



Militarization of U.S. Foreign Policy in Africa: Strategic Gain or Backlash?

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MANY THINK AMERICAN foreign policy objectives reflect America's values and ideals. The United States globally promotes human rights, democracy, international justice, rule of law, and free trade. Achieving these liberal ends would require liberal policies. Ironically, U.S. foreign policymakers, informed by neorealist motivations, employ realist mechanisms, especially military force, to pursue its putative liberal goals, undermining the attainment of those liberal ends. U.S. policies toward Africa historically followed a "hands off" approach until the onset of the Cold War. U.S. anti-communists stratagem led to its involvement in Cold War African security issues, evidenced in the Angolan war and the militarization of some client states and factions. In the post-Cold War era, America had limited political, humanitarian, security, and economic interests in Africa. Expectedly, its interest in African security issues dimmed with minimal military involvement in Africa. Eastern Europe and Asia gained primacy in America's foreign policy, demoting African security issues to the periphery of its foreign policy. In 1995, the Defense Department asserted that American security and economic interests in Africa were limited: "At present, we have no permanent or significant military presence anywhere in Africa: We have no bases; we station no combat forces; and we homeport no ships. . . . Ultimately we see very little traditional strategic interest in Africa."¹

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Contrary to Africa's strategic insignificance to the United States in the post-immediate Cold War era, it gained primacy in post-9/11 due to terrorism, energy sources, and China's creeping influence into Africa.² Defense secretary Robert Gates warned against the risk of "creeping militarization" of U.S. foreign policy and recommended the State Department lead U.S. engagement with other countries.³ This article is an examination of the militarization of America's foreign policy and the ramifications for its strategic interests in Africa. It observes that America's military involvement in Africa, despite some strategic gains, has backfired due to the inherent contradiction of the use of realist means to achieve liberal ends. The article recommends that it would be prudent for America to deemphasize "hard power" and heighten "soft power" to achieve its interests in Africa.

Why Militarization?

U.S. militarization of Africa is intended to fight terrorism, secure oil resources, and counter China's influence in the continent.⁴ Africa's relevance in U.S. national security policy and military affairs gained primacy during the Bush administration. Vice Adm. Robert T. Moeller, while serving as deputy commander for Military Operations, U.S. Africa Command, listed oil disruption, terrorism, and the growing influence of China as challenges to U.S. interests in Africa. The spillage of Al-Qaeda's heinous activities in the Middle East into Africa in 1998 with Al-Qaeda's bombing of U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam changed America's disengagement policy with Africa. America's involvement in Africa was accentuated by the 9/11 attacks and the emerging hotbeds of terrorism in East Africa.

America views weak and failed African states as incubators of threats to its geo-strategic interests in Africa. Weak and failed states are prone to growth of terrorism and international criminal activities such as drugs and money laundering, all of which threaten America's interests. Susan Rice, former assistant secretary of state for African Affairs, states:

Much of Africa has become a veritable incubator for the foot soldiers of terrorism. Its poor, young, disaffected, unhealthy, uneducated populations often have no stake

in government, no faith in the future, and harbor an easily exploitable discontent with the status-quo . . . these are the swamps we must drain . . . to do otherwise, is to place our security at further and more permanent risk.⁵

The lethality of terrorism attained a new height following the 9/11 attacks on the United States, and the composition of the attackers reinforced the argument. Al-Qaeda, for example, enjoyed the hospitality of Sudan, where it organized to launch attacks on U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.⁶ Data on global terrorists' attacks show that, from 1991 to 2007, most terrorists came from weak and failed states such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Algeria.⁷

An analysis of foreign jihadists in Iraq estimated that 25 percent were from Africa, particularly from North Africa and the horn of Africa. The strategically located east African seaboard near the shipping lanes of the giant tankers that supply oil to the United States from the Middle East has become the hub of terrorists and pirates threatening U.S. interests.⁸

A recent U.S. Central Command report anticipated a high regrouping of African trained jihadists into the Horn.⁹ Consequentially, U.S. military involvement in Africa has increased in the horn region and parts of North Africa to counter growth of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.¹⁰

