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AFRICOM and African Security

The Globalisation of Security *or* the Militarisation of Globalisation?

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In October 2008, the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) will be 'stood up' as a unified combatant command. In Africa this announcement has been met with trepidation and controversy.

Resistance to the idea is fuelled primarily by fears that it could lead to the militarisation of American foreign policy towards Africa. Of its numerous critics, South Africa has been especially vocal. Yet in other parts of Africa there is a cautious optimism based on the hope that Washington is finally taking the relationship between African security and development seriously.

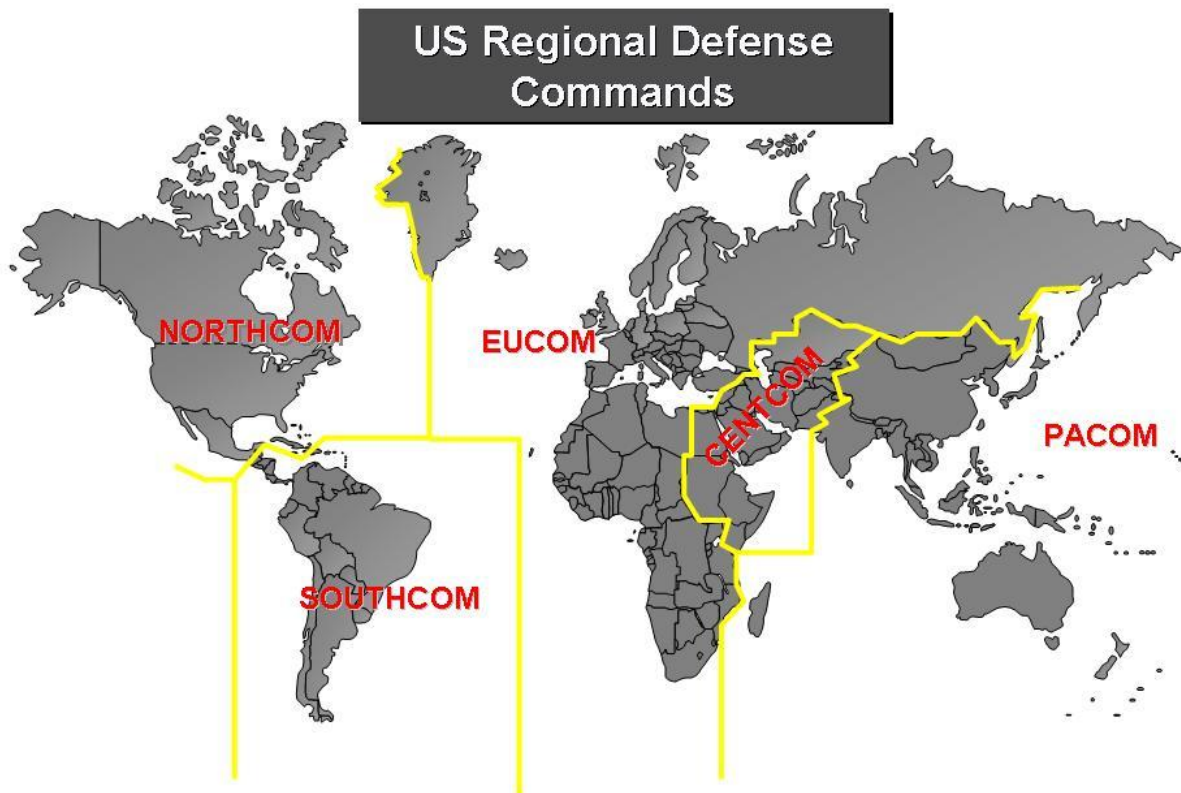
However, there appears to be agreement on two key points. The first is that AFRICOM is still an enigma. No one is sure what it will do or how, and what it means for Africa. The second is that AFRICOM's success will ultimately depend on how well the U.S. understands and responds to the security priorities of Africans.

