

UNITED STATES AND THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF AFRICOM (2007-2025)

¹Peter Equere, ²Inwang B. Utin and ³Amah Williams

Department of History and International Studies
Faculty of Arts, Akwa Ibom State University
P.M.B. 1167, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

<https://doi.org/10.60787/aasd.vol4no1.98>

Abstract

Superpowers rivalry between the United States and the defunct Soviet Union during the Cold War era prompted the United States to established military bases in different parts of the world. During the Cold War, these military bases were established to prevent the spread of Communism to United States allied areas. After the Cold War, these bases were used to checkmate the activities of terrorist organizations and its operations in different parts of the world. The study found out that extremist organizations emerged in Africa and that has prompted the United States to act decisively to combat this threat to global security. Also with the strategic significance of African resources especially crude oil, it becomes imperative to strengthen peace in the area through watertight security alliances and crisis response force. It is in this regard that the United States established the African Command Centre (AFRICOM) in 2007. Despite challenges and criticism bordering on neocolonialism and militarization of the region by the United States, AFRICOM became a full-fledged military command on October 1, 2008. The research relies on secondary and primary sources and proffered that AFRICOM wealth of experienced can be harnessed to curb the increasing menace of terrorism and bandit activities especially in West Africa and Nigeria in particular.

Key words: United States, Terrorism, Africa and Africom

Introduction

After the Second World War, United States diplomatic relations with Africa was not very pronounced. This was because they perceived Africa as a place mainly for European affairs. This notion changed due to the cold war policies, when they tried to gain friendship with countries outside it domain. In order to establish friendship with other Countries Francis D. Roosevelt in alliance with other European countries signed the Atlantic Charter. This Charter which was later incorporated into the charter of the UN resulted in the independence of colonized territories especially in Africa. It was from this period that the United States started viewing Africa from its own perspective coupled with the mass independence of African countries in the early 1960s which provided opportunity for them to promote mutual cooperation and understanding.

This cooperation hinges on the fact that Africa is endowed with abundant natural resources that are needed by the United States. The major resources include Crude oil, Platinum, Uranium, Diamond and others. It was President John Kennedy that first mentioned the issue of Africa in 1961 during his inaugural speech. After the speech, Kennedy established the peace corps¹ which was a US foreign aid programme with the aim to promote peaceful coexistence in Africa. Africa is still bedeviled by poverty, HIV/AIDs pandemic, unemployment, environmental degradation, humanitarian issues and others.

As long as these challenges persist, African countries still need aids from the United States. The period after the Cold War saw the proliferation of weapons especially in the hands of die hard opposition. These weapons, readily available resulted in civil wars and genocide especially in Rwanda in 1994 during the post-Cold War era. High profile Islamic groups and terrorist organizations especially the Al Qaida utilized the opportunity resulting in collaboration and linkages between them and therefore

launched severe terrorist activities in Africa. The United States as a world power cannot fold its arms and watch Africa ravage by these terrorist groups hence the establishment of AFRICOM as an African command centre to combat the menace of terrorism in Africa. This work is an assessment of United States role in the fight against terrorism in Africa with AFRICOM as a case study.

The Concept of Terrorism

The term “terrorism” is derived from the word terror. It is a Latin word although similar words also exist in other Indo-Germanic languages such as Sanskrit *trase* meaning to tremble in Russian: *triasti* which mean to shake. All these refer to a field of meaning where fright, dread, dismay, consternation and alarm are present. The term terrorism was popularized by the conservative writer Edmund Burke who wrote on the revolution in France in 1795. Because of the chaotic situation during the revolutionary Government of France, the Jacobins declared terror to be the order of the day. It was in that regard that Robespierre was accused of terrorism, a term which indicated an illegal abuse of power. Under the *Thermidorian* reaction the agents and partisans of French revolutionary tribunals were termed terrorist. From this time onwards the term spread fast into Europe and later polarized by Edmund Burke³.

There has been a complete shift in the meaning of terrorism and its perpetrators resulting in a shift from State actors to non-State actors as perpetrators of terrorism. The Guitoline as instrument of regime Terrorism was replaced in the second half of the 19th century by the bomb which was facilitated by the invention of dynamite in the 1860s by Alfred Nobel. An anarchist militant Alexander Berkman looking back at his career recalls that terrorism was considered a means of avenging a popular wrong, inspiring fear in the enemy and also calling attention to the evil against which the act of terror was directed⁴.

