A New National Strategic Narrative

Charles Kindleberger

Imagine several senior officers in the Pentagon claiming that our first priority should be “intellectual capital and a sustainable infrastructure of education, health and social services to provide for the continuing development and growth of America’s youth,” and that “dominance, like fossil fuel, is not a sustainable form of energy.”

Long time PEP members are likely to be amazed and confused. However, this PEP-sounding message comes from two special assistants to Admiral Michael Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Captain Wayne Porter (Navy) and Colonel Mark Mykleby (Marines) recently published a paper entitled “A National Security Narrative” by Mr. Y. Along with a preface by Anne-Marie Slaughter, Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton. It can be downloaded from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at www.wilsoncenter.org.

In 1947, U.S. Foreign Service Officer George Kennan published an extremely influential article in Foreign Affairs magazine using the pseudonym X. Entitled the “Sources of Soviet Conduct” Kennan’s central idea was that the United States as leader of the free world needed to contain the expansionist tendencies of the Soviet Union. In many respects this doctrine characterized United States foreign policy during the second half of the 20th Century. Ms. Slaughter recently served as Director of Policy Planning in the State Department. She believes that Porter and Mykleby have articulated a new “national strategic narrative” that is much more appropriate to the 21st century.

She suggests that the new narrative is relevant to 5 “major transitions in the global system.”

- “From control in a closed system to credible influence in an open system.” No longer is it possible to control events (George Kennan) through “deterrence, defense and dominance in the international system.”
• “From containment to sustainment.” What is really important for this country is investing domestically in our youth and food, water, energy and other resources, not projecting our power around the world.

• “From deterrence and defense to civilian engagement and competition.” We must have a “new willingness to invest in the skills, education, energy sources and infrastructure necessary to make our products competitive.”

• “From zero sum to positive sum global politics and economics.” The rise of countries like China and India is likely to be a good, not bad thing for us and our allies.

• “From national security to national prosperity and security.” We need a new “blueprint” in which we “do not see ourselves as the leader of any block of nations” but instead are widely respected because of our values, our ability to compete and the prosperity of our people.

Maybe I am missing something. Perhaps Officers Porter and Myklebzy will be kicked out of the service, or otherwise put in their place by the forces of the military-industrial complex. But what I believe that I am hearing from some presumably very influential individuals, sounds a lot like the traditional Peace Economy Project message. Not exactly a plea to beat “swords into plowshares” but not too far from it.

Porter and Myklebzy have proposed a national strategy that shifts our mindset away from things like dominance, containment, winners and losers, and toward goals of mutual prosperity, sustainability and realistically addressing a future that is expected to have between another 2-3 billion hungry people in the next 40 years.

Do you hear the same message? If so, let us push our government more than ever toward a more realistic, humane and sane domestic and foreign policy. It sounds to me like we have some allies in high places.

PEP Goes to Washington
Tila Neguse, Executive Director

The time of year has come again! Peace Economy Project is preparing for our annual trip to the nation’s capital, and it couldn’t come at a more fundamental moment. I, along with the PEP Inter-Campus Coordinator, Justin Stein, will be hand delivering our Congressional Appeal (calling for a 25% reduction of military spending) to DC. Our visit to DC to deliver this message is one of the most important campaigns that the Peace Economy Project does as an organization. By collecting signatures and actually hand-delivering them to congressional representatives, we are able to stay true to our mission of educating people about the dangers of military industrial complex and address the public’s need to see budget cuts from the Department of Defense. Given the national debt crisis that the U.S. is experiencing and with plans to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, there couldn’t be a more appropriate time for PEP to shout out the message of military and defense reductions and expect to be heard.

Everywhere you look deficit reduction and defense cuts and the ending of seemingly endless wars are buzzing in Washington, in Congress, and in the media. With signatures in hand, we hope to bring our very important statement and message into the forefront and hopefully urge defense cuts a little closer to the chopping block.

It is essential that PEP takes advantage of this important political time and deliver our signatures to Washington with utmost conviction and sincerity. As a member organization of the New Priorities Network, a national network of groups committed to ending wars and funding our communities, Peace Economy Project also backs and supports the Congressional Progressive Caucus’s People’s Budget.
for FY2012. The People’s Budget, among other things, advocates for cuts to military spending and putting an end to wars. Our issue of cutting military spending is becoming more palpable each day, and the climate around defense and military spending is changing, as evidenced by such ideas as the policies supported in the People’s Budget.

