



U.S. AFRICA COMMAND: A New Strategic Paradigm?

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This new command will strengthen our security cooperation with Africa and help to create new opportunities to bolster the capabilities of our partners in Africa. Africa 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.¹

—President George W. Bush

ON 6 FEBRUARY 2007, the president announced the establishment of a tenth unified combatant command called Africa Command, or “AFRICOM.” Its area of responsibility will cover Africa, and it will have an unprecedented number of interagency civilians in leadership roles (including a civilian deputy commander). This new command’s objective will be to enhance Department of Defense (DOD) efforts to assist African partners in achieving a more stable environment through security cooperation.

Yet questions abound. AFRICOM’s vision, as outlined by the president on the day of its public unveiling, is anomalous among unified commands. Words like “development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth” are atypical of military missions, which traditionally center on fighting and winning wars. In many ways, AFRICOM is a post-Cold War experiment that radically rethinks security in the early 21st century based on peace-building lessons learned since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Will it work? This article explores possibilities by analyzing AFRICOM’s origins, timing, strategy, and composition as well as the early challenges that will confront the nascent command.

Why AFRICOM?

AFRICOM originated as an internal administrative change within DOD that remedies “an outdated arrangement left over from the Cold War,” in the words of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.² Or, in the words of Ambassador Robert Loftis, the former senior State Department member of the AFRICOM transition team, it was created because “Africa is more important to us strategically and deserves to be viewed through its own lens.”³ That lens is the new unified command.

Unified commands, or combatant commands, were instituted during the Cold War to better manage military forces for possible armed confrontation with the Soviet Union and its proxies. Today, they are prisms through which the Pentagon views the world. Each command is responsible for coordinating, integrating, and managing all Defense assets and operations in its designated area of responsibility, per the Unified Command Plan. This plan is regularly

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reviewed, modified as required, and approved by the president.

The unified command design has proven problematic for DOD's involvement in Africa, a continent not viewed as strategically significant during the Cold War. That DOD never designated a unified command for Africa evinces the want of concern for one of the largest and most conflict-prone continents on the planet. Instead, DOD divided African coverage between three unified commands: European Command (EUCOM), Central Command (CENTCOM), and Pacific Command (PACOM). This lack of focus had several deleterious effects.

The first effect is that Africa was never a number-one priority for any unified command. Each viewed its strategic imperative as being elsewhere, leaving Africa as a secondary or even tertiary concern. For example, EUCOM's strategic center of gravity has always been Europe, with the overwhelming majority of its forces, staff, and resources dedicated to that continent, even after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Second, the three-part division of responsibility violates the principle of unity of command, increasing the likelihood of an uncoordinated DOD effort in Africa. This disunity can occur especially at the "seams" between unified commands; for instance, a hypothetical U.S. military response to the crisis in the Darfur region might be complicated because the area of interest straddles the EUCOM and CENTCOM boundary, causing coordination challenges.⁴

Third, owing to historical disinterest, DOD never developed a sizable cadre of dedicated African experts. Only within the past decade has DOD invested in the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (a think tank akin to the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Germany) to support the development of U.S. strategic policy towards Africa.

Lastly, Africa has never benefited from the advocacy of a four-star commander whose undiluted mandate includes helping policymakers understand the perspectives of African countries and formulate effective African security policy.

Taken together, these four deficiencies resulted in a disjointed and hindered approach towards Africa that lacked primacy within the Pentagon and, by extension, U.S. interagency networks.

Partly in response to this unwarranted lack of attention, DOD decided to redraw the unified com-

mand landscape by creating AFRICOM (see figure 1). As Secretary 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]."⁵ AFRICOM combines under a single unified command all but one of the countries conventionally considered "African." (Egypt is the exception, owing to its relationship with the Middle East in general and Israel in particular. It remains covered by CENTCOM).

AFRICOM will be a distinct unified command with the sole responsibility of Africa.⁶ A four-star general will command it and its approximately 400-700 staff members. It will be temporarily located in Stuttgart, Germany, as a sub-unified command, but is scheduled to move to Africa (place to be determined) and be operational by 1 October 2008.⁷ Its four-star commander will be able to enhance policy decisions regarding Africa by advocating for African security issues on Capitol Hill and raising the military's strategic awareness of the continent.

DOD intends AFRICOM's presence to be innocuously transparent to African countries. Ryan Henry, the principal deputy under secretary of defense for policy, continually reiterates: "The goal is for AFRICOM not to be [sic] a U.S. leadership role on the continent but rather to be supporting the indigenous leadership efforts that are currently going on."⁸ The theme of partnership is ubiquitous in DOD's dealings with AFRICOM and Africa. The department has, for example, conducted high-level delegations to African countries to discuss the creation of the command. As Theresa Whelan, deputy assistant secretary of defense of African affairs, explains, "If we take partnership seriously, then we must go out in a way never done before and consult with the nations affected. This manner of approaching partnership was not done with EUCOM, PACOM, or CENTCOM."⁹

Why Now?