Background

Africa is currently part of the area of responsibility (AOR) of three U.S. combatant commands: European Command (EUCOM), Central Command (CENTCOM), and Pacific Command (PACOM). No other continent is similarly divided. For the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), the creation of a single combatant command for Africa is primarily an internal bureaucratic shift, a more efficient and sensible way of organizing the U.S. military's relations with Africa. In other words, with AFRICOM the U.S. will do the same kinds of things it has always done in Africa, but with more consistency, coherence, and depth.

AFRICOM removes the 'seams' that made it difficult for DoD to operate across different regions in Africa and engage consistently with African militaries. Within EUCOM and CENTCOM, African issues have to compete with the inevitably higher priorities in Europe and the Middle East. AFRICOM will provide senior U.S. officers with a 'fit-for-purpose' structure and dedicated resources to engage with Africa.

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AFRICOM also represents a transformation in the way the military instrument is used to advance security and stability in conflict-prone or post-conflict societies. The Pentagon sees AFRICOM as a test-run for new forms of collaboration with other U.S. government agencies. Indeed, for the first time in a U.S. unified command, a State Department official will occupy a senior leadership position as the deputy to the commander for civil military activities. Officials from USAID and half a dozen other agencies will also be detailed to the command, bringing their knowledge and expertise to bear on the execution of the AFRICOM's mission.

African Perceptions

That AFRICOM will have such a significant civilian component does not impress many African observers, for whom even the word 'command' suggests malign intentions. In Africa the view is widespread that AFRICOM is a tool to secure better access to Africa's natural resources, erode China's growing influence on the continent, and establish forward bases to hunt and destroy networks linked to Al-Qaeda.

Moreover, by emphasising AFRICOM's role in development and humanitarian tasks, U.S. officials may have actually *amplified* African concerns. The fear is that, henceforth, the main lens through which development efforts in Africa are perceived will be the Pentagon's.

Washington has underestimated how deep-rooted and ideological African assumptions about U.S. aims can be. To many, AFRICOM is, along with Iraq and Afghanistan, another sign that the U.S. is seeking to re-assert American power and hegemony globally.

In the words of Virginia Tilley at South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council, the "Bush administration's agenda offers little but mounting expense and new dangers for African security. The urgent question for South Africa is not how to join that war, but how to help protect Africa from it."¹

Or as Charles Cobb argues, "in the thinking of Pentagon and White House officials, the world today is too dangerous a place not to be policed by Washington." For Cobb "the establishment of AFRICOM...is being driven by two main strategic concerns: first, the growing demand for African oil and gas... and second, the perceived danger of Islamic radicals." Cobb suggests that Washington's excessive focus on "security tends to erode, if not crush, civil liberties, and those governments on the continent that already show little inclination to support democratic freedoms will almost certainly use 'security' as an excuse to clamp down on things they don't like."²

But not all African perceptions of AFRICOM are negative. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia spoke for those who feel well-disposed to the initiative when she wrote in June 2007: "AFRICOM should be seen for what it is: recognition of the growing importance of Africa to U.S. national security interests, as well as recognition that long-term African security lies in empowering African partners to develop a healthy security environment through embracing good governance, building security capacity, and developing good civil-military relations."

"AFRICOM should be seen as the end-product of a significant strategic realignment a long time in the making – one where engagement with African nations is more than just a humanitarian cause. Liberians," she said, "can only hope that the United States will use AFRICOM to raise standards for engagement and help change 'the way of doing business' in Africa. AFRICOM is undeniably about the projection of American interests – but this does not mean that it is to the exclusion of African ones."³

Washington hopes all African leaders will eventually share that perspective. But convincing them that AFRICOM is 'military lite' will not be easy. It cannot be denied that, in terms of its structure and declared intent, AFRICOM embodies a fresh attempt to create a joined-up inter-agency strategy that weaves diplomacy, defence, and development into a coherent mechanism. And it would seem that underpinning AFRICOM is a post-9/11 strategic logic that is sensitive to local needs and regional differences, and cognisant of how globalisation has fundamentally altered the understanding of security and made traditional (i.e., Cold War) means to provide it redundant.

