

Economic Diplomacy vs. Gunboat Diplomacy: De-Escalating China-United States New Cold War in Africa

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Abstract: This article focuses the growing rivalry between China and the United States in Africa as the former deepens its influence on the continent since the start of the new millennium through a novel strategy of economic diplomacy. It highlights US response to China's influence in the form of expansion of its military presence in Africa through the setting up of AFRIOM. The article likens the Chinese-US rivalry to the cold war era when the US and the defunct USSR were locked in a supremacy contest as they struggled to advance the course of their respective capitalist and socialist ideologies globally through proxy states. In this connection, the article traces the antecedent of the new cold war, dovetailing into the dimension it is taking in Africa. It, importantly, explores the prospects for the war's resolution in view of the dangers it poses to the stability, security and survival of Africa.

Keywords: Gunboat Diplomacy, economic diplomacy, war's resolution.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Cold War can be said to have begun when the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) emerged as superpowers at the end of World War II in 1945. The overt, precipitating cause of the Cold War was ideological differences between the two superpowers. While the United States wanted capitalism to remain the world's dominant ideology, the USSR was committed to the spread of communism towards the attainment of classless and stateless societies universally. That marked the beginning of bipolarity characterized by the division of the most powerful states within the international system into two ideological blocs. The Western or capitalist bloc was led by the United States, while the Eastern or communist bloc had the USSR as its vanguard. An unpleasant and terrifying feature of the Cold War was the arms race. It was an era when substantial resources were expended on the invention and production of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), particularly nuclear war heads in their thousands, which were positioned in each bloc to hit targets in the opposing bloc. Another feature of the Cold War era was proxy wars. This is a situation where the superpowers would take side with one group against the other within a country or side one country against another, often on the basis of ideology. Ideological struggle was at the root of the partitioning of Korea into North and South. The same applies to the two Germanys – East and West – before their reunification. Africa, too, was a major battle ground of the Cold War. The civil wars in the Congo and Angola, the reign of apartheid in South Africa, the de-colonization struggle in Mozambique, among other cases across the continent, all had their Cold War dimensions, in which case the superpowers lurked in the background as 'shadow parties' aiding their ally in the conflicts.

With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the world simultaneously experienced a shift from bipolarity to a unipolar order, in which the United States emerged the sole superpower. However, towards the close of the 20th century, the void the defunct USSR left behind appeared to be closing as China's global influence grew on account of the rapid growth of its economy. As elsewhere, China's influence is rising in Africa on account of its massive economic foray into the continent.

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Much as this trend presents opportunities to the continent, it has its strategic fallouts, chief of which is the United States' efforts at China's containment. A New Cold War scenario is thus unfolding in Africa with all the negative potentials of the old Cold War that ended upon USSR's demise.

The aim of this article is to analyse the nature of the New Cold War and explore the prospects for its resolution in view of the dangers it poses to the stability, security and survival of Africa. Towards this end, the paper is divided into four sections. The first section explicates the Conflict Management Framework which undergirds our analysis. The second section offers an overview of the struggle for power between China and the US in Asia as a springboard to understanding the African dimension of the struggle, while the third discusses China's economic diplomacy as a power strategy. The fourth section analyses the prospects for the resolution of the conflict and concludes the paper.

II. THE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

We start by asking, what is conflict *per se*? There appears to be as many definition of this rather notorious concept as there are people willing to define it. Suffice it we cite two authorities. According to Coser (1967, 8) conflict is "struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources, in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate the rivals." In Deutch's view (1973), "conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur . . . an action which prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures, or in some way makes it less likely or less effective." We then may ask, what is conflict management? Again, definitions abound but we consider Wikipedia's (2007) version as most apt for our purpose. It says, "Conflict management refers to the long-term management of intractable conflicts." The first assumption underlying the Conflict Management Framework (CMF) is the inevitability of conflict in inter-state relations. The root of conflicts lies in differences existing among states in terms of their foreign policy goals and their perception of what constitutes their national interest. Conflict occurs when the pursuit of a country's national interest or foreign policy goals is at variance with another country's, leading to a clash. The United States, for instance, is committed to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons while North Korea sees the acquisition of these very weapons as being in its national interest. This has been at the root of tension between both countries.

