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US POWER DYNAMICS IN AFRICA

A critical geopolitical reading of US security policies
in Kenya in the post-9/11 era

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Course Code: FKV02:3
Spring Term 2016
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Abstract

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 have had profound effects on global perceptions of security and threats. The ensuing global War on Terror has increasingly been used by the US as a pretext to wage a 'global war', far outside the borders of the American homeland. As a result of this, Africa has grown in strategic value, with the US increasingly engaging with states like Kenya with the aim of disrupting and dismantling terrorist networks in the region. This new form of war has a distinct geopolitical nature that when examined could provide insights into the underlying aims and motives of US foreign policy. The aim of this study is therefore to gauge whether America's increased interest and engagement with Kenya can be explained through a critical geopolitical perspective. In doing so this study analysed official US national security strategies, reports and policy documents and also utilized an analytical framework that centred on six key concepts of critical geopolitics; *Geostrategic discourse*, *Geopolitical discourse and the discursive process*, *Geopolitical vision and subject*, *Geopolitical traditions*, *Geopolitical culture* and *Geographical imagi-nations*. Furthermore the analysis was divided into three main sections; ideology & hegemony, identity & difference and space. The results of this study show that US engagement in Kenya can be understood through a critical geopolitical perspective. Not only has the US framed the nation as strategically important for safeguarding American interests, but by categorizing Kenya as a vital partner that shares the same values and goals the US has justified their increased engagement and interest in the country.

Key Words: [United States, Kenya, Security, 9/11, War on Terror, Critical geopolitics]

Characters: 76,618

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1. Introduction

“Africa is the battlefield of tomorrow, today”

–Major General James Linder

Africa has for centuries attracted the interests of external actors whose activities have had decisive and long lasting effects on the dynamics of the continent. With vast economic, political and strategic opportunities on offer, global powers jockeying for influence have used the continent to maintain hegemonic structures aimed at supplementing their own national interests. The Colonial era saw the continent lie at the centre of a global scramble between superpowers vying for a toehold in the region. Overseas colonies played a key role during the two World Wars, not only by serving as military bases but by providing the vital man power and resources needed to sustain the war-machines.¹ During World War I for instance, East Africa was a site of fierce fighting between the Germans and British. Both sides recruited heavily from local populations and the fighting had catastrophic economic and social impacts that lasted well beyond the wars end.² Nevertheless, African’s strategic value was not fully realised until the Cold War period, when the security opportunities the continent provided played a vital role in the ideologically charged politicking that defined the era. With the international community galvanized between the East-West dichotomy, geopolitical considerations had an increasingly significant role in shaping the many strategies implemented in Africa.³

The United States (US), while relatively inactive during the Colonial era, had an understandably more decisive role in Africa at the height of the Cold War. With the rise and spread of Communism the perceived principal threat to national security at that time, US interests in the Africa centred on containment and the promotion of Western ideals and norms.⁴ However, with the ending of the Cold War and the collapse of a global superpower (USSR), US interests and their dominant realpolitik stance in Africa began to wane. While the post-Cold War era was characterized by US strategic disengagement from the continent, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent global ‘War on Terror’ (GWO’T) has once again reinvigorated the relevance of Africa for US security interests.⁵

¹ Olawale, I. & Sköns, E. “Introduction”, in Olawale Ismail & Elisabeth Sköns (eds.) *Security Activities of External Actors in Africa*, SIPRI, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 1-2.

² Koller, Christian. 2008. “The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War.” *Immigrants & Minorities* 26 (1– 2): March/ July 112.

³ Schmidt, E. “Africa”, in Immerman, Richard H. & Goedde, Petra (red.), *The Oxford handbook of the Cold War*, 1. ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 265-266.

⁴ Ibid, p. 267.

⁵ Sköns, E. “The United States”, in in Olawale Ismail & Elisabeth Sköns (eds.) *Security Activities of External Actors in Africa*, SIPRI, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 105.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

With the emergence of a new exceptional threat (in this case transnational terrorism) that risks global security, geopolitical considerations have once again re-emerged as a significant component of US security and foreign policy decisions.⁶ With its global-scale, zero-sum character and its framing of an extremist threat that rejects Western liberal values, academics have likened the current GWoT with the Cold War.⁷ While this comparison may be misleading, contemporary US engagement in Africa has tended to mirror similar endeavours in the past, specifically with regard to the US's propensity to pursue their interests by proxy.⁸ With the reevaluation of Africa's role in the GWoT the US has increasingly sought to engage and foster ties with strategically important countries in the continent. Kenya is one such country that has received increased attention from the US and has remained a strong and vital ally for them in the region.⁹ While US engagement has taken several forms, the formulation and endowment of specific spaces with strategic importance has become a mainstay of US foreign practices in contemporary global discourses.

Building on these insights, this thesis will focus on US-Kenyan relations in the post-9/11 era with regard to security.¹⁰ In doing so I intend to adopt a critical geopolitical perspective that aims at understanding the formation of US foreign policy and how it has been translated into foreign policy actions in Kenya. The intention of this thesis is to understand what factors are considered when formulating foreign policy for specific regional spaces and how these spaces are given importance through geopolitical discourses. As such, the research question that will underpin this thesis reads as follows;

Q: How can US foreign policy security strategies and actions implemented in Kenya be explained and understood through a critical geopolitical perspective?

Ultimately, the aim of the thesis is to gauge Kenya's strategic importance for the US and whether this can be understood through critical geopolitical considerations.

⁶ Ingram, A. & Dodds, K. "Spaces of Security and Insecurity: Geographies of the War on Terror", in Dodds, K., and Ingram, A. (eds.) (2009) *Spaces of Security and Insecurity: New Geographies of the War on Terror*. Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 2-3.

⁷ Buzan, Barry. 'Will the "Global War on Terrorism" Be the New Cold War?' *International Affairs* 82 (2006): 1101.

⁸ Prestholdt, Jeremy. 2011. "Kenya, the United States, and Counterterrorism". *Africa Today* 57 (4). Indiana University Press: p. 4.

⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁰ Security in this sense includes traditional notions but also considers contemporary forms of security that includes human security.

1.2 Relevance

The 9/11 attacks not only highlighted the transnational threat terrorist groups posed but also the global reach the GWO'T has in dismantling and countering that threat. Africa and specifically East Africa has become an increasingly active arena within the GWO'T. Kenya has faced a growing challenge posed by the al-Shabaab terrorist group which has strongholds in the neighbouring Somalia. In the past 5 years Kenya has been hit by two large scale terrorist attacks, one that took place at a shopping centre in Nairobi that killed 67 people and another that targeted a university situated near the Kenya-Somalia border, where 148 students were massacred. Both attacks were organized and carried out by al-Shabaab, who are associated with al Qaeda. As such US interests in what has become the 'African front' in the GWO'T have increased considerably, making this a relevant study.¹¹

Plenty of research has been dedicated to how the role of identity formations and narratives have been used justify US policies in the GWO'T, but little focus has been placed on the African context. Understanding and explaining foreign policy strategies implemented in Kenya is therefore a relatively unexplored area of study. The scope of this thesis is also relevant, as it considers US security related interests, actions and activities in Kenya in the post-9/11 era. Here focus will be placed on how the US have framed their interests in Kenya since September 11 2001 and how these have been translated into action up until present time. The value here lies in that US activities and interest in Kenya, and Africa as a whole, have grown significantly in the past few years, and the majority of previous research in the field has failed to cover these new developments. As such a more contemporary analysis may provide new insights into the field of geopolitical reasoning in global affairs.