U.S. militarization of Africa is also fueled by Africa's growing petroleum reserves. Africa today accounts for about 15 percent of U.S.-imported oil, and with the politicization of supplies from the Middle East, the United States relies on Africa for its energy needs. Coincidentally, nearly all of Africa's oil reserves are in countries experiencing violence or instability, such as Sudan and Nigeria. As Joanne Gowa and Edward D. Mansfield argue, economic transactions generate security concerns since trade thrives in secured environments.¹¹ America is concerned with the insecurity of trading partners and violence in those countries, prompting U.S. intervention.¹² U.S. current security commitments in the Niger Delta region are to ensure its continuous access to the region's oil resources. Perceived threats of terrorist attacks by northern Nigerian Islamic fundamentalists on U.S. interests in West Africa, coupled with criminal activities by self-styled warlord Alhaji Dokubo-Asari's group

that steals crude oil and kidnaps foreign oil workers for ransom in the Delta region, threaten U.S. investments and oil supplies.¹³

In a realist world, countering the influence of its strategic rivals, especially China, reminiscent of the Cold War, has renewed U.S. interest in Africa. The rapidly growing economies of countries such as Malaysia and China strategically compete with America for Africa's energy and other natural resources. China, in particular, poses a formidable challenge to U.S. interests in Africa. African leaders seem to cater to China because its aid and

China...poses a formidable challenge to U.S. interests in Africa.

investment in Africa exclude conditionality such as good governance and human rights commonly associated with U.S. investment programs, which are viewed by African leaders as imperialistic and neocolonialistic.¹⁴ China's investment approach offers Africa equal opportunity and stake in their development in view of China's subtle diplomacy of noninterference in Africa's domestic issues. China's investment and aid programs have been well received because they include infrastructure projects, long ignored by the United States and other Western aid programs.¹⁵

U.S. Military Involvement in Africa

U.S. aid to Africa has been observed to be increasingly militarized.¹⁶ In fact, its military is involved in a range of activities that were perceived to be the exclusive prerogative of civilian agencies and organizations in the past.¹⁷ America's military involvement in Africa includes—

- Sales of arms.
- Military training and advice.
- Establishment of security commands and intelligence.

- Joint overt and covert military operations with selected security allies.

In 1996, the United States launched the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) program to address challenges of peacekeeping and conflict management in Africa. Fears that the ethnic massacres occurring in Rwanda in 1994 might also occur in neighboring Burundi prompted its formation. In addition, America's reluctance to get involved in African local conflicts following the 1993 Somali debacle where 18 U.S. Army rangers died in Somalia. The ACRI enabled selected African military forces to respond to crises through peacekeeping missions in Africa. The selection criteria of countries participating were democratic governance and the preparedness of the military to submit to civilian control. Benin, Ghana, Senegal, Malawi, and Mali were the countries selected. Several countries initially considered for participation became ineligible. However, because Uganda and Ethiopia were U.S. military allies they were included in the selection even though they did not pass the test.

Several antiterrorism programs were initiated, including the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, consisting of 1,200 to 1,800 U.S. and allied troops in Djibouti to patrol, interdict, and strike at threatening targets in the Horn of Africa.¹⁸ The task force led the U.S. engagement with Somalia,, establishing three permanent contingency operating locations at Kenyan's Manda Bay Naval Base and Hurso and Bilate in Ethiopia. From these locations the task force trained allied troops and initiated attacks on Somalia.¹⁹ The Pan Sahel Initiative deployed U.S. Special Army Forces with the Special Command Europe to Mali and Mauritania, engaging in counterinsurgency wars in Mali and Niger against the Tuareg rebels. The Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative that replaced the Pan Sahel Initiative in 2004 has American military personnel assigned to 11 African nations—Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal—to counter the activities of Islamist militants in the Sahel Sahara region in Northwest Africa. For example, American forces, in a joint operation with Chadian forces, killed 43 alleged militants in the Chad-Niger border.²⁰ The Joint Task Force Aztec Silence, created in December 2003, under the European Command, conducts surveillance operations and, in coordination with

U.S. intelligence agencies, shares intelligence with local military forces.²¹ America has military ties with Nigeria and other oil-producing west and central African states that include bilateral military assistance, naval operations of the Africa Partnership Station, and other initiatives to promote maritime safety and ensure uninterrupted oil supplies.

