The Iraqization of Africa?

Looking at AFRICOM from a South African Perspective

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Introduction

The South African government has openly expressed its opposition towards the creation of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM).[1] What's more, South Africa presents its position on AFRICOM as representative of the country as a whole, but particularly on behalf of a group of African countries—the Southern African Development Community (SADC)—which holds an aversive stance towards US plans in this regard.[2] This does not represent a radical change in South Africa's ruling African National Congress's (ANC) general policy stance towards the United States over the last 10 or more years. While this is not the place to dissect South Africa's policy towards the United States in general, it is important to ask critical questions about the legitimacy of the South African government's position—and that of some other African countries—towards AFRICOM. The discussion is an effort to examine some of the considerations that underpin this scepticism about US motives towards Africa.

From a military operational perspective, Africa presents a geographical challenge, especially for conventionally minded militaries with questionable success in fighting small wars. In the past, US policy and military communities implied sub-Saharan Africa when they referred to "Africa." North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia) was treated as part of the Middle East and Europe rather than as part of Africa. American constituencies concerned with Africa tend to focus on sub-Saharan rather than on North Africa. This divide exists even in the minds of most Americans. Many Americans refer to themselves as "Afro-Americans" as if Euro-Africans or Arab-Africans do not exist, and as if Afro-Americans have closer ties with the African continent than their fellow Americans. The division between North and sub-Saharan Africa has created some problems for the US armed forces in recent years, especially in countries such as Chad and the war-torn Sudan that straddle the regional divide.[3] Within the context of this reality, it became increasingly difficult for the US armed forces to deal with Africa in its totality. The divide between North and sub-Saharan Africa made some geographical sense, to the extent that a desert is often more of an obstacle than even an ocean. In most cases, the Mediterranean represents an easier obstacle to negotiate than the Sahara.

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Africa did not feature in the US military command structure until 1952, when several North African countries were added to the responsibilities of the US European Command because of their historic relationship with Europe. The rest of Africa was not included in any US command structure until 1960, when US concerns over growing Soviet influence in Africa led to the inclusion of sub-Saharan Africa in the Atlantic Command. In 1962 sub-Saharan Africa was given to Strike Command. When Strike Command was transformed into Readiness Command in 1971, its responsibility for Africa was resolved. In 1983, Cold War priorities led the Reagan administration to divide responsibility for Africa between three geographical commands—European Command, Central Command, and Pacific Command.[4] On 6 February 2007, the US president announced the formation of a US Africa Command as part of the Unified Command Plan.[5] AFRICOM is to be established by 30 September 2008. An initial operating capability would have been in place in Stuttgart, Germany, by August 2007, well before the official starting date. Of course, what the actual "operating capacity" will entail is subject to the advancements of the establishment of the command by that time.

Is This Something Mutually Beneficial?

There are a number of ways to think about the creation of AFRICOM. The most obvious would be to look at its creation from a realist perspective. Such a perspective accepts that the United States has vital and other interests in Africa to protect or extend. For the extension or protection of these interests, the US military needs to develop command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (C4I) and other capabilities to ensure military operational success on the African continent. In view of possible vital US interests in Africa, the creation of AFRICOM would be of strategic importance to the United States, and it would not necessarily have to consult with Africa or anyone else about the creation of such a command. This would allow the United States the luxury of building and structuring the command according to its own needs. Of course, a realist approach is inherently unilateral, nationalistic, and competitive by nature, and there is a very real danger that it may be perceived as aggressiveness by the United States within Africa. In addition, realist thinking contains the risk that Africa may view the creation of AFRICOM as a potential threat to the extent that it may undermine US interests in Africa.

The truth is that there is doubt about US interests in Africa among African leaders.[6] Indeed, Africa is perhaps the only sizable inhabited geographical region that has not recently been considered as vital to US security interests. To state it bluntly, until very recently the United States had hardly any concrete, material interests in the continent.[7] This highlights the need to downplay the realist approach and for the United States, on the one hand, to be much more cautious in dealing with Africa and, on the other hand, to have a more consultative approach with Africa in the development of AFRICOM. This also requires the US polity and bureaucracy to cultivate support within the United States for the creation of AFRICOM. A more consultative approach is rooted in the notion that while clear identifiable interests provide policy with a solid foundation and coherence, a lack thereof normally leads to ambiguity, debate, and vulnerability to changing political moods.