¹ Virginia Tilley, "Africa and the 'war on terror'", *Mail & Guardian*, 7 March 2007.

² Charles Cobb Jr, "The Pentagon hunkers down in Africa, *Mail & Guardian*, 26 January 2007.

³ Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, "AFRICOM Can Help Governments Willing to Help Themselves," 25 June 2007, accessible at <http://allafrica.com/stories/200706251196.html>.

The key to winning over the pessimists will be to demonstrate how AFRICOM will add real value to African security.

The African Security Dilemma: A Mirror for AFRICOM?

The first way AFRICOM can make a real contribution is by aiming its resources at the security challenges faced by African nations. At the outset AFRICOM will be operating in an environment of suspicion, where most assume that it will act to the *detriment* of African interests. It is thus essential for Washington to align AFRICOM's rhetoric, focus, and resources robustly and publicly to African concerns.

Africa's principal security challenge is to mobilise sufficient resources to provide a secure, stable, and well-governed environment in which civil liberties are enhanced and business can thrive. Africa, from Cape to Cairo, faces a capacity deficit in its institutions of state, where the state is too often a predator rather than a facilitator. In some countries, the military is the most extreme example of rapacious behaviour. While the impetus for reform can ultimately only come from within Africa itself, external assistance can be of enormous benefit to the continent if targeted at the right people and programmes.

While Africa's primary insecurity relates to poverty, it is conceptually important that both the U.S. and African governments not fail to articulate the security threats that continue to emanate from relations between African states. During the Cold War, African state security and human security were fatally undermined by superpower rivalry expressed through proxy wars. Today, African states have more to fear from each other, despite renewed commitment to African Union and regional mechanisms of conflict resolution.

AFRICOM's posture towards inter-state conflict in Africa should be carefully planned and articulated. This includes unambiguous examples of state-to-state war such as the Ethiopia-Eritrea war or the DRC conflict, as well as cases where rebel movements take advantage of 'ungoverned spaces' in neighbouring states, as has been the case in Somalia, Chad, and the Central African Republic. Freedom from the fear of subversion is a precondition for true democratic political development.

This deficit is especially acute in countries that have faced sustained conflict or where the state has collapsed. The lessons in peacebuilding from these countries are complex, but can be distilled into a number of key points, notably: the importance of sustained external mentoring and commitment (at least as long as the period of decline, probably in most cases demanding a generational commitment), the usefulness of a lead-nation rather than multinational approach, and the allocation of sufficient financial resources to do the job properly.

But herein lie three key facets of the African security dilemma. Addressing them effectively will be AFRICOM's biggest challenge.

Development and Defence. Without security Africa cannot develop. This requires channelling scarce resources to the institutions of security and stability – armed

forces, police, and intelligence services. Key measures of development such as health and education can lose out in terms of the allocation of resources. Moreover, history shows that the supposed guarantors of state security in Africa have a woeful record. The challenge of African states is to build professional security forces with limited resources while keeping them under civil control.

Development and Diplomacy. To develop Africa needs the means, but the right strategies and tools to obtain them often are politically untenable. Typically external partnerships and assistance arrangements come with strings. The domestic actors are wary of the consequences of undertaking unpopular actions or reforms on which foreign help is contingent. For example, while African states have to be sensitive to the Western-led environmental lobby, it serves potentially to handicap access of African countries to rich markets and to technology that enabled fast-paced development elsewhere.

Development and Democracy. There has long been a tension between setting the 'right' conditions for development and stability and the extension of political freedoms according to a democratic model. In simple terms, it is more difficult to ensure democratic stability in environments of socio-economic deprivation especially where expectations are fuelled by access to global media images.

