

Why AFRICOM?

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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.”

President George Bush, February 7, 2007

[Creating AFRICOM] “will enable us to have a more effective and integrated approach than the current arrangement of dividing Africa between [different regional commands]“

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 6, 2007

Introduction

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for African Affairs, James Woods, used to begin his annual presentation to U.S. Army Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) with a question: “Why is Africa important to the United States?” The answers would range from the practical (natural resources) to idealistic (people yearning to be free of dictators) to the altruistic (prevent disease and save lives from humanitarian disasters). According to Woods, while those were sound reasons, he wanted to draw the FAOs’ thinking to the strategic level, so the answer was: “Because it’s there.”

That’s a simplification, but Africa’s place in the world cannot be overlooked. As the second-largest continent in the world – 11,700,000 square miles (22% of the world’s total land area) with an estimated population of 690 million people (roughly 14% of the world’s population) – it’s geographically and demographically important. It’s economically important as well: by 2005, economic growth was averaging 5% and there were tens of thousands of U.S. jobs tied to the African market; Africa possesses an estimated 8% of the world’s petroleum; and it is a major source of critical minerals, precious metals, and food commodities. It is also politically important: of the ten elected members of the UN National Security Council, three are elected from the General Assembly by African nations.

Africa’s strategic importance has been reflected historically in ways that have sometimes been less than a blessing for the continent. It sits astride millennia-old trade routes; the possession of

its resources and even its people have been fought over by many nations both ancient and modern, a “fight” which continues to this day, albeit in less stark terms as that which occurred during the so-called “scramble for Africa” of the 19th century. The legacies of that colonialism continue to haunt the international community. There is perhaps a magazine or newspaper article written somewhere in the world every week that draws a parallel between what happened during the “scramble” and the alleged maneuvering between modern powers for access to African natural resources, be they oil, minerals, timber, or fish.

Africa remains a rich, vibrant and diverse place with an ever-increasing strategic significance in today’s global security environment. President Bush’s recent decision to establish AFRICOM is a direct recognition of Africa’s importance as well as a sincere hope that America and the many nations that make up Africa will continue to strengthen and expand partnerships to the benefit of all.

A command focused solely on Africa will have no impact on the sovereignty of African nations. In fact, AFRICOM’s success will be contingent upon its ability to foster important friendships and effective partnerships with the many nations in Africa.

U.S. military engagement on the African continent is not new. For many years African nations have worked with U.S. government agencies coordinating humanitarian assistance, medical care, and disaster relief. We also have undertaken joint military exercises and training programs to assist partner nations in the professional development of their military forces.

Africa’s growing importance is the imperative behind the creation of a command focused solely on Africa. It is a command that will be like no other in U.S. history. The intent is to create a command that is as unique and diverse as Africa itself. Doing so will require better integration of U.S. government capacity building efforts across the spectrum of U.S. agencies. One of the Deputy “Commanders” will be a senior-level State Department official. Other senior-level civilian representatives from numerous U.S. agencies will collaborate to help African nations tackle the security challenges related to humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, disease, poverty, deforestation, building partnership capacities, civic action, etc.

The Unified Command Plan

To understand the concept behind a unified command, one must understand the Unified Command Plan (UCP), and how the Department of Defense does business around the world. It is defined as:

“The document, approved by the President, which sets forth basic guidance to all unified combatant commanders; establishes their missions, responsibilities, and force structure; delineates the general geographical area of responsibility for geographic combatant commanders; and specifies functional responsibilities for functional combatant commanders.”

The [Unified Command Plan](#) (UCP) is regularly reviewed and updated and this includes, when appropriate, modifications to areas of responsibility or command alignments or assignments. As

of January [2007](#), there were nine Unified Commands, stated in law and the latest UCP. Five were regional responsibilities, and four have functional responsibilities. With the advent of AFRICOM, there will be six geographic COCOMs.

