



GEN William Ward tours Botswana Defense Force camp

## The Challenge That Is

# USAFRICOM

By ISAAC Kfir



Terrorist attack in December 2007 destroyed UN offices in Algiers

United Nations (Evan Schneider)

**O**n February 6, 2007, President George W. Bush announced the creation of a new unified military command for the African continent with its own headquarters and staff. The U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) emphasizes Africa's growing importance in U.S. geostrategic thinking. Washington has come to realize that Africa—with its vast natural resources, rising population, and unexplored markets, coupled with internal instability, rampant disease, and terrorism—demands special attention.<sup>1</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Supreme Allied Commander, General Bantz Craddock, USA, expressed this view:

*While Africa is rich in both human potential and mineral resources, it has historically struggled with relatively unstable governments, internal political strife, and economic problems. Many states remain fragile due to a variety of factors, including corruption, endemic and pandemic health problems, historical ethnic animosities, and endemic poverty.<sup>2</sup>*

Ultimately, USAFRICOM emphasizes that U.S. policymakers have ceased to see the continent through the prism of the Cold War (bipolar competition).

This article explores the reasons behind the creation of the new command, points out some of USAFRICOM's main challenges in purpose and structure, and concludes with some critical observations and recommendations that could help to ensure its success.

### Purpose and Structure

USAFRICOM appears to be part of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's new "transformational diplomacy," which focuses on the United States seeking to work with its partners and allies "to build and sustain democratic, well-governed states that will respond to the needs of their people and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system."<sup>3</sup> The distinctiveness of USAFRICOM arises from its purpose, which is not to fight wars but to develop and build partnerships specifically in the area of security cooperation. This means that the command will depart from the traditional J-code organizational structure. Rear

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Admiral Robert T. Moeller, USN, the executive director of the USAFRICOM Transition Team, has stated that the command's primary mission will be preventing "problems from becoming crises, and crises from becoming conflicts."<sup>4</sup> Thus, USAFRICOM will focus on providing humanitarian assistance, encouraging civic action, improving the professionalism of African militaries, assisting in border and maritime security, and dealing with natural disasters.<sup>5</sup>

To establish USAFRICOM's agenda, DOD worked closely with the State Department, particularly the Bureau of African Affairs and the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. It also cooperated with other agencies, especially the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Michael E. Hess of the USAID Bureau for Democracy, Diplomacy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance declared in testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations that USAID views USAFRICOM in a favorable light. Hess stated that USAID hoped the new command would advance the "Three D" (defense, diplomacy, and development) agenda. He maintained:

*DOD can support national security objectives in ways that USAID cannot. DOD can help professionalize African militaries; strengthen the African regional security architecture, including African Standby Force; mitigate HIV/AIDS and other public health threats in the security sector; and provide disaster response capacity if others cannot. USAID participation in such efforts seeks to maximize effectiveness in ways that broadly support development and humanitarian objectives.*<sup>6</sup>

The decision to create USAFRICOM arose out of realization that the current state of affairs in sub-Saharan Africa poses a serious threat to American national interests. Policy-makers acknowledge that poverty, social injustice, malfeasance, disease, poor governance, and economic inequality play a role in fomenting terrorism and insecurity. Since the mid-1990s, Africa has increasingly attracted radical Islamists.<sup>7</sup> For example, in the magazine *Sada al-Jihad (Echo of Jihad)*, Abu Azzam al-Ansari of the Global Islamic Media Front emphasized Africa's importance to al-Qaeda:

*There is no doubt that al-Qaeda and the holy warriors appreciate the significance of the African regions for the military campaigns against the Crusaders. Many people sense that*

*this continent has not yet found its proper and expected role and the next stages of the conflict will see Africa as the battlefield. . . . In general, this continent has an immense significance. Whoever looks at Africa can see that it does not enjoy the interest, efforts, and activity it deserves in the war against the Crusaders. This is a continent with many potential advantages and exploiting this potential will greatly advance the jihad. It will promote achieving the expected targets of jihad. Africa is a fertile soil for the advance of jihad and the jihadi cause.*<sup>8</sup>

Put simply, since the 1998 East Africa bombings of U.S. Embassies, American involvement in parts of the continent—especially the Horn of Africa, a volatile and dangerous area—centers around two initiatives: supporting socioeconomic and confidence-building programs and assisting in counterter-

rorism measures and training. These initiatives are clearly discernible in the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF–HOA), which spends an enormous amount of time assisting in nonmilitary actions, such as building wells, mending infrastructure, and sup-

porting development initiatives. At the same time, CJTF–HOA helps the region's security forces in counterterrorism.<sup>9</sup> It would seem that the CJTF–HOA model has helped shape the agenda of USAFRICOM.