For years, there have been discussions within the US Department of Defense about the merits of some kind of Africa Command.[8] By the middle of 2006, the

previous secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, established a planning team to advise him on requirements for establishing a new unified command for the African continent. He made a recommendation to President Bush, who then authorized the new command on the same day Rumsfeld left office.[9] During the announcement of the establishment of AFRICOM, the new secretary of defense, Robert M. Gates, outlined the function of the command as "oversee[ing] security cooperation, building partnership capability, defense support to non-military missions, and, if directed, military operations on the African continent."[10] Gates alleged that the command would enable the US military to have a more effective and integrated approach than the current command setup in which three geographical commands are responsible for Africa. He called this three-command structure an "outdated arrangement left over from the Cold War."[11] Some scholars therefore argue that AFRICOM will shift US involvement in Africa from a reactive to a proactive commitment.[12]

The US government is facing increasing domestic and international pressure to play a more prominent role on the world's most troubled continent. The creation of AFRICOM received strong support from both parties in the US Congress, and there is an increase in interest groups lobbying for support for African countries in the United States.[13] Since the 1993 "Blackhawk Down" incident in which 18 US servicemen were killed, the US government in general has arguably resisted the pressures to provide tangible military support to peacekeeping or other missions in Africa. Two recent challenges were instrumental in drawing the attention of US politicians and bureaucrats to "the globe's most neglected region."[14] The first is the failed state of Somalia, which has a tradition of links to Islamic militants, such as al-Qaeda.

The second is the crisis in Sudan, where UN figures estimate that more than 400,000 people have died from ethnic cleansing in the Darfur region.[15] The decision to create AFRICOM reflects—without any doubt—a rise in US national security interests on the continent.

There are numerous examples where the direct military involvement of a superpower in a particular region had been accepted because it was based on a mutually beneficial relationship. US involvement in Europe during the Cold War is the most obvious example. It is therefore important to distinguish between two sets of benefits. Firstly, there are the minor, almost secondary, benefits for Africa that may flow from the establishment of AFRICOM to serve primarily US security interests. Secondly, there are the geostrategic mutually beneficial payoffs for Africa and the United States in the creation of AFRICOM that should be clear from the outset. However, from an African perspective, this mutually beneficial relationship in the creation of AFRICOM is not apparent. Consequently, the US decision to create AFRICOM is saying more about its own fears and geostrategic position than about its interests in Africa. This particularly relates to US concerns about the growing Chinese involvement in Africa, the US war on terror, and the growing US need for oil from Africa. A more detailed analysis of these three considerations provides a clear indication that the US decision to create AFRICOM is driven by negative considerations from Africa rather than by positive interests in, or spin-offs for, Africa.

According to the independent global organization, Power and Interest News Report, Sino-African trade has risen from about $3 billion in 1995 to $55.5 billion in 2006.[16] On a macro level, there are increasing trade, defense, and diplomatic relations between African countries and

China. The economic and security support for the Mugabe regime is but one example in this regard, with China's investment in Sudan's oil industry and the cozy relationship with its regime as another.[17] These two examples are also a demonstration of what China is willing to do (or turn a blind eye to) in order to advance Chinese influence in Africa. The macro relations are augmented by interaction of a micro kind in the sense that almost every small town in the most remote places in Africa these days can boast about its Chinese shop! In 2006, for example, China hosted a conference in Beijing, which drew 43 African heads of state and representatives from five other African nations—more African leaders than would normally attend an African Union summit on the continent. The Chinese president toured Africa during February 2007 at the time of the announcement of the creation of AFRICOM. It was his third visit to Africa in as many years.

It may be true that China's policy motivations and intentions are typical of a large and growing superpower and that, because of this, the United States does not regard China's emerging interest in Africa as a security threat.[18] It may also be true that the United States does not have many interests in Africa. However, China is reemerging as a major economic, diplomatic, and military entity on the world scene, with a particular geostrategic interest in African resources and markets. The United States is obviously very much concerned about the growing interaction and cooperation between Africa and the "dragon with a heart of darkness."[19] China is obviously not very interested in encouraging democracy, good governance, and transparency on the African continent. Consequently, the recent agreements on defense, economic, technical, and other forms of cooperation between China and Zimbabwe will be under scrutiny in Washington.[20]

Though China is an alternative to US influence in Africa, the judgement is still out on the nature of Chinese involvement in Africa.[21] Africa's preference is saying as much about Africa as it is saying about China, and can most probably be linked to issues such as the militarized image of US foreign policy in Africa and the availability of Chinese support without too many attached labels. The US military has always been an important part of US foreign policy to the extent that the military is in some circles often seen as the leading US foreign policy agency. From this perspective, the creation of AFRICOM could be seen as an important first step in increasing US foreign policy presence and capabilities in Africa as a means to counterbalance growing Chinese influence. Steven Morrison, the director of the Africa program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, for example, argues that through the creation of AFRICOM, the United States is trying to gain a foothold on the continent for "intensifying competition with China, India and others for influence and for access" and because of "rising commitments with respect to global health in Africa."[22]

