

BRIEFING

US AFRICA COMMAND: NEXT STEP OR NEXT STUMBLE?

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FRUSTRATION HAS BEEN A LEITMOTIF IN THE POST-COLD WAR SECURITY LANDSCAPE, especially regarding multinational peace building. The latest development in this landscape is the United States of America's newly established 'Africa Command' (AFRICOM), a military command responsible for all US military activity in Africa. Although AFRICOM represents a shift in US strategy towards peace building, whether AFRICOM is good for Africa remains to be seen. Recognizing that AFRICOM is still at an embryonic stage, this briefing will broadly examine its origins, the US interests informing its mission, the key peace-building lessons learned it aspires to institutionalize, and finally some early challenges that will confront this nascent command.¹

The genesis of AFRICOM

The Pentagon views the world through the optic of the Unified Command Plan, which divides the world between 'Unified Combatant Commands (COCOMs)', also known simply as 'Unified Commands'. A Unified Command is responsible for coordinating, integrating and managing all Department of Defense (DoD) assets and operations in its designated area of responsibility. There are two types of Unified Commands: those that are responsible for territory and those that are responsible for a function. For example, Southern Command's (SOUTHCOM) area of responsibility is territorial, Central and South America, while Special Operations Command (SOCOM) oversees a function, US special operations worldwide. The Unified Command – arguably the most powerful command structure within

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1. The views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author, and do not reflect the official opinions of any US government agency.

the US military – is led by a four-star General or Admiral, and is a ‘joint’ unit, meaning that it controls forces from multiple services (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines). As of January 2007, there were nine Unified Commands: five territorial and four functional. On 6 February 2007, President Bush announced the establishment of a sixth territorial Unified Command, Africa Command or ‘AFRICOM’.²

The Unified Command concept originated during the Cold War, and was designed to better coordinate and integrate US military forces for armed confrontation against the Soviet Union and/or its proxies. Reflecting its perceived lack of strategic importance, no Unified Command for Africa was established. Instead, DoD chose to split African coverage between three territorial Unified Commands: European Command (EUCOM), Central Command (CENTCOM), and Pacific Command (PACOM). An unfortunate consequence was a potential for disunity in DoD efforts in Africa, especially at the ‘seams’ between Unified Commands. For instance, a hypothetical US military response to the crisis in Darfur might be hampered because the area of concern straddles the EUCOM and CENTCOM boundary, causing coordination challenges.³ Making US–Africa engagement even more problematic was the fact that DoD never developed a sizeable cadre of dedicated African experts. Only within the past decade did DoD invest in an African Center for Strategic Studies, akin to the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Germany, to support the development of US strategic policy towards Africa. Additionally, Africa never benefited from the advocacy of a four-star COCOM Commander, whose undiluted mandate includes assisting policy makers to understand the perspectives of African countries and formulating effective African security policy.

AFRICOM was at least in part a response to these potential problems. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates testified before the Senate, creating AFRICOM ‘will enable us to have a more effective and integrated approach than the current arrangement of dividing Africa between [different Unified Commands]’.⁴ AFRICOM combines all of the countries conventionally considered ‘African’ under a single, Unified Command, with the exception

2. The White House Office of the Press Secretary, ‘President Bush creates a Department of Defense Unified Combatant Command for Africa’ (press release, 6 February 2007). <www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/02/20070206-3.html> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

3. It should also be noted that the issue of ‘seams’ is not unique to DoD. The Department of State also divides Africa between Sub-Sahara Africa and Northern Africa/Middle East, rather than treat the continent as an organic whole. The Bureau of African Affairs is responsible for sub-Saharan Africa and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs is responsible for Northern Africa and the Middle East.

4. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 6, 2007. <www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1121> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

of Egypt, which will remain the responsibility of CENTCOM owing to its relationship with the Middle East in general and Israel in particular. As well as having its own four-star general, the new Unified Command will consist of approximately 400–700 staff members, be temporarily located in Stuttgart, Germany – although it is planned to relocate to Africa (time and place to be determined) – and is ambitiously scheduled to be operational by 1 October 2008.⁵ This administrative change within DoD is intended to be entirely transparent to Africa. Theresa Whelan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, explains that creating a ‘command focused solely on Africa has no impact on the sovereignty of African nations’.⁶