The signatures that we deliver this year are from concerned citizens in the city of St. Louis and the surrounding areas who want what's best for their communities and who care about the protection of basic human rights. What can be cut? Naming the excesses in our military expenditures, our congressional appeal outlines specifics such as, “the F-35 next generation fighter plane that will cost $325 billion dollars. The same is true for replacement nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, a new bomber, and many other high tech weapons and communications systems.”

During our week-long visit to D.C., we hope not just to deliver the signatures, but also to meet and to speak with congressional representatives and staff. We also plan on meeting with other national and regional groups in the D.C. area who share a similar mission with PEP. At the time of publication, PEP has collected 150 signatures. If you have not had the chance to sign the Peace Economy Project’s Congressional Appeal, please log on to our website and do so! Thanks for your continued support.

**YSTL**

Justin Stein, Inter-Campus Coordinator

The Student Activist Coalition of St. Louis (STACS), which has recently changed its name to Young Activists United St. Louis (YSTL), held its first conference planning meeting in January with fifteen students and young people from a variety of campuses and organizations throughout the city. Over the next three and a half months, we maintained a consistent meeting presence of fifteen people, we reached out to more students and young activists, we showed up and supported each other's social justice efforts, we had the opportunity to develop new skills, and most importantly, we had the experience of working with one another to successfully organize an event.

The conference in April was a success on a variety of levels. Participants were offered workshops about organizing techniques, St. Louis social justice history, understanding capitalism/neoliberalism, challenging racism, doing effective media work, and how to combine art and activism. Everyone enjoyed the panel in which presenters talked about their visions and strategies as they relate to concrete social justice work in the peace and justice movement, immigrant rights movement, environmental movement, and the movement to challenge the prison and military-industrial complexes. Forty-eight people attended the conference and engaged a number of new young people and students who expressed interest in getting involved with YSTL. All in all, the conference was a great first step for a project in its infancy.
Since the conference we have held a debrief session about the event and have engaged in a strategic planning process. The debrief offered us the opportunity to highlight the things that went well with the conference and how to build off of them. It also offered us the opportunity to examine some of our weaknesses and think about how to rectify them in the future. The strategic planning session gave us the chance to reach an agreement on several key pieces. First, as already stated we changed our name to Young Activists United St. Louis (YSTL). We also developed a value and mission statement to further clarify our work, which are as follows:

**Value Statement:** Young Activists United St. Louis (YSTL) believes in building and transforming our communities through relationships that support self-determination. We advocate for all forms of social, economic, and environmental justice. We oppose all forms of oppression. We stand for equality and justice.

**Mission Statement:** Young Activists United St. Louis serves as a link between students and young activists across campuses, social justice organizations, and causes in the St. Louis area. We facilitate learning and action opportunities through development trainings, organizing forums, and channeling students and young activists into concrete social justice work.

With these developments we hope to continue to grow and carry out effective work for progressive social change. We will continue to take steps to be a powerful force for social justice in this city and engage students and young people to increase their involvement in social justice movements.

I personally have experienced a level of growth I did not expect when I started working with PEP on this initiative and have learned so much from everyone who participated in organizing the conference. I have been challenged, rewarded, inspired, and reenergized throughout our organizing process and continue to be as we develop more long-term strategic efforts as a group working for social justice in St. Louis.
**The National Debt Crisis - The Rubber Meets the Road**

Charles Kindleberger

In April, the FY 2011 Budget finally got resolved. After multiple continuing resolutions, a compromise was finally reached that was acceptable to the House of Representatives, the Senate and the President. Thirty eight billion dollars was cut from the budget (which had started in October 2010). The big cuts came out of domestic programs like the Community Development Block Grant ($950 million), Public Housing programs ($556 million), Women, Infant and Children ($504) in the Agriculture Department and many more - Head Start, Community Health Centers, etc. There were a few controversial defense cuts like the second engine for the F-35, long advocated by PEP and the Administration. However, this was all a warm up. Now the Congress and the President must reach consensus on tougher issues: the debt limit and the 2012 budget.

**The National Debt.** The nation never had a debt limit before 1917, and some think it is a silly restriction. The sad fact is that the debt was largely preventable. For example:

- If the Bush Tax cuts had not been enacted in 2000 causing a huge loss of revenue.