If the African security dilemma can be broken down into these three elements, the dilemma for AFRICOM can be reduced to one: while AFRICOM is a U.S. defence initiative led by an American four-star general, it must be perceived by Africans as an agent of security and development – in essence, a military command *only in name* – in order to be palatable to them. To tackle this dilemma, a new combination of posture and process is required.

A 'Steady-State' of U.S.-Africa Security Engagement

Much debate has focused on where AFRICOM will be based and how it will be structured.

Currently the United States military presence centres on its 2,000-strong East African base in Djibouti – Command Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) – which falls under CENTCOM. In current thinking, the AFRICOM headquarters will be based initially in Stuttgart, Germany but will eventually move to the continent. U.S. officials have indicated that, based on their consultations with African countries, they will not have a large single headquarters in Africa but rather smaller regionally-based staff presences in order to work more effectively with the regional economic communities. The U.S. presence in Djibouti will likely be maintained. Other small regional bases will probably be established in each of North, Western and Southern Africa. In making such choices, the U.S. will have to consider not only its own expediency, but Africa's. This would be a tangible demonstration that AFRICOM's purpose goes beyond purely military calculations to one based on a combination of practicality, politics and (the effect of such) presence. Consideration has to be given, therefore, on the grounds not only where it might be easiest to locate such bases but where they might bring the most positive and constructive African effect. For example, a Liberia-based entity

would not only avoid the Francophone-Anglophone controversy, but also bring additional security and financial benefit to the West African nation.

How can the U.S. articulate the focus of AFRICOM such that it addresses African interests as fully as it does U.S. interests – and is perceived accordingly? Here are a number of elements that would contribute to both African and U.S. priorities:

- **Training, Mentoring, and Education:** A higher tempo of exchanges at U.S. institutions. Embedding U.S. expertise in both military and civilian units.
- **Equipment:** Focus on logistics support and organisation. This may be enhanced in particular through National Guard exchanges with African units.
- **Civil-Military Relations, Military Ethos, and Professionalism:** Focus on initiatives that link militaries, civil society, and parliaments. Include issues such as military budgeting. Helping inculcate a culture of democratic control and a professional military ethos could add real value to the governance-defence-democracy nexus.
- **Disaster-Relief, Environmental and Health Management, and Engineering Capability:** This would help to align the security-development braids, and enhance the development role of security agencies.
- **Peace Support:** AFRICOM might play a role in urging greater co-operation among external powers in building African peacekeeping capacity, especially in the African Standby Force. In peacebuilding, the setting of foundational priorities is critical, focusing on local security, private-sector development, and key infrastructure, particularly the supply of electricity.
- **Border Security and Control:** This may not only involve naval patrol capabilities, but also technology to regulate the flow of people and trade. This has obvious benefits in terms of improving the already low tax collection ratios of African states.
- **Strategic Planning:** Including campaign planning and the development of doctrine.
- **Policing:** Assisting with the provision of local security, thereby directly bridging the gap between state and human security.

With the above, much of what AFRICOM does will be about re-packaging and adding to what the U.S. Department's of Defense and State already do with African partners in the area of building security capacity. These programmes have taken a number of forms and already involve an annual financial commitment of over a quarter of a billion dollars (excluding the costs of CJTF-HOA):

- **African Contingency Operational Training and Assistance (ACOTA):** This \$40-50 million annual peacekeeping training programme replaced the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) which was established in 1997. ACRI/ACOTA has

trained 93,000 Africans, an estimated 65,000 of whom are still in service in twenty African militaries.

