Ungoverned Spaces: AFRICOM and U.S. Foreign Policy in Africa

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Table of Contents

Introduction

A 2004 article in *AIR FORCE Magazine* titled "Swamp of Terror in the Sahara" begins, "Vast, trackless, and ungoverned, Africa's sprawling desert is now a magnet for terrorists."[1] The article contains a map of the Sahara titled "The New Front in the War on Terrorism: Impoverished areas of Africa with large Muslim populations have become a haven for radical Islamists." The map is color coded with a dark green region that spans across the entire Sahara desert (an area larger than the continental United States) and the Horn of Africa indicating areas that are "more than 50% Islamic" and a lighter green region along the Atlantic Coast and into Central Africa to indicate regions that are "between 15% and 50% Islamic."[2] (see figure 1) The article refers to "pathologies" found in this huge desert, including trafficking and smuggling operations, weak security, little government control, and corruption.[3] The combination of this "ungoverned" space and a Muslim population, the article suggests, makes this region a "melting pot for the disenfranchised of the world—terrorist breeding grounds" according to Marine Corps General James L. Jones, who says "we need to drain the swamp."[4] The article describes the growing U.S. military presence in the region, under President Bush's Pan-Sahel Initiative, and efforts to build more permanent military sites that would ensure a long term U.S. presence in the region.

"Swamp of Terror in the Sahara" connects two observations –the Muslim population in the Sahara and its vast size and lack of formal government—and concludes that the region is a "magnet for terrorists" and ought to be a priority for long-term U.S. military engagement. The map in the article does not show terrorist activity or locate extremist groups, but shows the percentage of Muslims living in this huge part of Africa. The title, "The New Front in the War

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[1] Powell, Stuart M. "Swamp of Terror in the Sahara." *Air Force Magazine*. November 2004. 51
[2] *Ibid*, 53
[3] *Ibid*, 52
[4] *Ibid*

on Terrorism," suggests that this author is equating the presence of Muslims in a poor region with terrorist activity. This conclusion about the Sahara is found elsewhere in U.S. military materials. A similar map is part of a PowerPoint presentation given by General Charles Wald, Deputy Commander of the European Command, on U.S. strategic interests in Africa. (see figure 2) This map circles the Sahara desert and labels the region "Uncontrolled Spaces". An arrow from the Middle East into the region is labeled "Extremist Inroads."[5] This tendency to equate Islam, poverty, and large spaces with terrorism is representative of the thinking that is currently guiding U.S. military policy in Africa, including plans for a new Africa Command, AFRICOM.

What explains the broad acceptance of such a sweeping and simplistic analysis of the African continent? How does this analysis make sense as a justification for AFRICOM and its militarized strategy within dominant U.S. policy making circles? I argue that support for AFRICOM can be understood according to a "common sense" view of African states and societies that is grounded in a long history of Western interaction with the continent, dating back to the colonial period. AFRICOM finds support among policy makers largely because it makes sense according to understandings of Africa that are deeply embedded in the history of America's relationship with the continent. An analysis of policy discourses around AFRICOM reveals the presence of images and perceptions that have been consistently redeployed in conversations about foreign policy in Africa. The term "ungoverned spaces", which is used throughout AFRICOM discourses, is a loaded phrase that, I argue, serves to justify AFRICOM by placing it firmly within familiar images and "knowledge" of Africa.

In this paper, I use tools from post-structuralist discourse analysis to explain AFRICOM discourses' success in formulating policy toward Africa. AFRICOM discourses are legitimated

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[5] Wald, Charles F. "Leave No Continent Behind: U.S. National Security Interests in Africa" United States European Command. March 11, 2008. http://aei.org/docLib/200404141_wald.pdf

in policy making circles largely because of their representation of Africa as an ungoverned space and the resiliency of this image in the American imagination. I find that Africa has been repeatedly characterized as an ungoverned space in U.S. foreign policy discourses; by representing African people as immature and primitive, African spaces as chaotic, and Western intervention as a source of stability. Ungoverned spaces is an effective rhetorical tool in AFRICOM discourses because it redeploys images of an African identity that are familiar in U.S. foreign policy; not because of its accuracy in describing the nature of security threats in Africa.

I. Identity and International Relations

The Other in Western Thought

In his 1961 preface to Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre reflects on the significance of anti-colonial liberation movements for the European (and North American) reader. Sartre argues that Western perceptions of colonized 'natives' have played an integral role in shaping Western identity. "As long as the status of 'native' existed, the imposture remained unmasked. We saw in the human species an abstract premise of universality that served as a pretext for concealing more concrete practices; there was a race of subhumans overseas who, thanks to us, might, in a thousand years perhaps, attain our status."[6] Thus, Sartre argues, the category "native" served to reinforce Europeans' exceptionalist self-identity as the leaders of universal civilization and progress, even as their policies betrayed these universalist ideals in violent, colonial projects. For Sartre, colonialism cannot be explained only as economic and political opportunism by huge, military powers. Rather, it was possible because of the resilience of a native identity that could always be dismissed as primitive in opposition to a European identity that was equated with the universal progress of humanity.

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[6] Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Preface." In *Wretched of the Earth*. Frantz Fanon. New York: Grove Press. 1961. lix

The issues that Sartre raises—as to the epistemological and ontological foundations of Western attitudes toward the nations and peoples they colonized and how those attitudes manifest themselves in the postcolonial world—are at the heart of a postcolonial literature that is concerned with uncovering and interrogating these constructions of various 'Others' and their roots in Western scholarship. This work is based on the claims that (a) scientific knowledge is not simply an objective account of real experiences and events, (b) knowledge creation is inherently tied to particular historical and cultural contexts that inform and shape the interpretations of those creating and articulating this 'knowledge' and (c) that understanding the historical development of 'knowledge' and science can reveal things about how cultures understand themselves and those with whom they relate, and how power functions in this process. This work is more than a critique of the foundations of Western thought. It has great political significance in that it opens up new ways of explaining and understanding the relations between governments and peoples around the world. This scholarship seeks to demonstrate the necessary interdependence of the way in which we think about ourselves and the world and our actual possibilities for acting in the world.

The work of Michel Foucault, particularly his work on discourse and his concept of power-knowledge, are influential in post-structuralist social science. Foucault's work gives a theoretical and methodological basis for studying power, knowledge and the constitution of meaning and identity. Central to Foucault's work is his understanding of power-knowledge, a concept he develops in *Discipline and Punish*. Power-knowledge describes the mutually constitutive relationship between knowledge (science, religion, the law, norms, values, beliefs, customs) and forces of domination and resistance. Foucault argues that apparatuses of knowledge form the conditions of possibility for the workings of power, and likewise, power

shapes knowledge and the way it is deployed.

> We should admit, rather, that power produces knowledge...; that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations....In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.[7]

Thus, Foucault claims that knowledge and power are not created by or exercised by independent subjects, but rather that subjects act within a network of knowledge and power relations that form the conditions of possibility for both knowledge and power. Power acts as such only within a field of knowledge that acknowledges and recognizes that power. Likewise, knowledge is created, contested, and affirmed within an existing network of power relations, in which some ideas and some actors are privileged over others. For example, in the case of contemporary U.S. foreign policy in Africa, I find that power-knowledge describes a relationship between common images and representations of Africa and the possibilities for U.S. policy in Africa. Discourses that are most effective in formulating policy in Africa are those that successfully deploy familiar images of an African identity *vis a vis* the U.S. Likewise, the redeployment of these particular constructions of African identity in policy discourses functions to legitimate these discourses' political power.

Given these insights on power-knowledge, part of Foucault's project is an investigation of the "unconscious of science".[8] For Foucault, studying the development of scientific knowledge shows it to be inseparable from the context of power relations in which it was created. Both the claims of science and its silences reveal this "unconscious", by which Foucault means the internal assumptions, biases, and desires that influence what questions science asks, what results are privileged, and how those results are interpreted.

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[7] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage Books, 1977. 27-28
[8] Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.* New York: Vintage, 1973. xi

> The history of science traces the progress of discovery, the formulation of problems, and the clash of controversy; it also analyzes theories in their internal economy; in short, it describes the processes and products of scientific consciousness. But on the other hand, it tries to restore what eluded that consciousness: the influences that affected it, the implicit philosophies that were subjacent to it, the unformulated thematics, the unseen obstacles; it describes the unconscious of science—that which resists it, deflects it, or disturbs it. [9]

The successes and failures of science, the projects that were undertaken and those that were not, the findings that were celebrated and those that were rejected, all reveal the conditions of knowledge production; conditions that, for Foucault, are always indicative of power relations. Investigating scientific thought not as a collection of facts but as a historical phenomena creates space in which to identify and explore the categories of thought that made that knowledge possible and the values and assumptions that shape what is believable or reasonable.

This view toward the development of scientific knowledge has particular relevance to knowledge about Africa, because until recently, a large part of this knowledge was produced almost entirely by Europeans and because it was often used as a tool of violence and domination. Thus, revisiting this 'knowledge' as a product of a particular European cultural, historical, and economic context, with a view toward elucidating the power relations between African and European nations, has both intellectual and political importance. It shows the inadequacy of 'scientific' conclusions about Africa and Africans and undermines the intellectual foundations of projects of domination and exploitation.

This is the project of V.Y.Mudimbe in *The Invention of Africa* and *The Idea of Africa*. Mudimbe argues that scientific discourses about Africa and Africans must be interrogated with the understanding that they are based on categories and concepts grounded in specifically Western epistemological developments.

> It is obvious that to approach the questions 'What is Africa' or 'How do we define African cultures?' one cannot neglect a body of knowledge in which Africa has been subsumed by Western disciplines such as anthropology, history, theology, or whatever other scientific

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[9] Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Idea of Africa*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994. xiv

discourse.[10]

Drawing on Foucault, Mudimbe argues that Western knowledge about Africa is inherently tied to a particular Western identity. Intellectual disciplines, he argues, are a means through which the "identity of a culture and its dynamics manifest themselves as project and invention"; it is a way in which a culture asserts itself as active in creating and interpreting the world.[11] In this view, Western 'knowledge' about Africa shows us less about Africa itself than about the way in which a European identity interacted with and was reflected in its encounter with Africa.

In the *Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe is interested in investigating the history of African knowledge production and, necessarily, its relationship with Western science and Western knowledge about Africa. Within this history is an account of the West's 'discovery' of primitiveness. Mudimbe argues that the concept 'primitive' took shape within the simultaneous development of anthropological and evolutionary studies of Africa and Europe's imperialist projects on the continent.[12] Ideological and political discourses in support of mercantilism supported the conclusions of Enlightenment social scientists and *vice versa*. Within a universalist, teleological paradigm of history, Europeans understood themselves as leading the progression of human development. In this framework, scholarship in anthropology, philosophy, biology, and history offered epistemological and ontological foundations for a world view in which Europeans were intellectually and spiritually more developed than Africans. These sciences' measures of ideal types and of progress inscribed distinctions between more developed European traits, practices, and values, and less developed or primitive African traits. Thus, Africa was described as a prehistoric civilization, in opposition to Western civilization.[13]

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[10] *Ibid*, x
[11] *Ibid*
[12] Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Invention of Africa*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988. 17
[13] *Ibid*, 190

According to this epistemology, mercantilist political and economic projects could be understood as a natural relationship between a backward Africa and a superior, authoritative Europe.

These 19th century discourses about Africa, on which Mudimbe focuses, do not present a fundamentally different view of the continent in the European imagination. As Mudimbe shows in *The Idea of Africa*, Africa has been a "paradigm of difference" for the West since ancient Greek writings.[14] What is new and significant about the 19th century are the sophisticated epistemological models that formed a new foundation for these long-standing views. What they signify are a "pluralization of Western social and human sciences"; an expansion of Western science to create authoritative knowledge about the non-Western world.[15]

Mudimbe's work is important in emphasizing the long history of knowledge creation about Africa within the context of European imperialism. This history is important for understanding the relationship between African nations and Europe and the United States today. As I demonstrate in my analysis of current U.S. foreign policy in Africa, the legacy of colonialism and the body of knowledge that made it possible continue to influence knowledge about and policy making in Africa today.