AFRICOM is more than just an administrative change within DOD; it responds to Africa's increased geopolitical importance to U.S. interests. As Deputy Under Secretary Henry has stated, "Africa...is emerging on the world scene as a strategic player, and we need to deal with it as a continent."¹⁰ U.S. strategic interests in Africa are many, including the

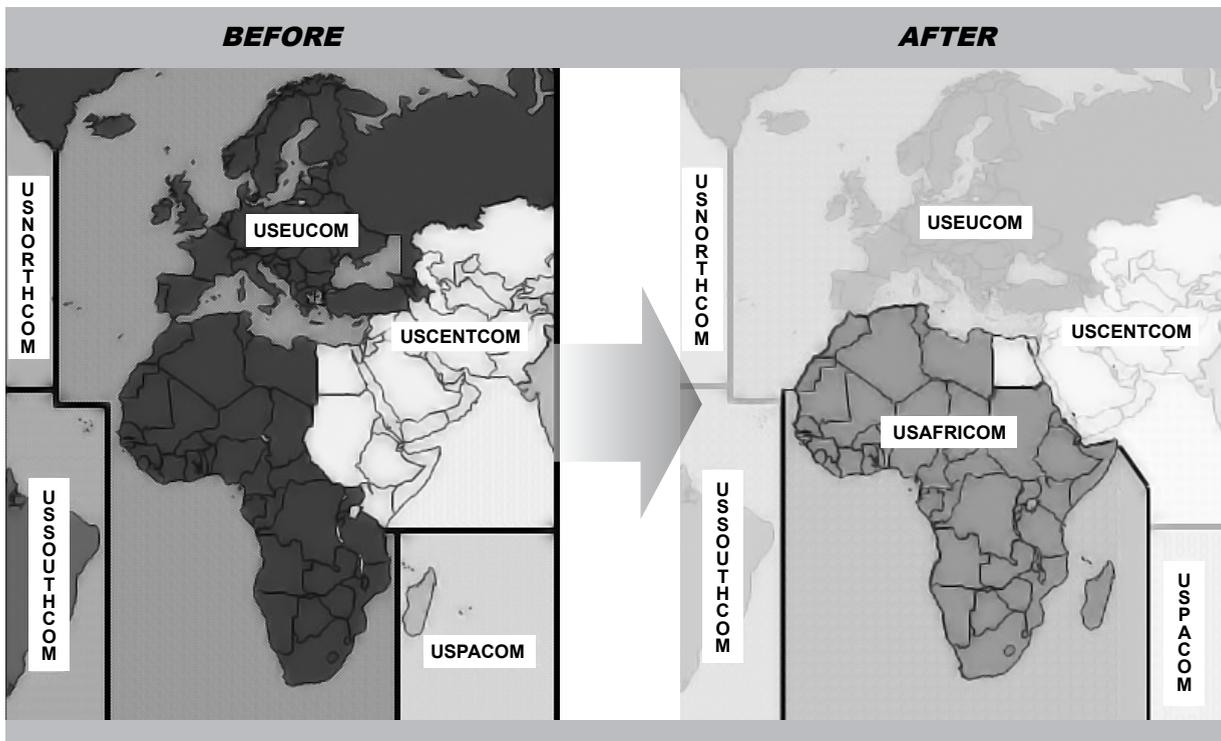


Figure 1. AFRICOM (right) will take over responsibility for all of Africa (except Egypt) from EUCCOM, CENTCOM, and PACOM (left) in October 2008.

needs to counter terrorism, secure natural resources, contain armed conflict and humanitarian crisis, retard the spread of HIV/AIDS, reduce international crime, and respond to growing Chinese influence.

Counterterrorism dominates much of U.S. security policy as the U.S. prosecutes its War on Terrorism. In a stark reversal of Cold War thinking, the 2002 *National Security Strategy* asserts that “America is now threatened less by conquering states than . . . by failing ones.”¹¹ From the U.S. perspective, the inability or unwillingness of some fragile states to govern territory within their borders can lead to the creation of safe-havens for terrorist organizations. Government recalcitrance was indeed the case with Afghanistan in the late 1990s, when the Taliban permitted Al-Qaeda to operate unfettered within its boundaries, leading to the events of 11 September 2001. Africa contains the preponderance of fragile states in the world today, placing it squarely in the crosshairs of the War on Terrorism. AFRICOM will oversee current U.S. counterterrorism programs in Africa, such as Operation Enduring Freedom: Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), and the Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI).¹²

America is also interested in Africa’s natural resources, especially in terms of energy security. As instability in the Middle East grows and international demand for energy soars, the world—and the United States in particular—will become increasingly beholden to Africa’s ability to produce oil, an inelastic commodity. Central Intelligence Agency estimates suggest Africa may supply as much as 25 percent of imports to America by 2015.¹³ Already by 2006, sub-Saharan African oil constituted approximately 18 percent of all U.S. imports (about 1.8 million barrels per day). By comparison, Persian Gulf imports were at 21 percent (2.2 million barrels per day).¹⁴