The second assumption of the CMF is that some conflicts are not amenable to a once-and-for-all resolution on account of irreconcilable differences among the parties involved. The power conflict between China and the US fits this description as it manifests itself in multiple dimensions across time and space. The immediate triggering factor, be it allegation of under-valuation of the Yuan, hot exchanges over Dalai Lama, hovering of US spy plane in China's airspace, bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade by American B-2 bomber, or fears over authoritarian China being a bad example to democratizing African states, is rooted in a more fundamental, deep-seated animosity over power. Thus, the best that can be done is to devise strategies to defuse the "triggering factors," as they shoot out, from escalating to destructive proportions. The whole range of efforts deployed at fostering de-escalation is what we call Conflict Management.

In applying the CMF for analysis, we first have to trace the trajectory of the conflict in focus. It is only after we have done this we would be in an informed position to devise strategies to manage it, thereby preventing its escalation to destructive proportions.

III. OVERVIEW OF CHINA-US POWER TUSSLE IN ASIA

As already noted, the underlying cause of China-US rivalry is power. What is power? In this context, it is viewed as the capacity of a state to make other states obey its wishes by force, inducement, or attraction. Force can take the form of threat of or actual use of military might by one state to compel obedience by another, while the use of economic aid to secure desired outcomes in inter-state engagement is an example of inducement. Ingrained in attraction is an element of voluntariness, in which case, one state kowtows to another out of a sense of shared values or common purpose such as Britain does to the United States on a wide range of international issues, including going to topple Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

The power conflict between the US and China has been on ever before Africa became of interest to either of them in the context of contemporary international relations. The conflict is only more evident in prevailing times than it hitherto was because China has rapidly translated its power potentials into actualities within the past three decades. Whether it is qualified as a "fragile superpower" (Shirk, 2007) or an "economic superpower" (Jacques, 2009: 151), there seems to be

agreement across the board that China is now a superpower. The United States had identified China as a potential rival in its struggle for power and dominance within the international system after a strong China emerged from a century-long domination by foreign powers with the ascent of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 1949 under the leadership of Mao Tse Tung. With its continental size and a population then about a billion or one-fifth of humanity, China naturally portended a tilt sooner or later in the balance of power in the international arena. This realization led one of America's most astute strategic thinkers, Morgenthau (1962: 46) to remark thus: "... If Communist China should add to its enormous superiority in manpower the achievements of modern technology under the firm political direction of the Chinese Communist Party, it would then become of necessity the most powerful nation on earth..."

To prevent China's possible rise to the level of a formidable rival, the United States has pursued a policy of containment, beginning with the Asian region. It was a policy anchored on the desire by the United States to wield untrammelled, unrivalled, and unchallenged power and influence over world affairs. It is in pursuit of containment policy that the United States has stood as the greatest obstacle to China's efforts at reclaiming its balkanized territories. In the case of Tibet which it successfully reclaimed via military operation lasting 1950 - 1951, the US has been the foremost foreign supporter of a return to *status quo ante*. Another well-known case is Taiwan annexed by Japan in 1895. Following Communist army's defeat of Japan during World War II, the island should have been returned to China. It was the US that forestalled that possibility by intervening with the Sixth Fleet during the Korea War to maintain Taiwan's autonomy under the control of its ally, the Kuomintang (or Nationalists) led by Chiang Kai-shek. And the US remains the greatest supplier of arms and diplomatic shield for Taiwan till date.

Containing China is not just limited to ensuring it does not return to its full size prior to its domination by foreign powers. It also entails encircling it as much as possible, using nations contiguous to it as bases. This explains why the United States has maintained military bases in East Asia, which ordinarily should be China's sphere of influence. Japan offers a good illustration on this score. The US has maintained military bases in Japan since the latter surrendered to its might following the detonation of atomic bombs in two of its cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, during World War II. The point that China was part of the unannounced strategic calculations that informed *ab initio* the setting up of American bases in Japan – China's neighbor – is revealed in a recent comment by Shirk (Ibid, 149), former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State of the United States: "The US-Japan alliance, originally designed to defend against Soviet expansion in Asia, has not withered after the fall of the Soviet Union. Instead the alliance has actually grown stronger, fed by Japan's fear of an antagonistic China... and America's desire to share with Japan the burden of deterring Chinese... military action." And as if the Japanese, speaking for themselves, want to underscore the fact that the US military bases on their soil are serving American interests and not Japan's, the money the country contributes annually to the maintenance of troops at the bases is treated as an aid to the US government and *a fortiori* called *omoiyari yosan* meaning "sympathy budget" (Wikipedia, 2010a).