More than maps

AFRICOM involves more than just redrawing maps inside the Pentagon and changing nameplates on office doors. AFRICOM is a response to the growing strategic importance of Africa within the US spectrum of vital interests.⁷ The March 2006 US National Security Strategy – which outlines the major national security concerns of the US and explains how the Executive branch plans to manage them – affirms that ‘Africa holds growing geo-strategic importance and is a high priority of this Administration’.⁸ As Ryan Henry, the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, explains: ‘Africa . . . is emerging on the world scene as a strategic player, and we need to deal with it as a continent.’⁹

AFRICOM has been created to address at least six areas of concern contingent to US interests: counter-terrorism; securing natural resources; containing armed conflict and humanitarian crisis; retarding the spread of HIV/AIDS; reducing international crime; and responding to growing Chinese influence. As the issues surrounding these areas will be familiar to most readers of *African Affairs*, we will not discuss them in any detail here. However, it is worth noting that AFRICOM will oversee current US counter-terrorism programmes, such as Combined Joint Task Force Horn

5. AFRICOM Public Brief, United States Department of Defense, 2 February 2007. Lauren Ploch, ‘Africa Command: US strategic interests and the role of the US military in Africa’ (Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report, 16 May 2007), p. 9. <www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL34003.pdf> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

6. Theresa Whelan, ‘Why AFRICOM?’ (Department of Defense White Paper, 2007, copy on file with the author).

7. This development predates 11 September 2001. See, for example, Peter J. Schraeder, ‘Reviewing the study of US policy toward Africa: from intellectual ‘backwater’ to theory construction’, *Third World Quarterly* 14, 4 (1993), pp. 775–86; Herman A. Cohen, ‘The United States and Africa: nonvital interests also require attention’, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 25, 1 (February 2003), pp. 19–24.

8. ‘The National Security Strategy of the United States of America’ (document prepared for Congress by executive branch of US government, March 2006).

9. DoD News Briefing with Principal Deputy Under Secretary Henry from the Pentagon, 23 April 2007.

of Africa (CJTF-HOA) and the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI),¹⁰ that AFRICOM may become increasingly involved in the maritime security of the Gulf of Guinea,¹¹ and that stemming armed conflict and mitigating humanitarian catastrophe also remain important objectives of the US. In 2004 the G-8 introduced the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), a multilateral programme that plans to create a self-sustaining peacekeeping force of 75,000 troops, a majority of them African, by 2010. In the US, the Department of State manages GPOI and the Africa Contingency Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA) programme in the same office.¹² Although AFRICOM will not manage the GPOI/ACOTA, it will offer technical assistance and probably partner with African states in security sector reform to help Africans improve their own security.¹³

In sum, US security interests in Africa are considerable, and Africa's position in the US's strategic spectrum has moved from peripheral to central. AFRICOM is more than a mere map change: it is a post-Cold War paradigm shift.

Lessons learned?

On the day AFRICOM was publicly announced, President Bush stated that the command 'will enhance our efforts to help bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa'.¹⁴ Words like 'development' and 'health' are atypical of a military unit's mission, which traditionally focuses on fighting and winning wars. From where did this anomalous, possibly revolutionary vision of security emerge?

AFRICOM was born out of four security lessons captured (but perhaps not yet 'learned') since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The first is that sometimes the best instruments of security do not fire bullets. Although AFRICOM will

10. For more information, see Peter Pham, 'Next front? Evolving United States–African strategic relations in the "War on Terrorism" and beyond', *Comparative Strategy* 26, 1 (2007), pp. 39–54.

11. 'You look at West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, it becomes more focused because of the energy situation,' General Bantz Craddock, EUCOM Commander, recently told reporters in Washington. Safeguarding energy 'obviously is out in front'. Tony Capaccio, 'Securing African oil a major role for new Command (Update 1)', *Bloomberg.com*, 18 May 2007.

12. For more information about GPOI/ACOTA and US interest, see: Nina M. Serafino, 'The Global Peace Operations Initiative: background and issues for Congress' (CRS Report RL32773, 11 June 2007), pp. 1–11. <fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32773.pdf> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

13. Jeff Schogol, 'AFRICOM shaping up as model of support,' *Stars and Stripes* Mideast edition (Arlington, Virginia), 27 March 2007.