The world has changed dramatically since 9/11 and the rise of the threat of international terrorism in the West. However, in view of the strategic situation facing US forces and their allies in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, the strategic effectiveness of the war on terror and the strategic competence of those conducting the war are still in doubt. This doubt is linked to the question as to whether the Western world in general, and the United States in particular, is, indeed, more secure because of the war on terror thus far. In Africa, the creation of AFRICOM is seen as "the official arrival of America's 'global war on terror' on the African continent."[23] The United States is obviously looking towards Africa as a potential source of internatio-

nal terrorism. The intelligence communities of most Western countries are scanning the world—including Africa—for new international terrorist threats. African countries in general are uncomfortable about the possible conduct of both overt and covert US intelligence operations within their borders. Of course, the US government and its allies are also looking for coalition partners in the war on terror in Africa. The creation of AFRICOM will serve both purposes to the extent that it will provide easier access for the United States to Africa in the conduct of intelligence operations and the cultivation of strategic partners for the war on terror.

The bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania serves as a stark reminder of the international terrorist threats that the United States is facing in and from Africa. The threat of international terrorism in Africa and its links with the al-Qaeda movement again came to the fore with the more recent suicide attacks in Algeria and Morocco.[24] The volatility of the African continent provides fertile breeding grounds for extremists, criminals, and, ultimately, international terrorists in terms of recruiting, training in uncontrolled areas, and providing a sanctuary from where they may operate. This volatility of the African continent is rooted in challenges such as extreme poverty, corruption, internal conflicts, border disputes, uncontrolled territorial waters and borders, warlords, weak internal security apparatuses, natural disasters, famine, lack of dependable water sources, and an underdeveloped infrastructure. It is easy to convince individuals to support terrorism against the West if they face a bleak future in these kinds of environments when it is contrasted with the situation in most Western countries, in general, and the United States, in particular, using the old method of relative deprivation. However, it is extremely important to note that though poverty, instability, and volatility do not necessarily breed terrorists, nations with weak civil societies, poor law enforcement, and a weak judicial system are vulnerable to penetration and exploitation by international terrorist groups.[25]

It is the increasing US interest in African oil that underpins the often heard argument in Africa that the United States is using the war on terror as an excuse to get access to African resources.[26] It is true, however, that the attacks of 9/11 and the consequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq had a definite impact on the relations between the United States and the Arab world. A recent report by retired US Army general Barry McCaffrey on the war in Iraq notes that the "disaster in Iraq will in all likelihood result in a widened regional struggle which will endanger America's strategic interests (oil) in the Mid-East [sic] for a generation."[27] The slumbering tensions between the United States and Iran are a manifestation of this growing regional struggle. Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 2006 should also be evaluated against what had happened in Iraq and the change in the balance of power in the Middle East brought about by it. Clearly, a general situation of distrust and suspicion has been created between the Arab world and the United States—rooted in the 9/11 hostile action by members of the Arab world and the military action by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the continued US support for Israel.

It is against this background that the United States is looking at the oil reserves of the world in general, and specifically in Africa, to lessen its dependence on oil production from the Middle East. The diversification of the US oil interests over the last 10 years made Africa's oil increasingly more important. This concerns the oil

production of the continent itself, but particularly of the west coast of Africa. Africa owns about 8 percent of the world's known oil reserves, with Nigeria, Libya, and Equatorial Guinea as the region's leading oil producers. Seventy percent of Africa's oil production is concentrated in West Africa's Gulf of Guinea, stretching from the Ivory Coast to Angola. The low sulphur content of West African crude oil makes it of further strategic importance.[28] The Gulf of Guinea, including Angola and Nigeria, is projected to provide a quarter of US oil imports within a decade, surpassing the volume imported from the Persian Gulf.[29] By 2003, sub-Saharan Africa was providing the United States with 16 percent of its oil needs.[30] This has risen to 20 percent in 2007.[31]

The rise in US energy needs is bound to continue. At the same time, the war in Iraq will, in all likelihood, result in a widened regional struggle that will endanger America's strategic oil interests in the Middle East. This will impact the strategic importance of African oil for the US market.