In an attempt to define terrorism it is pertinent to look at the terrorist act. Act of terrorism are contain in sectoral convention and protocols negotiated in the framework of the United Nations, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). These Organizations identify some offenses as crime and treaties to these crimes are referred to as anti- terrorist conventions protocols. They are:

1. 1963 Convention on offenses and other acts committed on Board Aircraft
2. 1970 Convention for the suppression of Unlawful seizure of Aircraft
3. 1971 Convention for the suppression of Unlawful Acts against the safety of Civil Aviation.
4. 1979 International Convention against the taking of Hostages
5. 1980 convention on the physical protection of nuclear materials.
6. 1988 Convention for the suppression of Unlawful Acts against the safety of Maritime Navigation.
7. 1997 International Convention for the suppression of terrorist bombing.
8. 1999 International Convention for the suppression of the financing of terrorism.
9. 2005 International Convention for the suppression of acts of nuclear terrorism
10. 2014 Protocol to the Convention on offences and certain other Acts committed on Board Aircraft.

Similarly, the following war crimes might also be considered acts of terrorism:

- i. Willful killing of civilians and prisoners.
- ii. Taking of hostages
- iii. Intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population or against individual civilians not taking part in hostilities.
- iv. Attacking and bombing by whatever means, towns, villages, dwellings or buildings which are undefended and which are not military objects.
- v. Intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable institutions.

In order to arrive at the concept of terrorism, it is also important to know who a terrorist is. It is therefore necessary to know groups or persons considered as terrorists or terrorist groups and organization. It is therefore necessary to know groups or persons considered as terrorists or terrorist groups and organizations. It is always argued that since no one is born a terrorist, what could actually push one to become one? The following are regarded as acts of terrorism:

- a.) Promoting and advocating the use of terrorism in demonstrations, in mass media or on the internet.
- b.) Assisting terrorists in the collection of information and the distribution of propaganda.
- c.) Offering an alibi or other false testimony for a person accused of an act of terrorism.
- d.) Providing services for terrorists like a safe house for those on the run from the law.
- e.) Donating money to a terrorist organization.
- f.) Providing facilities and other assistance for the recruitment and training of new members of terrorist organizations.
- g.) Providing false identity papers and other services to terrorists.
- h.) Providing expert advice and intelligence to terrorist organizations.
- i.) Providing terrorists with logistical assistance and transport for crossing borders and/or reaching target destinations.
- j.) Procuring weapons, ammunition and bomb or making materials for terrorists⁵.

An anonymous Chinese described terrorism, thus: "kill one, frighten thousands." In the 1937 League of Nations Convention, the expression acts of terrorism means criminal acts directed against a State and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons, or groups of persons or the general public. The 1998/2017 Bruce Hoffman defines terrorism as an ineluctably political in aims and motives, violent or equally important threatening violence, designed to have far reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victims or targets, conducted either by an organization with identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifiable insignia) or by individuals or a small collection of individuals influenced, motivated or inspired by the ideological aims or example of some existence movement or its leaders or both and perpetrated by a sub national or non state entity. Lastly the 1999 US

Department of States state that the term terrorism means premeditated politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents usually intended to influence an audience⁶.

From the above discussions on terrorism, it is seen that terrorism is an intentional and planned violence directed against an unarmed target but the aim is to create fear and tension in order to alert the government or group of persons concerning an issue of personal or public concern. The primary target in acts of terrorism is to create fear in order to draw the attention of the government concerning a particular cause or demand and their aim is not to take control of a particular territory. Terrorism is different from insurgency although their mode of operation seems to be the same. Insurgency operation involves the use of many options including guerrilla warfare, propaganda and even terrorist acts. Insurgency was quite prominent in the Nigeria Niger Delta due to marginalization of the area by the federal government of Nigeria and multinational oil companies⁷.

The above attempts by different groups to define terrorism have proved that there is no clear and outstanding analysis of the concepts of terrorism. However, for the sake of this study, it is pertinent to adopt the 1998/2017 Bruce Hoffman concept of terrorism. According to him, terrorism is ineluctably political in aims and motives, violent or equally important, threatening violence, designed to have far reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victims or targets, conducted either by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia) or by individual or a small collection of individuals influenced, motivated or inspired by the ideological aims or example of some existent terrorist movement or its leaders or both and perpetrated by a sub national groups or non-state entity.

The Formation of Africom

AFRICOM means African Command. It is a military command for Africa created on February 6 2007 by President George W. Bush. Until this time there was no United States military command for Africa instead its military activities in Africa was conducted from three separate military commands which are the European Command, the Central Command and the Pacific Command. The Central Command was primarily responsible for military activities in the Horn of Africa region together with the Middle East and Central Asia while the Pacific Command control military activities in Madagascar and other island in the Indian Ocean. These three commands were in charge of other regions of the world which were of primary concern to the United States. Only few staffs in these centers were in charge of African Affairs and these staff members were in the middle rank. It is in this regard that Volman states that "Africa is chiefly viewed as a regional theater in the global cold war or as an adjunct to US - European relations or as in the immediate cold war period as a region of little concern to the United States⁸.