- If the Iraq and Afghanistan wars had not cost in excess of a trillion dollars with no off-setting revenues.

- If government regulators had kept mortgage lenders and bankers under control, thereby averting the worst recession since the 1930s.

- If the economy had bounced back from the recession at a traditional clip causing employment and GDP growth, less “safety net” expenditures and more tax revenue.

The debt limit is currently $14.3 trillion. The level was to be reached in May. Then the Treasury Department estimated that with various adjustments it could be postponed until August. The Republicans have been clear that they will not allow the limit to be raised without securing a deal to cut “trillions” out of upcoming budgets. The Democrats are less enthusiastic about cuts, citing the need, in the short term, to resist further reducing national employment, and the need to raise additional revenues, as well cut programs.

To date almost all cutbacks have occurred in the small (13 percent) so-called non-military discretionary components of the budget. This is the segment of government spending that pays for roads, parks, education, child programs, and countless other critically important functions. PEP members recognize that cost reductions to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security will be painful, but need to be part of the solution. However our major concern is that military expenditures be curtailed and made part of the deficit reduction process.

In 2000, the annual Defense Budget was approximately $263 billion. In the succeeding years that budget has more than doubled. Obviously, there are many aspects that can’t be cut. The $123 billion in Veteran’s Benefits are national obligations, as is our need to provide a minimum defense and to contribute to international peace efforts that make sense. However, we believe that the cutbacks that have begun in the last few years can increase. National security need not be endangered; in fact in many respects it will be improved as a result of cuts. Here are some ideas for consideration.

a) **Troop Strength.** One might argue that increasing the size of the military during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars was necessary. Just look at the Post Traumatic Syndrome cases, the suicides and the family disruptions caused by repeated deployments by the relatively small force during the last decade. However, now that we are almost out of Iraq and in the next few years Afghanistan, do we really need 78,000 troops in Europe and 47,000 in East Asia? Do we really need to maintain some 800 military installations in more than 100 countries?

We can’t know all the details; however, PEP members will be sympathetic to many of the ideas put forth in April by retired Army Colonel Douglas Macgregor in Foreign Policy, published by Slate Group, a division of the Washington Post. After reviewing all the reasons why the US does not face “an existential military threat to its vital strategic interests,” Macgregor puts forth a series of recommendations that he suggests would
save $279.5 billion on an annual basis (about 40 percent of the defense budget). He would:

- Bring home most of the 317,000 active duty military personnel that are stationed or deployed overseas.
- Reduce the size of the Army (from 548,000 to 480,000) and Marines (from 200,000 to 120,000)
- Reduce the carrier battle groups from 11 to 8. In addition to saving on the terribly expensive aircraft carriers (which the Navy wants to replace at around $12 billion a ship), this would allow the reduction of all kinds of supporting ships, personnel and facilities.

b) Weapon Systems. We congratulate Secretary Robert Gates for taking on some expensive weapons systems like the F-22, Future Combat Systems and the Marines Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (new amphibious landing system), but it is hard not to be skeptical. Gates claims that over the last several years more than 30 programs were “cancelled, capped or ended that would have cost $300 billion.” On the other hand, Winslow Wheeler, Director of the Straus Military Reform Project at the Center for Defense Information recently described his review of the DOD’s Selected Acquisition Reports that monitor major development and acquisition programs and their associated costs.

In September 2008, 91 “major defense acquisition programs” were projected to cost $1,648 billion dollars. The most recent report (dated December 2010) indicates that there are now 95 major programs expected to cost $1,720 billion dollars.

Those who enjoy the details might want to look at a March 13, 2011 Sunday Opinion article entitled “The Pentagon’s Biggest Boondoggles.” Written by John Arquilla, professor at the Naval Post Graduate School, and author of the Worst Enemy: The Reluctant Transformation of the American Military, this article highlights some of the most expensive projects, including the date of their initiation, the amount invested, the estimated completion date and associated problems. Here are a few quotes with which most PEP members will agree:

F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (originally estimated at 178 billion, current projections are $325 billion for 2457 planes). “The F-35 is simply not needed. Only one American fighter has been shot down in the last 40 years. Our fighter aircraft are already a full generation of nearly everyone else.”