The Development of the UCP

Following World War II, the United States adopted a new system of defense organization under a single Secretary of Defense. The system established the U.S. Air Force, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and new commands composed of more than one military service. These new “unified commands” were intended to ensure that forces from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps would all work together.

The geographic areas come under “Unified Commanders,” who exercise command authority over assigned forces. The Commanders are directly responsible to the National Command Authority (the President and the Secretary of Defense) for the performance of these missions and the preparedness of the command.

The present division of Africa among three commands (European Command – EUCOM, Central Command – CENTCOM and Pacific Command – PACOM) was driven by historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors. Responsibility for North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya) was assigned in 1952 to the European Command, given those nations’ European cultural linkages and their perceived relevance to the increasingly important Middle East. As the Cold War grew in complexity and the United States and the Soviet Union maneuvered for influence among the newly independent African states, the UCP was revised in 1960 to include Sub-Saharan Africa under the AOR of Atlantic

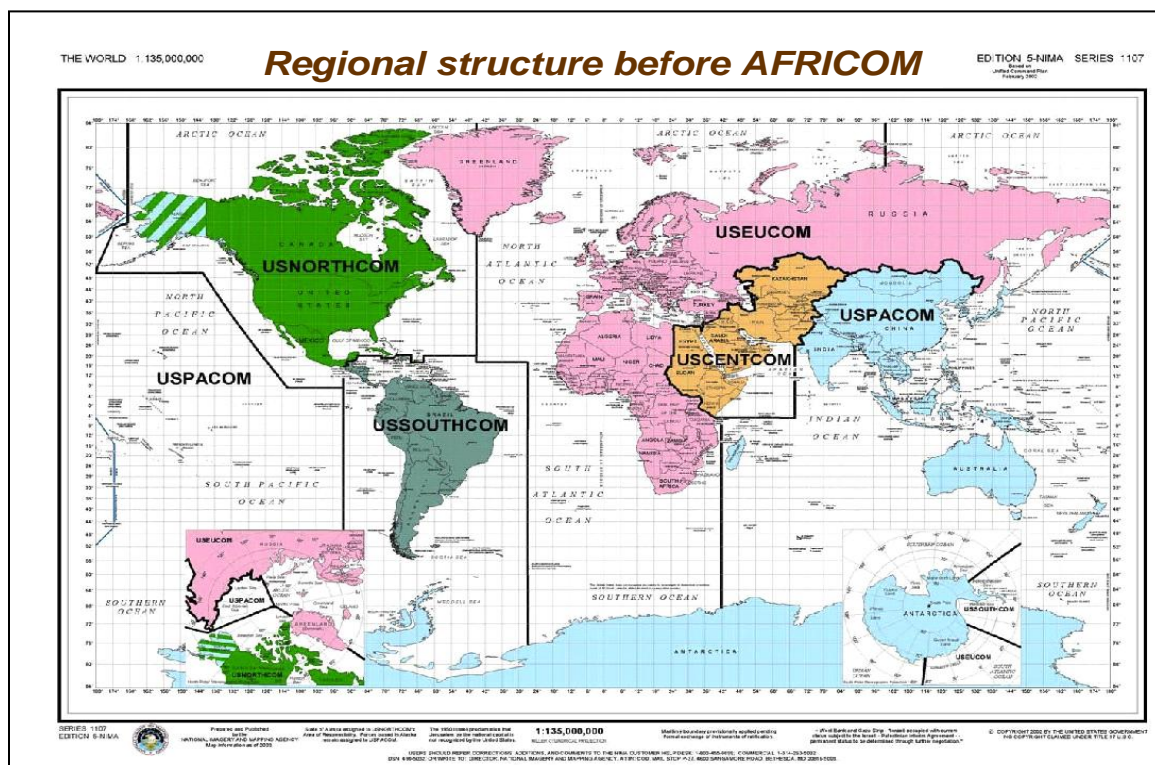
Command (LANTCOM). Shortly after, in 1962, a new command, Strike Command (STRICOM), was formed and assigned oversight of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia which continued until 1971 when STRICOM became Readiness Command (REDCOM) with a revised AOR that did not include Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, between 1971 and 1983, Sub-Saharan Africa was no specific Command’s responsibility. It was not until 1983 that Africa was divided among the three commands: EUCOM, CENTCOM and PACOM.