Regarding when the US might wind up its containment of China, we may find this account in Hartmann's work (1973, 611) instructive, "...There were press reports of testimony before the United States Congress by Assistant Secretary of State Walter Robertson to the purported effect that the United States must dominate Asia for an indefinite period until Communist China has 'disintegrated'".

It is only natural to expect China to react to the United States' unrelenting efforts at encircling it. It has tried on one hand to fend off America's onslaught through a strategy of collective security within Asia and, on the other, by opening new fronts in the two-nation rivalry in far-flung regions, including Africa. While our focus here is the African front opened by China, it is useful to take a cursory look at the nature of its containment of America's incipient military incursion into Central Asia, which, in terms of proximity, should ordinarily be the sphere of influence of China and Russia. In this connection, China is employing the platform of a six-nation collective security alliance that goes by the name the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which origin dates back to the mid-1990s. The SCO comprises China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The organization has accorded India, Pakistan, Mongolia and Iran observer status (Anon, 2010a). Significantly, on July 5, 2005, the SCO signed a declaration that the United States should set a deadline for the withdrawal of its troops from Central Asia (Leonard, 2008: 101-102). This was a reference to Karshi-Khanabad Air Base located in southern Uzbekistan close to Tajikistan and Manas Air Base in the north of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, both of which are used primarily to station soldiers, refueling jets, and cargo planes. Each airfield houses roughly 1,000 U.S. troops and civilian contractors for America's operations in Afghanistan. The Americans

replied that they had no intention to remain in the region permanently and would make their exit as soon as their military operation in Afghanistan that warranted the bases *ab initio* was concluded (Beehner, 2005). They probably had no choice as their two hosts (Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) are members of the SCO.

IV. ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY AS CHINA'S POWER STRATEGY IN AFRICA

There are basically two instruments through which a state can pursue goals within the international system. One is force, the other is diplomacy. Diplomacy, according to Morgenthau (1966), "is the pursuit of the national interest by peaceful means." For China, a handy, peaceful means of thwarting United States' efforts at containing it is its new-found wealth. As at the June 2010, its foreign reserves stood at approximately USD 2.5 trillion, which represents 30% of the world's total stock of foreign reserves (Anon, 2010b). Empowered by this huge arsenal of funds, China has opened a new front - the African front - in its struggle for power with the US, albeit at the latter's instigation. Creating an African front in the New Cold War with the United States is an astute tactical maneuver as it is capable of diverting or reducing United States' attention on China's immediate environs as a foothold in Africa takes it further to the enemy's rear, so to speak. Its *modus operandi* in this connection is the deepening of economic relations with Africa. We call this approach economic diplomacy, defined as a policy of prioritizing economic instruments towards achieving both economic and strategic goals within the international system by a state actor.

Three factors may be attributed for China's adoption of economic diplomacy. First is the worldview of its ruling elites who form the rank and file of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and are responsible, *inter alia*, for foreign policymaking. As Marxist intellectuals, the ruling elites believe the economic substructure of a national or international system determines the configuration of power at the superstructure level where resides governmental or controlling authority. Put differently, the elites believe that whoever possesses economic power in a system will ultimately be able to acquire controlling power over other competing actors, politically, culturally and militarily. Therefore, the reasonable pathway to untrammelled power is the attainment of economic supremacy. Their conviction in this regard must have been reinforced by the experience of the defunct USSR which engaged the United States in an arms race without a strong economic base and eventually collapsed in 1991 due to widespread internal discontent largely informed by economic hardships its disparate nationalities were made to undergo. Similarly, the Chinese ruling elites have read Sun Tzu's classic, *The Art of War*, which glorifies generals who can dominate enemies and achieve objects which war might have been required to achieve, without firing a shot. According to Sun:

...Those skilled in war subdue the enemy's army without battle. They capture the enemy's cities without assaulting them and overthrow his state without protracted operations. Their aim is to take all under heaven intact by strategic considerations. Thus, their troops are not worn out and their gains will be complete. This is the art of offensive strategy (Tzu, 1998: 25).

A strategy of global economic dominance then appears to be one by which China might be able to bend the world to its will.

