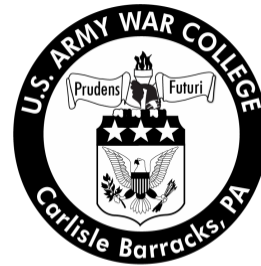


West Africa since the Cold War: Implications for U.S. Strategy

by

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United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2012

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 22-03-2012		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE West Africa since the Cold War: Implications for U.S. Strategy				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel Mark Miller				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Dr. James B. Bartholomees Department of National Security and Strategy				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for public release distribution is unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
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15. SUBJECT TERMS Counter Insurgency Operations, Regional Strategic Issues, Foreign Internal Defense					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 38	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

WEST AFRICA SINCE THE COLD WAR: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. STRATEGY

by

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel Mark Miller

TITLE: West Africa since the Cold War: Implications for U.S. Strategy

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 22 March 2012 WORD COUNT: 7,134 PAGES: 38

KEY TERMS: Counter Insurgency Operations, Regional Strategic Issues, Foreign Internal Defense

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

As U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan begins to wind down, political and military leaders are already beginning to make uncomfortable choices about the military's future force structure, missions, and procurement programs. These decisions are being shaped by the ongoing economic down-turn, domestic issues, public opinion, transnational threats, and increasing competition with China. The recently issued *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* indicates that the United States will only deploy large military forces for long-duration combat operations when vital America interests are clearly at stake. It also indicates policy-maker reluctance to intercede in the small wars that have been prevalent throughout much of the world over the last decade. This paper will examine the small wars in West Africa in the period since the end of the Cold War. Its purpose is to ascertain tendencies and characteristics of these conflicts and identify implications for future U.S. regional strategy in light of recent defense strategic guidance. Additionally, it is intended to provide policy practitioners a better understanding of the challenges they will face when attempting to frame the strategic environment and problems in a region like Africa.

WEST AFRICA SINCE THE COLD WAR: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. STRATEGY

We have no bases; we station no combat forces; and we homeport no ships. We do desire access to facilities and material...But ultimately we see very little traditional strategic interest in Africa.¹

--U.S. Security Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa, 1995

For the past two decades, political and military thinkers such as Martin van Creveld, Mary Kaldor, Max Boot, Ralph Peters, and John Keegan have postulated strategic environments in which Western militaries will be forced to contend with small wars as a rule rather than the exception. In this same period, the United States military has found itself committed to conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. These operations have provided the U.S. military with a wealth of experience in counterinsurgency warfare and stability operations. Unfortunately, this experience was purchased at great cost in both human life and national treasure. U.S. forces were not initially trained, organized, or equipped for these undertakings despite tacit recognition by policy makers and senior military leaders of the growing trend of low-intensity conflict. As U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan begins to wind down, political and military leaders are already beginning to make uncomfortable choices about the military's future force structure, missions, and procurement programs. These decisions are being shaped by the ongoing economic down-turn, domestic issues, public opinion, transnational threats, and increasing competition with China.

Given current domestic economic problems, budgetary constraints, and political considerations "...it seems likely that the United States will again commit large numbers of U.S. forces for direct combat, only very reluctantly, only when vital U.S. interests are

clearly and imminently threatened, and, if possible only with strong international support.”² The recently issued *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* states that while the U.S. will remain prepared to conduct “limited” stability and counterinsurgency operations, it will no longer be structured for the large-scale, prolonged operations conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan.³ John Tierney, Max Manwaring, John Fishel, and others have each identified the tendency of the U.S. military to continually look past previous counterinsurgency experiences and focus on conventional, interstate warfare. The U.S. military runs the risk of repeating this pattern as it begins shaping its forces for future conflict. Over the long term, the choices made today will affect the timeliness of future U.S. military responses and their cost.

This paper will examine the small wars in West Africa in the period since the end of the Cold War. Its purpose is to ascertain tendencies and characteristics of these conflicts and identify implications for future U.S. regional strategy in light of recent defense strategic guidance. It is intended to provide policy practitioners a better understanding of the challenges they will face when attempting to frame the strategic environment and problems in a region like Africa.

West Africa was chosen for several reasons. First, insurgency has been the prevalent form of conflict in this region over the last decade.⁴ Second, the countries in this region are located along a Christian-Muslim fault line that has been the focus of the current U.S. counterterrorism strategy. Third, instability in West Africa poses a threat to the security and economic interests of the U.S. and many of its European partners. Fourth, the operational environment in this region offers an overview of various political, economic, and security challenges faced by other nations throughout Africa. Finally, the

region was subject to a mix of British, French, and Portuguese colonial rule that continues to affect the region today. The causes and complexity of the conflict in West Africa provide a wide ranging sample of the types of insurgencies the U.S. may face throughout the continent.