At present, Nigeria is Africa’s largest supplier of oil and the fifth largest global supplier of oil to the United States.¹⁵ However, instability in the Niger Delta region has reduced output periodically by as much as 25 percent, escalating world oil prices. For instance, the price of oil jumped more than \$3 per barrel in April 2007 after Nigeria’s national elections were disputed, and it spiked again in May after attacks on pipelines in the delta. To help control this volatility, AFRICOM may become increasingly involved in the maritime security of the Gulf of Guinea, where the potential for deep-water

drilling is high. “You look at West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, it becomes more focused because of the energy situation,” General Bantz Craddock, EUCOM Commander, told reporters in Washington. Safeguarding energy “obviously is out in front.”¹⁶

Stemming armed conflict and mitigating humanitarian catastrophe also remain important U.S. objectives. Africa has long endured political conflict, armed struggle, and natural disasters, all of which have exacted a grave toll on Africans and compromised international development efforts. The direct and indirect costs of instability are high in terms of human suffering and economic, social, and political retardation. Although Africa is afflicted by fewer serious armed conflicts today than it was a decade ago, it hosts a majority of the United Nations peacekeeping operations.¹⁷

African militaries make up a sizable contingent of the African peacekeeping operations conducted by the UN and such regional organizations as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Despite a willingness to participate in these operations, many African militaries lack the command, training, equipment, logistics, and institutional infrastructure required for complex peacekeeping, leaving the onus of support on the international community. This burden has prompted some donor countries to help build the capacity of African militaries, thereby enhancing their ability to participate in peacekeeping operations. In 2004 the G-8 introduced its Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), a multilateral program that plans to create a self-sustaining peacekeeping force of 75,000 troops, a majority of them African, by 2010. The U.S. Department of State manages GPOI, as it does the Africa Contingency Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA) program, which also trains peacekeepers.¹⁸ According to Chip Beck, who heads ACOTA, “Our job is to help African countries enhance their capabilities to effectively take part in peacekeeping operations.”¹⁹ Although AFRICOM will not manage GPOI or ACOTA, it should offer technical assistance to such programs and partner with African states in security sector reform (SSR).

HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death on the continent, and controlling its global spread remains a critical concern for the U.S. In 2004, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell described HIV/AIDS as “the greatest threat of mankind

today.”²⁰ According to the UN, nearly 25 million Africans were HIV-positive in 2006, representing 63 percent of infected persons worldwide.²¹ The rate of infection in some African security forces is believed to be high (between 40 and 60 percent in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo), raising concerns that those forces may be unable to deploy when needed and may even be vectors of the disease’s spread.²²

International crime in Africa is also a U.S. interest, especially the narcotics trade. West Africa has become the newest center for trafficking drugs. In the past year Nigeria, West Africa’s economic hub, has made 234 drug-trafficking arrests at the Lagos airport, which is just grazing the surface, according to government officials.²³ Guinea-Bissau, another West African country, is quickly developing into a narco-state. Its soldiers have been caught facilitating the transfer of narcotics to mostly European markets.²⁴ To suggest the scale of this emerging problem, there were two seizures of over 600 kilos of cocaine, worth over \$30 million each, during the past year. In Guinea-Bissau, narcotics trafficking accounts for almost 20 percent of GDP.²⁵ African trade in contraband such as narcotics, small arms, and human beings is a continuing global concern.

The People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) expanding influence in Africa is also a continuing worry for the United States. The continent is quickly emerging as a competitive battlefield in what some U.S. defense intellectuals are describing as a proxy economic cold war with China, especially in the quest for resources.²⁶ China’s insatiable appetite for oil and other natural resources is the product of its own success. The PRC’s economy has maintained an incredible average of 9 percent growth per annum over the last two decades, nearly tripling the country’s GDP during that time. African oil fuels this growth. Until 1993, China was a net exporter of oil; now it is the world’s second-largest energy consumer, obtaining 30 percent of its oil from African sources, especially Sudan, Angola, and Congo (Brazzaville).²⁷ Competition for natural resources, and oil in particular, is a strategic concern for the United States.

China is also seeking new markets for its goods. As its policy paper on Africa bluntly asserts: “The Chinese Government encourages and supports Chinese enterprises’ investment and business in Africa, and will continue to provide preferential loans and