In 1983, the UCP was again revised in order to recognize Africa’s growing strategic importance to the both the United States and Europe in the context of the Cold War. European Command was given responsibility for all continental African nations save Egypt, Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia. These nations were seen as having closer ties to the Middle East and were deemed Central Command’s responsibility. This left island nations off the eastern coast (Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and The Comoros) within the Pacific Command; those off the western coast were assigned to Atlantic Command. This division, as one might imagine, led to difficulties coordinating U.S. activities and thus gave rise to the first thoughts of creating a single, unified Africa Command.

With the end of the Cold War the strategic paradigm the U.S. had used for nearly 50 years to understand and respond to the global security environment gradually became less and less relevant. No place was this more apparent than in Africa where Africa’s strategic importance to

the U.S. had been defined almost entirely in relation to U.S. Cold War security objectives. In the absence of the Cold War, U.S. national security policy makers in the 1990s struggled to understand exactly where and how Africa fit in the security context. The initial answer was that Africa’s security challenges manifested no direct threat to the U.S., militarily or economically (given the assumption that the collapse of the bipolar division of the globe would now allow free market-based access to world commodities) and therefore were relevant to the U.S. primarily in a humanitarian context. However, the events of 9/11, combined with 20/20 hindsight made clear that Africa was integral, not peripheral, to global security in general, and U.S. security in particular, in the post 9/11 world.

This was a world in which catastrophic threats to a nation-state’s security were not simply confined to rival nation-states with the capacity to build large sophisticated conventional militaries with the means to deliver WMD. Rather, such threats could come from anywhere in the world, including from among the poorest, least developed, and least secure countries on the planet. If a small group of terrorists operating out of an undeveloped country in Central Asia could inflict more damage on the U.S. in a few hours than the entire Japanese Imperial Navy did at Pearl Harbor, the U.S. could no longer afford to prioritize its security concerns using traditional conventional power-based criteria. To further complicate matters, it became clear that non-state actors could now be just as dangerous, if not more so, as an aggressive state-based power. In this post 9/11 world, African security issues could no longer be viewed as only a humanitarian concern. Cold, hard “real-politik” dictated a U.S. national interest in promoting a secure and stable African continent.

