

## COMMENTARY

**Strengthening AFRICOM's Case**

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**Introduction**

Over the past six months, the CSIS Africa and International Security Programs have closely tracked the development of U.S. Africa Command by interviewing key U.S. government officials, consulting expert opinion in the United States and internationally, and canvassing views from Africa. We had the opportunity to visit in late September 2007 with the AFRICOM transition team in Stuttgart, Germany, and have before and after that visit sustained a regular dialogue in Washington with visiting AFRICOM officials, other relevant administration and congressional players, and African experts.

The creation of a robust command dedicated to Africa can achieve substantial diplomatic and security results for both the United States and African nations. At the same time, there are policy difficulties and bureaucratic and operational obstacles that must be surmounted in order for this command to succeed in its delicate first year and beyond.

On March 13, General 'Kip' Ward, Commander of AFRICOM, will present before the House and Senate Armed Services Committees the first free-standing posture statement on the U.S. security strategy for Africa. It is a historic moment. We believe the long-term answer to AFRICOM's critics rests less on improved "strategic communications" and more on actual performance. Performance will be measured not only by how well AFRICOM executes its missions but, more importantly, by how carefully missions are selected and defined at the outset.

**Four suggested priorities:**

In our opinion, AFRICOM's performance can be strengthened in four critical ways:

**1. Emphasize that AFRICOM's core mission is cooperation with African partner states in *traditional* areas of security assistance—and that AFRICOM's greatest comparative advantage is to bring that cooperation *to scale* by doing it in a more coherent, more effective, better resourced, and *more sustainable* fashion than ever before. At the same time, admit the reality of possible future operations.**

Much of the initial resistance AFRICOM has encountered domestically and internationally stems from the perception that it will "militarize" U.S. relations with Africa. The early focus on basing decisions greatly exacerbated opposition on the continent and here in the United States, and General Ward and other AFRICOM officials' recent statements have helpfully moved attention away from the basing issue to the question of what AFRICOM actually does and can do in the future. Similarly, fears persist that tasks belonging to civilian agencies—humanitarian relief or development programs for example—will be taken over by the Department of Defense and implemented by interagency teams under military leadership. AFRICOM commanders continue to battle this misimpression.

At the same time, AFRICOM and administration officials do themselves and the command no service in portraying AFRICOM as a purely preventative command. It is highly plausible that AFRICOM will some day be used as a true "combatant" command to respond to threats or disasters on the continent. It thus must attend to its operational planning and potential contingency coordination responsibilities now. Selling AFRICOM as less than a full combatant command, with the capability to direct military operations in Africa, undermines the development of needed military planning and

creates the potential for backlash should an operational role become a reality.

A cardinal tenet of AFRICOM's mission planning for the foreseeable future should be a "back to basics" approach, focused on improving traditional military-to-military relationships. Given the wide range of useful ongoing and prospective security assistance initiatives, AFRICOM could advance with African counterparts, but there is no pressing need, initially at least, for AFRICOM to venture experimentally into new areas of traditionally civilian-led assistance activity.

There is practically no limit to the need for the reform and professionalization of Africa's militaries. AFRICOM is uniquely positioned to *build capacity* across a wide spectrum of requirements: small infantry unit tactics; counterterrorism operations that strengthen control of borders and ports; training of battalions for peace-support missions; enhanced relations with civilian authorities, including democratic governance and respect of human rights; enhancement of maritime security; and improvements in military health care. Historically, our security cooperation with African counterparts has tended to be episodic and brief; we should counter that by emphasizing that AFRICOM is committed to enlarge, strengthen, and sustain its engagement to build capacity in Africa.

## **2. Single out maritime security cooperation as a special AFRICOM priority.**

Already the subject of increasing U.S. government attention, Africa's maritime space should be a high priority of AFRICOM cooperation with African governments. The importance of offshore oil and gas production and of energy exports to the United States is well known: over 20 percent of U.S. energy imports derive today from the Gulf of Guinea, and that number is projected to climb. Also rising are the multiple dangers of increasing piracy, grand-scale oil theft schemes, narcotics transshipment between Latin America and Europe, human trafficking, and illegal immigration in Africa's mostly unpoliced coastal waters. Unchecked illegal fishing by foreign fleets threatens the livelihoods of millions of ordinary Africans, as does severe environmental degradation in many maritime zones: these account for estimated developmental losses of over \$1 billion per annum and contribute to food insecurity and malnutrition.