The second reason for China's preference for economic diplomacy is largely economic and less-driven by the quest for power. This is no contradiction of the power thesis on which we premised this analysis *ab initio*, for economic buoyancy is a form of power in itself. China needs additional sources of oil, for instance, to meet the needs of its energy-guzzling industries. As factories across the world relocate to China to take advantage of its cheap overheads, dearth of oil, if allowed, would be a serious setback to sustained growth. The scale of China's search for oil is captured in Dadi's (2006:70) observation: "The Chinese oil companies have become the major listed international companies on the major international stock market... The development of the international oil and gas prospecting and extracting businesses is... the inevitable focus of these Chinese companies." Thus, China accords oil deals the prime of place in its African business.

Thirdly, China's rise is taking place before the watching eyes of an extant superpower - the United States - whose military capabilities it cannot as yet match and is in fact monitoring its military affairs closely. The United States Congress has passed a law which provides that the Secretary of Defense of the United States shall prepare and submit an "Annual Report on Military Power of the People's Republic of China,":

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On the current and future military strategy of the People's Republic of China. The report shall address the current and probable future course of military-technological development on the People's Liberation Army and the tenets and probable development of Chinese grand strategy, security strategy, and military strategy, and of the military organizations and operational concepts, through the next 20 years.

(National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000)

Given this context, overt military expansionism by China would be an imprudent policy that might be countered with all the might of the United States, thereby making a stillbirth of its rise. A strategy of economic expansionism thus becomes a prudent option.

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), created in 2000, following a meeting held from 10th to 12th October in Beijing between Chinese and African leaders, is the multilateral, institutional platform for consultations with Africa's stakeholders towards fine-tuning China's economic diplomacy or what China would rather call "China's African Policy" in Africa. Implementation of the series of Action Plans (Anon, 2007b: 44-76) arising from the consultations is carried out at bilateral levels with individual countries. The Action Plans of FOCAC constantly cover lending, trade, investments, and infrastructure development, among other areas. Progress made on this score within about a decade of FOCAC's creation, has put China in a leading position among Africa's development partners. In 2005, a USD 2.5 billion soft loan from China emboldened Angola to end negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (I.M.F.), which wanted to set up a staff-monitored programme to oversee Angola's economic policies (Pawson, 2007). A unique feature of Chinese loans is that they do not come with the traditional conditionalities of Western donors. China will not tie its loans to such Western values as democratic governance, respect for human rights, transparency and openness etc in the recipient countries.

Trade is also burgeoning rapidly between China and African countries. A major stimulus in this regard is the relative cheapness of Chinese products. In Nigeria, the second largest national economy in Africa after South Africa, there is invariably a Chinese substitute for every consumer product in retail shops, either manufactured locally or imported from other countries, popularly called *shaina* – a corruption of the word, China. In 2006 the total value of Sino-African trade was USD 55.46 billion. By 2007 it rose to USD 73.65 billion. From this level it jumped to USD 107 in 2008, amounting to a 45% leap (*China Daily*, 11 February, 2009). The number of African countries with which China had more than US\$1 billion in trade increased to 20 in 2008 from 14 in 2007 (*China Daily*, Ibid). In terms of investments, what interests China is what makes the United States and the rest of the West uncomfortable: oil and mineral resources. The West's angst lies in the scale and speed at which China spreads itself across Africa to dominate these strategic resources. Flush with funds, China's foray into Africa's oil sector, for instance, seems capable of ending the domination of the sector by Western oil companies. Towards the last quarter of 2009, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) made a \$50 billion offer to Nigeria's Federal Government to acquire a 49% stake, translating to 6 billion barrels in oil reserves in 23 of the oil leases held since 1968 by Western oil companies, which duration recently expired. A breakdown of affected oil blocks is as follows: Seven were held by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), four by Exxon-Mobil, ten by Chevron, and one by TotalFinaElf. Affected Western oil companies had to engage in intense lobbying to renew their leases (*This Day*, 7 October, 2009). Whichever way the pendulum swings, the fact that cannot be denied is that Chinese offers are far more favourable.