Furthermore, the application of a critical geopolitical perspective offers a unique reading of US engagement in Kenya centred on power structures, identity formations and the social construction of space. As such the research topic fulfils both the inter-disciplinary criterion as it is cumulative in nature, in that it builds off and contributes to existing research, but also the extra- disciplinary criterion, as it caters to a wider societal appeal, with regard to its economic, political and social relevance.

¹¹ Qureshi Asim "War on Terror": the African Front" *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. Vol. 3, Iss. 1, 2010.

2. Theoretical Framework

Geopolitics is a concept that has occupied several spheres within global politics. It has been invoked by academics, politicians and military strategists alike and has taken various forms and been used for various purposes. It is understandable therefore that there has been a significant degree of contention surrounding defining the concept and fully grasping its contents.¹² Nevertheless geopolitics can be understood as both a scholarly and political practice, where meaning is constructed in the academic community and within particular political contexts.¹³ In this sense geopolitics builds on ‘situated knowledge’ and considers how states interact and compete with each other but also how they view and give meaning to global spaces within a specific context and time; simply put, the “essence of geopolitical analysis is the relation of international political power to the geographical setting”.¹⁴ While considered a ‘travelling theory’, the study of geopolitics can nevertheless be coalesced down to two distinct readings; *classical geopolitics* and *critical geopolitics*.¹⁵ A full comprehension of critical geopolitics requires an understanding of its classical roots and as such the following sections will highlight the historical contexts and formation of the two fields as well as outline the main tenets that underpin them (Fig 1). Furthermore a clarification of the role of discourse in critical geopolitics will also be explained.

2.1 Classical Geopolitics

While geopolitical considerations have once again become significant within political discourses, it is by no means a contemporary theory. In 1899 the Swedish political scientist, Rudolph Kjellén, was the first person to use the term ‘geopolitics’ to denote the interconnected nature of politics and the physical earth, arguing for the states organic nature.¹⁶ Geopolitics sought to draw meaning from the new global conditions of space, power and technology at that time and built off ideas of social Darwinism.

Drawing on this framework, Harold J. Mackinder and Nicholas John Spykman sought to expand the scope and clarify the geopolitical reasoning present in power politics at that time. Mackinder’s *Heartland theory* and Spykman’s *Rimland theory* divided the world into distinct geographic spaces that were assigned significance according to strategic attributes. Central to the

¹² Moisiso, S. “Geopolitics/Critical Geopolitics”, in Agnew, John A., Mamadouh, Virginie, Secor, Anna & Sharp, Jo, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Geography*, John Wiley & Sons, 2015, p. 220.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Cohen, Saul B. (2003) *Geopolitics of the World System*, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, p. 24.

¹⁵ Dodds, Klaus, *Global geopolitics: a critical introduction*, Pearson Prentice Hall, Harlow, England, 2005, p. 28.

¹⁶ Ó Tuathail, Gearóid, *Critical geopolitics: the politics of writing global space*, Routledge, London, 1996, p.35.

consolidation of hegemonic power was the control over specific land areas (the Heartland/Rimland) as control over those enabled full control over the 'World Island' (Europe and Asia) which was considered the centre of power for the rest of the world at that time.¹⁷ The formation of these spatial binaries outlined two prevalent tenets of classical geopolitics; the Western/Europe-centric nature of the theory and the importance of command over territory and natural resources to a state's position on the global map.¹⁸

Classical geopolitics during the Second World War was closely associated with the German school and the Nazi Party's policy of 'Lebensraum'. Here, territorial expansion was justified under the hierarchical nature of certain superior/inferior cultures. The Nazi Party considered Germany a vibrant and dynamic country that deserved to expand beyond its borders, claiming that territory should be gained and 'cleansed' of inferior races so that it could be made suitable for German settlement.¹⁹ A new geopolitical thinking was however ushered in during the Cold War and saw geopolitics become synonymous with the global contest between the Soviet Union and the US for control over strategic resources and territorial gains. Spatial boundaries were once again constructed around geopolitical and geostrategic regions, with the aim of creating spheres of influence. US strategies utilized during the Cold War were informed by realist traditions²⁰ which aimed at the containment of the Soviet threat and the restoration of hegemonic stability.²¹

Strategies used during the Cold War-era underpinned many of the central tenets of classical geopolitical theory. The battle between the two superpowers hinged on national strategies formed and justified within a geopolitical context. An example here can be taken from US engagement in so-called 'rimland' states that surrounded the Soviet Union, such as Vietnam and Korea, which the US aimed to control in order to contain the spread of communism. While understandings of classical geopolitics have shifted, the issues of power (influence) and space (territory) have been a common recurring theme since the theory's formation. Central to classical geopolitical theory is understanding that power is rooted in the physical nature of the world. As such, spatial boundaries (sea/land powers, Heartland/Rimland), as well as resource potential determine the strategic worth of a state and would therefore influence national strategies implemented.²² This understanding was implemented throughout Africa during the Cold War, where the US considered countries,

¹⁷ Flint, Colin, *Introduction to geopolitics*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 17-18 & 21-22.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 18.

¹⁹ Ó Tuathail (1996), p. 29.

²⁰ Realist traditions in this case references a system where states were the only relevant actor in world affairs and they continuously sought to maximize their power at all costs.

²¹ Agnew, John A., *Geopolitics: re-visioning world politics*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London, 2003, p. 109-113.

²² Mackubin Thomas Owens, "In Defense of Classical Geopolitics," *Naval War College Review* (Autumn 1999), p. 62-66.

such as Angola and Zaire, as ‘geopolitical prizes’ and sought to foster allegiances with them, with the underlying aim of containing communism.²³

2.2 Critical Geopolitics

Developed during the thawing and eventual collapse of the Cold War, critical geopolitics aimed to provide an alternative explanation to power relations in an era lacking the superpower rivalry that had dominated political discourses for decades. Critical geopolitics argues that the classical approach occupies an overly simplified reading of geopolitics based on traditional understandings of statecraft and hegemonic power relations. The critical approach provides an alternative way of viewing geopolitics, whereby instead of understanding geography’s effect on politics, the politics of geography is examined. In this sense, critical geopolitics considers how “geographical discourses, practices and perspectives have measured, described and assessed the world”.²⁴ This approach rejects classic ideas of pre-given ‘geographical’ truths but instead considers geopolitics as an inherently ideological and politicized form of analysis. Here, focus lies not on describing territories, borders and actors but on how these categories are socially constructed and given meaning through political actions.²⁵ A clear example of this can be seen during the Cold War with the West depicting those behind the ‘iron curtain’ as savage, a threat to peace and part of an evil empire.²⁶

The origins of critical geopolitics has been associated with the work of academic thinkers such as John Agnew, Klaus Dodds, Simon Dalby and Gearóid Ó Tuathail, who pioneered the notion that world politics should be understood on an interpretive basis. Central to this approach is its discursive disposition where “intellectuals of statecraft “spatialize” international politics in such a way as to represent it as a “world” characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas”.²⁷ This is primarily achieved through the formation of images of, for instance, the state, identity and culture that are framed within discourses of territory and power. As such, critical geopolitics does not provide a neutral understanding of world affairs but instead can be employed as a discourse where territorial spaces are given meaning by specific world powers to justify their foreign policies. Here the GWoT can be used as an example, as it has been argued that its representation as a crusade of good over evil has justified the use of overwhelming firepower on

²³ Kraxberger, Brennan M. (2005) The United States and Africa: Shifting Geopolitics in an “Age of Terror” (Electronic Version). *Africa Today*, 52(1), 4768, p. 51.

