

A photograph of Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a dark tie. His arms are crossed. In the background, the dome of the United States Capitol building is visible under a clear blue sky.

**THE UNITED STATES  
IN AFRICA:  
A POLICY OF  
DESTABILIZATION TO  
RESTITABILIZATION?**



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*The prevailing situation of strong authoritarian regimes coupled with weak civil society in the Middle East is changing.*

## The United States, The West and Hostility

The United States of America usually considers their stance on policy as being shared by their Western allies and believe that those shared views are universal. Freedom, democracy, free market, liberalism and human rights are selected values whose definitions are necessarily universal. States with different views are not necessarily foes but are not quite friends to the US administration. Opposition usually exists on a case-by-case basis but many states simply consider themselves as non-aligned entities. Defining democracy in China or Venezuela is quite different from the definition in Egypt, Tunisia, South Sudan, Togo, or Zimbabwe. The problem becomes complex when considering existing threats to America: even more complex in cases of suspected threats.

Resulting from failing to understand the complexity of the Arab and the African citizen's aspirations, America's pragmatism was primarily focused on extracting oil, gas, minerals, and unprocessed goods from those countries even with the latest version of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Ensuring stability is directly correlated with securing no lapse in the US energy supplies. Emerging economies, primarily the five BRICS nations and other newcomers such as Turkey have opened alternative opportunities to Arab and African economies. While reviewing the past development agenda of Western powerhouses in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), fear and mistrust are commonly acknowledged as the consequence of not taking into consideration people's democratic aspirations. Weak decisionmakers are entangled in the dilemma of supporting Western interests on one side, including US strategic objectives

in order to stay in power, or supporting national interests and incurring the risk of becoming an enemy of the United States on the other side. The unreachable target of 0.7 per cent of GDP as rich countries' contribution to development since 1960 is irrelevant in convincing authoritarian states to align themselves to the American way of doing business in security, democracy, and economic development.

As a result, US strategy is entrenched in a series of short-term concerns based on a clear worldwide power discipline. America's Western-centric understanding of problems was based on a fundamental confusion, which generated a misconception in US relations with others. For many countries in the MENA region, the root of this misunderstanding was based on a simplistic and concocted statement: Muslims and Islam were simply hostile to the West. This ill-advised approach implemented by past US diplomatic thinking bypassed the

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complex and volatile emerging questioning of poor governance in the MENA and SSA regions. The special support of America to Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Egypt should not overlook the ongoing dual and selective destabilizing-re-stabilizing process taking place as a follow-up to the "Arab spring". People are beginning to ask fundamental questions of the Western support to authoritarian rulers.

Hostility toward the US and the West in general may improve as long as

the fragile balance between Arab and African citizens' democratic aspirations becomes compatible with US interests. Any increasing division may lead to a new role of US centralized military command dedicated to each specific region. It is in this context that AFRICOM's role should be revisited. The role of institutionalized media in identifying real enemies as well as creating fake, virtual US enemies for US national consumption may have an adverse effect on the convergence process.

## Tintus Syndrome versus Development

With a severe budget deficit in the US, ending direct intervention abroad and sharing the burden with both existing and new allies became unavoidable. America is seeking to minimize its commitment while trying to get the maximum rewards in terms of strategic and economic interests. It is of utmost importance to "share" the vision of a "common enemy" with disrupted countries.

In a volatile world, America is looking for allies and not only traditional ones from the Second World War. So who is responsible for US security? It is no longer the US alone but countries whose rulers have accepted that their vision must be compatible with US security, strategic and economic goals. It may happen with the support of the local military structure benefiting from US knowledge through training and Ethiopia and Djibouti are good examples of this. This is a smart way to deal with the "agile threats" and improve US national security. Nevertheless, there is a serious problem: through the globalization of its security agenda, America's national security is partly dependent on the "appropriate" control of the reliability of new allies. For example, could Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and South Sudan promote this alien agenda

**MENA REGION**  
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*In a volatile world, America is looking for allies and not only traditional ones from the Second World War, but proactively solicited as well as unsolicited states.*

before the interest of the people? It is exactly this contradiction that has led America in the past to support autocratic regimes and rulers. The same contradiction pushed America to strengthen its military support of new allies as a means to ensure security in foreign countries as a last resort. This support is not compatible with a systemic authoritarian democracy learning process if the US administration systematically resists and counterbalances those who are against a "Western, liberal democratic order."