China's massive foray into infrastructure projects is, perhaps, the most effective of the tools of its economic diplomacy. Africa, a continent suffering a wide infrastructure gap, finds Chinese offer of infrastructure like railway, power plants, portable water schemes, highways and so on irresistible. But while African countries regard China as a benevolent partner that tries to live up to its "win-win" credo, its mission on the continent is by no means quixotic. As earlier pointed out, one of the reasons China is in Africa is to meet the needs of its economy. As a matter of fact, infrastructure undertakings in Africa is strategic to China's sustenance of its State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) as the projects involved keep the SOEs engaged. This is one important point that has escaped commentators on Chinese African projects. It took China decades to build its SOE's capacities. Up till now, it strives to upgrade the SOEs by using all sorts of devices to adapt technology from other countries in fields where they surpass it in skills. Against this background, China cannot leave its SOEs with hard-earned infrastructural skills to hibernate, grow stale, and probably collapse without projects to keep them busy because there are not enough of projects to keep all of them occupied back home. Africa, the continent with wide infrastructure gap, is thus an opportunity for China. This is why the Chinese government, as a deliberate policy, is ever

ready to enter into infrastructural development agreements with African countries. In this endeavour, lack of funds is no problem. Once an African country agrees to Chinese funding terms, which includes contracting the project in view to its SOEs, it would advance the necessary credit. Angola's Finance Minister Jose Pedro de Moraise disclosed China has granted credit lines valued at USD 4.5 to his country within four years (2004 – 2008). The money has gone into funding projects in the energy, water, and agricultural sectors. (*China Monitor*, 28: 19 -20). Similarly, the China Development Bank (CDB) has offered USD 1 billion to Zambia to build the Kafue Gorge Lower power station estimated to cost USD 1.5 billion. The president of CDB, Jiang Chaoliang, quite characteristically, said Beijing-based Sinohydro that has expressed interest in the project would bring valuable experience into its execution (*China Monitor*, 51: 16). This pattern of Chinese-funded, Chinese-executed projects has witnessed a surge hitherto unprecedented in Africa's dealings with any single country in terms of infrastructural development.

In corollary, China has endeared itself to African governments and people in no small measure through economic diplomacy, thus building for itself a vast reservoir of soft power on the continent. When President John Agyekum Kufuor of Ghana spoke on 5 November at the Roundtable of the Beijing summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, he was speaking the minds of most Africans:

We look on with admiration at the rapid economic growth of China in the past few decades and also acknowledge with appreciation the effort made by china to assist our continent solve its economic problems. For this, I would say, we are very grateful and ready to share the Chinese development experience for the benefit of our countries and peoples. (Anon, 2007a:115-116).

This is not, however, to say China's engagement of Africa is perfectly beneficial to the continent. Non-state actors such as African manufacturers and buyers of consumer products have had cause to be critical of China. In South Africa, cheaper textiles from China have put the local "textile industry... under threat of collapse," while affected firms, owing to some legalese, "can no longer call on Government to unilaterally impose protectionist measures" (*China Monitor*, 37: 10). In Nigeria, manufacturers of shoes, bags and garments are in dire straits over the flooding of the domestic market by cheaper Chinese alternatives of their products. A Nigerian journalist, Nnaemeka Meribe, spoke the minds of manufacturers in Aba, an industrial city in the Eastern part of Nigeria, in a piece titled "Lest China Compounds Our Woes" (*The Punch*, 15 July, 2010), when he comments:

It is common knowledge that Aba is the indisputable champion of shoe and bag manufacturing in Nigeria. Shoes, bags and garments manufactured in Aba are sold even outside the nation's shores. But when in the late 1990s, Chinese products bought from Dubai (and later direct from China) flooded Nigeria, what was left of commerce in Aba began to crumble. The cheapness of these products caused many patrons of Aba products (which became expensive because of high overhead) to shift loyalty to the former and consequently, most businesses packed up.

On their part, Nigerian consumers complain of sub-standard Chinese products in the market. On who is to blame for this, there have been accusations and counter-accusations. Some claim some Nigerian importers specifically request Chinese manufacturers to lower standards on their orders so that they can reap jumbo profits. Others counter that it is the Chinese themselves who fake their products. This has conditioned a series of inter-governmental consultations between China and Nigeria to rid trade between them of sub-standard goods. Only in the last week of August 2010, Vice Minister of General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of China, Mr. We Chuanzhong, led a Chinese delegation to Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Abuja, as part of efforts to rid Sino-Nigeria trade of sub-standard goods. Mr. Chuanzhong's visit was a confidence-building measure that entailed sending a Chinese team into Nigerian markets for on-the-spot assessment of goods originating from China. Mr. Chuanzhong further spoke reassuringly to the Nigerian public through the media:

We have had good relationship with the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON) and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Nigeria and we are doing our best to boost our relations through pre-shipment inspection... In the interim, we have sent a technical team to Lagos market to have first hand information of the quality of goods from China and find ways of addressing the challenges... SON and our ministry officials will strengthen surveillance to ensure that only products of high quality are brought into Nigeria. (The Guardian, 31 August, 2010).