More accessible than Mudimbe, Edward Said's *Orientalism* is perhaps the best known work on the genealogy of the West's understanding of a foreign Other. In *Orientalism,* Said applies Foucault's work on discourse to a study of the West's representations of, knowledge of, and actions toward the Orient. For Foucault, discourse describes the field of meaning creation in which ideational and material objects are constituted. Discourse is not the practice of a subject translating objects into language, but rather is a process in which subject and object are made socially meaningful.

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[14] Mudimbe (1988), ii
[15] *Ibid,* 192

I would like to show that 'discourses', in the form in which they can be heard and read are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words…I would like to show with precise examples that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary but the ordering of objects….Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this more that we must reveal and describe.[16]

For Foucault discourse is not a direct representation of reality. He argues that when one analyzes discourses, the relationship between "things and words" is less primary than "the emergence of a group of rules" that define "the ordering of objects". These rules are historically and socially produced boundaries that shape the possibilities for meaning production and interpretation. As such, the prominence or authority of some discourses over others is not a question of accuracy in representation, but rather of discourses' consistency with existing rules of meaning creation. Discourse functions within Foucault's power-knowledge relationship, and thus in a Foucauldian analysis, questioning what discourses are privileged and what discourses are silenced or absent is an inquiry into the functioning of power.

This idea of discourse becomes clearer in Said's work. Orientalism has many faces; it is an academic field of study, a "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the 'Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'", and a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it."[17] Said defines Orientalism this broadly—including patterns of thought, academic and cultural representations, foreign policy, etc—because he argues that all Western encounters with the Orient, ideational or material, take place within this embedded system of thought. "Orientalism…is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any

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[16] Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* New York: Pantheon, 1972. 49
[17] Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon, 1978. 3

occasion when that peculiar entity 'the Orient' is in question."[18] Orientalism describes the set of

discursive rules that shape the West's interactions with the Orient.

Said emphasizes that Orientalism is an expression of power. Orientalism is not just an

imperialist project, but it is possible within that power relationship. The claim of Orientalism is

that in imagining, speaking about, and acting toward the Orient, Westerners' economic and

political relationship to that Orient is implicit.

> The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of
> varying degrees of complex hegemony…The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was
> discovered to be 'Oriental' in all those ways considered commonplace by an average 19th century
> European, but also because it *could* be—that is, submitted to being—made *Oriental*.[19]

Europe's economic and military power does not, on its own, explain Orientalism, but it was a

condition of possibility for Orientalism. Thus, Orientalism emphasizes the interdependence

between material conditions and knowledge about the Orient. Orientalism is not just a collection

of myths or untruths about the Orient. It is a system of deeply held, institutionalized ways of

thinking about and interacting with the Orient.

> Orientalism is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient but a created body of theory and
> practice in which, for many generations, there has been material investment. Continued
> investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for
> filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied—
> indeed made truly productive—the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general
> culture.[20]

For Said, and Foucault, discourse is not simply a matter of thought or of language, but rather

describes the mutually constitutive relationship between knowledge about an object and our

actions toward it. Orientalism cannot be reduced to the economic and political relations between

the West and the Orient, nor to the Orient's representation in Western literature, history, and

science. Rather, while scholarly and cultural representations inform and legitimate economic and

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[18] *Ibid*

[19] *Ibid*

[20] *Ibid,* 6

political actions, those "material investments" both reproduce and affirm ideational representations.

The issues and questions raised by Said and Mudimbe are of utmost importance to the study of foreign policy and international relations. Too often power exercised by states and governments is understood independently from ideas and knowledge about the objects on whom that power acts. The contribution of Foucault for students of foreign policy is the insight that the knowledge that is both a condition of possibility for and produced by foreign policy is inseparable from existing power relations and the way in which actors are reproducing or resisting those power relations. In his 2003 preface to *Orientalism*, Said writes about the relationship between Orientalism and U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

> It is quite common to hear high officials in Washington and elsewhere speak of changing the map of the Middle East, as if ancient societies and myriad peoples can be shaken up like so many peanuts in a jar. But this has often happened with the "Orient," that semi-mythical construct, which, since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in the late eighteenth century, has been made and remade countless times by power acting through an expedient form of knowledge to assert that this is the Orient's nature, and we must deal with it accordingly.[21]

Said argues that the way in which policy makers in Washington DC in 2003 imagine the possibilities for acting in the Middle East is directly related to images and ideas about the Orient that trace back to the age of Napoleon. This 'knowledge' is not indicative of any objective truth about how the Orient really is (indeed, Said rejects the idea that there is a "real" Orient, apart from its discursive representations) but rather is the product of centuries of relations between East and West in which knowledge of an Oriental 'Other' is inseparable from political, economic, and cultural power struggles.

Discourse Analysis and Foreign Policy

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[21] Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. xviii

The insights of Foucault, Said, and Mudimbe, as they relate to International Relations, are developed in a growing literature in IR that studies the relationship between identities and foreign policy. This literature makes important criticisms of liberal and realist paradigms, which have dominated the field of IR. There is consensus among these scholars that mainstream IR scholarship has been too empiricist and positivist in theorizing relations between states and fails to account for the importance of interpretation as it relates to international politics. Mainstream IR theory has tended to treat state power and national interest as objectively present phenomena, and as such has not developed adequate tools with which to understand how different actors interpret, understand, and respond to political situations differently. Scholars concerned with understanding how identity operates within foreign policy discourses, argue that "Rather than being self-evident, threats and the corresponding national interests, are *fundamentally* matters of interpretation."[22] Foreign policy makers do not respond to a set of objectively present facts about the world, but rather deploy particular interpretations of the world and their possibilities for acting in it, which present some explanations and decisions as reasonable or possible and others as not.

This paper studies representations of Africa in Europe and the United States and the ways in which these representations shape U.S. foreign policy, specifically policy discourses about the creation of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). As discussed above, Europe and the United States have a long history of knowledge production about Africa, and this knowledge has often been used to shape and legitimate violent and oppressive policies on the continent by reproducing an image of Africa as backward and primitive, in opposition to the civilized West. However, little scholarship on U.S. foreign policy in Africa acknowledges this history or examines how these representations have been rejected, contested, or reproduced in

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[22] *Ibid*, 7 emphasis added

contemporary U.S.-Africa relations. The absence of this discussion suggests that the legacy of

the West's portrayals of and actions in Africa bear no relevance to politics today. I find this not

to be the case. Rather, throughout the history of U.S. policy in Africa, images of Africa as

ungoverned, chaotic, and primitive have been redeployed in changing historical and political

contexts. In policy discourses, these images have shaped how U.S. policy makers have

interpreted issues on the ground and their policy options.

The case of U.S. foreign policy in Africa highlights the important contribution of

scholarship on identity in International Relations. Foreign policy is not simply a response to

material needs and threats but is a space in which identities are formed and contested, and these

identities in turn shape the ways in which policy makers understand their possibilities for acting.

Foreign policy discourse necessarily contains descriptions of its objects, and these accounts of

identity are necessary for legitimating the need for a particular course of policy.

> Foreign policies need an account, or a story, of the problems and issues they are trying to address: there can be no intervention without a description of the locale in which the intervention takes place or of the peoples involved in the conflict. There can be no understanding of development policies without an understanding of who the underdeveloped are, where they differ from the developed West, and how they can transform their identity… Policies require identities, but identities do not exist as objective accounts of what people and places 'really are', but as continuously restated, negotiated, and reshaped subjects and objects.[23]

Policy relies on narratives in which identities are articulated and subjects and objects are located.

Treated as discourse, foreign policy is a site in which identity is a resource for policy

legitimation and is (re)constituted in policy. While identity constructions serve to make certain

policy choices possible, policy in turn serves to reproduce or contest identity narratives.

The productive capacity of foreign policy discourses, the degree to which these

discourses constitute or reproduce identity narratives, has important political implications.

Political agency is exercised within the discursive ordering of subjects in foreign policy.

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[23] Hansen, Lene. *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. New York: Routledge, 2006. i

Constructions of subjects shape their possibilities for acting and relating to power, and power is wielded to the extent that actors have the authority to author or contest identity producing discourses.

> Social action and agency result because people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, by their sense of *self* and *other*, as defined at that particular place and time…this approach resituates power in history away from a focus on the subject *positioning* (as reflected in theories of (neo)Realism, (neo)Liberalism, and Marxism) to one of subject *construction*.[24]

The post in post-structuralism signifies this emphasis on discursive production, rather than positioning in existing social structures (class, the market, the state, etc.), as the site of political agency. The site of contestation over power, then, is not restricted to struggles over positions in structures of power, but rather includes struggles over discursive space. The question for IR scholars, then, becomes how to understand the process by which some discourses come to have authority in foreign policy making while other discourses are absent or silenced.

In *Civilizing the Enemy*, Jackson offers a theoretical and methodological framework in which to understand how some policy discourses come to be privileged over others. Drawing on Max Weber, Jackson uses the concept of legitimation to examine the success of some discourses over others in policy debates. Weber's formulation of legitimation is consistent with a post-structural analysis, in that it understands the practice of legitimation as a social process in which meaning is produced and contested. Legitimacy is not "the transcendental ethical or normative validity of a policy or course of action, but a quite different social process…any social 'legitimacy' that a policy possesses must be empirically explained, not presumed or transcendentally demonstrated."[25] Thus, this understanding of legitimation sees policy, and the knowledge that makes it possible, as socially constructed. Legitimation is not a practice of

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[24] Dunn, Kevin C. "Narrating Identity: Constructing the Congo During the 1960 Crisis." *Identity and Global Politics.* Ed. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. 127

[25] Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus. *Civilizing the Enemy: German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 19.

showing a policy's consistency with reality or a transcendental truth, but rather is a process of meaning contestation.

Empirically, Jackon analyzes this practice of legitimation by identifying rhetorical commonplaces. Rhetorical commonplaces signify accepted interpretations of meaning that make up the discursive resources that are available to actors. Rhetorical commonplaces are sites in which identities are contested within policy discourses.

> If we examine…'state policy' for example what we see are individuals making claims, advancing arguments, trying to shape the public and intersubjective discursive space in such a way as to make their position unassailable. In so doing, they deploy rhetorical commonplaces concerning the identity of the actor or actors in whose name they claim to be speaking, whether these be states, nations, regions, individuals, private social groups, civilizations, humanity, or the planet itself. [26]

Particular policy discourses are legitimated over others to the degree that they successfully (re)produce a plausible account of identity in their deployment of rhetorical commonplaces. Methodologically, a discourse analysis gives an account of how a discourse "won" a policy debate by identifying the rhetorical commonplaces used by both sides and analyzing how the winning side deployed commonplaces in a way that legitimated policy.

Importantly, the discursive resources on which policy makers draw are not just from other policy or from government "experts" but also include travel writing, news media, and popular culture. Hansen emphasizes that foreign policy discourse is intertextual; authoritative voices in foreign policy draw on other textual and discursive resources in policy discourse and, in so doing, endow these texts with authority. For example, in Kevin Dunn's study of U.S. foreign policy in the Congo, representations of the Congo in the popular press were important sources in Congressional debates.

> American politicians, largely unfamiliar with Congolese history and politics, formed their opinions of the situation from the popular press, as is evident by the high number of popular press articles cited in the *Congressional Record*. For example, Senator Styles Bridges used a report

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[26] Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus. "Whose Identity? Rhetorical Commonplaces in 'American' Wartime Foreign Policy." *Identity and Global Politics*. Eds. Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. 172

from the *Washington Evening Star* as evidence that Lumumba was an 'ex-convict…who has fallen into the Red trap.'[27]

Similarly, literary nonfiction sources were important in Hansen's case study of U.S. and European responses to the Bosnian War. For example, President Clinton's policy decisions in the Balkans were influenced by a reading of Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts*, which was based on Rebecca West's travelogue *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, both of which gave pro-Serbian accounts of the region's history.[28] Thus, methodologically, Hansen advocates for including a broader set of sources in a discourse analysis of foreign policy. Literary non-fiction, in her case, was as important as official policy discourse in mapping out the discursive resources that shaped and legitimated foreign policy. In this paper, I draw on representations of Africa from both official policy discourse and popular culture.