The internal conflicts that plague Africa are known in academic and military literature by several names: guerrilla wars, civil wars, wars of independence, small wars, irregular wars, unconventional wars, terrorism, limited wars, uncomfortable wars, low-intensity conflict, and insurgencies. The antagonists in these conflicts are identified by names such as guerrilla, terrorist, insurgent, freedom fighter, rebel, and non-state actor. Each carries doctrinal, legal, and academic meanings depending on the audience. The adage “one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” also applies. It is not the intent of this paper to develop a universally accepted term that describes the range of internal African conflicts, but rather to examine these conflicts as a collective body. To this end, the term insurgency will be used throughout this paper to describe the collective body of internal conflicts in Africa as well as their associated movements. Bard O’Neill defines insurgency as

...a struggle between a nonruling group and the ruling authorities in which the nonruling group consciously uses political resources (e.g., organizational expertise, propaganda, and demonstrations) and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics.⁵

O’Neill’s work has been widely accepted in military and academic circles, and his definition is sufficiently broad to be inclusive range of internal conflicts in Africa.⁶

Of the United States’ global combatant commands, the nascent U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) stands to be most negatively affected by ongoing political

and military decisions in Washington. Established in 2008, AFRICOM was a response to the growing recognition of

Africa's role in the Global War on Terror and potential threats posed by uncontrolled spaces; the growing importance of Africa's natural resources, particularly energy resources; and ongoing concern for Africa's many humanitarian crises, armed conflicts, and more general challenges, such as the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS.⁷

The combatant command was formed in full recognition that the military was not the panacea for Africa's problems.⁸ The command has attempted to fully integrate the interagency into its organization in order to "...provide better informed and more effective support to initiatives led by civilian Departments and Agencies, such as the Department of State...and the U.S. Agency for International Development...."⁹

From its inception, AFRICOM has concentrated more on war prevention than traditional warfighting. Its strategy has focused on strengthening partner nation and regional defense capabilities and interoperability to enable African states to contend with their own security issues. This focus is based heavily on the rotational presence, advisory capabilities, engagement events, and exercises. Recent strategic guidance promotes this approach, but also emphasizes that "...thoughtful choices will need to be made regarding the location and frequency of these operations."¹⁰ Additionally, AFRICOM has experienced difficulty in filling its interagency positions due to competing agency demands and the reduced resourcing of other U.S. departments in comparison to the Department of Defense (DoD). The challenge for AFRICOM will be reconciling reduced U.S. Government resource and political will with the necessity to address the most prevalent form of current conflict in West Africa – insurgency.

The Role of Ethnicity in West African Insurgencies

Africa is one of the most ethnically diverse regions of the world. Nigeria, Africa's most populous state, has over 250 ethnic groups in its territorial borders alone.¹¹ Since the 1960s, ethnicity has been a major source of conflict in West Africa. Alignment along ethnic lines has also hindered the development of stable state institutions and economic progress. The U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has emphasized the need for political and military leaders to understand the impact of ethnic divides when examining the root causes of an insurgency. The large body of work on African ethnic groups provides four tendencies that are important to understanding regional insurgencies.

First, modern social divisions are not predominantly the result of primordial tensions between ethnic groups, but rather "...reactions of pre-colonial societies to the social, economic, cultural and political forces of colonialism."¹² Bruce Berman, Gustav Ranis, John Lonsdale, and others have written extensively on the origins of ethnic groups in Africa. "African ethnicities are now understood as open-ended and dynamic processes of social and political creation rather than static categories before, during and after colonial rule."¹³ During the pre-colonial era African societies were "...full of conflict and competition, instability and change."¹⁴ War, famine, disease, trade, and slavery were all forces that broke apart communities, assimilated identities, and forced migration. Dominant ethnic groups such as the Ashanti, which ruled in the Gold Coast region, often established power relations along patron-client lines with other ethnic groups.¹⁵

During the colonial period, ethnic groups "...emerged as instruments for the control and distribution of people and resources."¹⁶ The European powers leveraged and manipulated ethnicity and the pre-colonial concept of patronage to control

economic resources and the local populations. In many cases the “Big Men – Small Boy” power relationships established by colonial powers marginalized smaller ethnic groups or ran contrary to established pre-colonial networks. The European’s often promoted the assimilation of Africans into “tribes” based on language, physical appearance, or occupation that were subsequently labeled in ethnic terms.

This was reinforced by European assumptions of neatly bounded and culturally homogeneous ‘tribes’ and a bureaucratic preoccupation with demarcating, classifying and counting subject populations, as well as by the activities of missionaries and anthropologists.¹⁷

As Alexis Rawlinson has noted, “Africans themselves participated in this creation of “tribes” because not to do so would exclude or marginalise them from the bargaining process for state-allocated resources.”¹⁸

Second, African political leaders and societal elites have manipulated ethnicity for political gain and personal enrichment.¹⁹ Ruling elites have also deliberately played ethnic groups against each other in an effort to prevent the emergence of unified opposition movements.²⁰ The political and economic patronage systems established often serve to exclude other ethnicities while building a power base in one’s own group. In 1980, Liberia’s Samuel Doe was able to successfully use ethnicity to consolidate power around his minority Krahn ethnic group following the coup that removed President William R. Tolbert and the ruling ethnic Americo-Liberians. After seizing power, Doe proceeded to appoint Krahns to key political, bureaucratic, and military positions. He quickly established a system of patronage that excluded not only the Americo-Liberians, but also other Liberian ethnic groups. Doe also cultivated alliances with ethnic Mandingos to counter rival Gio and Mano political opponents.²¹