14. The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 'President Bush creates a Department of Defense Unified Combatant Command for Africa' (press release, 6 February 2007). <www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/02/20070206-3.html> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

have all the roles and responsibilities of a conventional Unified Command, including the ability to conduct lethal operations, it will also have a broader mandate aimed at preventing conflict. This 'soft power' capability, once anathema to the military (Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld professed not even to understand the term), is a recognition, in part, of the failure of kinetic weaponry alone to achieve 'victory' – by any metric – in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Based on this, the second lesson captured is the shift of strategic focus from combat operations to combat prevention. In conventional US military doctrine there are four phases of a military campaign: I Deter/Engage, II Seize Initiative, III Decisive Operations, and IV Transition. Recently, military thinkers have introduced an additional phase, 'Phase Zero', which is purely preventative in nature, focusing on actions to avert conflicts from developing.¹⁵ AFRICOM will adopt conflict prevention as its primary mission, as Ryan Henry makes clear: 'The purpose of the command is . . . what we refer to as anticipatory measures, and those are taking actions that will prevent problems from becoming crises, and crises from becoming conflicts. So the mission of the command is to be able to prevent that.'¹⁶

Similarly, the third lesson is that 'Phase IV' or stability operations may eclipse combat operations when determining 'victory'. In 2005 the White House issued National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 44, which recognizes the primacy of reconstruction and stabilization operations,¹⁷ and which forms the foundation for interagency coordination of all stability and reconstruction programmes.¹⁸ Additionally, the Pentagon issued DOD Directive 3000.05, earlier that year, defining stability operations as a 'core US military mission' that 'shall be given priority comparable to combat operations'.¹⁹ This marks an evolution of defence strategy for a military that traditionally has focused on 'fighting and winning wars'.

A fourth lesson is the growing realization that security and development are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. Since the end of

15. General Charles Wald, 'The Phase Zero campaign,' *Joint Force Quarterly*, 43 (Winter, 2006), pp. 72–5.

16. DoD News Briefing with Principal Deputy Under Secretary Henry from the Pentagon, 23 April 2007. <www.defenselink.mil/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=3942> (Accessed on 10 November 2007). See also, *Quadrennial Defense Review*, (Accessed on 6 February 2006), p. 17. <www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/QDR20060203.pdf> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

17. 'National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD-44: Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization', 7 December 2005. <www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-44.pdf> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

18. The term 'interagency' refers to the myriad of US government agencies within the Executive branch. Within the context of this article, interagency generally refers to those organizations that manage US foreign affairs: Departments of State, Defense, Treasury, Justice, US Agency for International Development, intelligence agencies, etc.

19. 'DOD Directive 3000.05: Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations', 28 November 2005. <www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/300005p.pdf> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

the Cold War, donor states have come to realize that if the security sector disregards the rule of law, democratic principles, and sound management practices, then sustainable, poverty-reducing development is nearly impossible to achieve. Ongoing events in Iraq have made it clear, even to sceptics within US policy-making circles, that achieving lasting development depends on first achieving lasting security. In other words, security is a precondition for development. The relationship between security and development, long avoided by the military, will be at the epicenter of AFRICOM's mission.

Shaping the security-development nexus

If there is a single lesson learned for DoD in recent years, it is that security is a precondition of development and that the failure of development can result in insecurity. Accordingly, AFRICOM's strategy for addressing African security challenges will rest heavily on security cooperation with African nations. In this vein, Ryan Henry and other senior DoD officials continually reiterate that, 'The goal is for AFRICOM not to be a US leadership role on the continent but rather to be supporting the indigenous leadership efforts that are currently going on.'²⁰

Security cooperation efforts to date are mainly limited to traditional 'train and equip' programmes, such as International Military Education and Training, Foreign Military Financing, and Foreign Military Sales. However, the Pentagon is exploring new, more broad-reaching programmes, such as the National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP), which links US states with African countries in order to enhance military capabilities, improve interoperability, and advance the principles of responsible governance. In 2006, the National Guard conducted over 89 SPP events and members of the National Guard and Reserve participated in over 50 of 150 Joint Contact Team Program activities.²¹

There is another programme on the horizon that may promise a more comprehensive approach to security cooperation. Legislated by Congress in 2006, Section 1206 of the 'National Defense Authorization Act to Build the Capacity of Foreign Military Forces' couples the authorities of the State Department with the resources of DoD to rapidly build and enhance military capacity of key allies and partners. Utilizing this legislation, EUCOM provided over \$11 million to build intelligence-sharing capacity for Pan-Sahel countries as well as maritime domain awareness systems