U.S. military involvement on the continent as of 2006 was divided among three commands: the European Command, Central Command, and Pacific Command. On 6 February 2007, the Bush administration created a new unified combatant command—Africa Command (AFRICOM)—to promote U.S. national security objectives in surrounding areas. AFRICOM'S foremost mission helps Africans achieve their own security and support African leadership efforts.²² However, according to Maj. Gen. Mike Snodgrass, chief of staff of Headquarters, U.S. AFRICOM, the command conducts “sustained security engagement . . . to promote a stable and secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy.”²³ Gen. Carter F.

Ham, former AFRICOM commander, stated that the command's immediate focus was on “the greatest threats to America, Americans, and American interests. . . . Countering threats posed by al-Qaida affiliates in east and northwest Africa remains my No. 1 priority,” including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Somalia-based al-Shabaab, and Boko Haram in Nigeria.²⁴ AFRICOM, in coordination with U.S. military and intelligence agencies, has initiated numerous major projects and programs to implement these policy objectives. These include establishing Camp Lemonnier at Djibouti as the base for AFRICOM and allied military units in Africa, creating an AFRICOM liaison unit at the African Union headquarters in Ethiopia, and establishing bases in Seychelles, Djibouti, and Ethiopia for operating drones for surveillance and attack operations.²⁵

The United States is also involved in both covert and overt military operations with security allies. Joint American-Kenyan military operations at the Kenya-Somalia border were targeting militant Islamists in Somalia.²⁶ U.S. troops also pursued



Army Gen. William E. (Kip) Ward, former commander, U.S. Africa Command, talks with Ugandan People's Defence Force Col. Sam Kavuma as they tour the Gulu District, Uganda, 10 April 2013. (U.S. Army)

Al-Qaeda and affiliated suspects in Sudan from 2002 to mid-2003.²⁷ The United States backed the insurgency by the Sudan People's Liberation, the guerrilla force that fought the northern Khartoum government, but the Bush government allied with the Khartoum government in the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism.²⁸

Darfur reportedly has the fourth-largest copper and third-largest uranium deposits in the world.²⁹ Sudan is China's fourth biggest supplier of imported oil. U.S. companies controlling the pipelines in Chad and Uganda seek to displace China through the U.S. military alliance with "frontline" states hostile to Sudan—Uganda, Chad, and Ethiopia.³⁰ America's increasing militarization of its foreign policy globally has been criticized by some American foreign policy decision makers and practitioners.

Strategic Gain or Backlash?

Despite some short-term modicum of success like the flow of oil from strategic allies such as Nigeria and Angola or the killing of leading terrorists figures in Africa, U.S. militarization policy has elicited backlash against its strategic interests on the continent. Defense Secretary Gates warns against the risk of a "creeping militarization" of U.S. foreign policy and recommends the State Department lead U.S. engagement with other countries. Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann denounces the progressive militarization of U.S. foreign policy over the past 20 years and underlines the perils it has wrought.³¹ According to Mark Malan "The danger is this strategy will not achieve the security objectives of addressing the root causes of terrorism, and it certainly won't address the developmental objectives of U.S. foreign policy."³² We observe mounting adverse ramifications for U.S. geo-strategic security interests in Africa.

America's Cold War military policy correlates with contemporary cycles of violence, crimes, and conflicts plaguing Africa today. Throughout the Cold War (1950-1989), the United States delivered over \$1.5 billion worth of weaponry to its top arms clients—Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, and Zaire (DRC)—that constitute the flashpoints of violence, instability, and state collapse in Africa. The ongoing DRC civil war exemplifies the devastating legacy of U.S. arms sales policy to Africa.³³

The U.S. military sustained the violent regime of Mobutu Sese Seko—who brutalized Zairians and plundered the economy for three decades—with military arms (\$300 million) and training (worth \$100 million) until overthrown by Laurent Kabila's forces in 1997.³⁴

U.S. weapons transfers and continued military training to parties of the conflict have helped fuel the fighting. The United States helped build the militaries of eight of the nine states directly involved in the war that has ravaged the DRC since Kabila's coup. In 1998 alone, U.S. weapons to Africa totaled \$12.5 million, including substantial deliveries to Chad, Namibia, and Zimbabwe—all backing Kabila. On the rebel side, Uganda received nearly \$1.5 million in weaponry over the past two years, and Rwanda was importing U.S. weapons as late as 1993 (one year before the brutal genocide erupted).