Third, inadequate access to power and resources is often the root cause of ethnic mobilization and not intrinsic hatred between groups.²² Exclusionary and segregationist social systems such as “paramountcy” in Ghana and the control of the rights of citizenship in Nigeria through the “indigene-settler” designation have led to heightened ethnic divides in both countries. Competition over land and water has stimulated ethnic violence. The Tiv-Jukun, Zangon-Kataf, Aguleri-Umuleri, Mango-Bokkos, and Ife-Modakeke feuds in various states throughout Nigeria, all feature land as the “predisposing factor in the escalation of violence” between these groups.²³ As a result, “[i]t is through ethnic identification that competition for influence in the state and in the allocation of resources takes place, instead of it being a contest between the “haves” and the “have nots” as in most Western societies.”²⁴

Finally, the inability of many West African states to provide policing and protection from the excesses of insurgent groups has led to the proliferation of ethnic militias. As William Thom has noted, “If the state cannot protect individuals, the tendency is to turn to one’s ethnic roots for refuge.”²⁵ These militias are often “double-hatted” as vigilante groups receiving tacit support from the local population.²⁶

Religion in West African Insurgencies

Religious tensions have also been a source of unrest in West Africa. Like ethnicity, the causes of religious strife in West Africa go beyond differences between the beliefs of animist, Christian, and Muslim. Colonial practices, economic and resource disparities, and political manipulation have all contributed to current friction between religious groups.

Colonial activity inadvertently set the stage for post-colonial relationships between West African Christians and Muslims in three ways. First, Christian European

missionary expansion into the interior of the colonies during the late 1800s and early 1900s coincided with a series of jihads by North African Muslims aimed at expanding Islamic influence into western Africa. "Encounters during this period were therefore more often than not polemic by nature, with Christian missionaries being identified with the colonial powers and Christians and Muslims seeing each other as rivals in the field."²⁷

Second, development and economic opportunity were often greatest in the locations where the Christian Europeans established their economic and administrative settlements. African societal groups in these areas often became Christians as a means of advancement and consequentially enjoyed better economic and educational benefits.

Finally, religious dividing lines were further reinforced by the policies and artificial geographic boundaries established by the Europeans to administer their colonies. An example is the British apportionment of Nigeria into three administrative regions based on the three largest indigenous ethnic groups; Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa-Fulani. This partition essentially created a Muslim enclave in the north under the Hausa-Fulani.²⁸ Britain's subsequent decision to restrict Christian missionary work to southern Nigeria reinforced this divide. It also led to further incongruities in regional economic development and the perceived distribution of power between these ethnic groups at independence.²⁹

Events in post-colonial Africa have also contributed to religious divides. Since the 1990s, Christian and Muslim missionary efforts have increased religious tensions in Ghana and Nigeria. Christian evangelical movements sparked conflict as missionaries

preaching anti-Islamic dogma attempted to convert followers of Islam in Muslim dominated regions.³⁰ Shia and Sunni groups sponsored by wealthy Middle Eastern countries generated tensions not only between Christians and Muslims, but also in Sufi and traditional African Muslim communities. “Muslim countries such as Iran, Libya and Saudi Arabia, under the guise of offering financial support to different Muslim organisations, are in fact transporting their own politico-religious rivalries into the country.”³¹

West African elites have not hesitated to use religious divisions to forge political alliances and further their own agendas. Leaders have often associated Islam with the slave trade, while Christianity has been cast as the religion of colonialism and corruption. In Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, and Ghana, politicians have transformed competition for power and economic resources into issues of religion. After seizing power in Gambia, Yaya Jammeh used Islam as a basis for establishing internal and international support. Dressing in traditional Muslim garb, he attacked the secular followers of Gambia’s former president Dawda Jawara. He then cultivated a base of support among the Gambian students returning from Islamic schools in Saudi Arabia.³²

The regional media often feeds these tensions through its superficial portrayal of the frictions between Christians and Muslims.

Too often, conflicts between incomers and indigenes over land or water or between groups struggling for local power are assigned religious labels that commentators and headline writers seize upon, overemphasizing the religious dimension.³³

Fractionalization in Insurgent Groups

Another obstacle to peace in West African has been factionalism in insurgent groups. The turbulence in Liberia during the 1990s is an example of this problem.