Opposing sides in a policy debate draw on a common set of discursive resources within a shared social historical context. Particular discourses are successful over others largely based on their deployment of discursive resources in articulating a plausible account of actors' identity. I use this approach to explain the success of AFRICOM discourses in U.S. foreign policy. In the case of AFRICOM discourses, supporters and critics of AFRICOM both draw on common discursive resources such as the Global War on Terror, energy security (oil), and development. Proponents of AFRICOM use these discursive resources to redeploy a construction of Africa as an "ungoverned space" that is consistent with past representations of Africa in U.S. policy discourses. In the following chapter, I show how ungoverned spaces is used within the context of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), U.S. energy security, and African development in a way that privileges AFRICOM as a necessary response to complex policy issues on the African continent.

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[27] Dunn, 137

[28] Hansen, 8

II. AFRICOM and U.S. Foreign Policy

America is on a mission of mercy.…This mission serves our security interests -- people who live in chaos and despair are more likely to fall under the sway of violent ideologies. This mission serves our moral interests -- we're all children of God, and having the power to save lives comes with the obligation to use it.
> --President George W. Bush[29]

It used to be a kind of cruel joke twenty years ago when some of us tried to pretend Africa might rise to the level of a strategic interest, but thanks to the oil deposits we're finding every day in and near Africa, I can say with a straight face that 30 per cent of our oil will come from there, and I promise you it is a strategic interest.
> -- Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Charles Snyder.[30]

U.S. policy discourses have, throughout history, portrayed African spaces as open, empty, and anarchic; African people as passive; and Western and American interventions as tools of civilization and development. Of course, this perspective has shifted with decolonization and a growing consciousness of the injustices and racism that characterized Western actions on the continent. However, I find that, in slightly more subtle forms, these paternalistic images of Africa remain deeply embedded in the American imagination and, specifically, in policy discourse around AFRICOM. The term "ungoverned spaces" is used in AFRICOM discourses to imply not only the potential for African bred terrorism, but also an inherent disorder and instability on the continent, including poverty, disease, crime, and corruption.   As such, it draws on existing, common understandings of African problems, and the need for particular American solutions.

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[29] "President Bush Discusses Trip to Africa at Leon H. Sullivan Foundation." *AFRICOM.* February 26, 2008. March 10, 2008. http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=1664

[30] "U.S. Promotes Development and Governance in Africa to Counter Terrorism - State Dept. official outlines key programs that bind continent to America", *AllAfrica*.com, April 16, 2004. April 2, 2008. http://allafrica.com/stories/200404160799.html

Background

On February 6, 2007, President George W. Bush announced plans for the creation of a

new Africa Command. AFRICOM is the sixth Unified Combatant Command, and will be in

charge of U.S. military operations on the continent of Africa, except for Egypt which will remain

under the purview of the Central Command. (see figure 3) Military responsibility for the area

was formerly divided between Central Command, European Command, and Southern Command.

According to the Department of Defense, AFRICOM, unlike other commands, is focused on

"war prevention rather than war-fighting."[31] Its stated mission is:

- Build partnership capacity
- Support U.S. government agencies in implementing security policies
- Conduct Theater Security Cooperation activities
- Increase partner counter-terrorism skills
- Enhance humanitarian assistance, disaster mitigation, and response activities
- Foster respect for human rights
- Support African regional organizations
- As directed, conduct military operations[32]

AFRICOM is focused on military to military training to "win hearts and minds" and increase the

US's bilateral relationships with African militaries. AFRICOM will differ from other Unified

Combatant Commands in that it has an explicit interagency approach and will include

management and staff from the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International

Development and will "seek to incorporate partner nations and humanitarian organizations, from

Africa and elsewhere, to work alongside U.S. staff."[33]

The creation of AFRICOM represents a growing recognition, among the U.S. military

and policy makers, that Africa is important to U.S. strategic priorities. This is a significant shift

in U.S. policy toward Africa. In 1995, the Department of Defense's (DOD) U.S. Security

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[31] Henry, Ryan and Lt. General Walter L. Sharp. "U.S. Africa Command." February 7, 2007. March 2, 2008.
http://www.defenselink.mil/dodcmsshare/briefingslide%5C295%5C070207-D-6570C-001.pdf
[32] *Ibid*
[33] "Questions and Answers about AFRICOM." *AFRICOM*. January 24, 2008.
http://www.africom.mil/AboutAFRICOM.asp 3/20/08

Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa stated that "ultimately we see very little traditional strategic interest in Africa".[34] In his 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush said that Africa "does not fit into the national strategic interests" of the U.S.[35] This view has shifted due to several factors including: changes in security strategy following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the establishment of the "Global War on Terror" (GWOT), the increasing importance of African oil, and a popular interest in African development and humanitarian efforts.

The GWOT, an increasing focus on Africa's energy resources, and American interest in African development and humanitarian efforts provides the context into which AFRICOM has been introduced. An understanding of this context helps explain the discursive resources that are available to and used by both policy makers who support AFRICOM and its critics. Below, I describe Africa's rise as a strategic priority within the framework of the GWOT, oil, and development and outline how these discursive resources shape AFRICOM discourses.

The GWOT, Oil, and Development as Discursive Resources

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the establishment of the GWOT, the U.S. articulated significant changes in its security strategy. These changes are introduced in the 2002 National Security Strategy. This document shows a new perspective toward U.S. security concerns in areas defined as poor or marginalized. In the context of the GWOT and the attention on global terrorism, these regions are seen as potential "breeding grounds" for radical ideologies, and thus as potential threats to U.S. national security.

> The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into

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[34] Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs. "United States Security Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa." *Defense Technical Information Center.* Aug 1995. March 3, 2008. http://stinet.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA297401

[35] Schraeder, Peter J. "Forget the Rhetoric and Boost the Geopolitics: Emerging Trends in the Bush Administration's Policy Toward Africa." *African Affairs* 100.400 (2001): 387–404.

terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders.[36]

The 2002 strategy cites weak states in Africa as presenting one such threat, and emphasizes the need for better governance and economic development on the continent. Four years later, the 2006 National Security Strategy included a lengthy section on Africa, emphasizing economic development, democracy, and market reforms as key priorities for improving African security, as well as the need for the U.S. to "partner" with African nations to address security threats.

> Africa holds growing geo-strategic importance and is a high priority of this Administration… The United States recognizes that our security depends upon partnering with Africans to strengthen fragile and failing states and bring ungoverned areas under the control of effective democracies. … We are committed to working with African nations to strengthen their domestic capabilities and the regional capacity of the AU to support post-conflict transformations, consolidate democratic transitions, and improve peacekeeping and disaster responses.[37]

Post 9/11, policy makers are drawing a connection between humanitarianism, development, and strategic interests. Addressing internal conflict and poverty, it is believed, will eliminate potential threats to national security.

In Africa, post 9/11 security analyses present "ungoverned spaces", particularly those in regions with Muslim populations, as a threat to U.S. national security. Within the context of the Global War on Terror, policy makers dealing with Africa consistently accept the following equation: Islam, poverty, and "ungoverned spaces" combine in the Sahara and Horn of Africa to present an imminent terrorist threat to the United States. Thus, a principal goal of the Africa Command is to support operations that will close borders, identify and destroy suspected terrorists, and end illegal trafficking. In addition, according to the logic of the GWOT, addressing the needs of "failing states", fighting poverty and disease and "winning hearts and minds" is interpreted as a new responsibility for the U.S. military. It is clear in plans for

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[36]Bush, George W. 2002 National Security Strategy. September 17, 2002. March 3, 2008. http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf , iii
[37] Bush, George W. 2006 National Security Strategy, March 16, 2006. March 3, 2008. http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/

AFRICOM that, within the GWOT, the 2002 and 2006 National Security Strategies' emphasis on development, stability, and conflict prevention is not interpreted as a need to increase the role of non-military agencies, but rather as a need to reframe, and often increase, the role of the U.S. military overseas.

In addition to the military interests defined by the GWOT, Africa's strategic importance to the United States is growing on other fronts. (see figure 4) A principal concern for the United States is ensuring stability in the oil producing regions of Africa. In 2001, the National Energy Policy Development Group (then led by Vice President Dick Cheney) recommended that increasing oil imports from West Africa become a national priority.[38] Twenty four percent of U.S. oil imports currently come from West Africa and that percentage is expected to increase significantly in the next decade.[39] According to a report published by the Center for International Policy in 2007, the U.S. military has shifted its priorities in the region in response to the growing importance of African oil. The military has "radically revised its strategic vision for the West African region; strategy shifted primarily from training for peacekeeping missions in Africa to training for counter terrorism and energy security."[40] The Pentagon has proposed several military operations that have increased U.S. presence in West Africa, including the Pan-Sahel Initiative, the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative and the Gulf of Guinea Energy Security Strategy.[41] Additionally, the U.S. Navy has requested funds for a Gulf of Guinea Guard, which would increase the Navy's presence in the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea.[42]

The Center for International Policy report cites increasing efforts by energy lobbyists and allies to increase U.S. military presence in the Gulf. Most significant is the activity of Paul

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[38] Lubeck, Paul M., Michael J Watts, and Ronnie Lipschutz. "Convergent Interests: U.S. Energy Security and the Securing of Nigerian Democracy." Center for International Policy. Feb 2007. 3
[39] Woods, Emira. No Bases Tour. Ward Circle Building, the American University, Washington DC. April 18, 2008.
[40] Lubeck, 1
[41] *Ibid*, 10
[42] *Ibid*, 16

Michael Wibhey, a powerful figure in neo-conservative and energy focused policy think tanks.[43] Wibhey has allied with Congressmen, particularly former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, William Jefferson and the State Department's Barry M Schutz, among others, to promote U.S. recognition of strategic interests in West Africa.[44] This included the creation of the African Oil Policy Initiative Group, which has actively lobbied Congress since 2001 to increase U.S. presence in the Gulf of Guinea. In a presentation to the House Subcommittee on Africa in 2000, Wibhey called for the construction of a U.S. base in the Gulf of Guinea, and in a 2001 paper recommended the creation of a "U.S. South Atlantic Command that would create a new U.S. military command structure in the South Atlantic, confirming the U.S.'s strategic interest in West Africa as the U.S. redraws its energy supply lines for the 21st century".[45] The message of Wibhey and his allies, of the importance of West Africa for U.S. energy security, has been adopted by many in the military, notably General Wald of the European Command, who, at a conference in London in 2005, gave a talk on "Measures to protect oil operations in the Gulf of Guinea".[46] Oil and "energy security" are important elements of the United States' growing interest in Africa.

Those lobbying for greater U.S. military presence in Africa's oil producing regions have been able to successfully link their priorities to those of the GWOT. Proponents of African oil emphasize its potential to promote both U.S. energy security, by diversifying sources and reducing U.S. ties to Middle Eastern oil producers, and African development. The term "energy security" captures the important historical link between U.S. access to energy resources and

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[43] Wibhey is a strategic fellow at Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, president of the Global Water and Energy Strategy Team, senior fellow in energy studies at the American Foreign Policy Council, and president of The Center for Strategic Resources Policy.
[44] Lubeck, 10
[45] *Ibid*, 11
[46] *Ibid*, 16

foreign policy.[47] Framing access to oil as a security priority has been common in United States foreign policy since the 1930s, and conversations about African oil and U.S. security deploy oil security in the same way. More novel is the emphasis on U.S. energy companies' capacity to be an engine for development in Africa. The combination of these messages is reflected in the title of a White Paper produced by the African Oil Policy Initiative Group in 2002, "African Oil: A Priority for U.S. National Security and African Development."[48]

Finally, there is a budding interest among the American public for the United States to have a larger humanitarian role on the continent of Africa. Evidence of this trend can be found in the popularity of the One Campaign, an internet-based community dedicated to "raising public awareness about the issues of global poverty, hunger, disease and efforts to fight such problems in the world's poorest countries"[49]; the visibility of American celebrities who have taken a particular interest in Africa; the priorities of philanthropists such as Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett; the excitement over the Live 8 benefit concerts for Africa in 2005; and media coverage and activism in response to violence in Darfur. All of these examples point to a perception that Africa has been neglected by wealthy countries for too long and that it is time for Americans to reverse that trend.