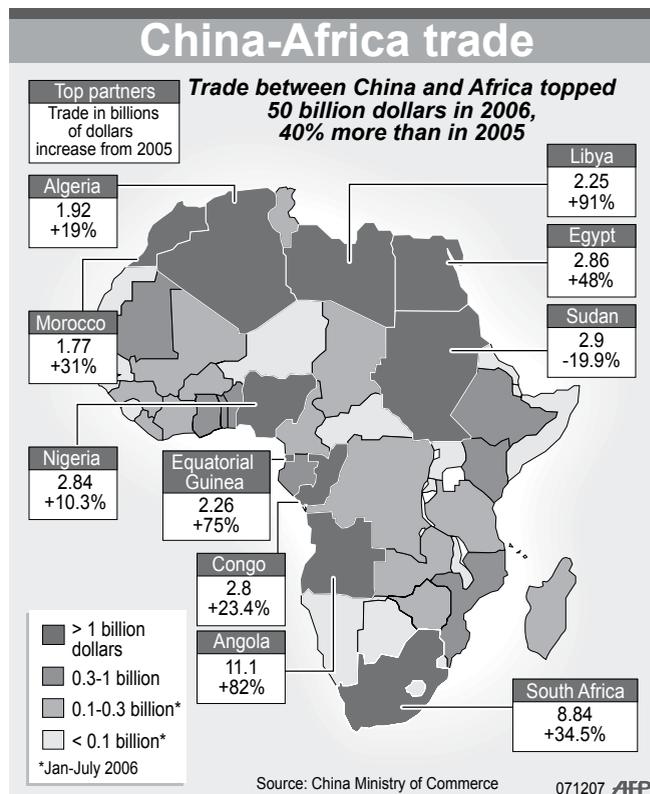
buyer credits to this end.”²⁸ Currently, over 700 Chinese state companies conduct business in Africa, making China the continent’s third largest trading partner, behind the United States and France, but ahead of Britain. A series of diplomatic initiatives buttress these commercial ventures, aimed initially not only at isolating Taiwan but also at broader policy objectives. The PRC has diplomatic relations with 47 of Africa’s states and offers limited, but not inconsiderable, development assistance in exchange for diplomatic support. China also engages in multilateral efforts to build strategic partnerships in Africa. In 1999, then-president Jiang Zemin petitioned the Organization of African Unity (now the African Union) to create a Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. A year later the first ministerial conference took place in Beijing with 44 African states participating. In 1995, two-way trade between Africa and China hovered at less than U.S. \$1 billion. By the end of 2006, it exceeded U.S. \$50 billion.

At the core of China’s rapid push into African markets is its drive to forge strategic alliances. African countries constitute the largest single regional grouping of states within any international organization, accentuating their importance to Chinese diplomacy. Furthermore, in multilateral settings such as the UN, African countries tend to engage in bloc-voting, an effective tactic for influencing rules formulation, multilateral negotiations, and other international processes. China has relied on African support in the past to overcome staunch international criticism. For example, African votes were crucial to blocking UN Commission on Human Rights resolutions that condemned Chinese human rights abuses.²⁹ In the words of Premier Wen Jiabao: “China is ready to coordinate its positions with African countries in the process of international economic rules formulation and multilateral trade negotiations.”³⁰ Strategic relationships with Africa will give China, at relatively low cost, the means to secure its position in the World Trade Organization and other multilateral venues.

This clout rankles the United States, which has admonished the PRC not to support “resource-rich countries without regard to the misrule at home or misbehavior abroad of those regimes.”³¹ Nevertheless, Beijing has secured many African alliances, public and private, through direct aid and conces-

sionary loans with “no political strings” attached. As Premier Wen told African delegates at the 2003 China-Africa Cooperation summit at Addis Ababa, “We do offer our assistance with the deepest sincerity and without any political conditions.”³²

Perhaps the best-known beneficiary of China’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy is Sudan. China is both the largest direct foreign investor in, and the largest customer of, Sudan’s petroleum production. The PRC owns 13 of the 15 largest companies working in Sudan and purchases more than 50 percent of Sudan’s crude oil.³³ In return, China is arming the Sudanese regime: according to recent Amnesty International reports, it is violating the UN arms embargo by illegally exporting weapons—including fighter jets—to Khartoum at the height of the Darfur conflict. By Amnesty’s estimation, the PRC has exported \$24 million worth of arms and ammunition, nearly \$57 million worth of parts and military equipment, and \$2 million worth of helicopters and airplanes to Sudan.³⁴ If this estimate is correct, then China’s implicit willingness to abet genocide puts it squarely at odds with multiple U.S. positions, especially in terms of national security policy. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council,



China must realize that its actions contravene the council's own mandatory arms embargo.

In sum, U.S. security interests in Africa are considerable, and Africa's position in the U.S. strategic spectrum has moved from peripheral to central. In 2006, EUCOM's then-commanding general James Jones said that his staff was spending more than half its time on African issues, compared to almost none three years prior.³⁵ The current EUCOM commander, General Craddock, was unequivocal in his written testimony for Congress: "The increasing strategic significance of Africa will continue to pose the greatest security stability challenge in the EUCOM AOR [Area of Responsibility]. The large ungoverned area in Africa, HIV/AIDS epidemic, corruption, weak governance, and poverty that exist throughout the continent are challenges that are key factors in the security stability issues that affect every country in Africa."³⁶

This relatively new interest in Africa is not confined to EUCOM, which currently covers the majority of the continent for the military. The president, for one, has mandated increased interest in Africa. The March 2006 U.S. *National Security Strategy* affirms that "Africa holds growing geo-strategic importance and is a high priority of this Administration," and that "the United States recognizes that our security depends upon partnering with Africans to strengthen fragile and failing states and bring ungoverned areas under the control of effective democracies."³⁷ AFRICOM is a product of this broad policy. More than a mere map change, it represents a response to the early 21st century's new security environment.

