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AFRICOM: JOINED-UP GEOGRAPHIC COMMAND OR FEDERAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY?

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to be here today to discuss with you U. S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), in the context of a serious civil-military imbalance in America's foreign policy instruments and the manifestation thereof in this new command. As an African enjoying the privilege of living in the USA while working for Refugees International on issues of peace and security in my home continent, I have followed the evolution of AFRICOM closely. And I believe that AFRICOM is step in the right direction, because it promises to make U.S. security policy toward Africa more coherent and to focus more sharply on building partner capacity for the maintenance of peace and security. However, AFRICOM stepped off on the wrong foot, in terms of public diplomacy, and is at risk of remaining off balance in its actual program delivery.

Rather than dwelling on arguments about AFRICOM that have been heard almost *ad nauseam* over the past year, I want to use a few points from the recent statements before this Subcommittee of several senior U.S. Government officials to highlight two fundamental concerns that have not yet featured large in the ongoing debates about AFRICOM.

In her testimony on July 16th, Ms. Theresa Whelan sought to debunk three "myths" about AFRICOM, by downplaying the salience to the Command's mission of the need to secure access to African oil and minerals, to combat terrorism, and to counter China's rapidly expanding interests on the continent. I raise the issue of myths simply because I want to suggest that AFRICOM has in itself become something of a mythical construct. It has, in its various public relations incarnations, and in various Congressional testimonies, attempted to be all things to all people – and it now runs the risk of being nothing unto itself.

My concern is that AFRICOM does not have the appropriate policy framework, the depth and balance of professional expertise, or the requisite funding mechanisms that are necessary to deliver on General Ward's concept of "active security" – defined as a "persistent and sustained level of effort focused on security assistance programs that prevent conflict in order to foster dialogue and development." Instead, AFRICOM's capacity-building mission will rely heavily on a non-existent interagency team and a number of disparate programs funded through the Department of State and delivered by commercial contractors.

In his testimony, Mr. John Pendleton of the GAO outlined in detail the significant structural obstacles to establishing AFRICOM as an *interagency* team, and I wish to elaborate on this part of the

AFRICOM myth. However I would first like to focus on a predominantly *military* issue and express some strong doubts about AFRICOM's ability to play a meaningful capacity-building role in Africa.

According to Ms. Whelan's testimony, "USAFRICOM's military engagement on the African continent will remain primarily focused on building partnership capacities, conducting theater security cooperation ... [AFRICOM] will focus on building African regional security and crisis response capacity ... and strengthen the capacities of Africa's regional and sub-regional organizations."¹ The problem is that the Department of State (DOS), not DOD, has the lead and the funding for such capacity-building endeavors. The DOS has been weak in its past efforts to build African peacekeeping and crisis response capacity, and it has relied on commercial contractors for the delivery of virtually all of its capacity-building programs in Africa.

COMBATANT COMMAND OR CONTRACTED COMMAND?

According to Scott Shane and Ron Nixon,² contractors have become a virtual fourth branch of government. The decades-long trend of increased spending on federal contracts soared from \$207 billion in 2000 to about \$400 billion in 2006. The near doubling of spending on contracts was fueled by the war in Iraq, domestic security and Hurricane Katrina – but also by a philosophy that encourages outsourcing almost everything government does.³ Between 1990 and 1995 the government began spending more on services than goods.⁴ Far more people now work under federal contracts than are directly employed by the government. Even the government's online database for tracking contracts, the Federal Procurement Data System, has been outsourced.⁵ In fact, the boundaries of what is "inherently governmental" and therefore off-limits to contractors have become increasingly blurred and the government is inviting contractors into agencies to perform some very delicate tasks. The State Department, for instance, pays more than \$2 million a year to BearingPoint, the consulting giant, to provide support for Iraq policy making, running software, preparing meeting agendas and keeping minutes.⁶

The most successful contractors are not necessarily those doing the best work, but those who have mastered the special skill of selling their services to the government. From 2000 to 2006, the top 20 service contractors spent nearly \$300 million on lobbying, and donated \$23 million to political campaigns. The biggest federal contractor, Lockheed Martin, spent \$53 million on lobbying and \$6 million on donations over this period. Lockheed gets more federal money each year than the Departments of Justice or Energy.⁷ The contracting surge has raised bipartisan alarms, and the Acquisition Advisory Panel has come to the disturbing conclusion that the trend "poses a threat to the government's long-term ability to perform its mission" and could "undermine the integrity of the government's decision making."⁸

This shift in governance, from the social contract to the commercial contract – from Locke to Lockheed as it were – should be of huge concern to Americans, for reasons that go far beyond Africa and AFRICOM. But it is within the context of this big picture that I want to raise an African issue – a

¹ Theresa Whelan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, AFRICOM, Testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, July 16, 2007.