The visit of Vice Minister Chuanzhong to Nigeria, his inspection team's fact-finding in Nigeria's market, and his reassuring statement on efforts being made by his government to check the influx of substandard goods of Chinese origin from entering the Nigerian market, underscore the high premium China places on its engagement with Nigeria, nay Africa.

V. US COUNTERMOVE: AFRICOM

US President, George Bush Jr., and his Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, announced the creation of a US African Command (AFRICOM) on 6 February, 2007. What is the purpose of AFRICOM? The US House Committee on Foreign Affairs' Sub-committee on Africa and Global Health (HCFA) under the chairmanship of Congressman Donald Payne convened a testimony on AFRICOM to get answers (Anon, 2007b). In her testimony, Theresa Whelan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, spoke to the effect that facilitating administrative convenience was an important factor behind AFRICOM: "For many years our military relationships on the continent have been implemented by three separate commands: U.S. European Command, U.S. Central Command and U.S. Pacific Command. While these commands executed their missions well, AFRICOM presents an opportunity to eliminate the bureaucratic divisions and operational seams created by this organizational structure" (Anon, 2007b). Whelan further highlighted in her testimony some features of AFRICOM that made it unlike a traditional unified command. One is the inclusion within its staff of representatives from the State Department and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). This is meant to enable AFRICOM tap from the expertise of inter-agency officers to enhance its effectiveness at building peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, and disaster response capacity in Africa. Another uniqueness of AFRICOM is in its Commander having two deputies, one a military officer, the other a civilian from State Department.

Towards the closing of her testimony, Whelan remarks that, "AFRICOM is about helping Africans build greater capacity to assure their own security" (Anon, 2007b) If indeed this is true, why is it that AFRICOM was a unilateral decision of the US government devoid of prior consultations with its supposed beneficiaries in Africa? Neither Whelan's testimony nor that of her counterparts from the USAID (Michael E. Hess) and State Department (Stephen Mull) furnished an answer to this question. This inexcusable error of omission is one of the reasons African countries and peoples received the rather shocking news of AFRICOM's creation with suspicion and apprehension. Africans are generally of the view that beyond the laudable, declared objectives for which AFRICOM was created, the US has some ulterior motives that cannot be in Africa's interest. This point was drummed home when at the House testimony, one of the two testifiers invited from South Africa to represent the African viewpoint, Wafula Okumu (Anon, 2007b) reeled out continental samples of what he subtitled "What Africans think of AFRICOM" in his presentation:

- "AFRICOM would destabilize an already fragile continent and region, which will be forced to engage with US interests on military terms." – Michele Ruiters, *Business Day* (Johannesburg).
- "Ironically, AFRICOM was announced as Chinese President Hu Jintao was touring eight African nations to negotiate deals that will enable China to secure oil flows from Africa," Editorial, *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), 8 February 2007.
- AFRICOM is "aimed at influencing, threatening and warding off any competitors by using force." – Editorial, *The Post* (Lusaka), 12 April 2007.
- African countries "should wake up after seeing the scars of others (Afghanistan and Iraq)." – *Reporter* (Algiers).
- Mohammed Bedjaoui, the Algerian Minister of State and Foreign Affairs, has questioned why there was no proposal for an anti-terror cooperation with Algeria when the country was experiencing high levels of terrorist violence in the 1990s.
- "How can the US divide the world up into its own military commands? Wasn't that for the United Nations to do? What would happen if China also decided to create its Africa command? Would this not lead to conflict on the continent?" Abdullahi Alzubedi, Libyan Ambassador to South Africa.
- "Increased US military presence in Africa may simply serve to protect unpopular regimes that are friendly to its interests, as was the case during the Cold War, while Africa slips further into poverty." – Nigerian journalist Dalue Mbachu.