The United States renewed interest in Africa arose due to its engagement in global war on terrorism as a result of the attack on World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2003. Another one was its declaration that access to Africa's oil supplies would be defined as a strategic national interest of the United States. It was these two issues that increased Africa's status in United States national security policy and military affairs. The United States declaration of African oil as a strategic national interest has raised a lot of controversy over the formation of AFRICOM. Some argued that this declaration is probably a signal for neo-colonialism in Africa and to achieve that, militarization of the zone becomes imminent. It is also the view of some people that this may lead to superpower confrontation between the big merchants in the oil industry which may include China and others⁹. Such confrontations usually result in the increase in price of petroleum at the world market resulting in untold hardship for people at the local level.

However, even with these controversies, the command is committed at enhancing linkages with African nations, non-governmental organizations and other foreign partners to address security challenges and to promote stability and peace in the African continent. In the bid to promote its national security interest on the African continent, the United States African command (AFRICOM) engages in the following outstanding activities which include Counter terrorism and Counter-Insurgency, Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, intelligence and espionage or surveillance activities, diplomatic dialogue and capacity building and training programmes.

Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency: This is one of the major activities of AFRICOM. The command in collaboration with other African countries; fight against the spread of terrorist groups, (such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, alshabab, and others), in the continent. Intelligence reports by countries are needed for AFRICOM to do its works. In this regard, security agencies are expected to furnish AFRICOM with intelligence report of security situations in the country. On the night of April 14, 2014, 276 female students were kidnapped from the Government Secondary School in the town of Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria. Boko Haram claimed responsibility. Some of the girls managed to escape. Approximately 80 United States Armed Forces personnel deployed to nearby Chad as part of the U.S. effort to locate and support the safe return of the remainder of those kidnapped. The United States also provided training to Nigerian and neighboring countries forces fighting Boko Haram¹⁰.

Intelligence and Espionage: Using sophisticated satellite intelligence monitors mounted in the airspace, AFRICOM conduct surveillance and espionage activities in order to monitor potential threat that would enhance a possible strike action or decide on the next line of action.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief: Apart from executing US military operations in Africa, AFRICOM also plays a vital role in providing humanitarian assistance in conflict-ridden areas in Africa. Such conflicts may include natural disasters, civil wars¹¹ and even public health emergencies.

The Impact of Africom on Africa

The creation of AFRICOM was to advance the activities of the Department of Defence and that of the U.S. Department of State and other U.S government agencies such as the Agency for International Development, Department of Commerce, Treasury, Justice and Homeland Security. These agencies under AFRICOM were chartered to conduct sustained security activities in order to enhance a stable and secure political atmosphere in Africa in order to promote the United States foreign policy.

AFRICOM has created huge impact on Africa, for instance in 2010 the United States forces trained partner countries in order to increase the capability of African defence institutions to address security challenges in the continent. Similarly, in 2011 the United States military personnel were deployed to Central Africa to serve as Advisors to forces of the African Union deployed to counter resistance by rebel forces. That deployment continued for many years with the aim of protecting the indigenous populations. AFRICOM also relied on others for military operations especially in Libya. Also in 2012 as a result of the attack on US diplomatic mission in Libya, AFRICOM commissioned more personnel in Europe and in Djibouti to respond to such attempt in the future. The East Africa Response Force and special purpose marine Air Ground task force were deployed to promote the security of the US Embassy or assist the departure of citizens and non-emergency staffs during emergency situation. Women, Peace and Security Working Group were equally established in 2012 to conduct seminars and training of military women and also protect civilians during peacekeeping operations especially in Africa.

In 2013, AFRICOM engaged in counter-terrorism operations in order to counter-terrorist operations against Al-Qaida and Al-Shabaab. AFRICOM carried out these operations through direct military operations and also assist troops contributing countries. They prepared them for deployment to the African Union mission in Somalia and International Stabilization mission in Mali. AFRICOM in collaboration with USAID responded to Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Through its Joint Force command it provided logistics and engineering support as well as training of healthcare workers. In 2015, the then US President Barack Obama announced the formation of the Counter-terrorism Partnership Fund, African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership and the security Governance initiative. All these initiatives were to ensure that AFRICOM had enough resources to combat terrorism in Africa and also to improve the deployment of forces in support of United Nations peacekeeping and African Union peace support missions. The United States government equally provided defence apparatus as well as services, military education and training to support the efforts of Benin Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria in order to defeat Boko Haram through the Lake Chad Basin Commission's multinational Joint Task Force.