²⁴ Dodds (2005), p. 28.

²⁵ Ó Tuathail (1996), p. 29.

²⁶ Flint (2006), p. 14.

²⁷ Ó Tuathail, G. & Agnew, J. (1992) ‘Geopolitics and discourse: Practical geopolitical reasoning in American foreign policy’ *Political Geography* 11(2): 192.

specific geopolitical spaces, i.e. Afghanistan and Iraq, in the name of 'global order'.²⁸ Discourses in this sense are not simply speech or written statements, but a resource or set of capabilities that allows readers to construct what they have read into an organized meaningful whole.²⁹ Further discussion on the role of discourse in critical geopolitics will be addressed in the following section of this thesis.

Another central tenet of critical geopolitics is how power relates to geography. Often considered to be an innocent product of nature, geography in this sense is instead considered to be a product of struggle between competing actors over the power to organize and occupy space. This approach considers therefore how 'global political space' is produced and scripted by dominant intellectuals, institutions and practitioners of statecraft.³⁰ What this highlights is a shift from the classical approach which considers geopolitics as a product solely of a state's intellectual elite, to an approach which considers different forms of geopolitics. Understanding these discourses and in turn how they influence political action can be problematic but Ó Tuathail & Dalby have developed a useful typology which helps clarify this. The authors describe three main spheres or ways of reasoning that informs critical geopolitical theory; *formal geopolitics*, *practical geopolitics* and *popular geopolitics*.³¹ Formal geopolitical reasoning considers the body of work written by academics and specialists of geopolitics and includes think tanks, academic institutions, and nongovernmental organizations that contribute to the field. Practical geopolitics encompasses the actors and entities of formal statecraft and involves the everyday reasoning of political leaders and civil servants in justifying foreign policy decisions. Finally, popular geopolitics considers the representation of global political space found in popular culture, such as cartoons films and novels.³²

Critical geopolitics provides a useful way to understand and analyse foreign policy decisions and while the field is board, three central themes that underpin the approach can be highlighted. Firstly, critical geopolitics considers the link between hegemony and ideology, more specifically it focuses on how hegemonic discourses are constructed and used as an ideological device to legitimize political actions. Secondly, the critical approach considers how identities are constructed along 'we' and 'them' boundaries, simplifying understandings of global politics by clarifying what is good and evil, right and wrong, us and them. This has become increasingly relevant in the post-9/11 era with the formation of geographical labels such as the 'axis of evil'

²⁸ Flint (2006), p. 185.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 193.

³⁰ Ó Tuathail (1996), p. 146.

³¹ Ó Tuathail, Gearoid, and Simon Dalby. 1998, Introduction; Rethinking Geopolitics; Towards a Critical Geopolitics, In *Rethinking Geopolitics*, edited by Gearoid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby, London; Routledge, p. 4.

³² Ibid, p. 5.

which could risk further condemning entire regions as enemies or threats to the US.³³ Finally, critical geopolitics addresses how space (territory) is given meaning and continuously rewritten by world leaders to maintain favourable power dynamics.³⁴

	<i>Classical Geopolitics</i>	<i>Critical Geopolitics</i>
<i>Focus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-Centric & West-Centric; focus on nation-state, borders & resources • Naturally given ‘geographical’ truths • Power rooted in physical nature (Sea/Land power, Heartland/ Rimland) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader perspective; identity, culture & history • Geography is socially constructed • Power is rooted in the spatialization of territory (given meaning through construction of discourses)
<i>Actors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States intellectual elite (formal geopolitics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combination of political elite (formal) and Academics (practical) and Media (popular)
<i>Leading scholars</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rudolph Kjellén, Harold J. Mackinder and Nicholas John Spykman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Agnew, Klaus Dodds, Simon Dalby and Gearóid Ó Tuathail

Fig 1: Central tenets of Classical and Critical Geopolitics

2.3 Discourse in Critical Geopolitics

As stated above, a core element and crucial to the study of geopolitics is the concept of discourses. As such, understanding how discourses are constructed and for what purpose can help in clarifying how they are utilized in critical geopolitics and what effects their formation have on foreign policy decisions. For example, the categorization and framing of Iraq as a member of the ‘Axis of Evil’ could be seen as having been used by the Bush administration to justify further military actions against them. As was highlighted above, discourses in critical geopolitics can be seen as a set of capabilities that are drawn upon by leaders to represent, reimagine or deconstruct perceptions of power in world affairs.³⁵ This process is no longer dominated by the political elite but can be produced by several actors and mediums at different levels of society: as highlighted by the formal, practical and popular forms of geopolitics.

The formation of discourses within critical geopolitics has frequently built off the writings of Michel Foucault, specifically with focus on his work on the relationship between power and

³³ Dodds (2005), p. 217.

³⁴ Ó Tuathail and Dalby (1998) p. 3-6.

³⁵ Ó Tuathail (1996), p. 196.

knowledge.³⁶ Central to this claim is that power is intrinsically connected to knowledge and as such the production of knowledge (through discourse) can be used to maintain and reinforce power structures. Here, geopolitical discourses can be used to explain or justify certain political actions, in so far as the states that construct them have control over the dominant discourse. In this sense, by understanding the dominant conceptions of world affairs, for example how we conceive international security, we can also understand where power lies.³⁷

The US occupies the role of ‘rule writer’ and can be considered a hegemonic power in the international community. As such, those in power have the ability to dictate the geopolitical world order, by defining the central drama (for example security threats), framed through discourses, in international politics.³⁸ By constructing these discourses they are not only declaring facts and statements about the world, but are marking “the site of space/power/knowledge production systems, operations that script the actors, settings, and dramas of global politics in deeply geopoliticized ways”.³⁹ An aim in critical geopolitics is to unpack or deconstruct discourses to understand the underlying assumptions that lie at its foundation. By understanding this, one is able to comprehend representations of the ‘other’, hegemonic practices, geopolitical identities and how space (territory) is given meaning.

³⁶ Müller, M. 2008. ‘Reconsidering the Concept of Discourse for the Field of Critical Geopolitics: Towards Discourse as Language and Practice’. *Political Geography*. Vol: 27, pp. 327.

³⁷ Ó Tuathail, Gearóid. “General Introduction” in Ó Tuathail, Gearóid, Dalby, Simon & Routledge, Paul (red.), *The geopolitics reader*, 2. ed., Routledge, London, 2006 p. 3-4

³⁸ Ó Tuathail (1996), p. 47.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 53.

3. Methodological Framework

The foundational methodological framework of this thesis rests on an in-depth case study, where the empirical focus will be placed solely on US military and security interests and how they have been translated into action in Kenya. To achieve this official documents and speeches will be analysed using a qualitative hermeneutic approach that will be based on a critical geopolitical framework. The following sections will provide an overview of the methodological approach and outline the framework that will serve as the analytical foundation of this thesis. Furthermore a clarification of the material to be analysed will be presented as well as an account for the operationalization of the main research question.