Difficulty of Understanding the US Politico-Military Bureaucracy

One of the major challenges for Africa in dealing with the United States about the creation of AFRICOM is the difficulty of understanding the nature of US politics, especially the unique intricacies that are found in any political-bureaucratic system. This particularly concerns the role and personalities of individual US politicians and bureaucrats. It is this factor that very often leads to doubts about how much political and bureaucratic support there is for a particular US policy initiative in Africa and, consequently, how serious the United States is about a given policy direction—

specifically in the absence of any serious US interests in Africa. Policy, in many cases, is nothing more than a declaration of intent by politicians.[32] Ultimately, it depends on the energy and support within the wider public and bureaucratic environment for the transformation of an intention into action (i.e., the execution of such a policy).

From this perspective, the declared intention of the Bush administration to create AFRICOM is dependent on the US bureaucracy, in general, and the military bureaucracy, in particular, to transform the intention of an Africa Command into a workable US military C4I structure. If there is no strong support in the bureaucracy for a declared policy intention, it may slow the process down by not infusing it with the necessary energy. In some circles the creation of the Africa Command is seen as a policy initiative of the Bush administration as a whole and of Rumsfeld, in particular. There are, therefore, serious doubts in these circles as to whether the creation of AFRICOM will survive the Bush administration. There are also some questions as to the amount of support there is within the US military for the creation of such a command.[33]

The other side of this truth, however, is that bureaucracy has staying power and that once AFRICOM has been created, it will become increasingly difficult to change direction. This is of primary concern to the US military's organizational or institutional interests in AFRICOM. Once US military personnel have started to build their careers on the availability of certain career paths for "African specialists," the military bureaucracy will develop a vested interest in maintaining such career paths. In practice, this means that once military personnel have reached general rank by being African specialists, it will become very difficult to change direction. Bureaucratic interests can, indeed, be a very

important factor for the generation and development of national interests in a region, and it is often very difficult for outsiders, Africans in particular, to develop a clear understanding of the role of the US bureaucracy in this regard.

Until now, US policy concerning the majority of African countries was to a large extent the responsibility of the bureaucratic middle echelons in Washington practicing the art of bureaucratic conservatism. These bureaucrats operated within a framework of three guidelines: don't spend much money; don't take a stand that might create domestic controversy; and don't let African issues complicate policy towards other, more important, parts of the world.[34] This bureaucratic approach to US policy formulation led to a situation where the United States very often lost interest in Africa and, indeed, had to "rediscover" Africa at several junctions during the post–Second World War era.[35] However, there is the potential that high-level military bureaucratic concerns about maintaining interests in Africa may have a definite influence on the nature and sustainability of US policy towards Africa. This becomes even more important considering the reality that the US military is often the leading US foreign policy institution.

From a US policy implementation perspective, the US bureaucracy is perhaps no different than any other bureaucracy in the sense that its structures and programs have a very "stovepiped" nature. An expert on African affairs in the United States, Dr. Dan Henk from the USAF Air War College, for example, noted that US engagement with Africa has often reflected rather different approaches and intensities between the US Department of State, the US Agency for International Development, and the US Department of Defense. This very often results in some confusion about US interests, objectives, and motives.[36] AFRICOM, with its envisioned interagency character, will without a doubt positively influence US policy coordination in Africa. Not only will it ensure greater efficiency, it will also definitely contribute towards higher effectiveness of US policy initiatives in Africa—benefiting both the United States and African countries. The promise that the creation of AFRICOM will result in informed, consistent, coherent, and sustained engagement by the United States in Africa is something that ought to be welcomed throughout the continent.

Providing Military Support to Africa

Many (perhaps most) of the US actors involved in setting up the new command believe that AFRICOM will be significantly different from other combatant commands. It will have a much more robust "interagency complexion." From the outset, the planners have had a much greater interest in "soft power" issues such as health, infrastructural rehabilitation, the environment, economic development, security-sector reform, conflict attenuation, and other human security angles.[37] This arrangement is rooted in the belief that diplomatic, informational, and economic actions will be more critical in achieving US foreign policy objectives in Africa than the use of military force.[38] However, it also raises a question about a more proactive and preventative approach in protecting and extending US security and other interests in Africa, in contrast to the very cautious and defensive approach that has defined the US security involvement in Africa until now. AFRICOM, though, is not planned as the typical combatant command. Such an approach is appreciated, given the often very destructive nature of outside military involvement on the continent in the past. However, it should be

recognized that there are also some dangers to an approach that underplays the role of the military in Africa.