Global Information Network. $300 billion is being spent on what has been called “the mother of all networks.” Acquilla argues that much “cheaper and more secure web based alternatives exist.” He suggests the system is “vulnerable to viruses and hackers.”

c) Reorganization. Douglas Macgregor believes that reorganizing the defense function will be just as important as scaling back the size of personnel and weapon systems.

- Limiting the Marines to helicopters and the long controversial V22 Ospreys. They would no longer have their own air force. This would allow discontinuing the troubled F-35B version of the Joint Strike Fighter being developed for the Marines.
- Reducing the “number of regional and functional unified commands” from 6 to 4 and the number of high ranking generals and admirals.
- Eliminating the Department of Homeland Security, restructuring the national intelligence agencies, and the National Guard. Reducing the number of DOD political appointees and creating an integrated national defense college.

As this newsletter goes to press, there are about five weeks in which to work out a compromise. We believe along with others around the country that a compromise must involve new revenues, as well as cuts, and that the cuts must be balanced. All aspects of the budget must be curtailed, but all cuts are not equal. Reducing monies for education, the poor, work force development and basic research needs to be resisted. Alternatively, the Defense Department has a bloated budget that can and should experience a significant reduction.
Hello fellow PEP enthusiasts! My name is Ammar Karimjee and I am going to be a junior at Washington University in St. Louis this coming fall. I was born and currently live in Karachi, Pakistan, but I lived for a while in Houston as well. After working with PEP this summer, I’m going to be studying abroad in New Zealand for a semester. I have always been interested in non-profit work in general, and I spent a lot of my high school years involved with a non profit called Schools for Schools, through Invisible Children. After finishing my bachelor’s degree in Political Science, Anthropology, and Persian, I hope to go on to study international law, with the eventual goal of working for an international non-profit organization. I came across PEP while searching through a database of St. Louis non-profits, and the goals really rung true to some of my personal ideas. Being a Pakistani, I have already seen the hazards of unchecked military spending, and the emphasis on war. The U.S. is heading in a direction I believe to be just as troubling. I hope you enjoyed my article on the arms trade and please feel free to get in touch with me to discuss any ideas or give comments!

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Charlie Edelen was born and raised in South St. Louis City and South County. Upon completion of his bachelor’s degree in Sociology from the University of Missouri – Columbia, Charlie interned in Detroit, MI at the pro-labor, pro-union democracy monthly newspaper Labor Notes. After his internship he traveled to Burlington, VT to work with the Vermont Workers’ Center/Jobs With Justice, where they were laying the groundwork of their “Health Care is a Human Right” Campaign. He returned to St. Louis in late 2006 and volunteered with St. Louis Jobs with Justice for several months, working full time as a machinist. Then Charlie had a two-year stint in Vail, CO as a ski bum. He returned to St. Louis in October 2009 and again volunteered for the now Missouri Jobs with Justice, while working at a restaurant in Kirkwood, MO. He was offered part time employment in March of 2010 and has been full time staff at MO JwJ since November.

Charlie is a bicycle enthusiast and cycles around the city and across parts of the state. He plays roller hockey and snowboards, weather permitting. He enjoys smashing patriarchy and televisions, and raising awareness of the military–industrial complex – he even has a copy of President Eisenhower’s famous cautionary speech on the wall of his room.

Charlie joins our board as part of our Youth Initiative Outreach.
Where are the Weapons Coming from?
Problems with the US Arms Trade Philosophy

Ammar Karimjee, Research Intern

Over the course of the last year, Wikileaks has brought our attention to the extent and complexity of the international arms trade. Although this new information serves as a reminder, weapons dealings are by no means a new phenomenon. The big players in our global theatre have long used the arms trade as a means to help exert their influence over smaller countries. Most of these behind-the-scenes transactions are kept out of the media and invisible to the public eye. One such event that did happen to make it into the public domain was the Iran Contra Affair, where the Reagan administration sold weapons to Iran even though there was an arms ban. There is hardly a doubt that such transactions continue to happen even today. For example, two weapons that continue to make their way around the world without the public knowing are the AK-47 and the Uzi. Today, they are the two most smuggled guns in the world, making their way into the hands of governments and rebel groups in a vast array of different countries.