3.1 Case Study

As has been inferred above, this thesis aims to understand Kenya's strategic importance for the US in the post-9/11 era. As such a case study is a suitable methodological choice as it allows an author to undertake an extensive examination aimed at unveiling the "complexity and particular nature of the case in question".⁴⁰ While it may prove suitable, utilizing a case study in a research design requires one to consider issues of reliability and validity. More specifically, one issue that must be reflected on concerns the *external validity* of a case study. Here, the problem lies in whether the findings generated from analysing a single case can be considered representative, in that they can be applied more generally to other cases.⁴¹ In this case, the findings from a case study are very rarely generalizable, which highlights a disadvantages of utilizing this form of method. However, a counterargument to this claim, is that the aim of this study is not to provide generalized conclusions that can be applied broadly, but to generate a thorough reading of a specific case through a particular theoretical lens.⁴² In this case, this thesis proposes to provide a critical geopolitical reading aimed at understanding US security interests in Kenya, the case study therefore being US foreign policy towards Kenya. The findings of this study will be a result of subjective context-based assumptions generated from geopolitical considerations pertinent to the US and Kenya. As such, while not generalizable, the findings from this study will nevertheless contribute to the study of US foreign policy analysis in the post-9/11 era and better understandings of US engagement in Africa.

⁴⁰ Bryman, Alan, *Social research methods*, 4. ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, p. 66.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 69.

⁴² Ibid, p. 71.

Following on, while a case study will allow for an intensive examination, a hermeneutic method will be employed to interpret and analyse the collected material. This approach, is acknowledged as the practice of interpreting texts, documents or actions within the social and historical contexts they were produced in. This method of textual analysis involves the collection and analysis of data that allows for a contextual understanding of texts, where the point of view of the author is considered, to be forged.⁴³ While this approach provides a useful method for interpreting texts, it is necessary to limit its scope, as a wider perspective may deviate from the intended goals of this study. As such the hermeneutic analysis will be conducted within a critical geopolitical framework and applied to the case study in hand.

3.2 “Geopolitics as Culture”

As has been highlighted above, critical geopolitics is a broad field of academia that borrows and contributes to a variety of different disciplines. As such, competing interpretations of terms and concepts within the field have somewhat blurred the lines of conceptual understanding, which has complicated the use of the approach as an analytical tool to understand foreign policy decisions. While a discourse analysis approach is frequently used in this type of study, there has been a tendency for it to “become a catch-all term with only very vague notions of its conceptual underpinnings”.⁴⁴ Ó Tuathail has however endeavoured to conceptualize several key anchoring notions of critical geopolitics aimed at clarifying and providing a framework for analysis, the core of which I employ in this thesis. This framework utilizes elements of discourse analysis but has been modified to be primarily situated within a distinct critical geopolitical understanding. Ó Tuathail’s model of ‘geopolitics as culture’ considers six distinct concepts that anchor around the notion of geopolitics, which will serve as the point of departure for the analysis of this thesis. Here, Ó Tuathail considers *Geostrategic discourse*, *Geopolitical discourse and the discursive process*, *Geopolitical vision and subject*, *Geopolitical traditions*, *Geopolitical culture* and *Geographical imagi-nations* as the six concepts that “concern geopolitical culture or the cultural ways in which dominant institutions [...] make sense of their position in the world and theorize their role within interstate society”.⁴⁵

Geostrategic discourses can be understood as a form of geopolitical discourse, which make specific strategic claims about the material national security interests of the state in question. Central to this concept are the notions of state competition, threats and danger and is closely

⁴³ Ibid, p. 560-561.

⁴⁴ Müller (2008) p. 323.

⁴⁵ Ó Tuathail, G. (2004): Geopolitical Structure and Cultures: Towards a Conceptual Clarity in the Critical Study of Geopolitics. In Tchantouridze, L. (ed.): Geopolitics: Global Problems and Regional Concerns. Centre for Defence and Security Studies, Winnipeg, p. 82.

associated with war fighting, resource scarcity and issues of global insecurity. This form of discourse is situated and produced primarily within national security bureaucracies and can be associated with ideas of 'securitization'. In this sense geo-strategization is a process in which a specific foreign policy issue is framed or constructed to have the necessary national interest qualities that makes it strategic. Competition for a valuable resource may be at stake for instance or the location may significantly affect national security interests. Material self-interest of the state lie at the centre of these discourse which are constructed through speech acts, and can either gain acceptance or be rejected depending on the power structures of the state constructing them.⁴⁶

Ó Tuathail's second central concept, considers geopolitical discourses and the process in which they are constructed. Central here is the role of "intellectuals of statecraft", made up of political leaders and foreign policy elites (practical) and academics who study the tradition (formal). While the former group shapes geopolitical discourse through foreign policy, the latter group's ideas help codify foreign policy perspective or challenge them and articulate new geopolitical visions.⁴⁷ Discourses in this sense can be considered as story-lines about a policy challenge, for example security threats, that are constructed within geographical imaginations, traditions and visions (which will be developed further down). Geopolitical 'scripts' are often utilized to present a specific argument about a policy challenge, framed around key metaphors and specific analogies ('Axis of evil' for example).⁴⁸

Geopolitical traditions which are historical schools of foreign policy theory and practice, are also important to consider as they lie at the foundation of geopolitical thought. Here historical perspectives are considered and are characterized by competing schools of thought and interpretations of a state's position in world affairs. In this case geopolitical traditions include the scholars and academic who have developed geopolitical thinking, be it the German school, Mackinder or Spykman. Every large state can be seen to have geopolitical traditions that have significant effects on the formation of their foreign policy.⁴⁹ US foreign policy in the post 9/11 era can for example be seen to mirror some aspects of their strategies implemented during the Cold War, which in turn borrowed from geopolitical traditions established by Mackinder and Spykman.

Following on, geopolitical visions can also be considered to understand the world's political map. These visions consider what powerful states wish the current world order to look like, by describing and promoting particular ways of seeing how territorial powers are formed. The US had a very clear geopolitical vision after the 9/11 attacks, which focussed on the threat posed by Iraq

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 95-97.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 93.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 94-95.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 88-89.

and Afghanistan, which was then used to justify their invasions despite other countries (Saudi Arabia) being more complicit in the attacks.⁵⁰ A geopolitical vision is a normative world picture or indeed “a wish posing as analysis”.⁵¹ This form of discourse helps to understand how powerful states construct the world political map in ways that conform to their own visions or imaginations. Imaginations considers the binaries constructed around national identities and the specification of boundaries. Here, “a geographical imagination can, thus, be defined as the way in which influential groups in the cultural life of a state define that state and nation within the world.”⁵² This allows us to consider how concepts like ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’ or ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ are formed and framed, which in turn helps us understand how certain images of a state get constructed.⁵³

Finally, Ó Tuathail defines geopolitical culture as a central concept in critical geopolitics, which serves as a link between the other concepts in this analytical framework. Geopolitical culture considers how a state’s geographic location, history and political culture interact to produce a distinct way of viewing the world. US geopolitical culture can be seen as a culmination of its colonial, racial history and its capitalist, internationalist modern form.⁵⁴ The role and ‘mission’ of the state is often expressed through its geopolitical culture. The US for example has a distinct sense of ‘destiny’ in world affairs, often associated with perceptions of danger, security and foreign policy priorities. Here US geopolitical culture is highlighted by its tendency to reconceptualise foreign policy crises within themes that express American norms and values. ‘The homeland of freedom’ and ‘last best hope for mankind’ are phrases often associated with how the US sees itself within the international community and supports their claim of exceptionalism and uniqueness.⁵⁵ A state’s geopolitical culture is formed within the formal, practical and popular realms of geopolitics but also consists of states ‘strategic culture’. Rooted in historical experiences, geography and political and military structures, a state’s strategic culture can be useful in seeking to understand the workings of their security policies and strategies. The US for example can be seen to possess a strategic culture shaped by their unique history, beliefs and values and their ‘way of life’. Countries that share the same norms and values that underpin US geopolitical culture or are close to US allies and their objectives can therefore be seen as strategic for the US.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Dodds (2005), p. 221.