African governments are beginning to confront these challenges, though maintaining navies and coast guards are still a low military priority for most African states. Many African states would welcome AFRICOM programs to help improve their maritime surveillance and enforcement capabilities. Ghana, Liberia, Cameroon, and Benin are ready partners. Angola is moving ahead in this area with support from the Chinese and has shown greater openness to dialogue with the United States. Nigeria's hostility will persist and will have to be managed and reduced over time.

An important added benefit of expanded maritime security assistance is that it should enable local authorities to address more effectively issues of "human security" in maritime zones. Threats such as overcrowding, pollution, chronic hunger, environmental degradation, and disappearing livelihoods—threats to "human security" in a broad socioeconomic sense—cannot be effectively targeted in an ungoverned, chronically insecure maritime environment. By helping to restore physical security, AFRICOM can enable more broadly based "human security" initiatives in coastal Africa. New forms of onshore and offshore collaboration with civilian authorities and with humanitarian and developmental agencies would evolve naturally as this mission is carried out.

## **3. Increase both budgetary and personnel support for the State Department's security assistance programs in Africa.**

AFRICOM's current meager budget for bilateral security cooperation, estimated at \$250 to \$300 million, falls far short of what is required if AFRICOM is to have true credibility and impact. It is important that this funding issue be challenged immediately and that Congress be prodded to act.

Just as Defense Secretary Gates has publicly urged that more resources be made available to the State Department for stabilization and reconstruction missions worldwide, so too should AFRICOM receive an immediate doubling of the roughly \$250 to \$300 million that the State Department now spends annually on security programs in Africa. This step will be critical to meeting real needs, building AFRICOM's credibility, and winning higher investment in AFRICOM by

the Department of State. Increases in foreign military financing (FMF), international military education and training (IMET), and peacekeeping operations (PKO) funding should be used to fund AFRICOM engagement initiatives. At the same time, the State Department's Africa Bureau will need at least a small increase in personnel to facilitate coordination with AFRICOM and to ensure faster processing of program and spending proposals.

These resource increases should help to address the conspicuous imbalance that now exists between the modest amounts currently allocated to actual programmatic activities in Africa and the much larger cost projections for the establishment and operation of AFRICOM. Unless substantial programs exist to justify AFRICOM's overhead costs, hard questions are likely to arise in Congress, and possibly under a new presidency, about the overall mission. To the extent that AFRICOM can demonstrate plans for substantial increases in traditional security assistance missions across Africa to be carried out in close coordination with interagency partners, it will be easier to respond to such questioning and retain overall control of the mission.

#### **4. Tie AFRICOM's priorities directly to UN peacekeeping in Africa.**

In the past decade, UN peacekeeping in Africa has rebounded from an abject nadir point in 1998 to a historic high today, accounting for 70 percent or more of the over 120,000 blue helmets authorized by the UN Security Council worldwide. This dramatic turnaround, which the Bush administration has consistently supported through its votes in the UN Security Council and its 20 percent share of peacekeeping costs, has been—and remains—absolutely critical to restoring security on the continent and enjoys broad political support among Africa's elected leadership, military officers, and general public. If AFRICOM is to achieve legitimacy and standing in Africa, it has to link itself systematically to this reality.

Although U.S. forces have deployed to Africa and worked with African militaries in different contexts over the years, the U.S. military has less exposure to and knowledge of Africa than many other foreign militaries. Ex-colonial powers such as France and the United Kingdom have more military experience in Africa, both combat and peacetime, than does the United States. Even Indian and Pakistani forces, thanks to their frequent deployments in UN peacekeeping operations, have arguably had more exposure to African operating environments than has the United States. With the Somalia intervention of 1992 the exception that proves the rule, U.S. policy in the decades leading up to 9/11 was to avoid at any cost all but the smallest and most routine peacetime military excursions into Africa. While this caution probably spared the United States political problems over the years, it also means AFRICOM will be launched without the historical knowledge, cultural references, and local connections regional commands enjoy in other theaters of operation. Partnering with more experienced allies in security assistance initiatives should thus be another early AFRICOM objective.

Even more important will be careful communication and cooperation with the United Nations. With the United Nations present in virtually every corner of Africa, often in a security-building or peacekeeping capacity, it will be impossible for AFRICOM to operate for long without intersecting in some way with UN activities. Whatever their operational shortcomings, the United Nations and its specialized agencies command respect and support from almost every African government and from all levels of African society. To the extent that AFRICOM is perceived as supportive of UN security and peacekeeping missions, international acceptance of AFRICOM will grow. Conversely, few things are as likely to undermine AFRICOM's effectiveness or its welcome in Africa as a perception that AFRICOM is working at cross-purposes with the United Nations.

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