² Scott Shane and Ron Nixon, *In Washington, Contractors Take On Biggest Role Ever*, The New York Times, 3 February 2007.

³ Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, *Income Redistribution in Disguise: Escalating Military Spending*, Counter Punch, April 16, 2007. <http://www.counterpunch.org/hossein04162007.html>

⁴ *Report of the Acquisition Advisory Panel to the Office of Federal Procurement Policy and the United States Congress*, January 2007, http://www.acquisition.gov/comp/aap/24102_GSA.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Scott Shane and Ron Nixon, *op cit*.

⁸ Report of the Acquisition Advisory Panel to the Office of Federal Procurement Policy and the United States Congress, *op cit*.

concern that AFRICOM may become little more than a vehicle for State to outsource U.S. support for African peace and security while DOD continues to focus on U.S. defense priorities in Africa – including the War on Terrorism.

Information on outsourcing is readily available through a click on the URL for Federal Business Opportunities, where the visitor is welcomed to: “... *FBO.gov*, the Government’s one-stop virtual marketplace. Through this single point of entry, vendors and government buyers are invited to post, search, monitor, and retrieve opportunities solicited by the entire Federal contracting community.”⁹

One such opportunity is a State Department search for suitable private contractors to implement a significant chunk of what AFRICOM promises to do, under the banner of the Bureau of African Affairs’ Africa Peacekeeping Program (AFRICAP). On February 6, 2008, the DOS posted to the FBO site a search for companies willing and able to bid for a renewal of the extant contract to implement AFRICAP, which is described as follows:

“The program enhances African countries’ ability to conduct peacekeeping operations and builds African capacities for crisis management and counter terrorism. One of the programs key objectives is regional peace and stability. DOS uses its peacekeeping operations (PKO) funds to advance that goal by undertaking training of armed forces, enhancing their ability to deploy by land, air and sea. AFRICAP contractors also work with regional organizations to enhance their abilities to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict and supporting peacekeeping and peace building operations.”

The current AFRICAP contracts were awarded to Pacific Architects and Engineers (a subsidiary of Lockheed Martin) and DynCorp International in FY 2003. It is anticipated that the total, combined ceiling amounts of all contracts awarded under the current competition may exceed one billion dollars over the next five-year period. Each contract has a ceiling of approximately \$500,000,000.00. Specific tasks for the contractors include logistics support, construction, military training and advising, maritime security capacity building, equipment procurement, operational deployment for peacekeeping troops, aerial surveillance and conference facilitation. These tasks are to be “implemented in countries throughout the African continent, as designated by the DOS.”

The DOS also posted, on April 2, 2008, a Request for Information from companies interested in competing for contracts to continue with the implementation of a program described in Ms. Whelan’s July 16 testimony as “a mainstay of the U.S. effort to build peace support operations capacity in Africa” – the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program.¹⁰ The purpose of the ACOTA Program is to enhance the capacity of selected African nations to participate in multinational peace support operations in Africa, in accordance with U.S. policy objectives supporting the United Nations, the African Union and African Regional Economic Communities. The ACOTA Program has three main objectives, namely:

- To directly train and equip African peacekeepers, peacekeeping contingents, and associated staffs;
- To train African trainers so as to enable African partners to indigenously sustain peacekeeping training over the long term; and

⁹ <https://www.fbo.gov/>

¹⁰ ACOTA is the African (and major) component of the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), which was established in 2004 as the centerpiece of the U.S. contribution to the G8-Africa Action Plan. GPOI is a 5-year, \$660 million program that focuses on enhancing peacekeeping capabilities in Africa. Key goals of GPOI including a training target of 75,000 military peacekeepers; the provision of long-term skills and infrastructure to partner countries and regional organizations; and the provision of nonlethal equipment and transportation to support countries’ deployment of peacekeepers.