⁵¹ Ó Tuathail (2004): p. 91.

⁵² Ibid, p. 84.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 83-84

⁵⁴ Ó Tuathail, G. “Geopolitics” In, Atkinson, David (red.), *Cultural geography: a critical dictionary of key concepts*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2005, p. 68

⁵⁵ Ó Tuathail (2004): p. 84-86.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 87-88.

Concept	Definition
Geostrategic discourses	Particular discursive speech acts about ‘national security’ and the ‘strategic interests of the state
Geopolitical discourse & the discursive process	The crafting and design of a particular spatial account of international affairs by institutions and practitioners of foreign policy
Geopolitical vision & subject	A normative picture of the world political map and the basic agent shaping global political relations
Geopolitical traditions	Historical schools of foreign policy theory and practice
Geopolitical culture	The culture of knowledge and interpretation of the state as a foreign policy actor in world affairs: institutional setting and communicational culture of foreign policy making
Geographical imagi-nations	Location of a national identity in the world; maps of friends and enemies in the world: assertion of territorial borders, national mission and trans-national collective forces in world affairs: inclusions and exclusions

Fig 2: Concepts for the study of Geopolitics as Culture
Source: Ó Tuathail (2004: 98)

3.3 Operationalization & Material

The sections above have outlined a coherent theoretical (Fig. 1) and analytical (Fig. 2) framework based on critical geopolitical theory. These frameworks provide the primary strategy employed in this thesis to analyse the chosen material and provide a suitable response to the research question at hand. The analysis section will be divided into three main parts. As the aim of this thesis is to undertake a critical geopolitical analysis, these parts correspond to the three main tenets or themes of critical geopolitics that have been highlighted in section 2.2; namely; 1) the link between ideology and hegemony, 2) the construction of identities and difference and, 3) how space (territory) is given meaning. These three categories will provide a platform for structuring the analysis while also addressing the central characteristics of a critical geopolitical reading of US foreign policy.

As the research question highlights, the aim of this study is to understand and show if or how a critical geopolitical analysis can explain US security interests and activities in Kenya. Important here is to highlight what threats exist to US security, how they are mapped out, and what consequences such mappings have on their foreign policy and strategic thinking. Furthermore, attention must also be placed on how specific spaces or identities are made important or marginalized and how all this in turn justifies certain kinds of foreign policy

approaches best suited for dealing with dangers in these specific places. Here for example, Kenya's strategic role in the GWoT will be highlighted. In order to achieve this the methodological process will be conducted in two steps. Firstly the hermeneutic approach will be utilized to identify specific concepts within the empirical material, which will, secondly, be sorted into and analysed by the relevant geopolitical categories highlighted by 'geopolitics as culture' framework (Fig. 2). Here the six central concepts will be considered and used when analysing the chosen material to show how or if US interests and activities in Kenya can be explained and understood through a critical geopolitical analysis. By analysing the chosen material and deconstructing their meaning with help from the analytical framework, the social construction of world politics (in this case US foreign policy and interests in Kenya) and the geopolitical assumptions that underpin them, will be highlighted.

This thesis will also take heed of Ó Tuathail & Dalby's typology outlined in section 2.2 which clarifies the different forms of geopolitical reasoning (formal, practical and popular). However focus will be placed primarily on the formal reasoning, contributed by academics and specialists in the field of geopolitics, and the practical reasoning which encompasses the actors and entities of formal statecraft and involves the everyday reasoning of political leaders. As such popular geopolitical reasoning will not be considered. While it is a very important form of geopolitical reasoning and may provide interesting insights into the media's role in influencing foreign policy, the decision to exclude popular geopolitics was made with regard to limiting the scope and defining a manageable study.

In order to highlight these forms of geopolitical reasoning a number of diverse primary sources will be drawn upon. Included in these are US defence department reports, national security strategies as well as other policy documents drafted by think tanks and foreign policy elites⁵⁷ that highlight US security approaches to Kenya. Furthermore, a select few presidential speeches that focus on security issues associated with Kenya will also be drawn upon. Finally quantitative data, that highlights the amount of counter terrorism aid the US delivers to Kenya, will also be considered to understand the strategies and goals of US foreign policy but also highlight how they have been translated into action. Considering that this studies interest in US foreign policy in the GWoT era, the timeline of focus is from September 11, 2001 through to present day⁵⁸ and as such all documents and speeches will be chosen from this defined time period.

An analysis of these policy documents, security reports and counterterrorist strategies and speeches published after the 9/11 attacks will aim to highlight how the US has scripted and

⁵⁷ Included here are organizations such as The Council on Foreign Relations and its publication *Foreign Affairs*.

⁵⁸ The end date for this timeframe will be defined by the date this study began, namely March 2016.

constructed security discourses around themes of power, identity and space with regard to Kenya and how these constructions have been represented in policy action in the region. This study has also drawn upon a wide array of secondary literature consisting mainly of academic books, articles and reports. This material developed a foundational understanding of the concept of geopolitics and provided a contextual foundation to apply the analytical method on.

4. Background

While US interests in Kenya and Africa as a whole have increased significantly in the post-9/11 era, understanding and outlining this relationship before the terrorist attacks can help in providing a contextual point of departure for the analysis. As has been described in detail above, the US had a very active role in Africa during the Cold War, where several African countries were drawn into the East-West rivalry.⁵⁹ The ending of the Cold War however saw a general US disengagement from the continent as geopolitical interests were reevaluated as the world transformed into a unipolar system.

The post-Cold War era ushered in a hope for a new world order with Western attention being diverted to promote new visions of economic and democratic development in the former Soviet spheres in Europe and Asia.⁶⁰ Africa was however largely treated with indifference by the US and other Western countries. This view was exemplified in the 1995 Department of Defence (DOD) report on US security strategy in sub-Saharan Africa which claimed that while the US were still interested in having access to African facilities and materials they ultimately had “little traditional strategic interests in Africa”.⁶¹ US engagement in Africa during the end of the twentieth century centred largely on humanitarian and democratic assistance aimed at establishing economic reforms and bolstering trade opportunities between the continents.⁶²

The majority of policies implemented during this time were based on the assessment that Africa (or Kenya) was no longer a strategically important region for American interests. This however changed as US interests in Kenya were once again invigorated with the increased activity of transnational terror groups in the region. The 1998 al-Qaeda bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, thrust East Africa to the centre of a global concern over the rise of a new brand of international terrorism.⁶³ The attacks highlighted that African facilities could become proxy targets for groups seeking to attack US interests, which ultimately elevated the strategic relevance of these countries for the US.⁶⁴ Just like the Cold War before it, the 9/11 attacks drastically shifted geopolitical understanding in the world, with Kenya being drawn into the GWO'T due to what security analysts claim was their “strategic value to the US”.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Sköns, E. “The United States” (2014), p. 106.

⁶⁰ Kraxberger (2005), p. 52

⁶¹ US Department of Defence, ‘US security strategy in sub-Saharan Africa: Report published by the Office of International Security Affairs, Department of Defense, Tuesday, August 01, 1995.

⁶² Sköns, E. “The United States” (2014), p. 107.

⁶³ Howell, Jude & Lind, Jeremy, *Counter-terrorism, aid and civil society: before and after the war on terror*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p. 136.

⁶⁴ Olawale, I. & Sköns, E. “Introduction” (2014) p. 8.