U.S. military transfers in the form of direct government-to-government weapons deliveries, commercial sales, and funds from the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program to the states directly involved in the DRC conflict has totaled more than \$125 million since the end of the Cold War.³⁵

Somalia is now a failed state and, like Sudan, it has become a den for terrorism and other criminal activities such as piracy, threatening America's strategic interests. U.S. arms sales and military training for officers of strategic allies correlate human rights violations, poor governance, and anti-democratic coups in Africa. An IMET trainee, Capt. Amadou Sanogo, led the antidemocratic coup in Mali in March 2012. This ignited U.S. congressional concerns that the United States "may not be adequately assessing long-term risks associated with providing training and military equipment for counterterrorism purposes to countries with poor records of human rights, rule of law, and accountability."³⁶

The U.S. discriminatory selection of countries participating in African Crisis Response Initiative bred animosity and tension among African countries. The division undermined Africa's collective efforts to confront emerging threats on the continent. Non-U.S. security allies do not cooperate with the United States. Moreover, some U.S. allies, informed by the U.S. foreign policy axiom of permanency of interests, are suspicious of U.S.



U.S. Army Maj. Thamus J. Morgan, a veterinarian from the 411th Civil Affairs Battalion in support of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, greets children from Kakute Primary School in Kakute, Uganda, 23 April 2013. (U.S. Navy, Petty Officer 1st Class Tom Ouellette)

intentions and view its presence as exploitative and imperialistic. The African Crisis Response Initiative was not universally popular in Africa. The selection criteria for countries participating in ACRI raised questions about U.S. interests on the continent. Some African states and even France suspected that ACRI's design gave the United States a military foothold in Africa reminiscent of the colonial and Cold War eras. It was conceptualized as U.S. expansionism and exploitation of Africa's newfound energy sources. Opposition politicians in African states receiving training as well as the states excluded from the program were critical of Washington for using ACRI to gather military intelligence to advance other exclusive U.S. interests in Africa.

No single issue or event in recent decades in Africa has provoked so much controversy and unified hostility and opposition as the AFRICOM. The intensity and sheer scale of the unprecedented unity of opposition to AFRICOM across Africa surprised many experts. African nations have been repeatedly opposed to the hosting of U.S. bases

on the African continent and the militarization of their relations with the United States. Because of this dissent, AFRICOM is located in Stuttgart, Germany. Civil society leaders and journalists in Africa have objected that AFRICOM will pursue narrowly defined U.S. interests at the expense of both the sovereignty and welfare of the African nations.³⁷ Regional organizations have been most vocal in their critique of AFRICOM. The Southern African Development Community, including U.S. ally South Africa, stated that "it is better if the United States were involved with Africa from a distance rather than be present on the continent." The Southern African Development Community defense and security ministers urged other states not to host AFRICOM since it would have a negative effect.³⁸ The economic community of West African states (including Nigeria, a strong U.S. ally), opposed AFRICOM.

African citizens and civil societies also objected to AFRICOM. Ezekiel Pajino of the Center for Empowerment in Liberia calls AFRICOM "a deadly plan of U.S. military expansion on African soil."