A second principal reason behind the creation of USAFRICOM was the realization that the United States could no longer allow three separate U.S. commands, situated thousands of miles from Africa, to monitor events on the world's second largest continent. U.S. European Command (USEUCOM), located in Stuttgart, had responsibility for northern Africa and much of sub-Saharan Africa; U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), located in Honolulu, covered the islands off East Africa; and U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), headquartered in Tampa, had responsibility for the Horn of Africa. Dividing the continent that way meant two commands might deal with a

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single crisis. For instance, in the period prior to the establishment of USAFRICOM, Sudan was under USCENTCOM's area of responsibility, while Chad was under USEUCOM. Consequently, once the Darfur crisis reached international attention and action was demanded,



U.S. Navy (Michael Larson)

**Special Forces Soldiers train Nigerian soldiers during multinational exercise**

leading to NATO involvement, the split command caused problems as the American contribution to the NATO operation came from USEUCOM, even though Darfur is in Sudan and therefore within the USCENTCOM area of responsibility.<sup>10</sup> It is hoped that USAFRICOM will end this type of division and confusion.

### Major Criticisms

Criticism leveled at U.S. Africa Command stems from the distrust that Africans in general have toward the West and increasingly toward the United States in particular.<sup>11</sup> The continent's bitter colonial legacy has continued to shape African thinking, especially in the way its leaders interact with the global community.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the idea of placing a large American base in Africa evokes notions of neoimperialism. South African Defense Minister Mosiuoa Lekota declared in a meeting of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), "Africa has to avoid the presence of foreign forces on its soil, particularly if any influx of soldiers might affect relations between sister African countries." This view was shared by Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa, who claimed that none of the 14 states that make up SADC is interested in having a U.S. base on its soil.<sup>13</sup> Minister Lekota also warned countries that may consider hosting USAFRICOM that such a move would undermine African solidarity.<sup>14</sup> The warnings came after Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf expressed support for the command.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, even if some leaders decide to support the initiative, they will need to contend with opposition, and African leaders know that it is never wise to upset one's neighbors on a continent with porous borders and a history of cross-border interventionism and meddling. After all, today's friend could be tomorrow's enemy.<sup>16</sup>

Second, Africans remember the Somalia debacle as well as former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's clever semantics during the Rwanda genocide. These events have ensured that Africans remain highly skeptical about America's real commitment to the continent. They fear that at the first sign of trouble, pressure from the American public will compel Washington to end its involvement.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, some Africans argue that American engagement revolves around the U.S.-led war on terror, and they refer to the recent covert action against the Islamic Court Union by U.S. forces along the Somalia-Kenya border.

For such skeptics, the United States is in the process of *militarizing* sub-Saharan Africa—and the last thing Africa needs is more guns and soldiers.<sup>18</sup>

A third criticism leveled at the formation of USAFRICOM is the failure of DOD to announce where the force will be stationed and headquartered, even though that failure is largely due to African opposition to hosting foreign troops. The issue of location is central because USAFRICOM's area of responsibility is Africa itself, and placing the command anywhere else would ensure logistic problems as well as embarrassment, as no country in Africa appears to want the force on its soil.

African opposition arises out of concern that USAFRICOM will facilitate interference in African countries' domestic affairs, even though the command's mandate is specific: conflict prevention. USAFRICOM is seen as a part of President Bush's militaristic approach to resolving foreign policy problems.<sup>19</sup> The problem vis-à-vis location for USAFRICOM is exacerbated by those advocating a "lily pad" approach, whereby the command will have small bases across Africa with key bases in West Africa and the Horn. This approach provides ammunition to those claiming that America is only focusing on areas of geo-strategic importance to itself (West Africa is important for its oil, while the Horn sits on an important waterway and is susceptible to Islamic terrorism).