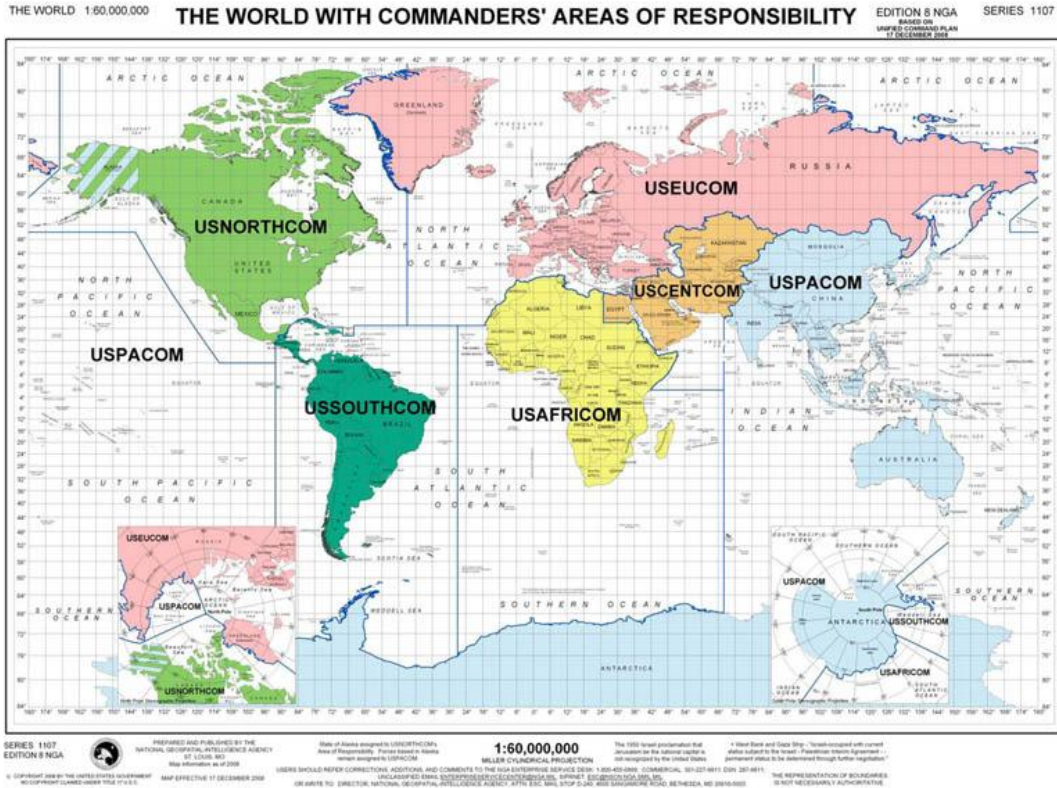


The Geographic Unified Commands as of January 2007

Security and stability in Africa however, are not merely a function of developing competent military and police forces. Experiences in Africa and the Balkans in the 1990s and in Afghanistan and Iraq over the last 5 years have made clear that those tools only provide security and stability on a temporary basis. Sustainable security and stability are dependent on good governance, the rule of law and economic opportunity. Those elements of security, in turn, have a symbiotic relationship with such things as health and education. If a secure and stable Africa is in U.S. national interest, then the U.S. would need to take a holistic approach to addressing the challenge. Additionally, in the new, more volatile, fluid and unpredictable global security environment, the old adage about an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure does not simply make sense from a resource perspective but also from a risk mitigation and management perspective.

AFRICOM

It is in this context that former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld asked his military and civilian staff to re-examine the merits and feasibility of establishing a stand-alone Unified Command focused exclusively on Africa. Africa's direct relevance to U.S. national security demanded that DoD re-think the Cold War based structure that artificially divided the continent among three different commands that were frequently distracted by responsibilities in their primary geographic regions. Keeping Africa divided among three commands would mean that, at best, Africa would remain a secondary and sometimes even tertiary concern for those commands. As such neither the commands, nor the military services that supported them with personnel, would deem it a priority to develop a large body of personnel with knowledge and expertise on Africa. It also meant that the bureaucratic barriers created by the "seams" between the commands would continue to present challenges to coherent and efficient action in the areas where the "seams" met. The fact that the "seams" ran through key areas of conflict and instability on the continent made them even more problematic. Additionally, the establishment of the African Union (AU) and its ambitious program for a continent-wide multi-lateral security architecture created further complications for DoD's command seams, as EUCOM found itself working more and more in CENTCOM's back-yard in Addis Ababa with the AU. Further, both CENTCOM and EUCOM struggled to deal with emerging African stand-by brigade structures that cut across their respective areas of responsibility.



The Transformation of the 3 Unified Geographic Commands to AFRICOM

Beyond simply mandating a re-look at the way lines were drawn on the DoD map, the Secretary also directed that the effort involve members of the U.S. government inter-agency, in particular, the State Dept and USAID, and that the team consider innovative organizational constructs as well as mission sets for a command dedicated solely to Africa. The former Secretary believed that if DoD was going to establish a command for Africa it needed to be a 21st century command, not a 20th century command and it needed to be tailored to address the unique security challenges of the continent.

Secretary of Defense Gates has since embraced the effort, stressing that the command should “oversee security cooperation, building partnership capability, defense support to non-military missions” and expressing the importance of moving away from an “outdated arrangement left over from the Cold War.”