- **International Military Education and Training (IMET):** This \$10 million scheme brings Africans to American military institutions, schools, staff and war colleges.
- **Excess Defence Article (EDA)** programme: involving ad hoc transfers of equipment such as, for example, C-130 aircraft to South Africa and Botswana, M-16 rifles to Senegal, trucks to Uganda and coastal patrol vessels to Nigeria.
- **Foreign Military Financing (FMF)** programme: some \$20-30 million available annually for bilateral equipment purchases plus maintenance and training.
- **National Guard State Partnership:** This program which was used in Eastern Europe to help former Soviet bloc nations restructure and build their military capabilities to prepare for NATO membership is now being refocused on Africa. It establishes long-term military-to-military training partnerships by pairing National Guard units with African countries. Current examples include: South Africa with New York; Ghana-North Dakota; Wyoming-Tunisia; and Nigeria-California.
- **Defence Transportation System:** The U.S. DoD assists in moving donated humanitarian goods free-of-charge, such as ten 40-foot containers with medical supplies to counter a meningitis outbreak in Burkina Faso. The same scheme has been used in Kenya, Ethiopia, Chad, Niger, Senegal and Burundi.
- **Gulf of Guinea** programme: In 2007, \$30 million was budgeted to establish a regional naval capacity.
- **Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Program (TSCTP):** Since 2005, The U.S. government has spent over \$150 million to build border security and counter-terrorism capacity and co-operation in Nigeria, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. The U.S. currently plans to devote at least another \$300 million to this programme over the next five years.
- **East Africa Regional Security Initiative:** \$15 million is available to help countries in the Horn of Africa improve their border and coastal security capacities.
- **Humanitarian Assistance and De-mining Programs:** This includes dedicated funds currently from both EUCOM and CENTCOM to support such projects as the digging of wells, goat vaccination, and school and medical clinic refurbishment.
- **Commander's Initiative Funds (TSIF):** These are funds that are available to EUCOM and CENTCOM to sponsor events such as the 2007 Africa Air Chiefs conference in Stuttgart, and the July 2007 South West Indian Ocean Maritime Security conference in Madagascar.

- **Defence Health Programme (DHAP):** Annual HIV-Aids spending on 30 African militaries of \$17 million, aligned also to the \$1 billion in U.S. government spending through the PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) initiative.
- **Regular Exercises:** For example the 'Flintlock' Special Forces exercise training small units, or the \$1 million 'African Endeavor' communications exercise or the bi-annual MEDFLAG medical exercises designed to train military medical teams and provide medical care to local populations
- **Peacekeeping Logistics Support:** The U.S. has been spending over \$120 million per year in providing direct logistics support to African Union-sponsored peacekeeping operations in Sudan and now Somalia

Not only could AFRICOM assist in streamlining and institutionalising the initiatives outlined above, its added value over previous structures of U.S. security engagement comes from its institutional expression of a long-term commitment to Africa that is joined to and, critically, framed by an inter-agency approach. Ultimately, however, AFRICOM will only be accepted if it is postured in a manner that is focused not on addressing the U.S.'s insecurities, but Africa's.

Indeed, AFRICOM will be most effective where there is a commonality of purpose and a coincidence of interests between the United States and African states. Establishing that sense of shared purpose and mutual interest requires constant high-level dialogue, joint analysis efforts, and frequent recalibration of priorities and programs. In particular it requires frank exchanges about each side's core security interests. AFRICOM will not be effective if Africans feel that the 'true' U.S. interests have not been disclosed. Nor will it succeed if U.S. attempts to market AFRICOM as a development or security tool result in unfounded expectations. AFRICOM will provide no quick fixes.

U.S. engagement in Africa is adjusting to new security and economic environments. AFRICOM is thus a work in progress, where greater joint African and U.S. engagement could decisively shape the continent's future – for better or for worse, depending on how the relationships are managed.

If AFRICOM turns out to be a 'minimalist' institution – with modest outcomes limited to DoD bureaucratic reshuffling and incremental enhancements to current U.S. military initiatives in Africa, cloaked under the rhetoric of a comprehensive and 'joined-up' approach, then it will be a lost opportunity. AFRICOM can only serve the interests of both partners if it is a 'maximalist' and genuinely transformational institution that provides what Africa needs most: help in building security institutions that support democratic statehood.