Pajino states “AFRICOM will be the legacy of Bush’s failed foreign policy that threatens future generations of the continents.”³⁹ Ikechukwa Eze states, “Apprehension exists about the extent to which AFRICOM may violate rules of sovereignty and its attempt to replace the African Union.”⁴⁰ These observations raise concerns about sovereignty, Africa’s welfare, the role of private military contractors, U.S. military administered development assistance, and U.S.-controlled African resources at the expense of ordinary Africans, especially in the face of China’s presence in Africa for energy sources. America’s Africa Command, in conceptual terms and actual implementation, is not intended to serve Africa’s best interests. It just happens that Africa has grown in geopolitical and geo-economic importance to America and her allies. Africa has been there all along, but the United States with the notable exception of the Cold War era, always had a hands-off policy toward Africa. Severine Rugumamu, Professor of Development Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, understandably observes that “a consistent axiom guiding U.S. foreign policy toward Africa is permanency of interests and not friends or enemies,”⁴¹ implying shifts in engagements in Africa in accordance with shifts in its strategic interests.⁴²

U.S. military covert operations with strategic allies have adversely affected U.S. credibility and reputation on the continent. The U.S. military, Ugandan, and Rwandan forces covertly invaded Zaire (now Congo) in 2007. On 5 September 2007, U.S. covert military forces, Ugandan troops, and rebels aligned with chief rebel Jean-Pierre Bemba and occupied Congo’s oil- and gold-rich Semliki Basin.⁴³

U.S. military involvement indirectly correlates with the protractedness and structural linkages of the conflicts in the region, creating an environment of insecurity and instability prone to terrorist recruitment and crimes such as piracy and money laundering that are detrimental to America’s geo-strategic interests on the continent. Countries militarily allied to the United States are involved in the Congolese and Sudanese/Darfur conflicts. Rwandan and Ugandan troops invaded Congo in 1998 and triggered ongoing cross-border fighting that persists to this day. Rwanda and Uganda are both U.S. and British military client states. Uganda military forces

occupied the Congo oil- and mineral-rich towns of eastern Congo. It internally fights the Lord’s Resistant Army rebels, and has been accused of “genocide” against the Acholi people. Rwanda is fighting in eastern Congo, meddling in Burundi, and has some 2,000 forces in Darfur. Ethiopia is at war with Somalia and poised to reinvade Eritrea. Ethiopia, Uganda, and Chad are the “frontline” states militarily disturbing Sudan. Sudan in turn backs guerrilla armies in Uganda, Chad, and Congo. U.S. support for factions and shifting loyalties with parties in the Darfur and Sudan conflicts have affected Sudan’s insecurity and instability.

The United States seems to replicate the Cold War strategic mistakes with high risks of getting deeply into African conflicts, supporting repressive regimes, excusing human rights abuses, diverting scarce budget resources, building resentment, and undermining long-term U.S. interests in Africa.⁴⁴

Oxfam and other charitable groups signed a report called “Nowhere to Turn” that was very critical of the militarization of aid because it puts civilians at greater risk.⁴⁵ Elsewhere, in Afghanistan, the Taliban targets schools and hospitals erected by the U.S. Army or associated private contractors, but those erected by civilian or nongovernmental organizations are rarely harassed.⁴⁶

Counterinsurgency analyst David Kilcullen has warned that heavy-handed military action, such as air strikes that kill civilians and collaboration with counterinsurgency efforts by incumbent regimes, far from diminishing the threat of terrorism, helps it grow.⁴⁷ Undoubtedly, we witness increasing terrorism in Africa despite U.S. military presence. These conditions of insecurity and instability threaten America’s geo-strategic interests in Africa, demanding strategic change in its dealings with Africa.

Policy Implications—Demand for Soft Power

Defense secretary Gates stresses civilian aspects of U.S. engagement and recommends that the State Department lead U.S. engagement with other countries. He argues, “We cannot kill or capture our way to victory” in the long-term campaign against terrorism,” suggesting increased civilian efforts.⁴⁸ Despite its lofty agenda, AFRICOM’s stratagem excluded state capacity building and socio-economic development of the impoverished

people. Refugees International reports that U.S. aid to Africa is becoming increasingly militarized, resulting in skewed priorities and less attention given to longer-term development projects that could lead to greater stability across the continent.⁴⁹ Malan argues that “this strategy will not achieve the security objectives of addressing the root causes of terrorism and it certainly won’t address the developmental objectives of U.S. foreign policy.”⁵⁰ Gates observes that “America’s civilian institutions of diplomacy and development are undermanned and underfunded relative to both the military budget and U.S. relative responsibilities and challenges around the world.”⁵¹ The Pentagon, which controlled about 3 percent of official aid money a decade ago, now controls 22 percent, while the U.S. Agency for International Development’s share has declined from 65 percent to 40 percent.⁵²