So what exactly have we learned from Wikileaks so far? We now know that Iran and Pakistan both have an arms connection to Al-Qaeda at large. We know that there is fear within the Obama administration that Syrian arms (which may be of US origin) are being transferred to the Lebanese Hezbollah, a paramilitary political organization that has been known to engage in acts of terrorism. There is information to prove that snipers are making their way into Yemen, Sudan is shipping arms to Hamas, and Russia is selling arms to India. These are major developments that alter our socio-political realm.

The arms trade doesn’t only affect the international arena. There are repercussions within the United States itself. New articles show that Lockheed Martin, the the number one U.S. defense company, is receiving help from the United States government in selling arms to other countries. A review of a number of Wikileaks sources finds that the U.S. government employees go to great lengths to ensure the international success of U.S. companies in general, and military contractors may be THE prime example of this. Read: United States government resources are going to help a private company sell arms to different countries around the world.

National Nuclear Security Administration

The NNSA is a branch of the Department of Energy that is charged with some very scary responsibilities – Managing our Stockpile, Preventing Proliferation, Powering the Nuclear Navy, Safe Transportation of Nuclear Weapons, Emergency Response and more. While the NNSA was only created in 2000 as a separate agency within DOE, the review of their “time line” is impressive. It begins with Albert Einstein in 1939 warning FDR Roosevelt about the importance of nuclear research. It ends with President Obama’s Czechoslovakia speech calling for the end of Nuclear Weapons (April 2009), his speech at the UN Security Council asking for their support in ending nuclear weapons (September 2009) and the Global Nuclear Security Summit hosted by Obama (April 2010). Our question/concern – Why has there been no additional entry in the time line during the 14 months since then?

Last year, the U.S. Department of Defense spent $316 billion in contracts for arms, part of a total of $716 billion dollars being spent on the military in general, almost half of the world’s total military expenditures. In 2008 alone, $37.8 billion went to United States “allies” in the Middle East and Africa. What do all these numbers really mean? It means that a large part of U.S. industry, with help from the U.S. governmental foreign policy, profits from war. And many of these wars are wars that the majority of the public would not morally agree with. Would we be okay if we knew that the U.S. supplied arms to countries that were going to hurt civilians?

All these questions started coming up a lot more once the outbreaks in the Middle East and North Africa started. New questions started being asked about the weapons being used in these conflicts and where they were coming from. Was the U.S. to blame at all? The short answer is yes, at least in part. The U.S. gives or has given arms to at least some of the countries that
THE X-51 WAPERIDER
DO WE REALLY NEED THIS?

Some in the military worry about the amount of time that it took cruise missiles from Navy ships in the Arabian ocean to reach Osama Bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan after 9/11. ~ 80 minute traveling at 550 mph. These people get excited about the hypersonic Waverider. Also known as a scramjet, the X-51 is designed to travel around 4000 mph. It would have reached the camps in around 12 minutes, if it worked.

Boeing and Pratt & Whitney have spent some $250 million dollars on a recent contract which builds on years of earlier research. There was an apparently successful test in 2010, followed recently by a failed test, as the X-51 fell from a B-52 at 50,000 feet into the sea. The next test is said to be in September.

Frankly, we’re nervous. Deputy Assistant Steven Walker of the Air Force has indicated that we will start “weaponizing the X-51 in FY 2012.” Mr. Walker’s goal is to have a “prompt global strike” capability able to hit anything on earth in an hour or less. Can you think of a more destabilizing weapon? We need slower, not faster weapons; the kind that can be retrieved or destroyed if one of our people makes a terrible mistake.

have recently broken out in protest: Egypt, Yemen, and Syria. The U.S. sent $1.3 billion to Egypt for weapons purchases for 3 years starting in 2009. It can be all but confirmed that some of the weapons used by the government of Egypt against the protestors came from this money or other U.S. supplied arms. France gave Libya $405 million for tanks and radio equipment, which are no doubt being used in the war against Libyan civilians today.

The U.S. has reacted to these new developments, but not sufficiently. Even after all the protests and outbreaks, arms sales from the U.S. are projected to reach a new high during the coming fiscal year. Major arms trades to Saudi Arabia and the UAE are to continue as planned. The State and Defense Departments say they are assessing each case, and will not provide arms to any area where they think the arms may be used against civilians. According to the State Department’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, the U.S. is looking at reconsidering certain places we have traditionally provided arms to, but because of strategic interests, not for humanitarian reasons. According to the department, the goals and objectives of the United States change over time, and with them the countries we provide arms to.