The sense that Africa is due for increased support from the international community is an important resource on which supporters of AFRICOM draw. In a television interview on March 19, 2008, President Bush framed the creation of AFRICOM as an acknowledgment that the United States cares about Africa. "First of all, this administration recognizes that Africa is important. That's why we named an Africa Command….it's a commitment that we care about

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[47] For an in depth study of this link, see Michael Klare's book *Blood and Oil,* in which he gives a thorough analysis of what he calls the "economization of security" and its relationship to oil since the 1930s.
[48] Wihbey, Paul Michael and Barry Schutz, eds. "African Oil: A Priority for U.S. National Security and African Development." March 5, 2008. http://www.iasps.org/strategic/africawhitepaper.pdf
[49] "About One." *One: The Campaign to End Poverty*. March 30, 2008. http://www.one.org/about/

the people of Africa."[50] The AFRICOM website is largely devoted to news stories about training

and development activities undertaken by U.S. forces. Headlines read, "New Maritime Chart to

Improve Port Safety, Help Economic Growth for Sao Tome and Principe", "Ghanaian Midwives

Train Aboard U.S. Navy Ship through Project HOPE", "US Navy Delivers Emergency Aid for

Chad Refugees".[51] Proponents of AFRICOM frame the command, in public statements, as an

effort to correct Africa's marginalization in U.S. policy institutions in order to better respond to

crises and aid in development and security building.

Critical Voices

Official AFRICOM discourse's interpretations of U.S. interests in Africa and the

appropriate direction for policy, described above, are contested, both in the U.S. and in Africa.

In fact, criticism of AFRICOM on the African continent has been so unanimous that plans to

place AFRICOM's headquarters on the continent have been abandoned. In the United States as

well, plans for AFRICOM have been met with suspicion and resistance from many academics,

activists, aid workers, and government officials. These critics challenge the discursive

deployments of the GWOT, American energy security, and African development in AFRICOM

policy discourses.

Some critics see the GWOT as a new, and often misleading, paradigm for military

engagement that, like the Cold War, creates "a timeless, borderless geopolitical strategy whose

presumptions lead to defining all conflicts, insurrections and civil wars as terrorist threats,

regardless of the facts on the ground."[52] In this context, AFRICOM is understood as an attempt

to use terrorism to justify greater U.S. presence in a resource rich region of the world by

[50] "AFRICOM will Help Africans Deal with African Problems, Bush Says." *AFRICOM* March 19, 2008.
http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=1687
[51] "News." *AFRICOM* April 1, 2008. http://www.africom.mil/articles.asp
[52] Lubeck, 1.

characterizing the Sahel and Horn of Africa as areas of rising Islamic extremism and

"ungoverned spaces" in Africa as potential terrorist "breeding grounds." Critics place

AFRICOM within a broader discourse against the militarization of U.S. foreign policy. Most

agree that fighting poverty, disease, and insecurity will create a safer world for all. However, the

conclusion that these goals can be best addressed by the U.S. military rather than by increasing

resources to non-military agencies is strongly contested.

This is a particular concern in the humanitarian aid community. Mark Malan, of

Refugees International, expressed the views of this group at an Aug 1, 2007 congressional

hearing about AFRICOM. Malan emphasized that the military was not suited to have oversight

over the funding or implication of humanitarian work. Working within the AFRICOM structure,

according to Malan, undermines the impartiality and independence on which humanitarian

workers depend. He argues that coordination between the military and humanitarian and

development workers is beneficial, but that integration is not. The website Resist AFRICOM, a

joint project of several NGO's and activist groups[53] cites similar concerns.

> If reorganization [of the DOD's Unified Combatant Commands] were the only goal, there would be no reason to oppose the command. What goes unsaid … is the fundamental shift in the roles of the State Department and the Department of Defense (DOD). Many duties that previously belonged to nonmilitary US agencies – things such as building schools and digging wells – will now fall under the jurisdiction of the DOD. The resulting dual-nature of the military is not only confusing to our African partners but sets a negative example for countries who already overuse the military in civilian affairs.[54]

Critics argue that if the U.S. was serious about addressing the connection between

underdevelopment and security, plans would include increased funding for State department and

USAID projects, not just their integration into a military command. They maintain that

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[53] These groups include Africa Action, Institute for Policy Studies, Africa Faith and Justice Network, Hip Hop Caucus, African Security Research Project. Arms and Security Initiative, New America Foundation, Association of Concerned Africa Scholars, Center for Democratic Empowerment, Liberia, Foreign Policy In Focus, Missionaries of Africa, Pan Africa Network, Oakland CA, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Justice and Peace Office, Resolve Uganda, TransAfrica Forum, United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society, Washington Office on Africa

[54] *Resist AFRICOM.* March 16, 2008. http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1552/t/5717/signUp.jsp?key=3094

increasing U.S. military presence in Africa (a) will undermine the work of development and humanitarian workers and (b) raises questions as to whether the U.S. is really committed to partnership and development, in addition to its own national interest.

Plans for AFRICOM have raised serious concerns among African leaders and civil society. The fourteen countries of the Sothern Africa Development Community, Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, and the sixteen nations of the Economic Community of West African States have all made strong public statements against AFRICOM. Liberia is the only nation whose government has publicly expressed support. Dr. Wafula Okumu, Director of the African Security Analysis Program at the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa, expressed the depth of African concerns in his testimony at a congressional hearing on August 2, 2007. Okumu warned that Africans were suspicious that AFRICOM's real priorities were imperial, not in the interest of African nations.

> Africans vividly remember that colonialism was preceded by philanthropic missionaries who came to fulfill God's Will of rescuing Africans from the clutches of barbarism. To paraphrase Kenyatta's allegory, 'when the Whiteman came to Africa, he was holding a Bible in one hand and asked us to close our eyes and pray. When we opened our eyes after the prayer, his other hand was holding a gun and all our land was gone!'[55]

Okumu cited a fundamental distrust of the U.S. military, given its history of selective engagement on the continent and its support, during the Cold War, of authoritarian and anti-liberation regimes. He says Africans question the sincerity of U.S. claims to be principally concerned with stability and development, asking the following biting questions.

> Many Africans are asking …Why the U.S. has not supported the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and instead supported the Ethiopian intervention through airpower from CJTF-HOA stationed in Djibouti? … Is Africa to become merely another theatre of operations in which winning the "hearts and minds" forms an essential component of a "security" driven agenda? Why should ordinary Africans welcome an American presence that will create African targets for extremists where none existed, and add an unwelcome dimension to already complex local conflicts? Why is Washington not able to do something to address Africa's needs by modifying its

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[55] Okumu, Dr. Wafula. "Testimony of Dr. Wafula Okumu – U.S. AFRICOM Hearing." *AllAfrica*. August 3, 2007. March 1, 2008. http://allafrica.com/stories/200708031070.html?page=3

trade policy? If the U.S. is really committed to participating in the continent's development why not support the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)?[56]

Further, Okumu is concerned with the potential for "mission creep" leading to more aggressive counter terror operations, and cites "mixed messages" sent by the DOD, particularly a comment by General Wald that he would "like to have some forward bases in Africa" and the statement by General Bantz Craddock to Washington journalists that "protecting energy assets, particularly in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, would guide the focus of Africom."[57] Okumu's testimony acknowledges serious and substantive concerns on the African continent that explain widespread resistance to moving forward with AFRICOM.

These voices contest AFRICOM's deployment of discursive tools from the GWOT and appeals on behalf of African development. Yet, within policy making circles, these critiques remain marginal and are consistently dismissed not as substantive policy concerns but, rather, as public relations problems; AFRICOM is just not adequately communicating its mission and intentions. This dismissal of critical voices and the dominant acceptance of the logic behind AFRICOM demonstrate that it has a particular resonance for American policy makers.   I argue that this is explained by AFRICOM discourses' successful deployment of rhetorical commonplaces that has continually (re)constructed Africa as an "ungoverned space." This construction has shaped how policy makers have conceptualized and responded to Africa's growing strategic importance.

The term ungoverned spaces was defined as a new "threat paradigm" by the DOD in a December 2005 presentation called "Africa's ungoverned space – a new threat paradigm", given by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, Theresa Whelan. (See figure 5) It reflects the DOD's prioritization of weak and failing states as potential national security threats,

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[56] *Ibid*

[57] Cited in *Ibid*

as emphasized in the 2002 and 2006 National Security Strategies. The use of the term

ungoverned spaces, as opposed to weak or failing states, signifies an increasing recognition

within the DOD of the importance of non-state and sub-state actors.

Prior to the 2005 presentation defining ungoverned spaces as a new paradigm, the term

was used by Donald Rumsfeld in 2003.

> [T]here are ungoverned areas in the world, as the general said, and that is a problem. That makes it easier for people who are trying to evade attention and capture to continue to function, because -- literally areas that no one is governing. [58]

Rumsfeld uses the term specifically with regard to the difficulties of fighting a Global War on

Terror. Ungoverned spaces has since become increasingly common in DOD language, and its

meaning has broadened to include threats of criminal as well as terrorist activity.[59] The DOD's

Director for Strategic Plans and Policy, Lt. Gen. Victor Renuart, said in 2006,

> Well, we spent a lot of time talking about a term that may have been mentioned by the secretary and chairman in the past, and that is, ungoverned spaces (…) [A]nd in that kind of environment it's easy for illicit trade -- smuggling, piracy, narcotics trafficking, as well as terrorists, all move through that kind of environment. [60]

Ungoverned spaces has become a common DOD term used to describe a new, post- 9/11 threat

paradigm. It has been used to refer to many regions, including but not limited to the African

continent. However, I argue that, in AFRICOM discourses, ungoverned spaces functions as

more than a technical security term.

In the context of Africa, ungoverned spaces functions as a means through which familiar

images of Africa as chaotic, primitive, and backward are discursively redeployed within the

context of the GWOT. The concept of ungoverned spaces, in AFRICOM discourses, serves to

securitize existing narratives about Africa as a largely unpeopled or primitive wilderness. While

the latter characterization of Africa would, in contemporary discourse, sound anachronistic, not

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[58] Cited in Pineu, Daniel. "Governing Security, Governing through Security: US police assistance and liberal governmentality." Paper presented at 6th Pan-European Internatioanl Relations Conference, *Making Sense of a Pluralist World*, Turin 12-15 September, 2007. 16
[59] *Ibid*
[60] Cited in *Ibid*

to mention racist and ethnocentric, I argue that the deployment of the concept ungoverned spaces in AFRICOM discourses serves, in practice, to reproduce these paternalistic analyses of Africa.

A history of Western representations of and interventions in Africa shows the repeated characterization of Africa as an ungoverned space; in images of African people as immature and primitive, African spaces as chaotic, and Western intervention as a source of stability and governance in the continent. Thus, in a genealogical account of Africa in U.S. foreign policy, ungoverned spaces becomes a tool with which to create a history of the present –its discursive deployment captures ways in which the history of Western representations of and interventions in Africa are deployed in the present. The concept of ungoverned spaces, in the context of AFRICOM, is rarely contested because of its consistency with a commonly accepted vocabulary about Africa. The Pentagon can produce maps in which vast sections of the continent are labeled "ungoverned" and these maps are used to communicate and justify policy that is often not disputed. Below, I trace the resiliency of an image of Africa as ungoverned space in American and European society and its deployment in policy and popular culture discourses since the colonial period.

Africa in the Western Imagination: Representations and Interventions on the Continent

It is useful to divide this history into three periods, each of which presented slightly different sets of discursive resources with which to make sense of policy toward Africa. These period divisions should be understood as somewhat fluid. Discursive resources that are dominant in one context may be redeployed or cited in others, and my characterization of the dominant discourses in a given period by no means applies to *all* approaches toward Africa.

They are, rather, the dominant discursive resources that I find to be most explanatory of U.S. policy during that period.

The Colonial Period: The African Frontier

With the European colonization of Africa in the late nineteenth century, an extensive colonial literature developed, in which European and American audiences were exposed to the "Dark Continent." Among the writings produced about Africa during this time were travelogues and reports from African "explorers" as well as a growing scientific literature about Africa. Both travel writing and scientific writing described Africa as exotic and backward, and overwhelmingly advocated the potential for European influence to civilize and save Africans.