During this period, the three principle protagonists all fractured or spawned separate groups along ethnic lines. Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) broke into the Independent NPFL lead by his former lieutenant and training officer Prince Johnson and a third faction led by Sam Dokie and Tom Woweiyu.³⁴ President Samuel Doe's Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) composed of Krahns, Mandingos, and other ethnic groups began to fracture along Krahn/non-Krahn lines following Doe's death. The Sierra Leone-backed United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO) composed of mostly AFL defectors, Krahns, and Mandingos eventually split along ethnic lines.³⁵ Additionally, Dr. George Boley, a former ULIMO leader, formed the Liberian Peace Council (LPC) that served as a Krahn proxy force for the AFL.³⁶ Finally, Groups such as the Bassa Defense Force, the Citizens' Defense Force, and the Lofa Defense Force rose as ethnic militias to counter the excesses of the other warring factions and at times served as proxies for these groups. Such was the case when Krahn warlords in the AFL continued to use the LPC to wage war while they portrayed themselves as observing the Cotonou Peace Accord that was to have ended the conflict in Liberia.³⁷

Factionalism creates several problems for the counterinsurgent. First, it makes determination and response to insurgent goals difficult. Bard O'Neill discusses in detail the difficulty of identifying the true ends and strategy of an insurgent organization.³⁸ Correct determination of insurgent goals allows governments to develop policies and programs that promote their ends while frustrating the insurgent's efforts.³⁹ When groups continually divide and subdivide, the task of assessing goals is infinitely more complex. O'Neill notes however, that identification of the contradictions among the

ultimate goals of factions “...may present an opportunity for driving a wedge into insurgent ranks.”⁴⁰

Second, fragmentation often leads to poor discipline in the groups and to excesses with the local population. In Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire, these excesses have set off cycles of ethnic and religious violence that became hard for peace keepers to contain.

Finally, factionalism makes negotiating any type of peace agreement difficult. Not only is it problematic to get all concerned parties to the negotiating table, but also it is an arduous task to reconcile the often disparate agendas of these groups. Additionally, problems arise when groups use proxy groups to further their agendas or gain a position of advantage during negotiations. As William Thom has observed, “Getting them to the table and getting them to commit to what they signed on a piece of paper are formidable obstacles.”⁴¹

Insurgent Groups as Proxies

In a number of West Africa's conflicts, regional leaders and power brokers have supported the incubation and subsequent operations of insurgent organizations to further their own political and economic aims in other countries. Benefactor assistance has come in the form weapons, training, sanctuary, and in some cases mercenary fighters. Poorly executed disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs have provided a pool of armed mercenaries to support these agendas.⁴²

The civil war that erupted in Côte d'Ivoire in 1992 exemplifies the problems caused by state sponsorship of insurgent groups. “Long considered a haven of peace and prosperity, Côte d'Ivoire was victim on 19 September 2002 of an attempted coup d'état, which plunged the country into a war whose consequences...threatened the

stability of the whole West African region.”⁴³ The group that precipitated the conflict, the Mouvement Patriotique de la Côte d’Ivoire (MPCI), comprised former Ivorian soldiers and parallel military groups that fled to Burkina Faso during President Laurent Gbagbo’s consolidation of power following his election in 2000.⁴⁴ Gbagbo’s continuation of the identification or “Ivoirité” policy that branded many of the Muslim northerners as foreigners provided the fuel that sustained this conflict. Although the coup attempt failed, the insurgents quickly occupied the northern half of the country and later captured much of the west.

Burkinabé President Blaise Compaoré supported the MPCI. Compaoré had a personal dislike for Gbagbo and his identification policy. “Despite its subsequent development of a political platform, developed over months of negotiation, the MPCI was a military operation designed from the outset to remove Gbagbo.”⁴⁵ The group’s demands eventually included new elections, and a reform of the nationality laws that have branded many Ivorians, particularly northerners, as foreigners. With support from both Burkina Faso and to lesser extent Mali, the MPCI was able to establish safe havens that it used throughout the war and during the negotiations process.

Into this mix was thrown the Mouvement Populaire du Grand Ouest (MPIGO) and Mouvement pour le Justice e la Paix (MJP) supported by Charles Taylor and the former Revolutionary United Front commander Sam Bockarie.⁴⁶ Taylor used the MPIGO to prevent insurgents from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) from threatening timber interests in eastern Liberia and to ensure access to the seaports that served as transshipment points for most of his arms.⁴⁷ The declared aims of these groups were to avenge the death of the former Ivorian Junta leader General

Robert Guéï, who was killed on the first day of the MPCl rebellion, and remove Gbagbo from power.⁴⁸

Laurent Gbagbo in turn backed the insurgent group known as the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy Movement for Democracy in Liberia (LURD-MODEL) as a counter to Taylor's largess of the MPIGO. LURD-MODEL formed from a split in the larger LURD movement that had Guinea's Lansana Conté as its benefactor.⁴⁹ The MODEL, comprised primarily of ethnic Krahns, pursued an agenda of attempting to "hurt" Taylor while at the same time preventing the Guinea-based LURD movement, composed largely Mandingos, from taking control of Liberia's capital.⁵⁰ Gbagbo also used Ivorian youth militias, recruited from refugee camps in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, to fight against Taylor and his proxy insurgents.⁵¹

Private Military Companies

Since the 1960s, private military actors have been a feature of the African security landscape. Private military companies (PMC) are the newest version of the non-state military actor in West Africa. These largely unregulated corporate bodies specialize in the provision of military services that include training, operational planning, security, technical assistance, logistical support, weapons procurement, and direct military support for combat operations.⁵² They provide their services to a diverse clientele that includes governments, the UN, corporations, media personnel, and NGOs. Opinions on the utility, necessity, and potential strategic impacts of these firms are as diverse as the services they provide. Detractors see them as nothing more than a modern derivative of the "soldier of fortune." Other critics view them as modern condottieri, with financial and political interests separate from the states that employ them.⁵³ They also note their encroachment into inherent government functions.