- To sustain partners over the long term through long-term mentoring and assistance of indigenous peace operations training, updated "train-the-trainer" refreshment training, and limited equipping.

From inception in 2004 to April 2008, State-funded ACOTA contractors trained a total of 36,968 African peacekeepers. The number looks impressive at first blush, but a recent GAO report found that the DOS lacks the capacity to assess the quality and effectiveness of ACOTA. The GAO found that the provision of equipment to countries deployed to peacekeeping missions has also gone wrong. As of April 2008, \$9 million of equipment obligated since 2005 for countries deployed to missions in Somalia and Sudan had not been provided by State – while \$5.6 million in fiscal year 2006 funds obligated for the purchase of equipment to support peacekeepers deployed from Rwanda, Ghana, Burundi, and Nigeria had not yet been expended.

In a weak attempt at building sustainable African peacekeeping capacity, the DOS has spent some \$12 million on activities aimed at enhancing the ability of countries to conduct their own peacekeeping training and to plan and manage their own operations. Part of this money has gone towards training 2,384 military peacekeeping instructors in African countries, but State could not identify whether these instructors subsequently conduct training. It is unlikely that they have; all the African armies and regional organizations I have worked over the past fifteen years lack the training infrastructure and finances to plan and conduct dedicated peacekeeping training without external assistance.

To its credit, the DOS has assigned staff within the Bureau of African Affairs to monitor contractor performance, and it established a program management team to oversee the activities of contractors providing training in Africa. However, the GAO reported that the team is comprised of nine contractor employees and only one federal employee. It is thus largely a case of contractors overseeing contractors, with the cash-work nexus no doubt trumping professional desire to seek durable solutions to Africa's enduring capacity problems.

THE "INTERAGENCY" ISSUE

AFRICOM brings to the fore many aspects of the broader challenge faced by a US administration that is intent on pursuing a "whole of government" approach to implementing its "transformational diplomacy" agenda. According to the dominant discourse on this subject, the challenge of engaging constructively with the world – particularly where this involves liberating oppressed peoples and building them a democracy – can best be met by increasing the levels of cooperation between and among the military and other government agencies to the extent that they are acting in harmony with a singular sense of purpose. It is this discourse that has elevated the word "interagency" from its status as an adverb or adjective (as in interagency cooperation or interagency input) to a noun – as in *the INTERAGENCY*.

Few would argue against the need for enhanced communication and cooperation among government agencies and between them and the military, or against a joined-up approach to a foreign policy objective of building the foundations of good governance in foreign countries. However, the DOD is so strong in human and material resources, and in thinking power as well as firepower, that its civilian agency counterparts pale into insignificance. There can thus be no meaningful talk of partnerships or an interagency team. *The "interagency"* in the context of US AFRICOM is in fact the Department of Defense, a department that includes many of the brightest and the best civilians in the federal government and that is adept at paying lip service to the myth of real interagency participation in planning, decision making and policy implementation.

Ms. Whelan emphasized in her testimony the fact that AFRICOM's Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Affairs (DCMA) is a Senior Foreign Service officer from the DOS, and that this civilian deputy (Ambassador Mary Yates) is responsible for the planning and oversight of the majority of

AFRICOM's security assistance work. However, the testimony did not reveal that the DCMA's salary is paid by the DOD, not the DOS – and it is a truism that s/he who pays the piper calls the tune.

Ms. Whelan further assured this Subcommittee that: “USAFRICOM will include a significant and carefully selected number of representatives from other U.S. agencies within its staff, including officers from the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development” and that ... “[t]he response and support from the interagency, both in collaboration and participation, has been outstanding.”¹¹ In their joint statement, Ambassador Yates and General Snodgrass echoed the sentiment that “the level of participation in USAFRICOM from across the USG has been excellent”.¹²

Yet Mr. John Pendleton of the GAO testified that DOD has had difficulties integrating interagency personnel in the command, and that DOD continues to lower its estimate¹³ of the ultimate level of interagency participation in AFRICOM.¹⁴ The reason, of course, is that the human resources of DOS and AID have been systematically degraded to the point where there are simply not enough federally-employed foreign service and development professionals to go around. Thus, while DOD is making substantive progress in filling its 1,304 approved positions for AFRICOM headquarters, the current plan is to have only 13 positions filled by representatives from non-DOD organizations. This represents a DOD to “interagency” ratio of 100:1 and indicates that the kind of interagency team originally envisaged remains notional at best.