A New Strategic Paradigm

How should AFRICOM help secure Africa, a continent in crisis? It must begin by adopting a new security paradigm, one that regards security and development as inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. This linkage is the nucleus of the security-development nexus, the strategic paradigm most likely to produce more durable security in Africa.

Since the Cold War's end, development donors have come to realize that if the security sector operates autonomously—with scant regard for the rule of law, democratic principles, and sound management practices—then sustainable, poverty-reducing development is nearly impossible to achieve. Africa has

been the recipient of several Marshall Plans worth of foreign aid since World War II's end, yet it remains arguably as impoverished today as it was in 1946. This situation partly stems from the World Bank, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other organs of development traditionally eschewing security-related development, allowing the cycle of violence in Africa's fragile states to continue.

As U.S. problems in Iraq have shown, if there is a single lesson to be learned from recent nation-building experiences, it is that security is a precondition of development.³⁸ This axiom should play a central role in formulating a new security strategy for Africa, the most underdeveloped continent on Earth. Sadly, however, U.S. security and development institutions have long been divorced from one another in terms of perspective, operations, and outcomes. USAID is prohibited by law from supporting defense-oriented reform, resulting in a strained toleration of corrupt police forces and abusive militaries that tend to spoil the fruits of development. DOD traditionally shuns noncombat missions, limiting its involvement to narrow venues such as the Joint Combined Exchange Training and Foreign Military Financing programs, which are necessary but insufficient for wholesale security sector transformation. Over time, the schism between these two communities has ossified into interagency intransigence, lack of interoperability, and absence of strategic coordination, all of which have contributed to Africa's failure to develop despite decades of dedicated resources.

AFRICOM's mission should not be development, but the failures of development may drive AFRICOM. This paradoxical relation stems from the principal threats to African security, which are not interstate but intrastate in nature. For example, the largest threat to Liberian security is not a Sierra Leonean blitzkrieg across its border, but internal: guerilla warfare, insurgency, *coup d'etat*, or terrorism. Full-scale invasions of one country by another are uncommon in African military history. African conflicts have sprung mostly from domestic armed opposition groups. Such groups find it easier to change governments through violence rather than through the legitimate means of democracy, given the political exclusion many regimes practice, the paltry rule of law, easy access to small arms, and expanses of ungoverned territory in which to find sanctuary.

Domestic armed groups do have a weakness: they must rely upon local popular support to hide, survive, and thrive within the borders of a country. To attain this support, they must gain public sympathy by exploiting public grievances—real or perceived—that often can be attributed to failures of development. Common grievances include disproportionate distribution of wealth, lack of social justice, political exclusion of some groups, ubiquitous economic hardship, ethnic violence, inadequate public security, and failure of democracy.

To deny the sanctuary in which armed groups incubate and thereby stave off internal conflict, governments must address the root causes of public grievances. These grievances are development based; therefore, the security solution must be development based. The best weapons against intrastate threats often do not fire bullets; in fact, large, idle security forces can incite violence as much as check it. As Jacques Paul Klein, the former special representative of the secretary general for the United Nations mission in Liberia, has quipped, not entirely tongue-in-cheek, many African armies “sit around playing cards and plotting coups.”³⁹

Only by addressing the challenges of development can security be achieved and maintained. This is the core of the security-development nexus. Failure to

heed this linkage results in a “security-development gap,” where the lack of security prevents development from taking root, thus perpetuating conflict and compromising development in a vicious cycle. AFRICOM’s strategic mandate must be to narrow the security-development gap.

Securing Development

Narrowing the security-development gap does not mean militarizing development. Nor does it mean transforming DOD into an aid agency. Narrowing the gap means shifting military strategic priorities from combat to noncombat operations; it means focusing on conflict prevention rather than conflict reaction. For some, the idea of a military command without a combat orientation is heretical. To others, AFRICOM represents an experiment in early 21st-century security, and potentially serves as a prototype for post-Cold War unified commands. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Whelan explains, “Ultimately we [were] simply reorganizing the way we do business in DOD. But then we saw an opportunity to do new things, to capture lessons observed since the fall of the Berlin Wall, to create an organization designed for the future and not the past.”⁴⁰ In many ways, AFRICOM is an opportunity to institutionalize and operationalize peace-building lessons captured over the past 15 years.⁴¹

The first lesson is that strategic priority should be given to conflict prevention rather than reaction. Owing to the size and complexity of Africa, concentrating on fragile states before they fail or devolve into conflict represents an economy of force. Intervening only after a crisis festers into conflict, as in Somalia in 1993, is costly in terms of American blood, treasure, and international standing. Moreover, such military interventions rarely achieve durable peace because they fail to address the root causes of conflict.

