and some intermediate inputs for additional processing before export to other markets. The latter include textiles and agricultural products for export to the United States under the preferential treatment of the African Growth and Opportunity Acts and to the EU under the Cotonou Agreement. Much of China’s investment in Africa is in extractive industries and infrastructure.

This relationship leads to “economic growth” but may not lead to broad economic development. It may also impose substantial costs on populations. Extractive industries and infrastructure projects are capital intensive and create few local jobs. What jobs are created may go to foreigners. Indeed, many workers in Chinese projects are Chinese. Earnings from extractive industries are concentrated and may not enter the local economy.

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32 Broadman, *Africa’s Silk Road*, p. 12.


34 Broadman, *Africa’s Silk Road*, p. 12.

Extractive industries often impose environmental externalities that fall heavily on the poor.

This relationship is concentrated in a small number of countries, among them some of the weakest. In 2003, oil dominated the China-bound exports of Angola, Sudan, Nigeria, Congo, and Gabon, and metals dominate the exports of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, and South Africa. Sudan, Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda sourced more than five percent of their imports from China.36

Nonetheless, this relationship provides a potential development model to other countries. The experience of China may resonate with African leaders. China emerged from Western and Japanese subjugation in the mid-twentieth century and, after a period of stagnation, has grown explosively since the late-1970s as the leadership allowed the emergence of a market economy in which government-owned enterprises are active participants. Importantly, China has had economic growth and development while the state, in the form of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), has maintained its position. What China offers may also resonate. Instead of the conditionalities of aid provided by the Bretton Woods organizations and Western governments influenced by NGOs and public opinion, China offers a market-oriented relationship with willing buyers who explicitly eschew conditionality. Lu Shaye, the Chinese ambassador to Senegal, captured this reality when he said “Now African countries have more choices. They have the panaceas of the World Bank the IMF, and at the same time the experience of China. They can compare and choose the best.”37

The result of current Chinese interactions with Africa promotes a world congenial to China. Countries do not interfere with each other’s internal affairs, and they protect each other from such interference. They focus on the common economic interests of merchants rather than political transformation. If Africa has commodities to sell that China needs, it is for China to buy those commodities with little compunction about the seller’s character.

This approach to Africa competes with the U.S. approach. Where the United States seeks to support political transformation into putatively more stable democratic forms of government and extend the state’s authority to the territorial frontiers of countries, China seeks to maintain the political status quo and is not seeking to extend the state’s authority. Where the United States wants countries in Africa to become like those in the developed world, China is content to support weak and authoritarian states. Where the United States wants pervasive governance, China supports states that do not effectively govern the entirety of the territory of their country.

These differences arise from the national security interests of the United States and China. From the U.S. perspective, it is weak and failed states that pose a significant problem. Global jihadist and criminal organizations can seek haven in weak states. Insurgencies can emerge that threaten Western investment. Humanitarian crises, whether political, economic, or epidemiologic, emerge from territories with ineffective governments. From a Chinese perspective, the problem is access to resources to support domestic economic growth that maintains the CCP’s position.

Additional problems arise for the United States when China provides an alternative source of demand, financing, and political support. Rather than cooperating with Western demands, weak states can seek support from China. For example, when the IMF pressured Angola in 2002 and 2003 about what became of billion of dollars of oil revenue, Angola turned to China and received a $2 billion loan backed by future oil revenue.

This is not a significant problem for the United States at present because China has intense relationships with a few African countries, but it could grow. Over time, African states may perceive that engagement with China and disengagement with the West meets their needs. Consequently Western influence would wane. In addition, China’s approach may actually weaken states in two ways. First, the Chinese approach does little to encourage development. Indeed, it may widen income disparity and further marginalize populations. In response, new states may emerge that seek redress. Such states in the form of insurgent groups increase the expense of the governing state to provide protection, so further reducing the protection available from the governing state. Second, insurgents may attack extractive industries and infrastructure. Current examples illustrate this problem. Nine Chinese were killed by an indigenous group in Ethiopia in April 2007. Activities like MEND’s hostage-taking along the southeast Nigerian coast has reduced Nigerian production by twenty percent as of April 2007 and cost Nigeria about $16 billion between December 2005 and April 2007. MEND does not constitute a direct threat to the Nigerian regime, but the regime is finding it difficult to protect the hydrocarbon infrastructure in the delta so MEND’s activities are eroding the foundations of the state.

More broadly, MEND may be the leading edge of a new kind of insurgency that focuses attacks on infrastructure networks. The effect of such attacks is visible in Iraq, where attacks on the electrical grid have made provision of electricity to Baghdad difficult and complicated the process of governing the country. Sabotage of pipelines has interrupted the export of oil from fields in northern Iraq. Similar attacks on gas pipelines in Mexico, in September 2007, significantly reduced economic activity in the affected region.

Seeing the effects of these relatively simple attacks is likely to inspire similar attacks elsewhere, including Africa. Second, Al Qaeda, and other radical Islamist terrorist organizations, have expressed keen interest in attacking hydrocarbon export infrastructure. Al Qaeda might find attacks on infrastructure targets attractive throughout Africa (especially if they affect major Western oil companies), and its affiliates in North Africa might think the same about local infrastructure.

The Chinese approach does little to forestall such situations that reduce the effectiveness of the state and consequently worsens governance problem that concerns the United States. Thus, the Chinese and U.S. approaches are in competition, and the Chinese approach is problematic from a U.S. security perspective. In addition, the Chinese approach may be counterproductive, creating problems for Chinese interests that their approach is unable to address. The U.S. approach can address such problems and, thus, may serve Chinese interests, allowing China to play the field without paying the price for any problems its approach creates.

**Conclusion**

AFRICOM is not a combatant command formed to strike at global jihadists, protect oil, or counter China—at least not directly. Rather, AFRICOM is a way to implement the U.S. national security strategy that seeks to strengthen states and eliminate ungoverned space, as well as establish relationships with African states that offer a means to greater state stability and foster economic development. In so doing, it does counter global jihadist by denying them haven among weak governments or in ungoverned areas. It protects U.S. interests in oil (and other resources) by helping governments become more stable. And it competes with the Chinese approach to Africa that could worsen the status quo of ineffective states and ungoverned space. Indeed, the U.S. approach of increasing state effectiveness makes African countries less susceptible to the problems that may arise from the Chinese approach and so serves China’s interests in access to natural resources.

There are several ways this situation might evolve. The following, listed in decreasing order of probability, is a sort of political science fiction meant to open up thinking. First, while the Chinese model in China—in which the rural population is integrated into the export manufacturing sector has some ways to run—Chinese manufacturers are already faced with increasing competition for workers. China will face the demographic problem that it will grow old before it grows rich. One alternative source of labor is Africa. One way for China to resolve this dilemma is to move manufacturing capacity to Africa. Second, China increasingly may see that its “development” approach to Africa is dysfunctional. It may then seek an approach like that of the West. Third, African states might set up export manufacturing zones for Chinese
manufacturers, and they might allow China to provide governance of such zones. Fourth, China might try a more muscular approach, setting up an equivalent of AFRICOM to train African militaries to provide protection to resource extraction infrastructure or future manufacturing facilities. Fifth, China might introduce troops, either Chinese or perhaps the equivalent of today’s private military contractors, to guard facilities and, like the French in West Africa, guarantee chosen states. Sixth, if it sought to undermine Western interests in Africa, China might support activities of insurgents who attack infrastructure. A MEND aided by China might make export of oil from Nigeria problematic.