To the U.S. government, the strategic concerns of the U.S. abroad are more important than humanitarian concerns. To understand this, the concept of leverage is vital. The U.S. believes that if it gives countries different things, in this case weapons, they will have a leverage over that country to make decisions and enact policies that will overall benefit the U.S. This could be in terms of that countries foreign diplomacy or even as simple as tax breaks for U.S. companies. Many reports have cited that Saudi Arabia may be next in the wave of civilian uprisings. If an uprising happens, what will become of the over $60 billion in weapons we are in the process of giving Saudi Arabia? Will the “leverage” we have over Saudi Arabia even matter anymore? Surely these weapons will be used against civilians if the oppressive regime deems it necessary.

The overall problem is not that we are not careful enough in deciding whom we give arms to. Once we give a country arms, we cannot control their distribution and their use. The U.S. government seems to think that a better monitoring system for our arms will solve this problem, but this is not a sustainable long term solution. The best way to solve all these wars may be to disarm the people making war – especially when in many of the cases, we are the ones who are supplying them the means. The real way to solve this problem is by changing the dynamics of our military-industrial complex. Currently, the U.S. government engages in arms trading for 2 reasons:
1) to help its interest abroad (as stated above), and
2) to help foster local employment by continuing to give international contracts to domestic weapons companies like Lockheed Martin and Boeing.

The answer to this problem is also two-fold. The U.S., the world leader in most global affairs, needs to STOP the trend of using arms trading as a tool of diplomacy. It is leading to a system where arms trading and buildup are the norm, and the escalation of such a system can be extremely catastrophic. This very tool that we are using to aid our strategic interest abroad has the power to lead to a global system in which we have no control over the actions and weapons uses of other countries, which will lead to a decrease in our overall goals, the exact opposite of what we want. The U.S. has taken initiative with the ratification of the new START treaty that is going to lead to a build-down of nuclear weapons, but this trend must not be limited to only nuclear power; it should extend to all types of arms.

Additionally, we need to focus internally on transitioning these large military companies to having more peace and infrastructure related projects. Instead of a new fighter jet, perhaps Boeing could invest some resources in a low flying plane that could drop water and fertilizer into drought-affected areas. This would keep employment up without having these companies constantly lobbying to Congress to engage in arms trading so that they can get international military contracts.

The process is a long, slow one. But should the U.S. decide to convert its military economy sector into a peace one, the results would be very worthwhile. Diplomacy would take a new turn, where our relations with countries would depend on more substantial things than the weapons we are giving them. We would be able to sleep in peace, knowing that we are not supplying weapons that are being used to kill civilians. And finally, employment would not have to suffer, because the old military sectors would not be completely eliminated. They would be slowly converted, enabling old jobs to be kept, and new ones to be created.

**AFRICOM: Somewhere Between Humanitarian and Military Aid**

Tila Neguse, Executive Director

The U.S. Military Command in Africa was established in October 2008 and is known as AFRICOM. As outlined by the Department of Defense, AFRICOM “aims to promote U.S. strategic objectives by working with African partners to help strengthen regional stability and security in the region through improved security capability and military professionalization.” AFRICOM operates as a strict military command in one sense, leading military operations, and training combatants, but it is also engaged in non-military operations such as “peace-keeping, counter-narcotics, sanctions enforcement, demining”, and AIDS prevention (Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa, Congressional Research Service, Ploch). According to the recent study published by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) in March 2011, when referring to this intersection of humanitarian and military efforts, it is noted that the U.S. Military’s goal in Africa is a part of a “three-pronged” effort which includes, “DOD, through AFRICOM, taking the lead on security issues, but playing a supporting role to the Department of State, which conducts diplomacy, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which implements development programs.” This combination of foreign security, diplomacy, and, development is a dangerous one. And this is where fragmented response to this command reveals itself, begging us to ask questions like, what is the U.S. doing in Africa? And why are we there?