The result of the inter-agency study team’s work was a proposal for a Unified Command for Africa that would concentrate its efforts on prevention rather than reaction. Its primary objective would be to contribute DoD’s expertise in the security arena in support of U.S. diplomacy and development efforts to “prevent problems from becoming crises, and crises from becoming catastrophes.” In that context the command would help build the capacity of African countries to reduce conflict, improve security, deny terrorists sanctuary and support crisis response. In order to do this, the traditional military J-code organization structure designed for combat operations would need to be fundamentally changed to incorporate an integrated civilian/military

architecture that would emphasize and facilitate non-kinetic missions such as military capacity building training, security sector reform and military professionalization, as well as support to the humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and medical assistance efforts of other USG agencies. The study team also recommended that the command not be developed in a U.S. vacuum but rather that the specifics of its mission, design and even possible location be informed by consultation with international partners. Particular importance was placed on consultation with African partners to insure that it would be appropriate to the African context. On 7 February 2007, President Bush publicly announced his direction to DoD to develop and stand up a Unified Command for Africa by the end of September 2008 based on the principles outlined by the inter-agency study team.

AFRICOM Myth vs Reality

The AFRICOM development process has begun, as has the international consultation process. The next 18 months will see flesh put on the bones of the AFRICOM skeleton. However, there is already much uninformed and sometimes sensationalist speculation about the command which has led to numerous misconceptions, especially regarding its structure and purpose. In many ways, the creation of this command is an historic opportunity to “catch-up” with Africa’s quickly evolving continental and regional security architectures and their increasing capacities to synergize African efforts in both the governmental and non-governmental spheres to address security challenges all over the continent. It is an opportunity to strengthen and expand U.S. and African relationships in such a way that our combined efforts can help generate a lasting peace and stability on the continent.

Location, Location, Location

There has been much speculation about the location of the command and the type of facilities that the command would require. Some believe the creation of AFRICOM means DoD will be establishing military bases for U.S. army, navy or air forces on the continent. That is most definitely not the case. In the last seven years DoD has engaged in a major global force restructuring project involving the withdrawal of U.S. troops from bases overseas. The creation of AFRICOM will not alter that process. Africa Command will be a staff headquarters not a troop headquarters. Consequently, the intent is to establish staff personnel presence in locations on the continent that best facilitate partnership with African nations and institutions based on consultations with those nations and institutions. AFRICOM will not be accomplishing its mission if the physical presence of the command itself becomes a burden to host nations. For that reason, as well as for force protection considerations, the command footprint in any given location will likely be relatively small and discrete. As is the case currently, U.S. military personnel involved in training or exercises in Africa would deploy to the continent from their home bases in the U.S. for the duration of their training mission. Such mission lengths are usually measured in terms of weeks.

Who’s in Charge?

Another concern/criticism that has been raised about the establishment of AFRICOM is that it will attempt to usurp African leadership on security issues on the continent or it will militarize

U.S. foreign policy in Africa. Neither assertion is true. With regard to leadership on the continent, DoD recognizes and applauds the leadership role that individual African nations and multi-lateral African organizations are taking in promoting peace, security, and stability on the continent. This is exactly the type of initiative and leadership needed to address the diffuse and unpredictable global security challenges the world currently faces. The purpose of AFRICOM is to encourage and support such African leadership, not discourage and suppress it. U.S. security is enhanced by African nations being able to address and resolve emerging security issues in their countries, regions and across the continent on their own. It would be counter-productive for AFRICOM to take actions that undermine that goal. AFRICOM is intended to compliment, not compete with the African Union. Its mission will be to facilitate the African Union's efforts to develop the capabilities and mechanisms across the continent needed to promote and sustain peace and stability.

The 600 Pound Gorilla?