Advocates claim they provide a necessary service that is not or cannot be provided by regional governments or the international community. Regardless of one's opinion on the need for PMCs, it is likely that U.S. diplomats and military leaders will have to work in a strategic environment shaped by their activities and, in some cases, use their services.

Peter Singer's "Tip-of-the-Spear" typology is a useful start point for cataloguing the types of PMCs operating in West Africa.⁵⁴ Singer has grouped these organizations based on the array of services and levels of force that firms can offer a client. His first category, the military provider firm, is the most controversial. These companies are oriented toward providing trained military personnel for frontline combat operations. The activities of Executive Outcomes (EO) and Sandline International in Sierra Leone during the 1990s are examples of firms that operate under this "business model."⁵⁵ In exchange for containing the immediate threat posed by the Revolutionary United Front insurgents, the underwriters of these operations received lucrative mining and other economic concessions from Sierra Leone's government.⁵⁶

Politicians, diplomats, and scholars are divided on the utility of military provider firms like EO and Sandline. On one hand, they "...accomplished tasks which both African and Western governments have approved of, but have hesitated to attempt themselves because of financial or political costs."⁵⁷ Critics argue that short-term success aside, the "business model" of these companies poses a threat to the "*de facto* sovereignty" (emphasis added) of the counties in which they operate by placing key economic resources in the hands of international corporations with potentially divergent long-term interests.⁵⁸

The military consulting firm is a second type of PMC. These organizations focus on providing advice and training, but fall short of directly participating in combat operations.⁵⁹ The U.S.-based Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI) and DynCorp are examples of the military consulting firm. MPRI is one of the companies currently supporting the U.S. Department of State's African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program (ACOTA). The purpose of this program is "...to improve African ability to respond quickly to crises by providing selected militaries with the training and equipment required to execute humanitarian or peace support operations."⁶⁰ While MPRI's activities have enabled regional U.S. capacity-building goals without employing military forces, they also have drawn scrutiny from the intentional human rights and "watch dog" organizations for their lack of transparency to both the U.S. public and Congress.⁶¹ Additionally, MPRI's training-related affiliation with the Croatian forces responsible for atrocities in Krajina in 1995 have raised media questions about oversight and the company's current training activities.⁶²

Given proposed budget cuts and reductions in forces, the U.S. will likely continue to use companies like MPRI to provide training to West African forces. Much of MPRI's training is conducted by former senior officers, warrant officers, and noncommissioned officers. The U.S. cannot afford to maintain a rank-heavy force structure with its associated cost solely for the purposes of capacity building. Additionally, use of military consulting firms diminishes the need to place high-demand military forces on the ground for training. The experience of MPRI does highlight the need to better inform the media and the public on oversight processes to prevent this from becoming a political issue.

Singer's final category is the military support firm. While these companies do not participate in the planning or execution of combat operations, they do provide supplementary services such as "...logistics, technical support, and transportation that are critical to combat operations."⁶³ U.S.-based Kellogg, Brown, and Root (KBR) is an example of Singer's military support firm typology. The U.S. has made extensive use of companies like KBR to meet its logistic and maintenance needs in Iraq and Afghanistan. The business practices of KBR and its former parent corporation, Halliburton, have been the subject of much government and media scrutiny since the First Gulf War.⁶⁴ Most recently, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission has charged KBR with bribing Nigerian officials in order to secure construction projects.⁶⁵

Currently, the U.S. relies heavily on military support firms to support its own military. It is likely that it will need to retain their services to support future regional stability operations. Logistical and maintenance shortfalls have been habitual in West African stability operations.⁶⁶ Current U.S. military force structure and logistics capabilities do not lend themselves to supporting foreign militaries with varied weapons and equipment. KBR's missteps do highlight the need to ensure proper U.S. oversight of contractor activities, especially in a region where the governments lack "...effective institutional oversight and monitoring capabilities..." and may be vulnerable to PSCs.⁶⁷ Proper oversight will ensure that mission support requirements are met and that the activities of military support firms do not undermine the legitimacy of any U.S. activities.

A fourth category that is not covered in Singer's typology is the security services company. These firms provide protection for corporate personnel, infrastructure, and business interests. Companies such as Outsourcing Services Ltd./G4S, Saracen, and

the now defunct Lifeguard Systems have won contracts to protect mining and petroleum operations throughout Africa.⁶⁸ In Nigeria alone it is estimated that there are between 1,500 and 2,000 private security companies, employing in excess of 100,000 people.⁶⁹

These companies are significant for three reasons. First, they are economically-aligned, non-state security actors that must be accounted for during operations in the region. Second their size and corporate reach-back raise the de facto sovereignty issues raised by critics of military provider firms. Finally, their proliferation is indicative of the inability of the West African states to provide internal security necessary to protect economic interests.

