Africa’s history, perhaps more than any other continent, has been beset by interventions from the outside world in general and by the reigning ‘great powers’ in particular. Indeed, it is only half a lifetime since African nations began to emerge from under the yoke of colonialism. The fading of the colonial era did not, however, end outside interference in African affairs. To the contrary, the continent became a proxy battleground for many of the hotter engagements of the so-called Cold War. It seemed that the fall of the Berlin Wall might usher in an era in which Africans might have the opportunity to keep Africa largely to themselves. Once again, however, this was not to be. Regional powers such as France showed considerable reluctance to release their grip on their former colonies, and crises like the one in Sierra Leone in 2000 seemed to demand intervention by reluctant former colonisers like Britain. New players, such as the United States of America, also

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found themselves responding to humanitarian disasters like that in Somalia in the early 1990s. Even then, interventions seemed to be undertaken with a strong eye to national self-interest on the part of the intervening powers. When hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were murdered in the 1994 genocide, the world stood by and watched.

Today Africa continues to feel the effects of the outside world’s interventions. What has changed, however, are the powers that now top the list of those with ‘interests’ in the continent. While traditional players like France, Britain and Portugal still appear on the list (see for example Berouk Mesfin’s contribution to this volume), their traditional position in Africa is now being challenged by China, the US, India and even Brazil. Many argue that the growing role of these powers is simply an inevitable product of globalisation, that unstoppable process that is ensuring that Africa is now inextricably ‘in’ the world. Others, however, are less charitable. There is much talk of a ‘new scramble’ for Africa’s natural resources, and some are calling these new interveners Africa’s new colonisers.¹

In this issue of the *African Security Review* we give focused attention to recent superpower and regional power engagement in Africa. In particular, our contributors subject the motives and missions of China and the US to close scrutiny. In his contribution Thaddeus Underwood puts forward the case for a closer relationship between the US and South Africa, arguing that South Africa’s role as economic and political leader of the continent makes this relationship a critical and mutually beneficial one. In contrast, Christopher Isike, Ufo Okeke-Uzodike and Lysias Gilbert argue for what is increasingly becoming an Africa-wide view, that the US claim that the standing up of AFRICOM reflects a confluence of interest between the US and Africa is to be viewed with suspicion. AFRICOM is the newest of the US Department of Defence’s ‘Combatant Commands’, each of which has responsibility for US military operations and military relations in a particular region of the world. AFRICOM takes over responsibility from EUCOM, CENTCOM and PACOM for all of Africa except Egypt. AFRICOM’s mission is envisaged as being unique, focusing on conflict prevention rather than military intervention, a mission it will pursue through a unique partnership between the US military and civilian government agencies.

China’s role in Africa is addressed by Kwesi Aning and Delphine Lecoutre in their contribution entitled ‘China’s African ventures’. Aning and Lecoutre challenge the reader to look beyond the standard view of China as ‘energy-grabbing dragon’. In its stead they put forward an argument in support of the view that China’s interventions offer ‘new avenues of flexibility and maneuverability’ for African states. Chris Alden’s recent book, *China in Africa* (Zed Books, 2007), is without question one of the best new works on this topic. This issue of the *African Security Review* continues the focus on China’s African ventures by way of an interchange dedicated to Alden’s book. After a brief overview from Alden himself, expert on Chinese domestic policy Li Mingjiang offers his reflections on the book.
Beyond the contributions on the theme ‘Africa in the world’, this issue of the *African Security Review* also offers, as always, some of the finest analysis of African security issues available anywhere. We are pleased to confirm that the journal has the accreditation of the South African Department of Education (SAPSE accreditation). As always our thanks to the dedicated contributors who make this publication what it is, and our thanks to you, the reader, for your interest in the *African Security Review*. As we continue to grow and evolve we see some exciting changes for the journal on the horizon. Further details should emerge through the course of this year.