⁶⁵ Howell & Lind (2009) p. 137.

5. Analysis

With the theoretical and methodological approaches contextualized above, an analysis aimed at explaining US interests and activities in Kenya through a critical geopolitical lens can be conducted. The analysis will centre on the three anchoring themes or tenets that lie at the foundation of critical geopolitics; 1) the link between ideology and hegemony, 2) the construction of identities and difference and, 3) how space (territory) is given meaning. Furthermore the ‘geopolitics as culture’ framework (Fig. 2) will be used as an analytical tool to help deconstruct the chosen material to uncover the meaning and geopolitical assumptions that underpin US foreign policy decisions in Kenya.

5.1 Ideology & Hegemony

The US has long occupied a place as a hegemonic power in the world system and as such has had a significant amount of influence and control over how political space in the international system has been constructed and represented. This has been increasingly apparent in the 9/11 era where the US have constructed discourses around issues of security to legitimize foreign policy decisions under the auspices of the GWoT. Here, an ideology that considers the US as a global ‘protector’ whose power is needed to confront a global threat has become especially relevant. The aim in this section is to highlight how US constructed security discourses have been used to justify their engagement in Kenya and consolidate hegemonic structures based on this described ideology.

While the African continent was previously framed as a region with little strategic value for the US, this soon changed with the 9/11 attacks. Already in 2002, Kenya’s importance for the US was highlighted in their National Security Strategy, which identified the ‘disease, war and desperate poverty’ that plagued Africa as a threat to their strategic priority of ‘combating global terror’.⁶⁶ Central here was the threat of enemies taking advantage of ‘ungoverned space and undergoverned territories’ from which they could plan and launch attacks.⁶⁷ The potential danger posed by weak states in Africa has also been highlighted by foreign policy elites, who have argued that failing states function as geopolitical vacuums where threats organize and emanate, posing a threat not only to neighbouring countries but to people all around the globe.⁶⁸ Imperative to dealing with these threats, and highlighted in the 2002 strategy, was the need to engage with regional actors

⁶⁶ White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (White House: Washington, DC, Sep. 2002), p. 10.

⁶⁷ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America: A Strategy for Today, a Vision for Tomorrow*, 2004, p. 5

⁶⁸ Rotberg, Robert I. 2002. Failed States in a World of Terror. *Foreign Affairs* 81(4), p. 12.

such as Kenya which have a ‘major impact on their neighbourhood’ and are ‘anchors for regional engagement’ and as such ‘require focused attention’.⁶⁹ This assessment was also reflected on in the 2006 National Security Strategy which highlighted the regions ‘growing geo-strategic importance’ and was considered a ‘high priority’ for the administration at that time.⁷⁰

Especially relevant here is how *geostrategic discourses* are constructed around security issues (transnational terrorism) and the role of Kenya. The portrayal of Africa as a threat to international, and specifically, US security interests is constructed around images of ‘failing states’ and ‘ungovernable spaces’ that breed and sustain terrorist activity. Susan Rice, former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, underscored these claims arguing that terror groups “take advantage of Africa’s porous borders weak law enforcement and security services [...] to move men, weapons, and money around the globe”.⁷¹ Rice further describes these areas as ‘swamps’ and ‘breeding grounds’ serving as ‘incubators’ for terrorist fighters, claiming also that it is the role of the US to ‘drain’ these swamps “not for liberal, humanitarian or moral reasons, but out of realpolitik recognition that our long-term security depends on it.”⁷² More recently though, the 2015 National Security Strategy also noted the problem of violent extremism and how ‘fragile’ and ‘conflict-affected’ states in Africa risk acting as incubators for the spread of ‘illicit weapons’, ‘drug smugglers’ and ‘destabilizing refugee flows’.⁷³

While a clear security threat had been constructed around African, focus was also placed on the importance of reinforcing cooperation, as US security was recognized as dependent upon “partnering with Africans to strengthen fragile and failing states and bring ungoverned areas under the control of effective democracies”.⁷⁴ Here Kenya’s strategic value was highlighted as one of the ‘key’ states “that are essential sub-regional linchpins”.⁷⁵ Once again this assessment not only highlighted the importance of a close ally in the region, but also emphasized Kenya’s strategic value as a stabilizing actor on neighbouring countries.

This increased focus on the potential threats to US interests abroad also highlighted the overarching ideology that has defined America’s *geopolitical culture* for so long; namely their role or mission as a global protector. Central here are the discourses that legitimize and reproduce

⁶⁹ White House (note 65), p. 11.

⁷⁰ White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (White House: Washington, DC, Mar. 2006), p. 37

⁷¹ Rice, Susan E. 2001. Testimony before the Subcommittee on Africa of the International Relations Committee, United States House of Representatives, 15 Nov.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (White House: Washington, DC, Feb. 2015), p. 1.

⁷⁴ White House (note 69), p. 37.

⁷⁵ White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (White House: Washington, DC, May. 2010), p. 45.

structure of power. The global reach terrorism has was clearly highlighted in the 2004 National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, which stated that the 9/11 attacks had proved that terrorism against US interests abroad should be similarly regarded as attacks on American soil, because “the American homeland is the planet”.⁷⁶ This ultimately revealed the stance that homeland security was not solely confined to US borders, which essentially justified intervention abroad, as long as it was within the purview of protecting US interests. This opinion has repeatedly been highlighted in US security strategies. The 2002 National Security Strategy clearly outlined the role of the US as an actor willing to ‘extend the benefits of freedom across the globe’ which was made possible because of Americas ‘unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence’.⁷⁷ Underscoring this ideology as a global protector is the absolute claim that the US would ‘deter and defeat any adversary that threatens our national security and that of our allies’.⁷⁸

Following on from this, the ideology as a global protector has been reflected in US strategies in Africa. The 2002 National Security Strategy highlights this very point and considers that the US ‘must help strengthen Africa’s fragile state [...] to deny havens for terrorists’ and as such will ‘continue to advise, train, and equip partner forces to perform essential tasks against terrorist networks’.⁷⁹ These discourses surrounding the security threats Africa poses for the US and the role of stable countries in the region, like Kenya, in countering terrorist activities has legitimized an increased interest and military presence in the region. The establishment of the US African Command (AFRICOM) in 2008, shows a clear incentive by the US to establish a more permanent military presence in the region. The mission of AFRICOM centres on building defence capabilities to defeat transnational threats in order to “advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity”.⁸⁰ Increased focus has specifically been placed on bolstering the capabilities of Kenya, with the country becoming one of largest recipients of US security related aid in Africa.⁸¹ Kenya is set to receive \$100 million in counterterrorism aid from the US for the 2015 fiscal year, the majority of which will be used to bolster the Kenyan militaries fight against regional terrorist threats.⁸² It is clear from the above that the US has cemented its position in Africa and developed strong partnerships with ‘key’ countries, such as Kenya, in their global struggle against violent extremism.

⁷⁶ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks. 2004. *The 9/11 commission report: the final report of the national commission on terrorist attacks upon the United States*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 362.

⁷⁷ White House (note 65), Foreword.

⁷⁸ White House (note 72), p. 11.

⁷⁹ White House (note 65), p. 10, US Department of Defence (DOD), Quadrennial Defence Review Report (DOD: Washington, DC, March 2014, p. 37.

⁸⁰ United States African Command, “2014 Command Brief – English”.

⁸¹ Blanchard, Lauren Ploch. 2013. "U.S.-Kenya Relations: Current Political and Security Issues." *Congressional Research Service: Issue Brief 1-18. International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Centre*, p. 16.