By focusing on pre-conflict operations, AFRICOM will help “prevent problems from becoming crises and crises from becoming conflicts,” as the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review* advocates.⁴² Military campaigns



U.S. Sailors work with Cameroonians from Buea diocese to offload boxes of food from a landing craft during an Africa Partnership Station Project Handclasp donation, Limbe, Cameroon, 6 December 2007. The Sailors are with Assault Craft Unit 2 and the USS Fort McHenry (LSD 43).

are conventionally understood to proceed in four stages: phase I—“deter/engage,” phase II—“seize initiative,” phase III—“decisive operations,” and phase IV—“transition/stability operations.” Recently, military thinkers have introduced an additional phase, “phase zero,” which encompasses all activities prior to the beginning of phase I. In other words, phase zero is purely preventative in nature, focusing on everything that can be done to avert conflicts from developing in the first place.⁴³ In a shift of traditional unified command strategy, AFRICOM should 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.”⁴⁴

The second lesson informing AFRICOM is that phase IV, transition/stability operations, may eclipse combat operations when it comes to determining “victory.” The situations in Iraq and Afghanistan have made it patently evident that lethal force alone is no longer the decisive variable in military campaigns. To this end, in 2005 the White House issued “National Security Presidential Directive 44,” which recognizes the primacy of reconstruction and stabilization operations.⁴⁵ Although a rudimentary document, it forms the foundation for interagency coordination of all stability and reconstruction programs. Additionally, that same year the Pentagon issued *DOD Directive 3000.05*, which defines stability operations as a “core U.S. military mission” that “shall be given priority comparable to combat operations.”⁴⁶ This definition marks a revolution in military strategy for a military that has traditionally focused on fighting and winning wars. Moreover, these new policies are influencing DOD, State, USAID, and others’ funding and program development for 2008 and beyond. This new focus represents a seismic shift in military thought, as it prioritizes noncombat functions above traditional warfighting missions in the pursuit of durable security.

A Civilian-Heavy Military Command

The shift of strategic focus from combat to non-combat missions will require a commensurate shift

in how unified commands function. If AFRICOM is expected to supervise an array of missions that are a hybrid of security and development, then it must forge interagency modalities, fusing the capabilities of DOD with State, USAID, and other civilian organizations. This coordination will prove difficult. As Ambassador Loftis puts the challenge, “How do you create a structure that is both a military Unified Command but needs to incorporate enough civilian inputs yet does not appear to take over these agencies and authorities?”⁴⁷ Issues concerning organizational structure, institutional culture, lines of authority, funding sources, best practices, and perspectives will mire efforts to create synthesis. Moreover, there are fears—both inside and outside the U.S. Government—that AFRICOM signals the militarization of U.S. foreign aid. Pentagon officials object to this perception, stressing that DOD will not be crossing into “other people’s lanes” but simply wants to work more effectively with other agencies, recognizing the symbiotic relationship between it and the interagency in peace-building missions.⁴⁸ Only time will tell.

Forging particular interagency modalities will be a gradual process with few shortcuts. The effort was initiated by a decision to staff AFRICOM heavily with interagency civilians, many of them in key decision-making positions and not just traditional liaison roles. In fact, AFRICOM will be the most civilian-heavy unified command in history. In an unprecedented break from tradition, one of two deputy commanders will be a civilian, most likely an ambassador.⁴⁹ That DOD sees AFRICOM as becoming a “combatant command plus,” with the plus being the exceptionally high number of civilians from other agencies, indicates the department’s commitment to addressing security challenges on the continent in a thoroughly interagency manner.⁵⁰ But again, this process will take time. As Theresa Whelan confirms, “The command will continue to evolve over time, and will ultimately be an iterative process. It will not become a static organization in October 2008, but will continue to be a dynamic organization, as circumstances merit.”⁵¹

Security Sector Reform

Moving beyond a strategy of conflict prevention and post-conflict transition, the best tactic for narrowing the African security-development

gap is SSR. Security sector reform is the essence of “security cooperation,” as it builds indigenous capacity and professionalizes the security sector so that African governments can effect development for themselves. As a senior USAID official and member of the AFRICOM transition team with extensive experience in Africa explains, “Security sector reform could contribute to a security architecture that ensures that citizens are provided with effective, legitimate, and democratically accountable external and internal security. What is needed is security sector reform that professionalizes forces for the protection of civilians and enables development. This would be a significant contribution.”⁵²

SSR is the complex task of transforming organizations and institutions that deal directly with security threats to the state and its citizens. SSR’s ultimate objective is to create a security sector that is effective, legitimate, and accountable to the citizens it is sworn to protect. This objective is the essence of “cooperative security,” as it can only be achieved in partnership with the host nation, civil society, and other indigenous stakeholders. SSR programs can range from building the capacity of a single military unit, such as a joint-combined exchange training mission, to the total reconstitution of a country’s armed forces and ministry of defense, as in the Joint U.S.-Liberia Security Sector Reform Program. SSR is crosscutting transformation, requiring a multidisciplinary, “whole-of-government” approach by the U.S. Government.