The next charge that is frequently levied is that the creation of AFRICOM represents the militarization of U.S. foreign policy. This is hardly the case, particularly if one examines the facts. Africa Command is merely the logical next step in a course set almost a decade ago as the US began to increase its emphasis on supporting trade, development and health initiatives on the continent. US health and development programs for Africa currently total nearly 9 Billion and include such major initiatives as the Millennium Challenge Account, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, PEPFAR (the largest program in the world sponsored by a foreign government to combat HIV/AIDs) and President Bush's recent initiative combat malaria. In contrast, US security assistance programs on the continent amount to no more than \$250M, or 1/36th of the non-security related programs in any given year. Despite newspaper headlines and uninformed rhetoric to the contrary, the facts and figures show that trade, health, development and governance issues and programs, not military programs, dominate the landscape of US policy toward Africa today and will continue to do so in the future. The creation of a DoD command for Africa will in no way change this US policy focus.

AFRICOM, just like EUCOM, CENTCOM and PACOM today, will be a key supporting organization in the implementation of US foreign policy as articulated by the Secretary of State. The creation of a single U.S. DoD point of contact for Africa will simply allow for the better synchronization and coordination of DoD efforts to help build security capacity in Africa with State and USAID efforts to improve governance and development capacity and opportunities. The inclusion of State Department, USAID, and other U.S. government inter-agency personnel in the command structure improves the Command's capabilities by injecting knowledge and expertise into the organization but not authority. Inter-agency personnel detailed to AFRICOM will be there to help AFRICOM conduct its mission on the continent. They will not be conducting the missions of their home agencies. The traditional lines of authority in these agencies and between these agencies and US Embassies in Africa will not change nor will the presence of inter-agency personnel in AFRICOM dilute or undermine the independence of their home agencies.

"It's About the Oil....."

Many pundits, both inside and outside Africa, have asserted that AFRICOM's primary purpose will be to secure U.S. access to African oil. Much has been made of the fact that the U.S. currently receives roughly 15% of its oil from Africa and that percentage is projected to grow over the next five to ten years. That said, the U.S. is far from the only beneficiary of African oil. Given the nature of the global oil market, African oil production is important to all oil consuming nations. While Africa's growing importance as a global oil producer is certainly a factor in the continent's strategic significance, it was not, as has been explained previously in this paper, the rationale for the creation of AFRICOM. It would not, therefore, be AFRICOM's mission to provide security for African oil or, for that matter, any other African natural resource. Rather, AFRICOM will work to help African nations develop their own capacities to protect their natural resources to insure they are not illegally exploited and diverted, thereby undermining economic development potential while possibly fueling conflicts or even terrorism. If African nations have adequate capability to protect their own natural resources, then the global market system will be sufficient to insure international access to them as needed.

It's also important to note that oil is not the only natural resource worth protecting in Africa. The international press focus on African oil obscures the importance of other natural resources, particularly the more mundane, such as timber and fish, to African economic potential. For example, coastal African nations lose billions of dollars of resources annually to international illegal fishing. The extent to which AFRICOM could help such nations develop maritime security capacities to protect their territorial waters could contribute to those countries' economic health, a key component of long term stability. DoD's involvement in helping African nations protect these more environmentally friendly natural resources is not unprecedented. In the 1980s and early 1990s, there were several U.S. security assistance programs that focused on helping African militaries build the capacity to protect their fisheries resources and even their game parks.

“Show me the money!”

So if AFRICOM is not going to base U.S. troops, sailors or airmen in Africa, or secure and control African oil fields, then the question arises as to what exactly this command will look like and what specifically will the command and its staff do? To begin with, AFRICOM, unlike existing U.S. Unified Commands, will be structured and staffed so as to emphasize and facilitate security capacity building and civil/military activities, the bulk of the command's mission. An initial working draft of the command's mission statement reads as follows:

“US Africa Command promotes US National Security objectives by working with African states and regional organizations to help strengthen stability and security in the area of responsibility. US Africa command leads the in-theater DoD response to support other USG agencies in implementing USG security policies and strategies. In concert with other US government and international partners, US Africa Command conducts theater security cooperation activities to assist in building security capacity and improve accountable governance. As directed, US Africa Command conducts military operations to deter aggression and respond to crises.”