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### *Africans remember the Somalia debacle as well as Madeleine Albright's clever semantics during the Rwanda genocide*

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A fourth criticism is that U.S. interest stems from a dual desire to impede Chinese investment in Africa and to secure access to oil. Chinese presence in Africa has increased over the last few years,<sup>20</sup> and America is arguably concerned by this "invasion" because of Africa's growing importance to the United States.<sup>21</sup> For over a decade, Chinese presence and investment have increased, as African leaders appear to prefer Chinese investment over American, Western, or international organizations' investment. China's focus seemingly is on economic development (making profit), and Beijing does not meddle in socioeconomic or civil-political affairs. Cao Zhongming, deputy director of the Department of African Affairs in the Chinese Foreign Ministry, has declared in regard to

his country's investment in Chad, "China won't interfere with Chad's internal affairs. As a policy, that doesn't change. If the [China National Petroleum Company], World Bank, and Chad reach an agreement, it's between them. . . . The Chinese government . . . won't enforce something that Chad thinks interferes with their internal affairs."<sup>22</sup>

A fifth issue that has emerged is a possible interdepartmental clash between DOD and the State Department. Despite the close cooperation between them in developing USAFRICOM, the key U.S. Government official responsible for American policy vis-à-vis the continent will remain the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, who will be supported by various Embassies.<sup>23</sup> However, with USAFRICOM focusing on nonmilitary issues, one of which is strengthening the capacities of Africa's regional and subregional organizations, there is a possibility of interdepartmental tensions. DOD officials seem to suggest that by appointing a high-ranking State Department official to the new command, these tensions will not occur, but experience has shown that such frictions emerge as departments seek to protect their own spheres.<sup>24</sup>

### Policy Recommendations

It is imperative that USAFRICOM find a home in Africa, whether in the shape of a single base or a host of small bases. Placing the new command anywhere else will ensure logistic difficulties as well as highlight that the command designed to *help* Africa is *unwelcome*. After all, how can a command designed for Africa operate from Europe or North America? Thus, American policymakers must redouble their efforts in encouraging an African country to invite the new command onto its soil.

A central selling point of USAFRICOM is that it will operate as a staff headquarters force rather than a troop headquarters, as its agenda is partnership building and cooperation. By stressing this point, Washington may alleviate concerns that the United States is engaged in a militarized foreign policy. USAFRICOM emphasizes America's desire to improve and build on its relations with Africa, which over the past decade have been extensive, as Washington has adopted such initiatives as the Millennium Challenge Account, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, and the President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Washington must assure African leaders that

USAFRICOM will not usurp their leadership in the realm of security but rather that it will complement and encourage African initiatives. Ultimately, it appears that the creation of USAFRICOM will not impinge on African programs or hinder bilateral or multilateral programs that DOD runs, such as the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative.

Second, Washington must stress that by having an Africa command, it can better gauge crises and prevent them from turning into disasters. Some commentators have suggested that logistic support was a key issue that prevented American intervention in Rwanda in 1994; Washington simply lacked the forces and, more significantly, credible information as to what was occurring.<sup>26</sup> One could therefore argue that an African staff command could assist in overcoming such a crisis by enabling effective assessment.

A third issue that demands attention is the previously mentioned interdepartmental rivalry. USAFRICOM is a DOD initiative and thus a DOD responsibility. It is fundamentally a military entity, headed by a four-star general. However, USAFRICOM's agenda also covers diplomacy and development, which come more under the remit of the State Department and USAID. Simply put, it is unclear who will set the agenda of the new command—DOD, whose focus is on security and defense, or the State Department and USAID, whose focus is diplomacy and development.

The emergence of a new Africa command is a positive development. It emphasizes that after decades of neglect, American policymakers finally appreciate the continent's importance to the United States and the international community. Assisting African nations in combating the many ills that plague them will only enhance international peace and security and alleviate abject poverty, political oppression, and misery for millions. U.S. Africa Command can provide substantial assistance as long as Washington works out the unresolved issues surrounding its establishment, and provided that Africans accept that the command represents a new American commitment toward the continent. Ultimately, having a U.S. command that combines defense, diplomacy, and development could be the answer to many of Africa's problems. **JFQ**

*The author thanks Shani Ross for her assistance in writing this article.*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Brennan M. Kraxberger, "The United States and Africa: Shifting Geopolitics in an 'Age of Terror,'" *Africa Today* 52, no. 1 (Fall 2005), 47–68; Pdraig Carmody, "Transforming Globalization and Security: Africa and America Post-9/11," *Africa Today* 52, no. 1 (Fall 2005), 97–120.