The core mission of U.S. Africa Command remained to help African nations and regional organizations build capable and professional military that respect human rights, adhere to the rule of law, and contribute more effectively to stability in Africa. The primary tools for implementing this strategy were military-to-military engagements, security cooperation programs, exercises, and operations. AFRICOM employed more than 20 distinct U.S. government programs totaling over 500 million dollars annually to support U.S. policy goals. Most of these programs required both military and diplomatic approval, so AFRICOM worked closely with the U.S. Embassy in each country through defense attachés, offices of security cooperation, and with the country receiving the assistance.

Conclusion

This research work has analyzed the theme of terrorism and AFRICOM extensively. Terrorism has change the face of human societies resulting in destruction of lives and properties; it has change the balance and equilibrium of human societies destabilizing the cohesion and peaceful setting of most countries. Africa is a victim of terrorism and insurgency activities. Most communities have lost its ancestral homeland due to eviction¹¹ caused by terrorist and bandit groups. The aftermath of terrorist activities include issues of poverty, HIV/AIDs pandemic, unemployment, environmental degradation, humanitarian issues and others. As long as these challenges persist, African countries still need aids from the United States. After the Cold War, there was immense proliferation of weapons especially in the hands of die hard opposition. The availability of these arms resulted in civil wars eg The Liberian civil war in 1990¹² and genocide in the post-Cold War era for example/ genocide Rwanda in 1994¹³. High profile Islamic groups and terrorist organizations especially the Al Qaida utilized the opportunity and collaborated with other regional bandit groups and launched severe terrorist activities in Africa.

The United States as a world power cannot fold its arms and watch Africa ravage by these terrorist groups hence the establishment of AFRICOM as an African command centre to combat the menace of terrorism in Africa. AFRICOM means African Command. It is a military command for Africa created on February 6 2007 by former President George W. Bush. Until this time there was no United States military command for Africa instead its military activities in Africa was conducted from three separate military commands which are the European Command, the Central Command and the Pacific Command. Since its creation AFRICOM has exerted it influence on Africa in order entrench stability on the continent. The command engages with African nations, non-governmental organizations and other foreign partners to address security challenges and to promote stability and peace in the African continent.

In the bid to promote its national security interest on the African continent, the United States African command (AFRICOM) engages in the following outstanding activities which include Counter terrorism and Counter-Insurgency, Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, intelligence¹⁴ and espionage or surveillance activities, diplomatic dialogue and capacity building and training programme. With these laudable activities ongoing it becomes imperative for African countries to give the command centre full support such as giving them strategic information on terrorist hideout and any other intelligence report on terrorist and its menace in the continent.

References

- ¹Executive order 10924, Establishment and Administration of the Peace Corp in the Department of State, p:10.
- ²Inwang B Utin and Uduak Johnson-Esua, (2025). An Appraisal of Thirty Years After The Rwanda Genocide (1994-2024): Lessons from History. *AKSU Annals of Sustainable Development*, 3(1), p4.
- ³Alex Schmid,(2023). Defining Terrorism, International Center for Counter Terrorism, p:8.
- ⁴Alexander Berkman,(1929). Now and After, The ABC of Communist Anarchism New York Vanguard press P.55.
- ⁵Daniel Byman, Deadly Connections, States that Sponsor Terrorism Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.34.
- ⁶Paul Wilkinson(1977). Terrorism and the Liberal State. London: Macmillan.
- ⁷Inwang B. Utin (2018). Insurgency, Counter Insurgency and Human Rights Violations in the Niger Delta in *International Journal of Educational Research and Technology, (IJERT) Vol. 9, p:48*.
- ⁸ Daniel Volman,(2009). US Military Policy towards Africa (ed.) David Schoenbrun PAS working p:11.
- ⁹Robert Moeller (2018). United States African Command: Partnership, Security and Stability, Power point Presentation at the Conference on Transforming National Security organized by the office of Under Secretary of Defense for Forces Transformation and Resources and also Centre for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defence University Fort Mc Nair Washington DC.
- ¹⁰Thomas Waldhouse United States African Command, the First Ten Years Germany 2018 p76.
- ¹¹Inwang B.Utin, (2022). The Impact of Eviction in Community Conflict in *Ifioke Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 7(1) p: 50.
- ¹²Inwang B. Utin, (2016). Regional Security and Conflict Resolution: A Study of ECOWAS Peace Initiative in Liberia. *The Calabar Historical Journal* vol. 6 No 2 December (2016) 42.
- ¹⁴Inwang B. Utin, (2025). Evolution of Intelligence in International Relations. *AKSU Journal of History and Global Studies. Vol. 6(2) p:1*