20. Henry press briefing, 23 April 2007.

21. Testimony of General Craddock to the House Armed Services Committee, 15 March 2007. <www.eucom.mil/english/Command/Posture/HASC%20-%20Craddock_Testimony_031507.pdf> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

for countries in the Gulf of Guinea.²² More significantly, this programme paves the way for AFRICOM to assist in more sophisticated programmes, such as Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and Security Sector Reform (SSR). In fact, the US Institute of Peace is currently developing a ‘whole of government’ approach to SSR, a potentially imperative mission for AFRICOM.

To be effective, AFRICOM must fuse the capabilities of DoD, the State Department, USAID, and other civilian organizations into a functional Unified Command. This will prove difficult: US security and development institutions have long been divorced from one another in terms of perspective, priorities, and even cultures. Many within Washington DC foreign policy circles jokingly quip that the State Department and USAID are from Venus while DoD is from Mars, referring to their inherently different cultures, personalities, and training.²³ Over time, this schism has ossified into interagency intransigency, lack of inter-operability, and disjointed efforts – an outcome which has frustrated the development of fragile states, despite decades of dedicated resources. Worse, it has allowed the cycle of violence in many conflict-prone regions to endure, requiring costly, reactive, and repeated interventions by the US military (in Liberia, for example).

AFRICOM must span the cultural divide within the US interagency community if it is to be expected to supervise an array of missions that resemble development more than combat. Thus the new command will be staffed with civilians from other government agencies, who will be placed in key positions and not just in traditional liaison roles. In an even greater break from convention, one of the Deputy Commanders will actually be a civilian, most likely an Ambassador.²⁴ This radical departure from the past signifies DoD’s commitment to make AFRICOM a ‘Combatant Command ‘Plus,’²⁵ with the ‘plus’ being an interagency approach to the security challenges of Africa. However, this approach remains *sui generis*, and interagency best practices will have to be identified, developed, and institutionalized. As Theresa Whelan describes it: ‘The command will continue to evolve over time, and will ultimately be an iterative process. It will not become a static organization but will continue to be a dynamic one, as circumstances merit.’²⁶

22. *Ibid.* p. 12.

23. See, for example, Rickey L. Rife, ‘Defense is from Mars State is from Venus: improving communications and promoting national security’ (US Army War College White Paper, Carlyle, PA, 1998).

24. Henry press briefing, 7 February 2007.

25. ‘Pentagon: AFRICOM won’t boost US troop presence on the continent’, *Inside the Army*, 12 February 2007. <insidedefense.com> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

26. Interview with Theresa Whelan, Pentagon, 9 July 2007.

Creating security challenges?

AFRICOM is likely to outsource a good portion of its capabilities to private security companies (PSCs),²⁷ an issue with compound implications, especially in Africa. Unlike private contractors who drive trucks, cook food, and maintain equipment, PSCs employ and/or train others to employ lethal force. For example, Blackwater, which holds at least \$109 million worth of US contracts in Iraq, provides armed convoy escorts, which occasionally kill Iraqi civilians;²⁸ DynCorp International received \$1.1 billion from the US government to train the new Afghanistan police force;²⁹ and AEGIS Defense Services (run by Tim Spicer of Sandline International) received a \$293 million contract from DoD to provide armed security services in Iraq.³⁰ This young billion-dollar industry, with companies listed on the New York and London Stock Exchanges, is increasingly performing traditional core military tasks, once considered the sole province of governments.

PSCs and AFRICOM have complementary interests: supply and demand. The US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have stretched the capacity of the military, creating a multi-billion dollar market for PSC services, such as training and equipping, war-zone logistics, humanitarian response, post-conflict reconstruction, infrastructure repair, and even SSR (DynCorp International in Liberia, for example). Once the Iraq and Afghanistan economic 'bubble' bursts, PSCs will seek new US-sponsored markets involving pre- and post-conflict support, and that market will be AFRICOM. Senior leaders within DoD have repeatedly assured African nations that AFRICOM will have a 'small footprint' on the continent with no new military units.³¹ In essence, AFRICOM will only be a headquarters unit that serves to coordinate DoD efforts in Africa. Yet, its mission remains ambitious, requiring more than staff officers to accomplish it. How will it reconcile the twin mandates of 'small footprint' with large mission? In a word: contractors.