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- “People on the street (in Africa) assume their governments have already had too many dealings with the US in the war on terror at the expense of the rule of law. The regimes realize the whole idea is very unpopular.” – Rachid Tlemchani, University of Algiers Professor.

Despite these adverse opinions from African leaders and peoples, the US, without any modification of AFRICOM’s original design, has gone ahead to, in Whelan’s words, “stand up” the command, a situation which further reinforces the belief in Africa that there is more to it than meets the eyes. A classic case of an African folkloric scenario where a sympathizer is shedding blood while the bereaved only sheds tears! Another reason to be suspicious of US intentions with AFRICOM is the fact that plans were already at an advanced stage to set up an African Standby Force by 2010 under the auspices of the African Union. If all the US truly wants is to strengthen the security situation in Africa, a rational course of action would have been for it to key into this multilateral platform as a supporter. In fact, the resources being expended on developing a new and separate operational apparatus for AFRICOM would have been put to more judicious use in the service of African security by deploying same into the African Standby Force. This would have been more in sync with Whelan’s claim in her testimony that, “AFRICOM is about helping Africans build greater capacity to assure their own security.”

What then is America’s true motive for establishing AFRICOM? The timing of its announcement on 6 February 2007 by President Bush and Secretary Gates, coming right in the middle of Chinese President Hu Jintao’s eight-nation tour of Africa (30 January to 10 February 2007), is seen by not a few as intended to warn China over whatever may be its ambitions on the continent. This is a perception that persists in Africa (as we earlier saw in one of the views sampled by Okumu) as well as the US, not the least, among congressmen. Excerpts of Donald Payne’s opening statement at the House testimony in reference attests to this: “There are some who think this effort is a reaction to the presence of the Chinese. There are others who believe that we are trying to extend the global war on terror. Still others are convinced that the United States is intent on protecting oil resources on the continent. I suspect that there is an element of truth to each of these rumours” (Anon, 2007b). This same concern over the Chinese dimension to AFRICOM was expressed by two congressmen during a March 11, 2010, testimony before the House Armed Services Committee (Anon, 2010c), featuring AFRICOM’s Commander, Gen. William E. Ward, among others. Rep Kissell asked Gen. Ward, “...What is the influence of China into the continent of Africa?...” He got a reply to the effect that China is giving developmental support to the continent, further noting that “...their (i.e. China and Africa) military relations are not very robust...” On his part, Rep. Jones asked, “...do you feel that at the present time that the Chinese are trying to buy the hearts and souls of (African) leaders by being able to be in a position of spending money, making investments in the infrastructure of certain countries? ...” Gen. Ward’s reply was terse, simply saying he viewed whatever China is doing as borne of the imperatives of its quest for “economic development”, which fits into the broader mould of its conception of its “national interest” (Anon, 2010c).

Whether or not America’s motive for setting up AFRICOM is to contain China militarily in Africa, one thing is certain; that is the fact that the US wants a military foothold on the continent. The way and manner the command was created shows a great deal of desperation on the part of the Americans to have it. They had made up their minds to create it whatever the odds. Rep. Skelton, chair of the House Armed Services Committee, enthused in his opening remarks, “AFRICOM has done some impressive things while working with its African partners to promote African stability and security. And that is, of course, a worthy effort.” It should be pointed out that the fact that some African countries relate with AFRICOM today is not borne of love for it. It is a matter of coping - not acceptance - with what seems a *fait accompli* as military cooperation hitherto existing between such countries and the US are now subsumed on the latter’s part within the framework of AFRICOM. For example, the response by Ade Adefuye, Nigeria’s ambassador to the United States, coming three years after AFRICOM debut, when asked in an interview with a Nigerian daily (*The Nation*, 3 Sept., 2010) whether there was any arrangement for the US to train the Nigerian military alluded to Nigeria’s continued rejection of the unilateralist AFRICOM in Africa’s security matters:

... What we are telling them is that we welcome their assistance in all areas, but when it comes to security, we prefer they deal with the structures that have been established. ECOWAS has a peace and security mechanism. You America, what we want you to do is to help our ECOWAS Standby Force in terms of equipment and training to maintain peace in West Africa. Help our military in training and in logistics to develop their efficiency. Work through our establishment agents, work through ECOWAS, work through AU... because generally intra-African intervention is often preferred to extra-African intervention. We want to have our destiny in our hands (emphasis mine)...