DOD’s role in SSR is essential but not all-inclusive. Building security-sector capacity and professionalizing actors requires many kinds of expertise, which fundamentally dictates an interagency effort. For example, DOD is not the best agency to train border control forces or set up criminal courts, two parts of the security sector. Rather, the Department of Homeland Security is best suited to train customs and immigration agencies, while the Department of Justice can assist with criminal justice reform. DOD’s strong suit is transforming the military sector, which goes far beyond current train-and-equip programs and may entail a comprehensive, soup-to-nuts approach, especially in failed states.

Lastly, institutional transformation is key to SSR, since all institutions must rise together. DOD, for instance, cannot begin to train indigenous soldiers until the ministry of finance has the capacity to pay

their salaries, which may be dependent on training from the U.S. Treasury Department. Failure to synchronize development may cause a relapse into conflict, as unpaid soldiers and police forces are a precipitant to violence. AFRICOM will be dependent on other agencies to implement SSR, hence its civilian-heavy nature.⁵³

African Perceptions of AFRICOM

Despite DOD’s exceptional campaign of consultations on the continent, American efforts to headquarter AFRICOM in Africa have met with resistance. A sampling of headlines from African newspapers is revealing: “Stop AFRICOM;” “New U.S. Command Will Militarise Ties with Africa;” “Wrong for Liberia, Disastrous for Africa;” “Why U.S.’s AFRICOM Will Hurt Africa;” “AFRICOM—the Invasion of Africa?” “Southern Africa says ‘No’ to U.S. Military Bases In Region;” and “We’re Misunderstood, Says U.S.”⁵⁴ Regional superpowers Nigeria and South Africa have refused to give the U.S. permission to establish AFRICOM on their soil, and they have warned their neighbors to do the same. Morocco, Algeria, and Libya, too, have reportedly refused U.S. requests to base AFRICOM forces in their countries. Member states of such regional organizations as the 14-country Southern African Development Community (SADC) have also agreed not to host AFRICOM, and there is discussion within the 16-country ECOWAS to do the same.⁵⁵ South African Defense Minister Mosiuoa Lekota summarizes the sentiment of many countries: “If there was to be an influx of armed forces into one or other of the African countries, that might affect the relations between the sister countries and not encourage an atmosphere and a sense of security.” He warns that it would be better for the United States not “to come and make a presence and create uncertainty here.”⁵⁶

There are other reasons behind the suspicion and refusals. To name a few, AFRICOM has been equated with CENTCOM, which is fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; the U.S. interest in African oil is well known and perceived to be predatory; and Africa’s colonial past has ingrained distrust in its leaders.

Some of the opposition may also be in response to AFRICOM’s inability, despite its consultative approach, to articulate its message to Africans. Rwandan General Frank Rusagara, former secretary



U.S. Air Force, TSGT Nic Raven

Military to military: AFRICOM commanding general William Ward (right, hands raised) meets with Botswana Defense Force Lieutenant General Tathego Masire (left) in Gaborone, Botswana, 3 December 2007, to discuss AFRICOM's mission.

general of the Rwandan Defense Ministry and top policymaker for Rwanda's military development, expresses a frustration common among military officers on the continent: "The lack of information [about AFRICOM] has resulted in people not knowing what it is and how it will relate to Africa." This statement is especially worrisome because Rusagara is no stranger to U.S. military operations and doctrine: he attended military courses at the U.S. Naval Post-Graduate School in Monterey, California, and the Africa Center for Strategic Studies in Washington, DC. Rusagara thinks that if AFRICOM wants to contribute to African security, it must do three things. First, it must embrace new strategic thinkers and innovative concepts of security, such as "human security," for peace-building in Africa. Second, U.S. officers must explain AFRICOM to their African peers—the command cannot simply rely on senior DOD officials to brief senior African government officials. Third, AFRICOM must enhance African capacity for peacekeeping operations.⁵⁷

Not all African countries have turned their backs on AFRICOM, however. Some, such as Liberia, see it as a boon to the continent. Having just emerged from a brutal 14-year civil war, Liberia has a significant perspective on African security. Liberian

Minister of Defense Brownie Samukai explains that AFRICOM has the potential to "build partnerships, lead to the convergence of strategic interest, prevent conflict, and conduct operations other than war." He also believes that professionalizing African militaries through SSR will promote good governance, buttress development, and enhance peacekeeping operations. Samukai adds that supporting AFRICOM does not indicate naiveté about U.S. interests in Africa, but rather shows a willingness to find synergies of interest between the U.S. and African countries. Owing to this understanding, he says, "ECOWAS stands to benefit most in terms of cooperation, interest and intervention, if necessary."⁵⁸ Liberia not only supports AFRICOM, but has also offered to host it.