Historically speaking, Africa has not typically been a priority for the U.S. military. At the height of U.S. military involvement in Africa during the Cold War, U.S. interest did not really pertain to the continent itself. Instead interests were sparked by a fear that the Soviets would possess greater influence on newly independent African countries than the U.S. would. A large part of our policies involved the distribution of weapons. “Throughout the Cold War (1950-1989), the U.S. delivered over $1.5 billion worth of weaponry to Africa” (World Policy Institute, U.S. Arms to Africa and the Congo War, Hartung and Moix). Perhaps this initial competition with the Soviets, causing the U.S. to arm Africa, can be translated to the reasons behind our involvement in Africa today. But this time it’s not the Soviets we’re competing against, but a different communist country, China. Chinese economic and
military success and rise as a dominant world power are issues of increasing concern to the U.S. So it makes sense that China would play a mitigating role in U.S. strategic moves and policy in Africa. China’s major economic engagement in Africa may be one part of U.S. interest in the country, but it’s not the only reason. Nigeria is the fifth largest global supplier of oil to the U.S., according to the CRS. Also according to the study, Africa “supplies the United States with roughly the same amount of crude oil as the Middle East.” These reasons make evident the need for the U.S. to center itself in a place of geopolitical dominance and maintain a presence on the African continent.

Soviets, causing the U.S. to arm Africa, can be translated to the reasons behind our involvement in Africa today. But this time it’s not the Soviets we’re competing against, but a different communist country, China. Chinese economic and military success and rise as a dominant world power are issues of increasing concern to the U.S. So it makes sense that China would play a mitigating role in U.S. strategic moves and policy in Africa. China’s major economic engagement in Africa may be one part of U.S. interest in the country, but it’s not the only reason. Nigeria is the fifth largest global supplier of oil to the U.S., according to the CRS. Also according to the study, Africa “supplies the United States with roughly the same amount of crude oil as the Middle East.” These reasons make evident the need for the U.S. to center itself in a place of geopolitical dominance and maintain a presence on the African continent.

Physical military presence in Africa is heavily centered on the Combined Joint Task Force located in the Horn of Africa. The CRS report cites that around 2,500 U.S. troops operate in land and airspace in the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia, and Sudan). The U.S. does not recognize any one particular African country that poses a direct threat; instead, AFRICOM’s initiatives are aimed at training local militaries to ensure local stability. But the question that comes to the forefront of my mind is how can the U.S. be certain that training and materials provided to these local African governments aren’t used as a means to suppress insurgents or hurt civilians? To me, this is the most important and unnerving question because there is no definitive way to ensure that the military training and weapons we provide don’t end up in the hands of tyrants and thugs. As mentioned before, U.S. Cold War policy regarding Africa involved a heavy militarization and armament of many countries on the continent, many of whom would turn out to be horrible human rights violators. Perhaps, one of the most well-known and striking examples of U.S. foreign military aid gone wrong in Africa is in the case of the Congo. In a report done by William Hartung and Bridget Moix for the World Policy Institute in 2000, they note, “The U.S. prolonged the rule of Zaïrian (now Congo) dictator Mobutu Sese Soko by providing more than $300 million in weapons and $100 million in military training. Mobutu used his U.S.-supplied arsenal to repress his own people and plunder his nation’s economy for three decades.”

AFRICOM and U.S. political attitudes towards Africa in general represent the atrocious dangers and consequences of a country operating with a military industrial complex. Whether it’s the modern day neo-colonial scramble for U.S. presence in Africa with China or oil reserves in Nigeria, U.S. strategic goals in Africa are not completely altruistic. Globalization and militarization go hand in hand in policies like AFRICOM. Africa needs and deserves U.S. aid, and to some extent we owe it, but we cannot pay it forward with military policy. Instead of strengthening African armies, we should focus on domestic aid. We cannot mix humanitarian efforts with military ones; they are, at their core, strategically opposed to each other. They are binary opposites. Should we encourage development and provide support? Yes. Should we do it through the Department of Defense? No. The U.S. cannot deny that we play a huge role in the militarization of Africa, and thus have some shared responsibility in the cases of genocide and war mongering that continue to ravage the continent. In the past, we’ve trained African militaries in countries like Rwanda, Congo, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia who have subsequently been engaged in violent conflicts. If AFRICOM is to seek to become a military command that is committed to Africa and that means a commitment to stopping wars instead of training and arming people to make them, its mission and internal instabilities need to be clarified. With this country already in financial crisis, and a budget stretched between Iraq and Afghanistan, serious considerations and reordering of the command must be taken into account. If U.S. military involvement in Africa is a priority, it must be taken with caution and utmost attention to detail, defining clearly the goals and duties of an African Command. There is no grey area between military and humanitarian efforts.
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