Essentially America has a three-track approach to foreign policy:

- To support democratic change;
- To promote status quo besides autocratic regimes;
- Not to object to the lack of truth of election ballots in autocratic regimes.

Exceptions are also numerous, which can make US foreign policy hard to read. America may not always question "leaders" of autocratic regimes relying on external activities with a governing oligarchy hijacking a large part of their country's wealth while simultaneously destabilizing any support to democratic, indigenous, official and alternative parties. Manipulating institutionalized media is required to promote anti-democratic values as well as democracies of parody. Democratic opposition and civil society movements have been seriously undermined in countries where America's strategic interests such as energy related goods

might be threatened. The TINTUS syndrome (There is No Threat to US) could become a blackmail instrument in diplomacy.

It was also acknowledged by many African leaders that a rapid and hasty democratization process in weakly industrialized countries does not favor development and usually destabilizes countries. Democratization becomes a destabilization re-stabilization process which does not oppose the strategic interests and objectives of the US. South Sudan, Egypt, and Libya are in the middle of the process of finding the right balance, which differs from one country to another.

The US role in MENA states appears to lack consistency and innovation as it was based on a one-size-fits-all approach and sometimes, surprisingly, on a day-to-day "strategic" vision, especially in Tunisia and Egypt. It may result in ineffectiveness with too many exceptions in terms of support to

non-democratic and authoritarian rulers.  
**Remodeling "Africom" in Africa**

Created in 2007 by President George W. Bush and headquartered in Stuttgart in Germany, AFRICOM is supposed to "oversee security, enhance strategic cooperation, build partnerships, support non-military missions, and conduct military operations as necessary" in 53 African countries with the exception of Egypt.

The 2008 change of Headquarters to Africa never materialized till now as all African Heads of State were opposed except Liberia. It is difficult to ensure peace and security of the American and African people and at the same time promote common development goals in Africa. Because of a recurrent past rush approach of the US and a lack of respect for Africans decision makers' position (African Union Commission's position on Côte d'Ivoire and Libya), one could highlight a common



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*The new competition of emerging economies has opened alternative opportunities to Arab and African countries*

unwritten African stance: Africa leaders' backing of the US military way of doing business on the continent often leads to terrorist attacks or various forms of destabilization. Somalia, Kenya, and Nigeria are recent examples. This is not hostility but just an understandable adoption of caution.

One of the nine unified Combatant commands of the United States Armed Forces (USAFRICOM) is unfortunately called AFRICOM because of its focus on Africa region. Rebuilding trust and confidence with AFRICOM supposes a split in the US military command for Africa into USAFRICOM and AFRICOM:

- US AFRICOM is clearly the US foreign policy strategy in Africa including Egypt; and

- AFRICOM, a joint America-African Union Security Strategy including Morocco, presently not a member of the AU.

Implementing a new security paradigm supposes the adoption of new concepts such as networked nations embedded in a system of proximity security in support of collective capability to mutual influence.

While considering its effectiveness in Africa, AFRICOM should consider the emerging Afrocentric perspective of African leaders including those who are not leading under democratic rules. After the successful political transition which took place in Tunisia, America should understand that the "chief" and the "power" in the respective MENA and SSA regions are the people. Besides competition, there is a real chance to cooperate in accessing energy resources,

fighting against terrorism, preventing infectious diseases, preference for accountable and responsible governance, fighting corruption system and promoting transparency, regulated free markets and, after all, peace. These are all requirements for budding opportunities to grow.

### **Ending Hostility toward the US**

The US can end hostility by ending this suspicious war. From an Afrocentric perspective and in light of the above, the US could have promoted a more proactive joint "peace corps" as a support to MENA and SSA people in their search for freedom and democracy. US and Western interference might be reduced to a minimum, and eventually solicited by the African Union. Renewed trust may be the real winner. ■