This working draft mission statement places emphasis on what the February 2006 DoD Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), refers to as “anticipatory measures.” In other words,

AFRICOM's primary objective will be, as the QDR put it, to "...prevent problems from becoming crises and crises from becoming catastrophes." Given AFRICOM's mission emphasis on prevention versus reaction, one of the most significant organizational structure innovations currently being developed for the command is the creation of a major command element called the Directorate for Civil/Military Activities. This element will be separate from, and equivalent to, the traditional operational element of the command. Further, for the first time, DoD will have a non-DoD civilian as a senior official in AFRICOM's chain of command. A State Department Senior Foreign Service officer will lead the Civil/Military Activities Directorate and serve as one of at least two deputies reporting directly to the AFRICOM Commander. This Civil/Military Activities directorate will be staffed by both military and civilian personnel, with a large percentage of the civilians coming from other U.S. government departments and agencies such as State Department, USAID, Treasury, Justice, Energy and Homeland Security to name a few. European and Africa partner nations may also be invited to second personnel to this component of the command at some point in the future.

The new Directorate will oversee all of AFRICOM's capacity building assistance at the bilateral and multi-lateral level. Areas of focus will include security capabilities (both land and maritime) medical skills, command, control and communications, disaster relief, and security sector reform/restructuring (such as being done in Sierra Leone, Liberia and DRC). In particular, the Civil/Military Activities Directorate will be the primary interface with the African Union on developing ways in which AFRICOM can provide effective training, advisory and technical support to the development of the African Standby Force. State Department leadership of, and presence in, this Directorate will also enhance AFRICOM's ability to support such State Department funded endeavors as the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program, a mainstay of the U.S. effort to build peace support operations capacity in Africa. Additionally, the integrated approach AFRICOM will facilitate will allow DoD's various military exercise programs in Africa such as the AFRICAN ENDEAVOR communications exercise, Joint Combined Exchange Training exercises, and MEDFLAG exercises to be more effectively synchronized with African Standby Force development goals.

The Civil/Military Activities Directorate will also coordinate AFRICOM's modest humanitarian assistance and civic action projects as well as HIV/AIDs prevention programs with other U.S. government agencies that have the lead in the development and health sectors. This type of coordination/cooperation has already proven effective in the Horn of Africa, where Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa has worked closely with USAID and regional African governments responding to flood emergencies and conducting civic action projects such as digging wells and building schools in places where development agencies have identified critical needs. AFRICOM will build on this success.

DoD, working through EUCOM, CENTCOM, and PACOM currently has existing programs in many areas. AFRICOM will continue to execute those programs and, over time, seek to use its leverage as a stand-alone Unified Command to gain additional resources to strengthen and expand them, as well as develop new ones to address emerging African security needs.

Importantly, an AFRICOM "presence" in Africa (as opposed to a military base) is the means by which the Department of Defense can more easily consult with our friends on the continent,

collaborate on important initiatives that promote security and stability, and learn from our African hosts about how Africans view their own challenges, opportunities, and remedies for helping the continent achieve its full potential

Conclusion

As illustrated above, the United States presently enjoys thriving security, economic, and political relationships with most of the countries on the African continent. We want to continue to build on that. In that sense, the creation of Africa Command finally brings DoD in line with the rest of the US government and US policy toward Africa. DoD's development of an Africa Command to streamline its Cold War legacy organizational structures with regard to Africa, is a logical step in what has been and will continue to be, a long journey for both the US and Africa – a journey toward a more stable, peaceful and prosperous world. The security challenges of the 21st century demand that Africa be an integral, not peripheral, element of that world in a security context, as well as in political and economic contexts. Consequently African countries should be partners in the journey, as this journey will only be successful if we share the road and help each other along the way. This idea of partnership has characterized the US approach to security challenges in other parts of the world, which is one reason why the US has had geographically focused commands for those other regions for some time. In that context some might argue an Africa Command is long overdue. Whether it's overdue or right on time, the Africa Command is a concrete manifestation of the US commitment to establish a serious long term partnership with African nations to address the issues that present challenges to our mutual security interests in this new century.

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