⁸² “U.S. Counterterrorism Aid to Kenya”, Security Assistance Monitor, July 21, 2015.

5.2 Identity & Difference

The fight against terrorism is as much a war of ideals as it is a conventional struggle between two adversaries. The formation of identities constructed around binaries of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and ‘good’ and ‘bad’ have become an integral part of legitimizing policies within the GWOI. The framing of such identities, through *Geopolitical discourses* and *Geographical imaginations*, have been used by the US to construct boundaries used to justify and legitimize strategies in specific regions. This section will consider the framing and construction of identity discourses within the GWOI and how it has been used to legitimize increased US actions in Kenya.

The formations of identity binaries began already soon after the 9/11 attacks. George W Bush framed the attacks as not only an act of terror, but ‘acts of war’ further claiming that both ‘freedom and democracy’ were under attack and that what would follow would be ‘a monumental struggle of good versus evil’.⁸³ Bush, in his 2002 State of The Union speech, famously also portrayed specific areas as dangerous with certain states constituting what he described as an ‘axis of evil’. Furthermore, he was clear to distinguish between those who ‘embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed’ with the values that underpin the founding of the US, namely ‘freedom and the dignity of every life’.⁸⁴

The GWOI was framed as a struggle to ‘defend the peace’ against ‘terrorists and tyrants’ by championing ‘human dignity’ and promoting ‘freedom’ because ultimately the fight was over America’s ‘democratic values and way of life’.⁸⁵ This stance has also been underscored in more contemporary strategies outlined by the Obama administration. Once again, US efforts aim to draw a stark contrast between ‘what we stand for’ and the ‘heinous deeds of terrorism’. Here the ‘founding values’ of America that include ‘the rule of law and universal rights’ lie at the root of ‘American exceptionalism’ which ultimately is what sets them apart from their enemies.⁸⁶

The construction of these identity boundaries have been utilized by the US to justify specific foreign policy strategies and an increased presence in specific regions. This has been demonstrated with regard to the increase of US interests and policies in Kenya and Africa as a whole. As the above has highlighted, Africa has a ‘growing geo-strategic importance’ for the US, not only because of geographical considerations but because it is linked to the US ‘by history, culture, commerce, and strategic significance’. It is argued here that these similarities not only link

⁸³ Bush, G.W, "Remarks by the President," 12 September 2001, accessed on the White House. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010912-4.html>, 21/05/16.

⁸⁴ Bush, G.W. 2002. ‘State of the Union’. January 29, 2002.

<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/01.29.02.html>>

⁸⁵ White House (note 65), p. 1, 3 & 7.

⁸⁶ White House (note 72), p. 3 & 9.

the US with the continent but forges a partnership that aims to develop and promote ‘liberty, peace, stability, and increasing prosperity’.⁸⁷ US interests in establishing regional partners in Africa, was highlighted during Barack Obama’s visit to Kenya in 2015. Obama reiterated that the US and Kenya ‘are already strong partners’, following with that he wanted to reaffirm that the two nations ‘stand united in the face of terrorism’.⁸⁸ Obama was also quick to highlight Kenya’s new constitution describing it as ‘one of the most progressive in Africa’ as well as their ‘vibrant civil society’ and ‘active free press’ all of which are essential ‘for any democracy’. It was further stated that both nations ‘share deep values’ and therefore speak the ‘same language on many issues’, one of which was ‘fighting global terrorists who seek to destroy our way of life’.⁸⁹ Building on this, Obama announced a willingness to bolster the partnership between the two countries by providing ‘additional funding’ and ‘assistance’ to deal with ‘very specific counterterrorism threats’. Obama concluded with acknowledging the ‘persistent challenges’ facing Kenya but was eager to see the future the two nations ‘can build together’.⁹⁰

The US since the 9/11 attacks have increasingly dictated global geopolitical imaginations that centre on the formation of boundaries that create distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Bush’s famous threat that ‘either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists’ resonates with this thinking where the projection of the ‘other’ as a threat has been utilized as justification for foreign interventions. This has been highlighted within the African context, where strategically important countries, like Kenya, have been incorporated into the category of a force of ‘good’ with the US fighting against ‘tyrants’ and ‘extremists’. The framing of a common danger, in this sense transnational terrorism, that threatens to destroy the values and norms that are shared between the two countries; namely democracy and human dignity, legitimize further operations and presence in the region.

5.3 Space

Space (territory), or more specifically the social construction of space, is an essential component of understanding foreign policy decisions in the field of critical geopolitics. The 9/11 attacks highlighted the emergence of a new form of threat, one that had a global reach that existed beyond national borders. In order to address these new security challenges the US has been forced to

⁸⁷ White House (note 69), p. 37.

⁸⁸ Remarks by President Obama and President Kenyatta of Kenya in a Press Conference. July 25, 2015. , accessed on the White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/25/remarks-president-obama-and-president-kenyatta-kenya-press-conference>. 22/05/16.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

dramatically reconceptualise where and how its armed forces are deployed overseas.⁹¹ This section will aim to highlight how the US has utilized spatial constructions to give meaning to specific regions (Kenya or East Africa) to legitimize an increased presence and influence in the area.

As section 5.1 highlighted, the representation of regions in Africa as ‘ungovernable’, ‘fragile’ and ‘breeding grounds’ for terrorist organizations has been used by the US to legitimize an increased presence in the region. Interesting to consider here is America’s *Geopolitical visions* which describe how they wish the current world order to look like, by describing and promoting particular ways of seeing territory. Africa’s importance for the US was made clear in the 2012 U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa, which outlined that looking towards the future, it was clear ‘that Africa is more important than ever to the security and prosperity of the international community, and to the United States in particular’ following on with that they would concentrate on dismantling transnational terrorist groups in Africa ‘to ensure the security of our citizens and our partners’.⁹² Once again this demonstrates how the lines between what is considered international and America space have been blurred with regard to security in the GWoT, as US influence and interests extend well beyond their own borders.

A reoccurring trend in US strategies is the deepening of ‘security partnerships with African countries’ to defend one of the core goals in the region, namely ‘ensuring the security of the United States’.⁹³ Engaging with ‘regional partners’ to strengthen their ‘security institutions’ has become a ‘crucial part of efforts to defeat terrorist groups’ as well as contribute ‘to peace and security in Africa’.⁹⁴ This highlights the importance of fostering closer ties between the US and Africa, not only for the interest of countering regional instability but because it is integral to safeguarding against threats to US interests. In this sense while Africa benefits from US engagement, it is also accurate that the US benefits from African engagement.⁹⁵

Similar to the imaginations of space during the Cold War, where the globe was divided up into spheres of influence, the GWoT has mapped out the states or regions in Africa that can be considered ‘friends’ or ‘vital’ to protecting US interests. Once again, Kenya has been singled out as ‘an active and critical partner in the war on terrorism’ and continues to be a ‘strong ally of the United States’ in the fight against regional terrorist threats.⁹⁶ The geographical positioning of

⁹¹ Campbell, Kurt M., and Celeste Johnson Ward. 2003. New Battle Stations? *Foreign Affairs* 82(5): p. 95.

⁹² White House, *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa* (White House: Washington, DC, June. 2012),

⁹³ *Ibid.* p, 1 & 5.

⁹⁴ Lauren Ploch, “Countering Terrorism in East Africa: The U.S. Response,” *Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress* (CRS, 3 Nov 2010), p. 22.