Working with External Organizations

Another major challenge is courting nontraditional military partners early, such as non-government organizations (NGOs) and private voluntary organizations (PVOs).⁵⁹ These organizations often know the African lay of the land better than DOD, have decades' worth of operational know-how, are development experts, and have access to places that

may be denied to the U.S. military. Moreover, NGOs (both developmental and humanitarian) and DOD have complementary interests in terms of securing development and providing support for complex humanitarian crisis response. Their responses to the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia and the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan demonstrate their convergence.

However, there are several challenges facing this partnership, each of which deserves examination. First, many NGOs are uneasy about working with the U.S. military, believing it puts their people at risk of violent reprisals from groups targeted by U.S. combat operations. As Jim Bishop of InterAction, a large umbrella organization for many NGOs, explains: “Humanitarian organizations may want to keep some distance between themselves and the U.S. military, especially in environments with potential for violent opposition to the U.S.”⁶⁰ Second, some NGOs believe that aligning themselves with the military impugns their neutrality or impartiality, sometimes their only guarantee of safety in conflict-prone areas. Similarly, working with neutral or impartial NGOs may prove incompatible for AFRICOM, since “neutral” NGOs do not take sides and “impartial” NGOs give assistance where needed most, even if that conflicts with U.S. interests. Third, Defense’s understanding of the complexly diverse NGO community remains limited, and it risks viewing that community as a monolithic whole, which would have adverse consequences. Fourth, AFRICOM might find it difficult to partner with NGOs since they often receive money (and mandates) from multiple countries and sources, do not operate like contractors, and typically demand relative autonomy over program management and outcomes.

Still, there is reason to be hopeful. Currently, both DOD and elements of the NGO community are working to bridge the military-NGO divide. Defense is sensitive to NGO concerns regarding neutrality, as Theresa Whelan acknowledges: “We recognize that their [NGOs’] safety depends upon their neutrality, and we are looking for mechanisms that allow all of us to work together without undermining their mission.”⁶¹ Mechanisms under consideration include the African Center for Strategic Studies and the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), either of which could function as a “neutral space” for the government and NGOs to jointly explore opportunities for partnership.

Another alternative is working through NGO umbrella organizations like Global Impact or InterAction, which could act as credible interlocutors. Global Impact represents more than 50 U.S.-based international charities (e.g., the overseas Combined Federal Campaign), has worked with DOD in the past, and has even participated in AFRICOM planning cells. InterAction is a coalition of approximately 150 humanitarian organizations that provide disaster relief, refugee assistance, and sustainable development programs worldwide. On 8 March 2005, representatives from DOD, State, USAID, and InterAction met at USIP to launch a discussion of U.S. armed forces and NGO relations in hostile or potentially hostile environments. The meeting yielded pragmatic guidelines that could serve as a foundational model for AFRICOM.⁶²

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, AFRICOM should draw on USAID’s considerable experience and expertise working with NGOs. USAID staff can help translate perspectives, objectives, and best practices for both NGOs and AFRICOM, thereby deconflicting efforts on the ground and mitigating misunderstanding. As a senior USAID member of the AFRICOM transition team explains, “Effective and agreed upon mechanisms for dialogue could help keep each other informed about each other’s efforts and [help everyone] . . . coordinate differing approaches as appropriate. Such dialogue could also provide an opportunity for NGOs to discuss pressing concerns or issues.”⁶³ Although many challenges persist to forging a functional NGO-AFRICOM relationship, there are also many avenues for potential cooperation.

Conclusion: Will it Work?

Skeptics consider achieving durable security in Africa a sisyphusian task, and it probably is, if dependent upon the dominant security paradigm. Therefore AFRICOM must eschew this paradigm and adopt a new strategic focus that links security with development and regards them as inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing—the core of the security-development nexus. In Africa, most armed threats are intrastate in nature and reliant upon the support of the local population to hide, survive, and thrive within the borders of a country. To attain this, they exploit public grievances, real or perceived, that result from the failures of development. However, by “securing development” and narrowing the

security-development gap, AFRICOM will deny armed groups their sanctuary, thus fostering durable security on the continent.

Strategically, AFRICOM will narrow this gap by prioritizing conflict prevention and post-conflict transition over traditional “fighting and winning wars.” This represents a major shift in military strategy, and it requires a holistic interagency approach to security, hence AFRICOM’s extraordinary civilian-heavy structure and unprecedented civilian deputy commander. Tactically, AFRICOM will narrow the gap through security sector reform and other programs that professionalize forces, promote

good governance, and help Africans improve their own security. Security sector reform is at the center of AFRICOM’s conflict prevention and security cooperation mandate.

Will it work? Clearly it is too early to tell, with major challenges ahead, including instituting inter-agency best practices, addressing African concerns, and attracting NGO/PVO partners. These challenges may not be resolved by October 2008, but that does not mean AFRICOM will ultimately fail in its bid to stabilize the continent. The strategy it will employ is a promising one, suggesting that there is sufficient reason to be hopeful. **MR**

NOTES

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