Obviously, it would be naïve to ignore the relevance of military force in overseas contingency operations, but U.S. failure to address the causes of growing insurgency in Africa is also a strategic miscalculation. Gates recommends bolstering the civilian efforts that he considers vital to U.S. success overseas. According to Gates, “the most persistent and potentially dangerous threats will come less from emerging ambitious states, than from failing

ones that cannot meet their basic needs much less the aspirations of their people.”⁵³ The priority is rather to resolve the problems of poverty, promote good governance, help build weak state capacities, and promote responsible use of the country’s wealth to develop the human capacity of all the citizenry. Weak and failed states, due to their inherent weaknesses, are safe havens for terrorism and international criminal activities such as drugs and money laundering, which finance terrorism. The U.S. must work with African states to arrest the decline in state capacities. The State Department and United States Agency for International Development’s unprecedented Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review to enhance civilian capabilities of U.S. statecraft are most welcomed. The review must design a clear vision that will help build stronger and more effective governance in weak states, reduce corruption, promote rule of law, stimulate economic development, reduce poverty, and promote long-term development.⁵⁴ International coordination and trust-building are what makes America strong, and Judah Grunstein articulates this very well by stating :

Much of our national security strategy depends on securing the cooperation of other nations, which will depend heavily on the extent to which our efforts abroad are viewed



Chebelley villagers and Djiboutian guests line the road singing and clapping for the arrival of the official party for the Chebelley Clinic grand opening ceremony, Chebelley Village, Djibouti, 18 April 2012. (U.S. Air Force, Senior Airman Lael Huss)

as legitimate by their publics. The solution is . . . the steady accumulation of actions and results that build trust and credibility over time.⁵⁵

To enlist the cooperation of Africa in achieving its interests, the U.S. should formalize good relations with all African states and design a framework that harmonizes their security interests, which includes Africa's human-security needs. This requires an operational paradigm shift from primarily selective bilateral military policy to one that prioritizes collaborative and multilateral actions with both Africa and global partners. All African states' issues demand equal attention if the United States is to obviate the imminent threats to its interests in Africa. The challenges we face today are complex and demand collective efforts and use of both hard and soft powers. Selectivity and militarization alone would fail to overcome these challenges. It is prudent the United States debunks its neorealist "hard power" policy and adopts liberal "soft power" policies in line with its idealist values and ends to capture Africa's support in fulfilling its strategic aspirations on the continent. President Bush acknowledged the ineffectiveness of America's over-reliance on force alone as a foreign policy, stating that the promotion of freedom was "not primarily the task of arms," and the United States would not impose its own style of government upon the world. "Our goal instead is to help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom, and make their own way."⁵⁶ To demonstrate real commitment to develop a new partnership with Africa, the United States needs to redirect the focus away

from strengthening military capacity and toward promoting human development in Africa. The United States, as the only super power in a unipolar world, stands to benefit from a stable, developed, and peaceful Africa. The United States could help create the conditions needed for peace and stability by restricting the flow of military weapons and training and increasing support for sustainable development policies. The United States can also champion a cause of international arms sales code of conduct based on human rights, nonaggression, and democracy. The United States should provide increased development assistance to Africa and encourage civil-society building.

Conclusion

The United States increased military involvement in Africa to suppress terrorism, seek energy sources, and counter China's influence in Africa. Other nations conceptualized these actions as exploitative and imperialistic, aimed at controlling Africa's energy resources. The U.S. involvement also raised concerns about challenges to sovereignty, welfare, and the survival of the African Union. America's covert and overt military alliances and joint operations with selected military allies affected spillage, intensity, protractedness, and duration of the Congo, Sudan, and Darfur conflicts. The U.S. militarization policy has backfired, undermining the attainment of its strategic interests. To elicit Africa's support, the United States needs to debunk its neorealist "hard power" policy and adopt liberal "soft power" policies such as assisting Africa in its socio-political economic development. **MR**

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