⁹⁵ Brookings Institute. 2013. *Top Five Reasons Why Africa Should Be a Priority for the United States; Africa Growth Initiative*. Washington, D.C. March 2013, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*, Ch. 5A, Washington, DC, April 27, 2005 & *Country Reports on Terrorism*, Ch 2, Washington, DC, April 27, 2014.

Kenya is also important here due to its ‘proximity to the Arabian Peninsula’ and as such has been framed as a ‘decisive arena in the fight against al Qaeda and associated movements’.⁹⁷

A clear indication of Kenya’s and Africa new meaning for the US has been highlighted by the myriad of counterterrorism initiatives that have been developed in the continent after the 9/11 attacks. AFRICOM, one of six US overseas geographic commands, is one of the largest in terms of funding and operations and is tasked with protecting the ‘national security interests of the United States’ by ‘strengthening the defence capabilities of African states’.⁹⁸ This highlights the significantly larger role the US plays in African security and the scope of their counter terrorism measures. Similarly, the formations of the US operated Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PRACT), aims to bolster Kenya’s, among others, capabilities by training and equipping their military.⁹⁹

To understand many of the US policies and strategies highlighted above it can be useful to consider the *geopolitical traditions* that underlie them. Here strategies utilized by the US during the Cold War are especially interesting to consider. More specifically is the notion of containment that centres on the Rimland theory developed by Spykman. Many similarities can be taken for this, as current US strategies in Africa aims to bolster partnerships with strategic countries (Kenya) in the region to stop the spread of a global threat (terrorism). This has been achieved by allocating considerable amounts of military aid to bolster regional security capabilities, which aims at ‘detecting, disrupting and ultimately defeating transnational terrorist groups’.¹⁰⁰ Kenya has consistently been one of the largest recipients of Anti-Terrorism Assistance aimed at improving coastal security, specifically with focus to Somalia. Similarly, Kenya is also the largest recipient of US Foreign Military Sales, having received over \$28.6 million worth of military equipment and arms since 2006.¹⁰¹

It is clear from the above that East Africa and Kenya have been framed as vital spaces in the GWoT, with US engagement in region growing with each year. This increased strategic view of the region has been reflected in the large amount of military aid allocated to countries like Kenya as well as the initiation of counter terrorism programs aimed at containing the spread of transnational terrorist threats.

⁹⁷ Ploch (2010), “Countering Terrorism in East Africa: The U.S. Response”, p. 4 & 50.

⁹⁸ US Africa Command (AFRICOM), United States Africa Command, Fact Sheet, 5 June 2014.

⁹⁹ Lauren Ploch, “African Command: US Strategic Interests and Role of the U.S. Military in Africa” *Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress* (CRS, 10 March 2010), p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p, 20.

¹⁰¹ Ploch (2010), “Countering Terrorism in East Africa: The U.S. Response, p. 50-51.

6. Discussion & Conclusion

The 9/11 attacks constituted a fundamental landmark in US history, that not only resulted in the upheaval and reconceptualization of US security and foreign policy strategies but set forth a militarization of international affairs that has dominated security and political discourses for over a decade. The ensuing GWoT has increasingly been used by the US as a pretext to wage a ‘global war’, far outside the borders of the American homeland. Africa since 9/11 has become an increasingly important arena in the fight against transnational terrorist threats, and as such this study aimed to gain an understanding and highlight the reasons that underpin America’s increased interest and engagement in specific regions in the continent. More specifically, this study posed the questions; *how can US foreign policy security strategies and actions implemented in Kenya be explained and understood through a critical geopolitical perspective?*

To provide a suitable answer to the question above, a critical geopolitical reading of US strategies and policies was conducted. In doing so this study utilized a hermeneutic method as well as took use of an analytical framework that centred on six key concepts of critical geopolitics; *Geostrategic discourse, Geopolitical discourse and the discursive process, Geopolitical vision and subject, Geopolitical traditions, Geopolitical culture* and *Geographical imagi-nations*. Furthermore the analysis of the national security strategies, reports and policy documents was divided into three main sections; ideology & hegemony, identity & difference and space.

The analysis has shown that the US has clearly constructed a specific discourse around security threats in Africa. The representation of regions in Africa as ‘ungovernable’ ‘fragile’ ‘swamps’ that in turn risk acting as ‘incubators’ for terrorist groups has been underscored in many of the security strategies in the post-9/11 era. While detrimental to regional security, these representations also highlight the consequences these regions have on global, and more specifically US security interests. US *geostrategic discourses* in this sense centre on the importance of Kenya, as an ‘anchor’ in the region, in combating this threat. Kenya is framed as a ‘strategic ally’ due to its potential stabilizing effect on neighbouring states which in turn has justified further US engagement with the country. America’s *geopolitical culture*, which considers their role as a global protector, is also made clear. Central to many of the security strategies is the role the US has in bolstering the military capacity of African states, to ‘extend the benefits of freedom across the globe’. In this sense, this representation highlights that future stability in the region rests on a US presence and engagement in the continent.

Following on, the analysis also shows how the GWoT has been framed as a struggle of ideals, where the values that underpin the US, namely ‘freedom’ and ‘dignity of life’, have come under attack by ‘tyrants and terrorists’. Through *geopolitical discourses* and *geographical imaginations* the construction of identity boundaries that separates ‘us’ from ‘them’ have been used by the US to justify engagement in specific regions. By framing Kenya as a vital ally that is fighting against a common danger to protect

shared values, the US has incorporated Kenya into the category of a force of 'good'. By constructing these identities that share the same goals, the US legitimizes an increased presence in the region.

Furthermore, through the social construction of space, America's *geopolitical visions* have given meaning to territorial regions. With specific focus to East Africa and Kenya in particular, the US has framed the region as a crucial arena in the GWoT and of central importance to ensure the protection of American interests. It has been made clear in the policy documents that the US intends to continue to foster ties with Kenya as they are framed as a vital state in the region. America's *geopolitical traditions* have also become increasingly relevant with regard to US engagement with Kenya. Similar to Cold War policies, US strategies in Kenya can be seen as a way to contain a transnational threat by way of proxy. The US, with the aim of disrupting and dismantling terrorist organizations in East Africa, has allocated massive amounts of security aid to countries like Kenya to build their military capacities.

All in all and to answer the research question, it is clear that US engagement and interest in Kenya can be understood and explained through a critical geopolitical perspective that considers; 1) the link between ideology and hegemony, 2) the construction of identities and difference and, 3) how space (territory) is given meaning. Not only has the US framed the nation as strategically important for safeguarding American interests, but by categorizing Kenya as a vital partner that shares the same values and goals the US has justified their increased engagement and interest in the country. This study aimed to examine how and why the US forms their foreign policy and can therefore contribute to similar studies conducted in the post-9/11 era. Furthermore the analytical framework that was utilized is a relatively new framework and as such this study may help provide a practical outline for its application for future studies conducted in the field.

A perspective that has not been taken up in this study, but is nevertheless of interest is the unintended consequences of America's new interest in Africa. Considering the US counterterrorism strategies that have been employed, that aim to bolster regional military capabilities, it could be questioned whether the influx of weaponry will actually promote stability or have adverse effects. This 'militarization' of the region could end up fuelling many of the conflicts these strategies have aimed to counter, which risks compounding the continent's multifaceted problems. Similarly the debate surrounding the 'securitization of aid' is also a relevant and interesting topic that could be further explored. In this case, it could be questioned whether the military aid the US is allocating to African countries is beneficial for them in the long run, or whether the same money could be spent on other issues that are pertinent to the continent; poverty reduction for instance.

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