V.Y. Mudimbe argues that representations of Africa as primitive and exotic were not new in the 19th century, but that the incorporation of these views into scientific discourses was an important change. Mudimbe describes the convergence of mercantilist economic science, anthropological and philosophical scholarship, and evolutionary science, which produced a consensus that Europeans were biologically, intellectually, and spiritually more evolved than Africans. These scientific disciplines created epistemological and ontological foundations for a European discourse in which a mercantilist relationship between Europe and Africa was natural and necessary. "Evolution, conquest, and difference became signs of a theological, biological, and anthropological destiny, and assign to things and beings both their natural slots and their social mission."[61] This formed the basis for what Mudimbe calls the "discovery" of primitiveness.[62]

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[61] Mudimbe(1988), 17
[62] *Ibid*

An example of this application of Western ontology to Africa is evident in the philosophical writings of Hegel and Heidegger. Hegel wrote, "What we understand under the name Africa, is an ahistoric, underdeveloped world, entirely prisoner to natural spirit, whose place is still at the threshold of universal history."[63] Here, Hegel distinguishes Africa's "natural" or primitive "spirit" from Europe's rational "spirit". For Hegel, Europe participates in a "universal" human history, from which Africa is excluded. Similarly, Heidegger claimed, "There are human beings and human groups (negroes, for instance Xhosa) who have no history."[64] For both these thinkers, the charge that Africans do not have history is equivalent to saying that Africans are inferior beings to other humans. For both, having a history was a principal requirement for being human; in Heideggerian terms, history is what separates humans' Being from that of other animals. These claims were possible and were justified by the development of an epistemological framework in which were embedded distinctions between civilization and barbarism, modernity and tradition, truth and superstition: oppositional categories that separated Europeans' humanity from others'.

This image of African primitiveness was pervasive throughout representations of Africa. Emblematic of this is the work of Henry Morton Stanley, a Welsh explorer who was one of the first to write about the Congo for European audiences and whose accounts shaped public perceptions of Africa as well as policy. Stanley describes the Congolese as animal-like, childlike, and feminine. These images were reproduced in the Belgian popular press, which often placed images of Congolese next to chimpanzees or apes to show an evolutionary likeness, presenting visual evidence to support anthropological hypotheses that Africans were "more animal than man."[65] Along with these images of African people, African spaces were presented

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[63] Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Philosophy of History*. New York: Willey Book Co, 1900. 99
[64] In Sikka, Sonia. "Heidegger and Race." In *Race and Racism in Continental Philosophy*. Eds. Robert Bernasconi and Sybol Cook. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003. 77
[65] *Ibid*, 30

to Western audiences as an unpeopled wilderness. The following is a revealing passage of

Stanley's in the *New York Herald*.

> What wild and ambitious projects fill a man's brain as he looks over the forgotten and unpeopled country, containing in its bosom such a store of wealth, and with such an expanse of fertile soil, capable of sustaining millions! What a settlement one could have in this valley! See, it is broad enough to support a large population! Fancy a church spire rising where that tamarind rears its dark crown of foliage, and think how well a score or so of pretty cottages would look instead of those thorn clumps and gum trees! Fancy this lovely valley teeming with herds of cattle and fields of corn, spreading to the right and left of this stream! How much better would such a state become this valley, rather than its present deserted and wild aspect! But be hopeful. The day will come and a future year will see it, when happier lands have become crowded and nations have become so overgrown that they have no room to turn about. It only needs an Abraham or a Lot, and Alaric or an Attila to lead their hosts to this land, which, perhaps, has been wisely reserved for such a time.[66]

The spaces Stanley described as blank were, for its inhabitants, part of complex historical,

political, social, and economic structures. But the common view that these areas were "forgotten

and unpeopled" was an important factor that made European actions in Africa possible.

These discourses about an unpeopled, ungoverned land that was ready to be developed by

Europe was used by European policy makers, the popular press, and by European missionaries

and humanitarians during the colonial period. As Mudimbe emphasizes, colonial discourses

about Africa represented Europeans' conquest of Africa as "natural" and as a means of

deliverance. Europeans saw themselves as bringing economic exchange and social structure to

an ungoverned Africa. Colonialism was understood as a possibility to humanize Africans; to

make them into complete or mature men. This discourse often justified the most dehumanizing

of European violence against African people. For example, Kevin Dunn cites Leopold II's claim

that, in the Congo, forced labor "was the only way to civilize and uplift these indolent and

corrupt people".[67] Leopold's brutal rubber economy killed as many as four to eight million

Africans. The King's discourse about his project in the Congo relied on images, often taken

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[66] Cited in Dunn, Kevin. *Imagining the Congo*: *the International Relations of Identity*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003. 38

[67] *Ibid, 44*

from Stanley, of Congolese as weak, passive, ignorant, and idle and as victims of Arab slave traders. Thus, Leopold presented himself as saving Congolese from (a) their own ignorance and laziness by forcing them into labor as rubber harvesters within a new export economy and (b) from Arab slave traders whose use of African labor could not, unlike the Europeans', be a means of uplifting Africans. This account of the Congo and the Congolese framed violent military and economic exploitation as a civilizing project.

Dunn also shows that the paternalist narrative of Westerners uplifting the Congolese was equally prominent in the international movement against King Leopold's rule. Dunn's analysis of this movement shows how pejorative images of the Congo, taken from Stanley's writing and others', were redeployed in the movement to liberate the Congolese from Leopold. The reform discourse, according to Dunn, did not challenge the passive Congolese social identity described by King Leopold. Whereas Leopold framed Congolese as helpless victims of the Arab slave trade and primitive culture, the reform movement framed them as helpless victims of Leopold and of primitive culture.[68] For example, Mark Twain, an active participant in the movement, understood himself as an advocate for "those twenty-five millions of gentle and harmless blacks."[69] The idea of the Congo as uncivilized and docile was not challenged by humanitarian-minded reformers. Critics of Leopold were not critical of Western intervention or colonialism, but of Leopold's greed and brutality. Thus, while the Congo reform movement successfully delegitimated the Belgian King's ownership of the Congo, colonialism itself was reified as a means of uplifting "gentle and harmless" Africans.

These discourses present Africa as an ungoverned space that is (a) open for Europeans to build states and periphery economies and (b) backward and ready to be civilized according to the

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[68] *Ibid*, 55
[69] Cited in *Ibid*, 56

logic of Western epistemology, ideology, and theology. The pervasive appeal of this spectacle of Africa as an ungoverned space successfully framed colonial and imperial projects as civilizing primitive or empty spaces, rather than disrupting or overtaking existing livelihoods.

The Cold War Period: Saving Africa from the Communists

Decolonization in Africa represented a struggle against Europeans' claims to a natural right to control African nations and peoples. As Jean-Paul Sartre writes in his 1961 preface to *Wretched of the Earth*, with decolonization came the unraveling of European discourses that dehumanized African "natives" and celebrated European superiority. "We too, peoples of Europe, we are being decolonized: meaning the colonist inside every one of us is surgically extracted in a bloody operation. Let's take a good look at ourselves, if we have the courage, and let's see what has become of us."[70] The political changes of the 1950s and 60s undoubtedly challenged the way in which Africa was understood by Europeans and Americans. However, throughout decolonization and the Cold War, European and American discourses about Africa successfully redeployed many of the images that were pervasive in colonial descriptions of Africa. Western representations of Africa during the Cold War were variations on those of the colonial period, and they often relied on the resilient image of Africa as a primitive, apolitical, and chaotic jungle –an ungoverned space. Cold War discourses tended to present African people as passive, African spaces as chaotic and anarchic, and American intervention as a means of bringing stability and order. In the Cold War political climate in the United States, this characterization of Africa as ungoverned and of black Africans as unable to govern was understood as creating a Communist threat. This framework suggested that, in the absence of American presence, Africa's ungoverned spaces would be open to the Communists.

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[70] Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Preface." In *Wretched of the Earth*. Frantz Fanon. New York: Grove Press. 1961. lvii

This deployment of ungoverned spaces in the Cold War context is evident in Dunn's description of U.S. actions in the Congo immediately following that country's independence. Dunn argues that U.S. policy during the 1960 political crisis can be understood as the product of a convergence of familiar colonial-era discourses about the Congo's backwardness and savagery with dominant Cold War narratives about an imminent Soviet threat. In this formulation, the Congo was presented as an irrational, chaotic, and primitive place and this perceived backwardness meant that the Congo was particularly vulnerable to the Soviets. The U.S. interpreted the crisis in the Congo as an imminent threat to United States security, and the establishment of an anti-Soviet leader in the Congo became a national security priority.

Dunn argues that the Eisenhower administration actively employed images of the Congo as a chaotic, savage, and primitive jungle, knowing that this image of chaos directly suggested the possibility for Soviet incursion in the Congo. He quotes Eisenhower, calling the Congo "a restless and militant population in a state of gross ignorance – even by African standards."[71] Dunn references coverage in *Time* magazine that demonstrates this particular construction of the Congo. For example, a caption underneath a picture of a Force Publique fighter after the 1960 mutiny read, "With a tribal howl, a reversion to savagery." The body of the article continued, "With a primeval howl, a nation of 14 million people reverted to near savagery, plunged backward into the long night of chaos."[72] This portrayal of political unrest in the Congo as mere primeval savagery immediately denied the possibility that there were genuine political motives for the Force Publique mutiny. As such, media coverage perpetuated an image of the Congo as ungoverned and politically immature and incompetent and justified U.S. interference in that nation's political affairs. Thus, the CIA's involvement in the assassination of populist leader

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[71] Dunn (2003), 136

[72] *Ibid*

Patrice Lumumba and U.S. support of the pro-American leader Mobutu Sese Seko was justified according to these assumptions; that (a) the Congolese were politically incompetent and (b) a Soviet threat was imminent.

The Nixon and Reagan policies toward apartheid South Africa illustrate the policy consequences of combining images of an ungovernable, black Africa with Cold War discourses. Both administrations used National Security Study Memorandum 39 to guide their South African policies. The Memorandum presents a similar perspective to that of the U.S. response to the Congo crisis. It describes black resistance to the apartheid regime (led by the African National Congress) as a potential source of chaos, which would present an opportunity for Soviet expansion, and advocates working with the white minority government, which it presents as a source of stability.

> There is no hope for the Blacks to gain the political rights they seek through violence, which will only lead to chaos and increased opportunities for the communists…We can, by selective relaxation of our stance toward the white regimes, encourage some modification of their current racial and colonial policies…At the same time we would take diplomatic steps to convince the black states of the area that their current liberation and majority rule aspirations in the south are not attainable by violence and that their only hope for a peaceful and prosperous future lies in closer relations with white dominated states.[73]

This excerpt demonstrates an effort by U.S. policy makers to delegitimate the grievances of South African resistance movements and their capacity to bring about political change in South Africa. The Nixon and Reagan administrations consistently defended their support for the white regimes in southern Africa (which included using CIA operatives to spy on ANC "terrorist" activities in Mozambique) by claiming that white rule was necessary to maintain stability and that black rule would lead to chaos and Soviet expansion.

Within this narrative was a racist interpretation of the appropriate place for blacks in southern Africa. This racism is explicitly present in the following statement by Jeane

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[73] Cited in Fatton, Robert. "The Reagan Foreign Policy toward South Africa: The Ideology of the New Cold War." *African Studies Review* 27.1 (1984): 61

Kirkpatrick, foreign policy advisor to President Reagan and ambassador to the UN. In response to concerns about the suffering of black South Africans, she said,

> the miseries of traditional life are familiar, they are bearable to ordinary people who, growing up in the society, learn to cope, as children born to untouchables in India acquire the skills and attitudes necessary for their survival in the miserable roles they are destined to fill.[74]

This excerpt claims that blacks have a natural place in society, and that place is not in government or in a politics of resistance. Kirkpatrick dismisses black resistance across South Africa, which clearly demonstrated a refusal to "cope" and a rejection of the idea that there were "roles they are destined to fill". Rather, Fitzpatrick wants to suggest that political resistance was a marginal response in a society in which blacks accepted their place at the bottom, outside of the political process. This view was comprehensible in the midst of Cold War discourses in which black Africans were consistently represented as politically incompetent and white rule was represented as a source of stability.

