

Protection versus Stabilisation? US Africa Command as a Laboratory for Future US Military Activities

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It has been argued that the new security challenges perceived to be emerging from terrorist networks, fragile states, global health and environmental risks in the global South require new thinking amongst Western policymakers: Remaining in the comfort zone of traditional departmental duties would mean ignoring the scope of the uncertainties and would make these departments appear unfit and anachronistic. As a consequence, new arrangements and tools have been established in many Western foreign policy portfolios culminating in “whole-of-government”, “comprehensive” and “inter-agency” approaches towards the regulation of “undergoverned” social spaces. These moves have not only expanded the responsibility to intervene but have also further obscured the boundary between civilian and military logics of governance. Mobilising objectives of human security on the one hand and stabilisation of “undergoverned” spaces on the other, Western militaries have recently widened their engagement into civilian terrains including humanitarian assistance and development. Through a reading of the different rationalities of stabilisation and whole-of-government approaches the paper problematises the military’s increasing involvement in issues of governance. The argument will be illustrated through a discussion of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) that continues to be envisioned as a laboratory for future US military activities. Even though AFRICOM officials have recently re-emphasized the command’s focus on traditional military activities, AFRICOM symbolises the reorientation of the US military through its ambition of interagency integration, its pursuit of humanitarian and development activities as well as its proposed engagement in non-conflict environments. The papers discusses the implications of te expansion of military activities for both civilian agencies and the targeted societies on the African continent.