The growing number of PSCs currently working in Africa evidences this supply and demand symmetry. For example, DynCorp International and Pacific Architects and Engineers (owned by Lockheed Martin) presently support US peacekeeping operations in Africa; MPRI, Blackwater

27. The term 'private military companies (PMCs)' is also often utilized to describe these companies. For the purposes of this article, the term PSC is assumed to be generic and all-encompassing.

28. John M. Broder, 'Report says firm tried cover-ups after shootings', *New York Times*, 2 October 2007.

29. James Glanz and David Rohde, 'The reach of war; US report finds dismal training of Afghan police', *New York Times*, 4 December 2006. <<http://www.nytimes.com>> (Accessed on 27 July 2007).

30. 'Aegis Iraq contract renewed'. <<http://www.aegisworld.com/article.aspx?artID = 6>> (Accessed on 27 July 2007).

31. Henry press statement, 23 April 2007.

and Northrop Grumman support GPOI; Triple Canopy, Armor Group, and other companies maintain offices across the continent. Remarkably, this growth is less than five years old. Ryan Henry recently confirmed AFRICOM's intention to use contractors: 'there'll be some presence of contractors, but that the US government and government employees will clearly be the ones there making the decisions'.³²

However, this assumption that the government will control policy outcomes ignores the co-dependent relationship between government and this industry. While the military has honed its war-fighting skills in the Middle East, the PSC industry in the US has developed the monopoly on technical knowledge relating to post-conflict reconstruction. This asymmetry of expertise means that government personnel will be dependent upon contractors' technical opinions in order to make relevant policy decisions. This creates an irreconcilable conflict of interest, as contractors have a vested interest in steering the government towards profitable outcomes rather than good public policy. Worse, some of these companies may claim that the technical knowledge developed while performing a government contract is 'proprietary information', meaning that they are not obligated to share techniques paid for by the government with the government.³³ Consequently, companies would be patenting essential post-conflict reconstruction functions, which they can sell back to the government at inflated monopoly rates. With a few notable exceptions, there has yet to be a serious discussion within Congress or the Executive branch defining the appropriate spheres of activity for private contractors and government personnel in the security sector.

Other questions also loom. If AFRICOM relies heavily on PSCs, then will this encourage a market for force, which attracts PSCs from other countries, such as Russia, China, or elsewhere? How will the industry respond if there is a demand for more combat-oriented services? Will the market develop a diverse clientele, including multinational companies, NGOs, opposition groups, and private individuals? Could, for example, a NGO hire a PSC to conduct an armed humanitarian intervention in Darfur to 'save lives' in the name of human rights and the 'Responsibility to Protect' doctrine? Could this draw the US into a war with Sudan? What impact would this have on the future of global security governance? Few would like to see the formation of an industry vested in conflict in Africa, yet these critical questions remain scarcely examined.

32. *Ibid.*

33. For more information, see James Cockayne, 'Commercial security in humanitarian and post-conflict settings: an exploratory study' (March 2006). <ssrn.com/abstract=917876> (Accessed on 10 November 2007).

Conclusion

Is AFRICOM good for Africa? It may be too soon to tell, and it depends on who one asks. AFRICOM is a grand experiment for the US military, as it inverts the strategic paradigm by prioritizing non-combat missions over traditional war-fighting operations. Its bilateral approach to security and emphasis on the root causes of conflict rather than reactionary, force-driven solutions are a promising development for a military that prides itself on assault rather than prevention. However, to many, 'cooperative security', 'defense diplomacy', and 'security sector reform' are euphemisms to describe the strengthening of militaries of authoritarian regimes, which might use the armed forces to quash domestic dissent. When so many governments in Africa are part of the development and security problem, enhancing their militaries is hardly a neutral or even welcome activity. Also, the potential over-utilization of PSCs could create a market for force in Africa, if not checked by meaningful regulation and knowledgeable policy makers. Moreover, irreconcilable incongruities between profit motive and public policy suggest the potential for a US foreign policy collision on the continent. Lastly, AFRICOM's 'cooperative security' mandate has the dual challenge of securing US interests in Africa while simultaneously bolstering Africa's own interests, however defined. Reconciling these divergent objectives rests upon the assumption that they are, in fact, one and the same. This is a grand assumption for a grand experiment.