The Post-Cold War Period: "New Barbarism"

With the end of the Cold War, policy makers' geopolitical interests in Africa all but disappeared. U.S. policy discussion about Africa shifted from focusing on concerns about Soviet expansion to an inconsistent interest in humanitarian issues. Overall, this shift brought about a rapid and dramatic decrease of U.S. activity in Africa, including the withdrawal of U.S. aid to many African Cold War allies. Policy discourse shifted from legitimating intervention to contest Soviet power to legitimating withdrawal from and inaction in Africa. These discourses continued to incorporate images of Africa as an ungoverned space. Whereas during the Cold War, African chaos had implied an immediate threat because of the susceptibility of these regions to Soviet influence, after the end of the Cold War the same idea of chaos was often deployed to justify inaction by the U.S. government. Images of a primitive or anarchic Africa

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[74] Cited in Fatton, 77

were commonly used in the context of what has been called the "New Barbarism" thesis.[75] The "New Barbarism" thesis describes a neo-conservative analysis of the post Cold War world that defines a new geopolitical divide between civilization and democracy on one side and the chaos of the underdeveloped world on the other. In this thesis, Africa, especially West Africa, was often used as the prime example of "barbarism," though following 9/11, radical Islam became a more popular example.

The "New Barbarism" thesis is epitomized by Robert Kaplan, a journalist and travelogue writer whose work is often cited and referenced by U.S. policy makers. Kaplan's book, *The Coming Anarchy,* presents the African continent as a teeming wasteland, without a hint of irony. Kaplan assaults his readers with alarming images of chaotic, sinister "Third World urban dysfunction", in which a growing population of urban Africans inevitably threatens not only the stability of African nations, but that of the whole world. For example, Kaplan describes his drive from the airport to Guinea's capital as,

> a nightmarish Dickensian spectacle to which Dickens himself would never have given credence. The corrugated metal shacks and scabrous walls were coated with black slime. Stores were built out of rusted shipping containers, junked cars, and jumbles of wire mesh. The streets were one long puddle of floating garbage. Mosquitoes and flies were everywhere. Children, many of whom had protruding bellies, seemed as numerous as ants. When the tide went out, dead rats and the skeletons of cars were exposed on the mucky beach.[76]

For Kaplan, disease, "animist beliefs not suitable to a moral society", polygamy, and "unprovoked crime" doom African cities and states to chaos and violence.[77]

Kaplan suggests that, with the withdrawal of the superpowers after the Cold War, Africa is reverting back to pre-modern political, economic, and social organization. He writes that a "pre-modern formlessness governs the battlefield [of Sierra Leone's civil war], evoking the wars in medieval Europe prior to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which ushered in the era of organized

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[75] This phrase was coined by Paul Richards in his book *Fighting for the Rainforest*
[76] Kaplan, Robert. "The Coming Anarchy." *Atlantic Monthly* 273 February 1994: 48.
[77] *Ibid*, 51.

nation-states."[78] Kaplan presents violence and poverty in Africa as a fundamentally cultural phenomenon, contrasting the chaos of African slums with those in Turkey, where Islam is a stabilizing cultural presence. Instead of engaging in a serious analysis of the historical, political and economic contexts of Africa's urban challenges, this view simply pits the "barbarism" of Africa against the civilization of others. It is easy to see how, for policy-makers, this discourse can justify dismissing African issues as apolitical and irrelevant.

Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1993 and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 are two cases that demonstrate the relationship between the "New Barbarism" thesis and U.S foreign policy. These cases illustrate an important relationship between American interpretations of Africa and policy choices. In the case of Somalia, interpreting political violence within the New Barbarism thesis led to an analysis in which the only reasonable and defensible American engagement in Somalia was a narrowly defined humanitarian one. In response to catastrophic famine in Somalia, President George H Bush's Operation Provide Relief (the mandate of which was explicitly to respond to humanitarian need and *not* political issues) initially had strong public support. But President Clinton's Operation Restore Hope, in partnership with the UN's broader mission to create political solutions to ongoing violence in Somalia, proved untenable because, as I demonstrate below, that violence was perceived as primeval and endemic and, thus, not politically resolvable.

Policy discourses and media portrayals of violence in Somalia framed it as the result of ancient clan rivalries that had reignited following the withdrawal of American and Soviet presence in the region. The violence was framed as a direct continuation of past rivalries, modernized only with weaponry.

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[78] *Ibid*, 55

> The emerging image of Somalis became one of savages who got ahead of themselves technologically; of tribesmen still out there wandering around the primordial landscape, bound by ancient ties and animosities, dutifully following the factional footsteps of their forefathers.[79]

This explicitly apolitical and irrational account of Somali violence framed political solutions as largely implausible. This was in contrast to America's greater willingness to intervene politically in Kuwait during the same period. Butler contrasts Americans' interpretation of violence in Somalia as compared to that in Kuwait.

> Unlike the Kuwaitis who had been cast as citizens of a democratic nation overtaken by a ruthless aggressor, the Somali citizens were overtaken by themselves, a mysterious, kinship based culture of uncivilized, unsophisticated tribal people. They were, argued the dominant narrative, a pre-modern people without the impetus to solve their own problems.[80]

This interpretation illustrates the deployment of the "New Barbarism" thesis that explained violence in Africa as unavoidable or natural and, thus, not an appropriate site for political intervention (as opposed to humanitarian intervention).

This interpretation of violence in Somalia influenced policy-making discourse at the time. President Clinton consistently described the U.S. enemy in Somalia as an amorphous, primitive threat. He used the words "warlords", "armed gangs", and "a small minority of Somalis", rather than identifying a particular agent or group.[81] Not only was an agent not named, President Clinton spoke as though one did not exist. Rather, in policy discourses, the U.S. faced a nebulous group that was simply disposed to violence or against stability and order. Butler notes that in President Clinton's speech, following the death of eighteen U.S. soldiers and the capture of one during a manhunt for Mohamed Farah Aideed, there was a glaring omission of any mention of Aideed or his group *Habr Gidr*.

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[79] Besteman, Catherine. "Representing Violence and Othering Somalia." *Cultural Anthropology* 11.1 (1996): 122.

[80] Butler John R. "Somalia and the Imperial Savage" *Western Journal of Communication*, 66.1 (2002): 6.

[81] Cited in Edwards, Jason Allen. "Foreign Policy Rhetoric for the Post-Cold War World: Bill Clinton and America's Foreign Policy Vocabulary." Doctoral Dissertation, Georgia State University, May 2006, 115

> The press was clearly uneasy about the exclusion of Aideed from the narrative [about the Battle of Mogadishu], revealing the radical difference between the construction of the Somalia enemy and the modern enemy of Cold War rhetoric.[82]

Butler emphasizes a distinction between the American analysis of the violence in Somalia, which described an incomprehensible chaos of random violent acts by bandits and warlords, and that of the UN, which identified Aideed and *Habr Gidr* as a principal political obstacle to moving forward with a political solution. [83] Thus, when an American soldier was captured by Aideed and eighteen others killed in a UN led search for the leader, President Clinton did not pursue an analysis of Aideed and his objectives and grievances, but rather was consistent in blaming warlords, gangs, and bandits. In contrast to foreign policy discourses during the Cold War, where the U.S. justified opposing foreign leaders and groups that were aligned with the Soviets, U.S. discourse about Somalia framed the violence as primeval and ignored attempts to identify political agents behind the violence.

The outcome of Operation Restore Hope significantly influenced the way that American policymakers and the American public viewed intervention in Africa. Images of a killed U.S. soldier being dragged down the streets of Mogadishu provided emotionally charged evidence for the "New Barbarism" thesis. As recently as the 2000 American presidential campaign, Operation Restore Hope was used as an example to justify the United States' disengagement from humanitarian or "nation-building" efforts on the continent. Most significantly, academics and policy analysts agree that the outcome of Operation Restore Hope directly led to the Clinton administration's decision not to intervene in the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

Samantha Powers' detailed analysis of the United States' response to the genocide in Rwanda clearly demonstrates how common sense 'knowledge' of Africa led to wrong-headed

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[82] Butler, 11.

[83] The Secretary General at the time, Egyptian Boutros Boutros- Ghali had a history of animosity toward Aideed's group, *Habr Gidr*

policy choices. As with Somalia, popular press reports in the U.S. reinforced an understanding of the Rwandan genocide within the "New Barbarism" thesis, presenting the killing in Rwanda as unexplainable and rooted in ancient hatreds. They rarely attempted to provide a historical, political, or economic context for the killing; it was assumed there was none. For example, a CNN report by Gary Streiker said, "What's behind this story is probably the worst tribal hostility in all of Africa, hostility that goes back centuries long before European colonization."[84] Powers cites at length an interview with Daniel Zwerdling on NPR with Howard University African Studies professor Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja,

> **Zwerdling:** Why are things in Africa so bad? Why is tribal violence so deep?
>
> **Ntalaja:** Most of it has been exacerbated by politicians hungry for power.
>
> **Zwerdling:** …Well, of course, politicians can exacerbate that tensions already exist. I mean, you're not arguing, are you, that these tribal hatreds were not already there before modern politicians came along?
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> **Ntalaja:** I'm saying that the ethnic groups do have prejudices and people do tend to feel they may be different from other groups. But it's not enough to make a person pick up a knife or a gun and kill somebody else. It is when politicians come and excite passion and try to threaten people – make people believe that they are being threatened by other groups that are going to be extinguished.
>
> **Zwerdling:** Of course, in most of these battlegrounds, though, there is ancient ethnic hatred and something that surprises me actually is that you're blaming modern, contemporary African politicians for this divide and conquer, playing one tribe against another.[85]

This excerpt is telling in demonstrating that, even when offered, nuanced explanations of the violence seemed incomprehensible within existing narratives about African conflict.

Throughout the violence and leading up to it, the Clinton administration did not prioritize Rwanda. President Clinton did not have a single meeting with top advisors about the violence. Within the policy-making bureaucracy, the issue was marginalized. African specialists had the least influence of all regions on foreign policy and, as a result, the people with the most influence over policy in Rwanda had no knowledge of the region.[86] Further, Powers argues that those in

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[84] Powers, Samantha. *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*. New York: Harper Collins, 2002. 355
[85] Cited in *Ibid*, 355-356
[86] *Ibid*, 365

Washington who were familiar with Rwanda had "come to expect a certain amount of ethnic violence from the area."[87] "Most of us thought that if a war broke out, it would be quick, that these poor people didn't have the resources, the means to fight a sophisticated war. I couldn't have known that they would do each other in with the most economic means."[88]

To the degree that policy makers were responding to the Rwandan violence at all, that policy often failed to adjust according to information about what was happening on the ground. U.S. foreign policy makers were simply not prepared or open to considering diplomacy outside the usual channels. State department officials were biased toward working within official state structures and negotiating with government officials, but in Rwanda, this required diplomats to rely on and trust individuals that were simultaneously planning the genocide.[89] In idealizing the diplomatic process of the peace framework agreed on in Arusha, U.S. officials did not challenge or question information that should have been suspect.

The crisis in Somalia helped to justify the "New Barbarism" thesis' account of African violence. The costs of this viewpoint for the people of Rwanda were huge. It helped justify non-intervention by framing the violence as irrational ancient hatred. It also obscured nuanced analyses of the situation that could have provided policy makers with a more accurate picture of what was happening on the ground. Powers clearly shows that the U.S. government was receiving detailed information from Rwanda; however it interpreted this information according to a framework that made productive responses near to impossible.

Throughout the history of European and American interventions in Africa, during the colonial, Cold War, and post Cold War periods, representations of Africa have consistently

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[87] *Ibid*, 347
[88] *Ibid*, 348
[89] *Ibid*, 346

presented African spaces as empty, anarchic or chaotic, African people as barbaric, immature, or passive, and Europeans and Americans as carriers of development and stability. These images are found in discourses on AFRICOM. The term "ungoverned spaces" is frequently used to describe African regions and nations and is a lynchpin in the argument that Africa is an important front in the GWOT. American intervention through AFRICOM is presented as an opportunity to bring economic development and stability to these ungoverned areas, which as Dr. Okumu suggested in his testimony, is reminiscent of colonial promises to civilize Africans. Finally, in a variation on childlike representations of Africans in past discourses, African people and leaders are presented in AFRICOM discourses as coming of age. The idea that African people are showing a "new" commitment to economic growth and better governance is repeatedly used as a justification for increased American attention to the continent.