Moreover, AFRICOM's continued emphasis on the civilian and diplomatic nature of Ambassador Mary Yates' role is perplexing. Like her small number of non-DOD colleagues in AFRICOM, Ms. Yates is embedded in a military structure and seems to see any interagency coordination on policy and program implementation taking place outside of the Command. Indeed, in their joint testimony Amb. Yates and Gen. Snodgrass describe AFRICOM as the “military component within the context of the broader USG effort” and state that AFRICOM will conduct all its activities as “part of the interagency team.” On the other hand, their testimony states elsewhere that “our capacities as an interagency command are growing” and that “we anticipate the USAFRICOM interagency team will further foster closer collaboration within the USG.”

Such apparent confusion is not surprising; the “interagency”, like AFRICOM, remains largely a mythical construct and will do so for as long as the structural imbalances exist – imbalances in civilian and military power distribution, between Defense, Diplomacy and Development as instruments of US foreign policy, and between the amount of common goods and services provided by commercial contractors versus those provided by public servants in federal jobs.

CONCLUSION

While the sentiments I have expressed today may seem overwhelmingly negative, I do believe that Africa needs AFRICOM. Not the mythical AFRICOM that has emerged to date, but a unified geographic command that can make a clear and credible commitment to providing long-term, sustainable support to African partner countries' and organizations' quest to develop a real capacity for effective conflict management. Africa needs an AFRICOM that can work with partner agencies

¹¹ Theresa Whelan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, AFRICOM, Testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, July 16, 2007.

¹² Statement of Ambassador Mary C. Yates, DOS Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Activities and Major General Michael A. Snodgrass, U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff, U.S. Africa Command, before the House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, July 16, 2007.

¹³ Originally estimated at around 25 per cent of AFRICOM headquarter posts.

¹⁴ John Pendleton, Director Defense Capabilities and Management Issues, US GAO, FORCE STRUCTURE, Preliminary Observations on the Progress and Challenges Associated with Establishing the U.S. Africa Command, Testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives, July 16, 2008.

and countries to strengthen those African institutions that should provide stability and security under the rule of law. It needs an AFRICOM that has the knowledge and expertise to critically examine programs such as AFRICAP and ACOTA; that can properly evaluate and upgrade these and other programs to ensure their relevance, coherence and effectiveness in building sustainable African security capabilities

Currently, however, neither State nor DOD have a firm handle on “capacity-building”, probably because this is essentially a developmental concept – and USAID’s small voice has been largely silent on the issue of AFRICOM. Capacity building is a long-term, relationship-based activity, rather than simply a menu of trainings or skill-sets to be delivered in Africa by a variety of commercial contractors that have no diplomatic relationships whatsoever with the host nations concerned. Human resources development is central to any capacity building process. Foreign-led practices have to be replaced by local training, education and transfer of technical know-how, for the aim of capacity building is to nurture local ownership and to develop local competencies in order to break out of a vicious circle of dependency. The design and implementation of such programs requires substantial diplomatic skill and developmental expertise.

AFRICOM presently lacks the human resources to do these things – it lacks an appropriately balanced staff of serving professionals with the knowledge and ability to work in and with Africa. This is a weakness in AFRICOM that cannot be addressed without a fundamental strengthening of departmental capacity at the center. The weakness will not be overcome by a continued fixation with “the interagency”, while the real need is for strengthening the human and financial resources of “the agency” – the US Agency for International Development, in particular – but also the DOS and its Africa Bureau.

Refugees International and many like-minded organizations are therefore calling upon the next President to work closely with Congress to ensure that the further development of AFRICOM is accompanied by a significant strengthening of State’s Africa Bureau, and of USAID personnel dedicated to Africa. In the interim, there is a clear need for continued close oversight of AFRICOM plans and activities by this Subcommittee and others in Congress, to ensure that the Command does not treat its responsibilities in Africa as just another Federal Business Opportunity.