VI. CONCLUDING NOTES: TOWARDS A DÉTENTE

In light of the foregoing, the risk of a slide into proxy wars in Africa at the instance of the two contending superpowers, China and the US, is high and real. Africa seems a safe distance from Asia and North America for the two to engage in a test of strength. Africa indeed had been the battlefield of foreign powers in at least two epochs in modern history. First was during the great scramble among European powers to possess its vast, richly-endowed territory in late 20th century. The second epoch was the old Cold War period when series of proxy wars were fought at the behest of the defunct USSR and the US. Nothing would stop a repeat of these gory precedents in a new dimension except some counter-measures are devised.

What then is to be done? From a generalized, non-regionalised excursion into what Friedberg (2005) calls “the future of US-China relations,” he poses the question, “Is conflict inevitable?” He did not give a categorical answer but rather offers a brilliant assortment of perspectives that either affirm or negate the question, leaving his audience to make their conjectures. Rosecrance (2009), on his part, is of the view that the way to forestall an arms race between China and the US, with all the consequences that portends, is for the two superpowers to reach an agreement on the size and use of their respective military forces. He did not however furnish the modality to put his suggestion into practice. Habib (2008) has suggested a Continental Charter of Rights governing investments and engagement on the continent to avoid both US and China’s dominance in Africa with all the associated threats of proxy wars and political instability occasioned by the competition for resources. The Charter, according to Habib, would be negotiated by the AU and could supersede bilateral agreements and force all external powers to accord to a specific set of practices. The charter could subsequently be ratified by the United Nations, thereby institutionalizing it as well as spreading the reach of its compliance globally.

We wish to contend, however, that creating a legal bulwark against destabilizing foreign powers’ engagement of the African continent as Habib opines is not likely to guarantee expected outcomes in a world where powerful nations act unilaterally when it suits their whims, even when such acts are antithetical to the Charter of the United Nations and its resolutions. In this circumstance, political action seems a more feasible approach. In this connection, regional powers in Africa, including Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt would have to convene a tripartite “African Collective Security Strategy Meeting” to work out modalities to rally sister nations on the AU’s platform to sign a declaration with a perpetual effect for the withdrawal of any foreign troops unauthorized by any of the UN, the AU or other recognized multilateral authority from Africa. Of course, the declaration would simultaneously spell out the sanctions that non-compliance by any of the foreign power or their African host nations would face. Such sanctions could range from severance of diplomatic relations to trade embargo. As an illustration, it seems certain that if the US (or China if it also attempts to gain military foothold in Africa) is confronted with the possibility of embargo from oil business in whatever form, it would do away with gunboat diplomacy as a leveraging strategy in Africa. The ultimate and imperative aim of this proposal would be the creation of an African Security Organisation (ASO) to function like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

In view of Africa being the center-piece of Nigeria’s foreign policy, it would be in order for the country to spearhead political action in the manner suggested here. For good measure, Nigeria has always been a front-liner in the efforts to rid Africa of foreign domination and oppression in any form. The country occupied the UN defunct anti-apartheid chair perpetually and applied the pedestal dexterously to mobilize sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa till it crumbled in 1993. Much earlier, it had successfully used sanction in the form of nationalization of British Petroleum (renamed African Petroleum) to force the British government to withdraw its support for Ian Smith’s illegal regime in Zimbabwe (then known as Northern Rhodesia), thus paving the way for that country’s independence in 1980. History beckons on the “Giant of Africa” to once again pull its weight against foreign militarization of the mother continent at a time its governments and peoples are grappling with the challenges of democracy and the daunting tasks of development.

Yet, it is worthwhile to explore a diplomatic approach to the problem by engaging the Obama administration, whose worldview appears to be more pacifist than pugilistic. President Barack Obama has practically disavowed President George Bush’s West Point doctrine (Wikipedia, 2010b) of global military dominance, even if some would argue that he is only pragmatically acting in tandem with his country’s financial handicaps at sustaining a policy of global militarism, being at the vortex of the global economic meltdown. By rooting for nuclear disarmament, demobilization of US troops from controversial international war campaigns, and by committing itself to a pro-active use of diplomacy to promote

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democracy, defence and sundry values, with recourse to military force as a last resort, the Obama administration could be receptive to parleying with Africa on the dismantling of AFRICOM, as well as forging new ways of protecting US interests in Africa in a manner that builds confidence mutually.

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