"Ungoverned Spaces": the GWOT and AFRICOM

Discourses on AFRICOM deploy images of Africa that have been prominent in U.S. policy making throughout its history. Similar to the Cold War equation of African ungoverned space + Soviets = communist threat, the GWOT has created a particular interpretation of Africa's importance to U.S. security. This new equation could be characterized as African ungoverned space + poverty + Islam = terrorist threat.

The phrase "ungoverned spaces" is used over and over in discussions on AFRICOM, throughout Congressional hearings, on the AFRICOM website, in DOD news releases, and on maps produced by the DOD (see figure 6). "Ungoverned spaces" has become a buzzword among policy makers and is used to mean not only a potential "breeding ground" for terrorist activity, but also a general state of underdevelopment. Excerpts from a November 14, 2007

Congressional hearing on AFRICOM reveal the prominence of this idea and the general

acceptance of its relevance as a threat to U.S. national interests.

> **Rep. Ike Skelton (D-MO):** Expanding the borders of one or more of those nations are large portions of territory where no state government really exists, and terrorists can find safe haven, sadly, in those ungoverned places.

> **Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA):** We have seen how ungoverned and under-governed spaces can become safe havens for terrorists. By partnering more closely with nations on the African continent, we can help to develop more secure borders, more responsible and capable military forces, and security institutions that are more responsive to national governments, and we can help to close the doors of any safe havens located there.

> **Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Ryan Henry:** Extremism, and the safe havens afforded to them by ungoverned, misgoverned and undergoverned areas is a concern which we will address in cooperation with our African partners, in a manner similar to the way we do today, each and every day.[90]

Throughout the hearing, Africa was repeatedly described as having vast, ungoverned spaces that

posed a threat to U.S. national security. AFRICOM's commander, General Ward, reiterated

these concerns in his March 13, 2008 posture statement to Congress.

> The uncontrolled regions of the Trans-Sahara and the Horn of Africa offer sanctuary to Islamic extremist terrorists, smugglers of drugs and contraband, and insurgent groups…In North Africa, broad expanses of uncontrolled areas remain havens for extremists, terrorists, and criminals…In West Africa… land forces have difficulty securing large tracts of land, and this contributes to insecurity by providing safe havens for terrorists, smugglers, gangs, and warlords.[91]

This use of ungoverned space has a number of implications for U.S. policy in Africa. Not only

does it imply a terrorist threat, but it also raises concerns about criminal activity; smuggling,

contraband trade, migration, and gang activity. Thus, ungoverned spaces functions to collapse

issues of policing, national and local governance, and military capacity into a single threat, all of

which are framed as appropriate sites for United States military intervention. This conflation of

havens for "criminals", "terrorists" and "extremists" is not questioned in Congressional hearings.

There has not, as of yet, been a debate about whether the United States ought to intervene in

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[90]Africa Command : *Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee,* 110th Cong., 1st Session. (2007)
[91] Ward, William E. "AFRICOM Posture Statement." *AFRICOM.* March 13, 2008.
http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=1679

criminal or "extremist" activity (which General Ward distinguishes from terrorism) within other sovereign nations, or what these terms mean on the ground.

What stands out in these hearings is the lack of specificity given when speaking about African spaces and terrorism. The Sahara and the Horn of Africa are identified as ungoverned, but, of course, this vast region includes capitals, major cities, and diverse communities that could not all be described as anarchic or uncontrolled. There is a striking absence of discussion or questions about existing governance structures within the spaces that are labeled as ungoverned. Exactly who is providing safe havens is left unclear, as is who these safe havens are harboring. In a rare question challenging these vague generalizations, Representative Shea-Porter asked General Ward how many Al Qaeda were on the African continent. Ward first avoided the question, instead referencing an allegation that North African fighters have joined anti-American violence in Iraq and citing a concern by North African nations that "these foreign fighters who flow into the Middle East and do whatever they do, those who survive that and then return to their home nations then foment discontent within their nations, as well."[92] When pressed, General Ward finally answered, "It's a disturbing number. More than a few."[93]

Policy makers' failure to question the term "ungoverned spaces", despite the striking lack of specificity in describing where these spaces are, what makes them ungoverned, and the nature of the threat they pose to the United States, demonstrates the degree to which this term resonates with policy makers *on its own* as a plausible characterization of Africa. Ungoverned spaces is not a concept that is new to a post-9/11 analysis of the United State's security threats. Rather it is consistent with past representations of Africa in U.S. policy. Ungoverned spaces does not only refer to Africa as a place of conflict and crime, but also resonates with concerns about African

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[92] *Ibid*
[93] *Ibid*

underdevelopment in general. In AFRICOM discourses, security and development go hand in hand.

AFRICOM discourses identify ungoverned spaces as the greatest barrier not only to security, but also to development. Images of Americans bringing development and stability to Africa's ungoverned spaces are prominent in AFRICOM discourses. In Africa, the U.S. military is emphasizing its role in development projects because of this union of security and development within the paradigm of ungoverned spaces. From the Department of Defense's perspective, their role in increasing Africans' security and governmental capacity is laying the groundwork for development. General Ward outlines this view in his definition of "Active Security" in his March 13, 2008 posture statement.

> The goal of Active Security is to enable the work of Africans to marginalize the enemies of peace and prevent conflict, thereby enabling the growth of strong and just governments and legitimate institutions to support the development of civil societies. Societies require security to flourish, for security provides the foundation for political, diplomatic, and economic development, which is essential to building long-term stability.[94]

Ward frames the African continent's biggest barrier to political, diplomatic, and economic development as insecurity, privileging the military's role in building the foundation for development. Increasing military capacity, closing borders, and increasing policing and government control are all seen as prerequisites for the development of civil society.

While in policy documents it is clear that hard security (military training, border control, etc.) is prioritized, the military also highlights its role in more traditional development work. The AFRICOM website shares news stories of military personnel participating in humanitarian efforts. For example, one article frames the production of new maritime maps, used by the Sao Tome and Principe Coast Guard and military and the U.S. Navy, as a tool for economic development.

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[94] *Ibid*

> The underlying motivation for producing these updated charts is for Sao Tome and Principe to publish them so that the merchant community can start to come to the port and initiate trade. Merchant ships will most often not enter a port when they do not have accurate charts…On the surface, this is helpful for the Coast Guard and military of Sao Tome and Principe, but more importantly, the charts will contribute to the economic well being of the country.[95]

A picture accompanying the article shows U.S. and Sao Tome military personnel unloading school and medical supplies at a port. These stories frame U.S. military presence in Africa as a broadly stabilizing force, not just in terms of building military and security capacity but also in promoting economic development.

The prominence of development in AFRICOM discourses serves to frame underdevelopment in Africa as a United States security threat and, in so doing, legitimate the military as the appropriate body to respond to development issues. The image of ungoverned spaces serves to collapse hard security threats, such as terrorism and crime, and development issues such as poverty and disease, into two products of the same general threat. As a result, the U.S. military is framed as providing a solution to both. In a talk on AFRICOM at the American University, the head of the university's development program, David Hirschman, raised the concern that the notion of "security" that the DOD uses in AFRICOM discourses was a very different one than that used by development scholars and practitioners.[96] Hirschman raised an important question: With *whose* security is AFRICOM concerned? For Hirschman, approaching development through the lens of United States national security, as opposed to a holistic focus on Africans' long-term political, economic, environmental, and social security, leads to very different policy. To the degree that the concept of ungoverned spaces is successful in intertwining security threats and development issues as simply two effects of the same basic

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[95] Goyak, Brian A. "New Maritime Chart to Improve Port Safety, Help Economic Growth for Sao Tome and Principe." *AFRICOM.* March 18, 2008. http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=1685

[96] Hirschman, David. "The U.S. Military's Africa Command (AFRICOM) – Implications for Development." *International Development Program Student Association Friday Forum*. School of International Service, the American University, Washington DC, March 21, 2008.

problem, development policy is likely to be framed narrowly in terms of U.S. national security, as it is in AFRICOM.

In one way, AFRICOM discourses represent a departure from past representations of Africa as ungoverned space. Whereas during the Cold War and post-Cold War periods Africa was portrayed as endemically chaotic, AFRICOM discourses emphasize the potential for change and growing stability on the African continent. Policy discourses about AFRICOM make a distinction between the former helpless Africa and a new generation of leaders who are finally capable of entering into a productive partnership with the United States. Past representations of African governments as immature, ineffective, and corrupt have shifted in a way that justifies growing U.S. attention to Africa. Africa remains largely ungoverned, but AFRICOM recognizes that it is governable and is showing signs of governability. U.S. officials repeatedly praise a "new" commitment among African leaders to "freedom" and "development." For example, in his address at the Museum of African Art, President Bush said,

> We are treating African leaders as equal partners, asking them to set clear goals, and expecting them to produce measurable results…For their part, more African leaders are willing to be held to high standards….Africa in the 21st century is a continent of potential. … It's a place where democracy is advancing, where economies are growing, and leaders are meeting challenges with purpose and determination….A new generation of African leaders is stepping forward, and turning their continent around.[97]

AFRICOM discourses suggest that Africa has grown up and is ready to partner with the U.S. to open markets and fight terrorism. The U.S., this discourse implies, has always been ready to work with African nations in the interest of freedom and prosperity, and it has finally found protégés in Africa with whom it can partner to ensure that, in President Bush's words, that continent one day "enjoys the light of liberty."

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[97] "Africa's Most Valuable Resource is Talent and Creativity, Not Oil or Diamonds." *AFRICOM*. February 14, 2008. http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=1666

This discourse sheds light on how distinctions between ungoverned and governed are drawn. Governability is defined by the United States' political and economic ideologies –to the degree that African nations are in line with U.S. preferred policies (free market economies and, secondarily, liberal democracy) they are commended for a commitment to "high standards" and "meeting challenges". AFRICOM discourses claim that, by imparting American norms of security, governance, and economic policy in Africa, the U.S. can help Africa develop toward an ideal, which is represented by the policies and values of the United States.

Africa's growing strategic importance may account for the shift to Africa-as-potentially-governable in AFRICOM discourses. While during, for example, the post-Cold War period the discourse of ungoverned spaces was often used to justify U.S. inaction in Africa, changing geopolitical priorities, such as the importance of African oil for the U.S., has made Africa a site for increasing U.S. involvement. Highlighting progress and hope on the African continent serves to reverse past justifications for marginalizing Africa in U.S. policy and to legitimate a bigger role for the U.S. in Africa.

Policy discourses about AFRICOM redeploy images of Africa that have been applied in U.S. foreign policy making throughout its history. AFRICOM's use of ungoverned spaces; drawing on images of African spaces as open and anarchic, African nations as newly coming of age, and Americans as fulfilling a "mission of mercy", fits into a broader narrative about America's role in Africa; one which places the United States in a role of both surveillance and guidance. One of the most important functions of this narrative is to silence voices on the continent of Africa that are opposed to U.S. policy. While President Bush is careful to call African leaders "equal partners", his ability to hold African leaders to "high standards" shows

that this is not the case –the U.S. president is surely not willing to let partner African leaders hold him to equally high standards or ask him to produce measurable results. African leaders cannot, for example, demand that the United States lower agricultural subsidies, but the United States is in a position to pressure African governments over trade policy and market liberalization. To the degree that AFRICOM can convincingly present itself in the context of a more advanced country advising a struggling continent, the U.S. plays the role of knowledgeable authority and Africans are less partners than subordinates. Thus, it is not surprising that the United States did not discuss their plans for AFRICOM with African leaders or civil society before it was announced, or that the DOD continues to dismiss African resistance to AFRICOM as a "PR problem," not as a substantive problem with policy. African resistance can be disregarded within this discourse because it gives the U.S., not African nations, the authority to define Africa's problems and solutions.