Narcotics Trafficking in West Africa

A surge in South American-based narcotics trafficking over the last decade has added to the security problems in West Africa. Large, well-financed criminal organizations in countries like Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Benin, Togo, and Mauritania threaten to destabilize weak and under-resourced governments. Additionally, there is increasing evidence that Al Qaeda is using relationships with South American drug cartels to fund its operations.⁷⁰

Drug trafficking is not new to West Africa. Ghanaian and Nigerian drug gangs have long been associated with the international drug trade.⁷¹ South American traffickers are targeting "...the 'failed states' along the Gold Coast, where poverty is extreme, where society has been ravaged by war and the institutions of state can be easily bought off - so that instead of enforcement, there is collusion."⁷² Many nations lack the constabulary and economic resources to regulate their borders and territorial waters. The judicial and penal systems are often corrupt, and when they do function, lack the capacity to deal with the volume of drug-related cases. Even in the region's

more stable nations, government counter-narcotics efforts are often frustrated by lack of resources, institutional capacity, and government corruption.⁷³ According to the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, the use of hard drugs is on the rise in Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, and Nigeria. Abuse has been fueled by the availability of inexpensive drugs, the cartel practice of paying members in narcotics, and unresolved societal issues.

The Gold Coast has now become the central cog in a network that supplies South American cocaine to Europe. “West Africa, which neither produces nor consumes significant quantities of cocaine, is a victim of global supply and demand.”⁷⁴ Experts have offered several trends that explain this development. Intensified U.S. and South American counternarcotic efforts diminished the flow of cocaine into North America. In response, the drug syndicates began developing markets in Europe, where cocaine use has grown over the past ten years.⁷⁵ The subsequent crackdown by European law enforcement on the air and maritime trafficking routes from South America led the syndicates to establish stockpiling and redistribution centers in West Africa. Additionally, “[t]he increasing might of Mexico's powerful drug cartels has forced the South Americans to search for trafficking routes to Europe across the Atlantic rather than through Central America.”⁷⁶

West Africa’s drug problems are not limited to cocaine. Heroin from East Africa, the Middle East, and Asia also transits through this region enroute to European markets.⁷⁷ Additionally, officials have noted that the cartels are beginning to use their trafficking network to smuggle ecstasy and amphetamines back to South America.⁷⁸

The international community has recognized the threat posed by drug trafficking both regionally and internationally. The United Nations, ECOWAS, and INTERPOL are attempting to establish interagency Transnational Crime Units as part of West Africa Coast Initiative.⁷⁹ The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency established the Ghana Vetted Unit in 2010 to “...serve as the cornerstone in the development of a counterdrug infrastructure needed to identify, disrupt, and dismantle criminal drug trafficking and money laundering organizations operating throughout West Africa.”⁸⁰ The U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) are providing training and advice on maritime operations to West African countries.⁸¹ European nations have also provided security force training and deployed naval forces and law enforcement officers to the region for maritime interdiction operations. Even with international assistance, many experts feel that little will change on the West African drug front until regional governments address their internal corruption issues.⁸²

Evolution of State Security Forces

Problems in West African militaries are often attributed to a lack of funding and resources.⁸³ While these shortfalls have undoubtedly affected their capacity, the evolution of these militaries has also affected their performance during conflicts. Modern West African militaries have evolved from two primary security structures: colonial armies and independence-era guerrilla movements. The Cold War and subsequent loss of benefactor support has also affected their development. This evolutionary process has created unique challenges that must be overcome if West African militaries are to be part of future solutions in the region instead of causes of future problems.

Many of the current West African security forces are based on security structures established by their former colonial masters.⁸⁴ During the colonial period, the primary mission of these forces was not to defend the local inhabitants from outside attack, but to assist the colonial governments in controlling the population and protecting colonial economic interests.⁸⁵ Loyalty to central authority, professionalism, and neutrality were desired attributes from these fighting forces.⁸⁶ In many cases, soldiers were selected from "...the economically more backward regions and less influential ethnic groups within the colonies...."⁸⁷ This recruiting practice allowed the colonial powers to use ethnic divides in areas such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone to aid in indoctrination and ensure the security forces would enforce colonial mandates in politically and economically sensitive regions. In many cases, the security forces were viewed as colonial mercenaries by urban populations where the colonial powers tended to focus their efforts.⁸⁸ For strategic reasons, colonial powers deliberately did not incorporate in the military individuals from groups whose traditional cultures or functions supported martial and security activities.⁸⁹ This often led to ethnic disparities in the military.⁹⁰

The concepts of civilian control of the military, respect for human rights, and the rule of law were not unknown in many of these militaries.⁹¹ However, these forces did not recognize the notion that the citizens of the state constituted civilian control. Following independence, it has been the tendency of the conservative military leadership to support the status quo and defend "...the conservative political values and ideas of the 'metropole' and the neocolonial disorder in the periphery."⁹² In countries such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone, the military has not hesitated to intervene when it perceives liberalization in the political agenda of the ruling elite.

West African militaries have also evolved from the guerrilla organizations that were the armed wings of various independence movements. The liberation armies have fared no better than their colonial counterparts at internalizing the concepts of civilian control of the military, respect for human rights, and the rule of law.