<sup>2</sup> Craddock also pointed to the demographic issue, noting the threat posed by the "youth bulge." See statement of General Bantz J. Craddock, USA, commander, United States European Command, before the House Armed Services Committee, March 15, 2007, available at <[www.dod.mil/dodgc/olc/docs/TestCraddock070315.pdf](http://www.dod.mil/dodgc/olc/docs/TestCraddock070315.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> Condoleezza Rice, "Transformational Diplomacy," remarks at Georgetown University, Washington DC, January 18, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Quotation taken from Stephanie Hanson, "The Pentagon's New Africa Command," Council on Foreign Relations, May 3, 2007, available at <[www.cfr.org/publication/13255/](http://www.cfr.org/publication/13255/)>.

<sup>5</sup> Ryan Henry, "U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) Update," Foreign Press Center Briefing, Washington DC, June 22, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Testimony of Michael E. Hess before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, August 1, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Osama bin Laden chose to move from Saudi Arabia to Sudan following his expulsion from the Kingdom. More recently, Ayman al-Zawahri declared Somalia an area of jihad.

<sup>8</sup> Quotation taken from testimony of J. Peter Pham, "AFRICA COMMAND: A Historic Opportunity for Enhanced Engagement—If Done Right," before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, August 2, 2007, available at <<http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/pha080207.htm>>.

<sup>9</sup> Lauren Ploch, *Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interest and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, updated July 6, 2007), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, "Anti-American sentiment is sweeping across Africa," *International Herald Tribune*, December 24, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> This is seen most clearly with the way African leaders have supported Robert Mugabe, with a number of leaders choosing to remember Mugabe's role in the liberation process rather than his authoritarian and destructive regime.

<sup>13</sup> Frida Berrigan, "The New Military Frontier: Africa," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, September 18, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Wyndham Hartley, "Southern Africa: More U.S. Soldiers Not Welcome in Africa, Says Lekota," *Business Day*, August 30, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, "Africa: Africom Can Help Governments Willing to Help Themselves," June 25, 2007, available at <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200706251196.html>>.

<sup>16</sup> This was made clear during the Congo war between 1998 and 2001, when several African countries became entangled in the affairs of the Congo, and former allies turned into bitter enemies.

<sup>17</sup> Pascal Fletcher, "U.S. Africa command: aid crusader or meddling giant?" Reuters, September 30, 2007, available at <<http://africa.reuters.com/top/news/usnBAN043646.html>>.

<sup>18</sup> Michele Ruiters, "Africa: Why U.S.'s Africom Will Hurt Africa," *Business Day*, February 14, 2007; Ezekiel Pajibo and Emira Woods, "AFRICOM: Wrong for Liberia, Disastrous for Africa," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, September 6, 2007, available at <[www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/4427](http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/4427)>.

<sup>19</sup> See Pajibo and Woods.

<sup>20</sup> In the 1990s, Sino-African trade and economic activity grew by 700 percent. In the first 10 months of 2005, Sino-African trade was valued at \$32.17 billion (in 2002–2003, it stood at \$18.6 billion). See Esther Pan, "China, Africa and Oil," Council on Foreign Relations, January 26, 2007, available at <[www.cfr.org/publication/9557/](http://www.cfr.org/publication/9557/)>.

<sup>21</sup> On the threat that China poses, see, for example, Gordon S. Magenheimer, "Chinese Influence on U.S. Operational Access to African Seaports," *Joint Force Quarterly* 45 (2<sup>d</sup> Quarter 2007), 22–27.

<sup>22</sup> Howard W. French and Lydia Polgreen, "China, Filling a Void, Drills for Riches in Chad," *The New York Times*, August 13, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Jendayi Frazer, "Exploring the U.S. Africa Command and a New Strategic Relationship with Africa," testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on Africa, Washington DC, August 1, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> On the failure to explore the possible tensions between the departments, see, for example, Theresa Whelan, "Africa Command: Opportunity for Enhanced Engagement or the Militarization of U.S.-Africa Relations?" testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, August 2, 2007, available at <<http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/whe080207.htm>>.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. health and development programs for Africa currently total nearly \$9 billion, while U.S. security assistance programs stand at approximately \$250 million, or 1/36<sup>th</sup> of the nonsecurity related programs in any given year. See Theresa Whelan, "Why AFRICOM? An American Perspective," Situation Report, Institute for Security Studies, August 17, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Alan Kuperman, "Rwanda in Retrospect," *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 1 (January-February 2000), 94–118.