Conclusion

Africa has become a strategic priority for United States foreign policy makers due to several factors; principally demand for its oil and other natural resources such as coltan, and as a site for counter-terrorism operations within the GWOT. The way in which Africa's strategic importance is interpreted and discussed, and then formulated in policy is, as I have shown, fundamentally linked to Africa's discursive construction as an ungoverned space. Ungoverned spaces remains, for many policy makers, a plausible account of Africa partly because it is associated with problems and issues that do affect large parts of Africa; such as weak or ineffective government structures, conflict, arms proliferation, and poverty. However, the deployment of ungoverned spaces, within AFRICOM discourses, does much more than describe these very real challenges. As I have shown, ungoverned spaces collapses these issues within the construction of a singular threat, in which terrorism, poverty, inefficient government,

unprofessional militaries and security forces, migration, crime, and economic stagnation all become attributable to one underlying problem –ugovernability—and can be addressed with one policy solution –partnership with the U.S. military to increase security capacity and fight terrorism. Thus, the deployment of ungoverned spaces becomes a real problem for policy makers, in that it stands in the way of nuanced and context specific analyses of issues in Africa as well as denying space for discussions of policy alternatives that address the different political and economic conditions of Africa's challenges.

The rhetoric of ungoverned spaces is, in many ways, a misleading account of Africa's political and economic challenges and its relationship to U.S. national security. Kurt Shillinger, director of the Terrorism in Africa research project at the South African Institute of International Affairs testified at an Aug 2, 2007 congressional hearing on AFRICOM that,

> AFRICOM is predicated on an assumption that instability in Africa poses direct threats to U.S. security. This is contestable. Somalia has not emerged as the next Afghanistan, as was the initial assumption after 9/11. It doesn't function as a nursery for transnational terrorism but for isolated cases. No civil or interstate African war has resulted in direct harm to the United States. The collapse of Zimbabwe has resulted in floods of immigrants to South Africa, not Florida.[98]

Shillinger suggests that AFRICOM discourses have functioned to exaggerate the threat that African instability poses to U.S. national interests. Framing African problems, first and foremost, as a threat to U.S. security serves to both incite a reactionary response within the Department of Defense and Congress as well as to distract from the real challenges and concerns that particular problems raise. For example, if evidence suggests that interstate and civil conflict in Africa creates risks primarily for Africans' health and livelihoods, and not a breeding ground for terrorists, an emphasis on U.S. counter-terrorism in conflict regions (like Somalia) at the expense of other post-conflict projects are misguided.

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[98] Africa Command: Opportunity for Enhanced Engagement or the Militarization of U.S.-Africa Relations?:*Hearing before Africa and Global Health Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee*. 110th Congress, 1st Session (2007) (testimony of Kurt Schillinger)

Evidence supporting Shillinger's concerns abounds. Studies and reports by various academics and policy think tanks question the accuracy of rhetoric that names Africa as the next front in the GWOT. In response to the characterization of the Sahel region as an ungoverned space and as the next front in the GWOT, a report published by the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) argues that the Sahara's size and distance from national governments does not mean that it is "ungoverned." Rather, nomadic communities, tribal leaders, and the central government maintain a balance of power over the region. In response to claims that terrorist activity in the region is increasing, the report cites an empirical study undertaken at the War College that finds a steady decline, not increase, in violence by Muslim groups in the Sahara since 2001.[99] The SSI study and others find that (a) radical Islam is not on the rise and fundamentalist Islam in Africa has not, historically, been associated with anti-Western ideology or violence, (b) poverty is not linked to radical Islamic movements in Africa; most of the poorest nations in Africa are not home to radical religious ideologies, Islamic or otherwise, (c) political movements in the Sahel are primarily concerned with local economic and social grievances, not an ideology of transnational jihad. To the degree that this identity is being used, it seems to be a publicity strategy that is applied when a group's visibility has declined, not a motivating ideology.[100]

Not only does the construction of Africa as an ungoverned space obscure nuanced analyses of poverty and insecurity in Africa, it may actually serve to worsen insecurity in regions where the United States is engaged in counter-terrorism operations. Several reports express concern that the U.S. exacerbates instability in these regions when it identifies areas as havens for international terrorists (especially Al Qaeda) and then responds militarily. The presence of the U.S. in, for example, the Sahel may be seen by African Muslims as evidence of U.S.

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[99] *Ibid*, 38
[100] See ICG, "Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?." Africa Report 92. March 31, 2005; Berschinski; Lubeck

antagonism toward Islam generally. [101] The tendency of the U.S. to associate local Islamist

groups, such as Algeria's Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), whose grievances

and objectives had been internal and national, with Al Qaeda, paradoxically results in creating or

extending their association with international terrorists, increasing their visibility, relevance, and

access to resources. [102] The resulting U.S. counter-terrorism activities are said to interfere with the

trade routes on which many Saharans' livelihoods depend.   Such disruption, with no provision

for alternatives, creates the potential for widespread economic and social instability in the

region. [103] Finally, an emphasis on military responses to poverty and violence in Africa leads to

the neglect of health and development needs, attention to which would likely aid in long-term

stability. [104] This evidence raises serious concerns as to the policy analyses that are currently

guiding AFRICOM and the potential consequences of AFRICOM's actions on the continent.

A poststructuralist discourse analysis of foreign policy makes the ontological claim that

identity constructions and policy discourses are in a mutually constitutive relationship. Identities

are not fixed, but rather are constructed and contested in policy discourses, media coverage, and

popular culture. Foreign policy depends on an account of actors' identities in the process of

articulating policies and legitimating some policy choices over others. As Hansen emphasizes,

policy discourses tend to present identities as static and objectively present, and this has

important political consequences.

> Those formulating foreign policy usually present identities as though they were objectively given,
> but these instantiations of objectivity are themselves necessarily reproductive performances.
> Foreign policies are articulated to legitimate particular actions, thereby installing and constraining
> agency. Politicians, editors, and influential commentators construct a collective 'we' as the

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[101] See Lubeck

[102] Berschinski, 32. Berschinski argues that the GSPC's decision to publicly associate itself with Al-Qaeda (calling itself Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) does not signify a significant shift in ideology or objectives, but rather is a response to the geopolitics of the American GWOT. He argues that U.S. rhetoric made it strategic for GSPC to identify itself with Al-Qaeda to increase it notoriety and relevance at a time when it was losing membership and resources.

[103] ICG, 35

[104] See ICG, Berschinski, Lubeck

> foundation for 'our' policy—and themselves as authoritative voices speaking on behalf thereof—and this 'we' has crucial political consequences for who is addressed and who can gain a voice and a presence.[105]
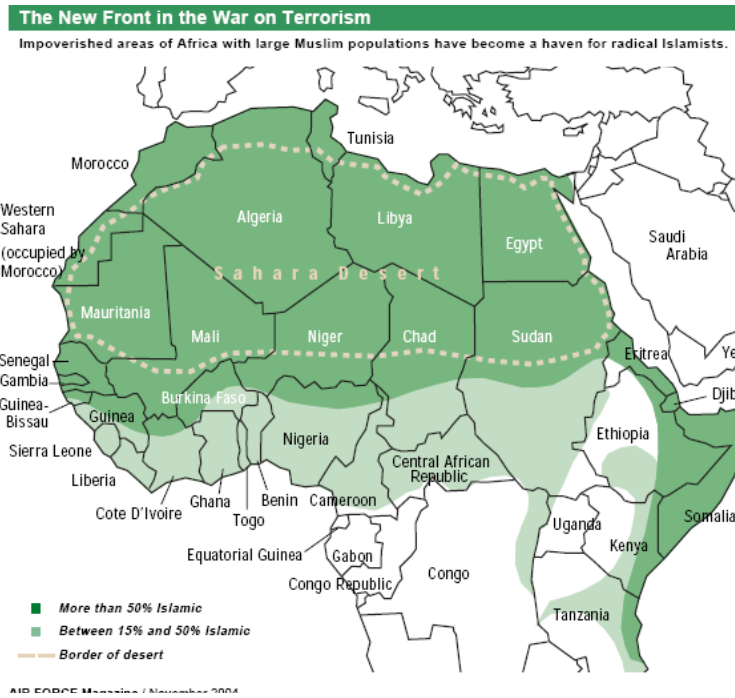
The authoritative presentation of a group's common interests, needs or threats is an important element of policy articulation, and itself contributes to the production and reproduction of identities. This has important consequences for individuals' and groups' political agency within policy discourse. As we have seen in the example of AFRICOM, constructions of Africa as an ungoverned space and of the United States as a means of stability and governance have often served to silence African opposition, to the degree that Africa is understood as politically immature and the United States as a political authority. Likewise, linking AFRICOM to the GWOT, which is waged to protect the collective American "we" from the threat of terrorism, limits the voices of American opponents to AFRICOM by situating them outside the "we" that is committed to stopping terrorists.

A post-structuralist discourse analysis, then, reframes the site of resistance and contestation in foreign policy. AFRICOM, and U.S. foreign policy toward Africa in general, is not simply a product of analyzing strategic interests, risks, and objectives, but rather deploys and redeploys an understanding of an African identity and its relationship to the U.S.. The political significance of this claim lies in the realization that contesting foreign policy is not just a matter of "correcting" facts about the people and places at which policy is directed or of "correcting" a U.S. articulation of its own strategic interests. Rather, another important site of resistance lies in identifying the ways in which identities are mobilized to silence some voices and privilege others. It is my hope that studies like this one can contribute to an intentional effort to identify the ways in which identity constructions are deployed in policy discourses and, in so doing, redress the ways in which these deployments silence political actors.

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[105] Hansen, 211-212

Appendix

Figure 1:

The New Front in the War on Terrorism

Impoverished areas of Africa with large Muslim populations have become a haven for radical Islamists.

Source: *Air Force Magazine*. November 2004. http://www.afa.org/magazine/Nov2004/1104sahara.asp

Figure 2:

Source: United States European Command. http://www.aei.org/docLib/200404141_wald.pdf

Figure 3:
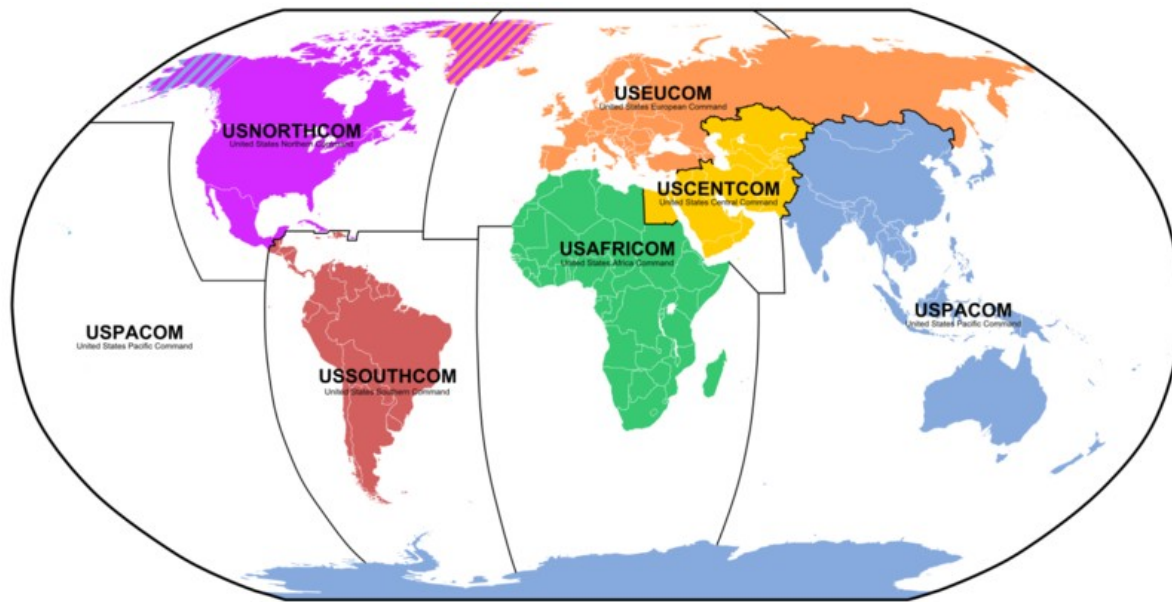
Source: Wikipedia. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/e/e6/20070919163923!
Unified_Combatant_Commands_map.png

Figure 4:

Source: Source: United States European Command. http://www.aei.org/docLib/200404141_wald.pdf

Figure 5:

Source: United States Department of Defense. ftp://ftp.jhuapl.edu/nsadrethink/121905/121905_WhelanNotes.pdf

Figure 6:

Source: United States Department of Defense. http://www.dtic.mil/india/2005solic/rosengard.ppt

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