In the case of guerrilla liberation movements, an orientation supposedly more reflective of people's needs and aspirations instead evolved into a bifurcation of agendas, preoccupations and practices, all of which resulted in a gap between the internal dynamics of former guerrilla movements...and the people of the states concerned."⁹³

AFRICOM's current focus on transforming militaries into responsible and responsive national institutions may face challenges based on both of these traditions.⁹⁴

"Most armies during the terminal colonial period were more recognizable as mechanized police forces than as combat units."⁹⁵ Cold War competition changed that paradigm as military aid flowed in from the Communist-Block countries and the West. The U.S.S.R., in particular, began providing growing amounts of increasingly sophisticated weaponry to its client states. This equipment and the conventional training provided by the Soviets were better suited to traditional maneuver warfare than current counterinsurgency and stability operations.⁹⁶ Much of this training focused on fighting in the local environment against "...another army trained for the same type of warfare."⁹⁷ It did not prepare these militaries for the urban combat they often face today.⁹⁸ Additionally, the Cold War chess game left many states with a diverse range of Soviet-Block, U.S. and European military hardware. Beyond obvious interoperability issues, this equipment now has to be maintained without the benefit of military aid.

State intelligence organizations established during the Cold War period were also a reflection of alignment.⁹⁹ They reflected the structure, capabilities, and collection priorities of their Soviet, European, or U.S. benefactors. These organizations are no

longer suited to supporting militaries executing counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and peacekeeping operations.

With the end of the Cold War and the associated waning interest in the region, foreign military assistance began a precipitous drop-off. This situation was made worse by the poor economic prospects of many of the West African countries in the 1990s and resultant military budget cuts.¹⁰⁰ Resourcing shortfalls inhibited the abilities of the West African countries to repair, maintain, and procure equipment. They also impacted training and pay. Tony Clayton has noted that training and professionalism, especially in the officer corps have been key foundations for effective peacekeeping and counterinsurgency operations in Africa.¹⁰¹ The inability of West African governments to pay or properly train their military forces has eroded their professionalism, decreased their readiness, and contributed to a gradual decay in public order.¹⁰² It has also led to the so called “sobel” problem – soldier by day and rebel by night – as underpaid and ill-disciplined soldiers sought ways to supplement their income through crime or complicit support for insurgent organizations.

In addition to economic considerations, African leaders have sought to limit their susceptibility to coup attempts by reducing the size of their militaries. Downsizing has created three potential issues. First, it has placed a significant number of unemployed soldiers into an economic environment with few legitimate options for their skills. Second, it has created mistrust between the military and political leadership. Lastly, it has limited the ability of the government to mobilize sufficient forces against insurgent organizations at the beginning of a conflict when the insurgents are most vulnerable.¹⁰³

For African militaries, even rebellions in the relatively vulnerable early stages are difficult to defeat. Most African governments lack systems to collect intelligence about what is actually happening on the ground, especially in rural areas distant from the capital.¹⁰⁴

Policy and Program Suggestions

To address the challenges discussed above, the U.S. must first clearly define its strategic interests in the region. As James Forest and Rebecca Crispin have observed, American policymakers and planners must “...see Africa as Africans see it’, since African priorities often do not mirror American interests.”¹⁰⁵ Socio-economic and ethno-religious problems are of greater concern for most African’s than the transnational threats that are their byproducts. Diplomats and senior military leaders must be prepared to openly discuss these interests with African leaders to establish common goals and a basis for collective action. If American regional response is to be predicated on African capacity, U.S. leadership should ensure Africans are partners in developing strategies that better align ends, ways, and means.

The U.S. must ensure that it understands the operational environment before it begins proposing solutions to problems in Africa. Africa was viewed as a strategic backwater for most of the last two decades. Accordingly, few senior-level decision makers, military leaders, and intelligence analysts have a full grasp of the region’s problems and their root causes.¹⁰⁶ As highlighted above, many of the region’s tribulations have complex origins. It will be important for the U.S. to begin developing broader regional expertise in the diplomatic corps, the military, and the intelligence community.

The U.S. government should develop sub-regional contingency plans that synchronize the activities of the Department of State (DoS), U.S. diplomatic missions, and AFRICOM during regional crises. With the exception of the U.S. Ambassador to the African Union, the DoS lacks a person or organization that synchronizes the activities of the U.S. missions by geographic sub-region. AFRICOMs initiatives focus heavily on developing regional vice solely bilateral partner nation capabilities. These plans should account for all phases of conflict resolution. As Fishel and Manwaring have noted, "...an enforced peace can provide only the beginning environment from which to start political, reconciliation, economic reconstruction, and moral legitimization processes."¹⁰⁷ More importantly, they should identify the international governments, organizations, and businesses that are willing to support post-conflict activities in which the U.S. will likely be hesitant to engage for political and economic reasons. Sub-regional whole-of-government plans will allow the U.S. to better deal with a range of contingencies from humanitarian crisis through multi-state conflicts like the Côte d'Ivoire civil war.

