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Vanguard (Lagos)

OPINION

21 November 2007

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Ochereome Nnanna
Lagos

VANGUARD

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I am normally a fan of the United States of America. In fact, just this time a year ago, I was invited by the State Department, among nine other journalists, to tour the US, understand its system and processes better and to observe the mid-term elections that renewed the mandates of members Congress and some state officials

. But over this matter of plans by the United States to establish what it calls the Africa Command or Africom in the Gulf of Guinea, it is time to call for deep caution and to agree with Nigerian officials that we should take the American initiative with a pinch of salt. On the surface of it, Africom appears like a good idea, at least going by the words of its deputy military operations officer, Vice Admiral Robert T. Moeller.

According to him: "The command will allow the United States to do more with our African partners when it makes sense to do so and when it's in their interest to do so."

Conceding that the scheme is viewed in several concerned quarters as a ploy to militarise Africa, Moeller declared: "that is definitely not the case". One would wonder aloud when the US suddenly became interested in partnering with African regimes to defend interests of African countries. Throughout the fourteen years that the Liberian civil war lasted, America stood aloof, while Nigeria, gravely concerned for the stability of the region, spent huge amounts of human and material resources to end the war and restore peace. Liberia, regarded as America's unofficial 51st state, did not seem important enough for the US to go beyond its cosmetic posturing over the crisis.

Now, the world's number one superpower has suddenly become an enthusiastic African military partner. And what is responsible for this new mood? Good old oil, that's what.

The Gulf of Guinea has emerged as the second largest pool of commercial petroleum resources in the world, next only to the Gulf of Persia and its territorial environs. In fact, it has recently surpassed the Persian Gulf as America's highest supplier of crude oil. Right now, three major countries share the resources of this zone viz: Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe as well as Equatorial Guinea, because of the contiguity of their marine boundaries.

Perhaps under-standably, the President of Sao Tome, Fradique de Menezes has displayed open fear of insecurity. Having suddenly come into great oil wealth with great prospects for future prosperity, Sao Tome first approached Nigeria for friendship (or at least, it was enthusiastic when an overture for friendship was offered by Nigeria, with which it now shares a joint economic zone). Nigeria, under its former President, Olusegun Obasanjo, actually sent troops to flush out the leaders of the July 16th 2003 coup d'etat in that country, an event that took place while de Menezes was on an official tour to Nigeria. This apparently increased de Menezes' sense of insecurity.

Perhaps he had reasoned that Nigeria's ability to so easily do away with

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military interventionists in his country was an open demonstration of what our country can do if it decides to have a bigger bite of the oil resources beyond its current fair share. Months later in November 2004, de Menezes took a trip to the United States and asked for America's protection. In an instant, a pact was agreed to allow American military presence in the small archipelago.

Not satisfied with only a small piece of the new oil destination of the world, America stepped up its formation of the Africom, making open moves to extend the kind of cohabitation it enjoys with Sao Tome and Principe to Nigeria. However, Nigeria does not have Sao Tome's security fears. We are the dominant force in West Africa. We do not need America's Africom.

We are not under threat by any of our neighbours. We are also great neighbours because we are not only a peaceable country, we are actually protective of smaller sister countries, a favour that is often goes unreciprocated or even appreciated.

Unlike America, Nigeria helps other African countries without counting the cost or calculating the economic gains. We don't even need the Africom for our engagement with the Niger Delta militants because it is essentially a protest rebellion. But if we should need help, it is up to us to design modalities for acquiring it and where we want to get it from.

The kind of "partnership" a US military base will offer in the Gulf of Guinea will not be different from the well-known American traditional do-gooding which eventually sparks off instability, radical regimes, wars, revolutions and attritional violence.

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THOSE who have discovered the writings of John Perkins, the bestselling author of *The Economic Hitman* and *The Secret History of the American Empire* will agree with us when we observe that primary interests of American corporatocracy usually drives these military "partnerships" that eventually end up causing instability.

The story is the same- from Panama to Iran, from the Philippines to Iraq, American corporate colonialism, which has been thoroughly laid bare by Perkins, has left a long trail of gunsmoke and blood.

Let us watch it. This "partnership" is a Greek gift!

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