The U.S. should develop a more comprehensive approach to counterterrorism (CT) in Africa. Current strategy focuses heavily on developing partner nation CT capabilities through the Department of States' Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership to combat a transnational terrorist threat. U.S. CT strategy must also address the sources of rising religious tensions in the region. Corruption, inequality, marginalized youths, political manipulation, and governance failures have made countries like Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria soft targets for criminal and terrorist organizations. Additional emphasis needs to be placed on strengthening institutions

and capabilities in African militaries rather than simply imparting mission-specific skill sets. Secure banking systems, working judicial systems, and enhanced enforcement of money laundering laws are also critical.

U.S. policy must place increased emphasis on enhancing the intelligence capabilities of West African partner nations. Currently, the Multinational Information Sharing Initiative provides training and equipment to build information sharing capability with, and between, the Trans-Sahara partner nations.¹⁰⁸ Effective intelligence organizations will allow regional partners to address not only terror threats, but also humanitarian, peacekeeping, and internal security challenges. As Max Manwaring has noted “...the best police, paramilitary, or military forces are of little consequence without appropriate and timely intelligence.”¹⁰⁹ Programs should emphasize the development of this capability across the military, law enforcement, and other regional government organizations. U.S. soft power will also be critical to ensuring this expanded capability is not used by governments as a tool of repression.

The U.S., in coordination with its international partners, should develop a process to synchronize the provision of military aid and training to regional militaries. Currently, no system exists to effectively coordinate donor aid. Developing such a process would help ensure training, doctrine, and equipment standardization during combined operations such as peacekeeping and peace enforcement. Interoperability and technical standards should also be established for certain key equipment such as radios, generators, and small arms. Finally, donor nations should focus on establishing a collective expeditionary capability to support the regional security capabilities that are the focus of U.S. and European capacity building efforts. The ability to rapidly project

power will allow regional security organizations such as the African Union to respond more effectively to conflict and crisis.¹¹⁰

Efforts must be made to increase the capacity of African militaries to train themselves. One way to accomplish this is through the development of regional training and military education centers. The U.S. and other donor nations should aid organizations like the African Union in establishing a regional network of military schools and training facilities. Institutions such as officer and noncommissioned officer academies will increase the training and professionalism of key leadership. Additionally, they will serve as a venue to cross-level experience and encourage better military-to-military relations between countries.

Based on its recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, there has been a renewed emphasis on building regional expertise in the U.S. military. In the face of budget cuts, DoD should continue to promote educational and training opportunities that increase regional knowledge and cultural understanding at the individual and unit level.

Policy makers must realize that AFRICOM's engagement strategy will not be the answer to all of the region's security issues. U.S. and African militaries cannot be expected to resolve issues like corruption, lawlessness, and crime that impact stability. Nor can they unilaterally establish legitimacy between a government and its people. More vigorous, better resourced diplomacy will be essential to an effective U.S. response to Africa's security challenges. Moreover, continual reliance on the military will reinforce perceptions of "militarized" U.S. diplomatic and development efforts.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed some of the root causes of the problems that will impact U.S. interests and shape response in the region. The list is not all inclusive, but

rather demonstrates the need to fully understand the strategic environment before attempting to shape and react to it. The problems that impact U.S. strategic interests in the region are Africa's daily problems. As such, the Africans have differing views on prioritization of effort and on the solutions to the problems. The challenge will be to translate U.S. strategic interests into options that also address African national and regional interests.

America's episodic engagement on the African continent since the independence period has left many Africans unsure of the U.S.'s level of commitment and true policy intentions. This view is further influenced by the African colonial experience. The U.S.'s strategic communication plan and diplomatic engagement will be critical to not only establishing relations, but explaining intentions. Most importantly, consistency and follow-through in U.S. policy and strategy will be critical to achieving meaningful, long-term results in Africa.

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⁹⁹ Sandy Africa and Johnny Kwadjo, "Introduction," in *Changing Intelligence Dynamics in Africa*, ed. Sandy Africa and Johnny Kwadjo (Birmingham, UK: Global Facilitation Network, 2009) linked from The GFN-SSR Homepage at "Publications," http://www.ssrnetwork.net/publications/gfn_ssr_publications.php (accessed January 18, 2011), 8.

¹⁰⁰ Thom, "An Assessment of Prospects," 3.

¹⁰¹ Clayton, "African Military Capabilities," 52.

¹⁰² Herbst, "African Militaries and Rebellion," 359.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 361.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ James J.F. Forest and Rebecca Crispin, "AFRICOM: Troubled Infancy, Promising Future," *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 1 (April, 2009), 18.

¹⁰⁶ Thom, *African Wars: A Defense Intelligence Perspective*, 27-32.

¹⁰⁷ Fishel, *Uncomfortable Wars Revisited*, 45.

¹⁰⁸ U.S. AFRICOM, "Fact Sheet: Operation ENDURING FREEDOM – Trans Sahara," linked from *The U.S. Africa Command Homepage* at "About the Command," <http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=1886> (accessed February 23, 2011)

¹⁰⁹ Fishel, *Uncomfortable Wars Revisited*, 25.

¹¹⁰ Shircliffe, "Tip of the African Spear," 60.