The image of US foreign policy in many parts of Africa is informed by US military actions in other parts of the world, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is an image that is strongly associated with the US military in general and the aggressive use of military force in particular. This very aggressive and "militarized" image of US foreign policy stands in stark contrast to the efforts by everybody involved in the creation of AFRICOM to downplay the hard-core military role of US military forces in Africa and to highlight the nonmilitary and soft-power roles of AFRICOM. This raises two kinds of questions in Africa. Firstly, will the US developmental and humanitarian assistance to Africa be militarized through a deliberate effort to put the military in charge of these activities? Related questions include, should the creation of AFRICOM be viewed as much more than interagency cooperation? Does AFRICOM represent a militarization of nonmilitary US support to Africa? Where is this militarization of humanitarian and other human security actions leading? These types of questions should be linked to the difficulty of understanding the US bureaucratic and military jargon in Africa. What, for example, is implied by "stability operations" in Africa?[39] Secondly, is the United States sincere with Africa about the creation of AFRICOM? The general image of US foreign policy in the world does not correspond with the declared intention of the United States with the creation of AFRICOM. This should be linked to the question as to why AFRICOM should be different than all the other US geographical commands in other regions of the world. Is this not a form of discrimination or disparagement? What about the argument that the US military is ensuring a "soft landing" for AFRICOM in Africa by placing the emphasis on the soft-power issues in the creation of the command?[40] How long will the soft-power approach last before AFRICOM shows its true character and Africa or certain countries in Africa will be "Iraqed"?

These questions should be viewed against the urgent need for hard-core military developmental and other forms of military support in Africa. It is a widely recognized fact that one of the biggest challenges African countries face since independence is the lack of military professionalism. This often reveals itself in challenging civil-military relations to the extent that coup d'états have colored the political landscape of many African countries since independence. Military unprofessionalism in Africa is linked to a number of causations, such as subnational or ethnically based recruitment, military corruption, the development of parallel security apparatuses such as presidential guards, and domestic military deployments.[41] From this perspective, it will be disastrous if AFRICOM does not take the need for the development of military professionalism in Africa seriously. However, one of the primary causes of military unprofessionalism in Africa has been the influence of foreign military support in times of crises. In many cases, external support translates into a lack of urgency within African militaries because of the guarantee of a bailout that is provided by foreign military powers. This reality leaves an open question pertaining to the kind of soft-power military support that AFRICOM will provide to African militaries. It serves as a warning against an overemphasis of nonmilitary angles of military support in the creation of AFRICOM.

AFRICOM, in supporting African militaries, should place the emphasis on the creation of capacity, not the provision of capacity. In developing capacity, it is important for the US military not to come to the

table with blueprints by being prescriptive or dogmatic—what had worked in America and other places in the world will not necessarily work in Africa. In short, Africans may be uncomfortable with the enforcement of US military doctrine on Africa. There are relatively well-developed doctrines within Africa—in most cases an interesting blend of old colonial doctrines combined with those of the United States and the former Soviet Union. This specifically relates to insurgency and counterinsurgency doctrines since Africa has been involved in these kinds of wars for the last 50 years or more. The challenge for the US military is to capture these doctrines through an understanding of the African historical tradition. It is seen as a history from below, rooted in a strong oral tradition.[42] In view of the strategic situation confronting the United States in Iraq and elsewhere, learning from the African unconventional experience in an unconventional way may be not such a bad idea. In return and in exchange for ideas, Africa may benefit from more conventional US military expertise, hardware, and simulation technology in the building of African military capacity.[43]

However, this brings another important consideration to the fore, namely the lack of enthusiasm of African militaries towards outside military support. This pessimism towards military support is linked, in many cases, to the exploitation of Africa's lack of military resources. A shortage of resources is a critical vulnerability of most African militaries. Outside military support may provide African militaries with vital resources. However, their sustainment, in most cases, remains in the hands of those who supplied them since African militaries don't necessarily have such technological capabilities and skills. Africans cannot maintain the military resources that are provided, and a culture of dependency is created. Consequently, many Africans see the military-industrial complexes of the industrialized countries of the world, the United States in particular, as a major motivation for involvement in Africa and other parts of the world. The economies of supplier countries are further developed while, in many cases, destruction is exported to Africa, increasing African dependency.

In addition, it is important for AFRICOM not to be seen by Africans as an effort by the United States to replace the continental, regional, and military structures—the regional standby forces in particular—that have been created by Africans themselves or are in the process of development. In fact, the United States can play a major role by enhancing these structures on a continental and regional level and exploiting these structures for capacity building in Africa and its different regions. Africa may benefit from the development of interoperability within regional structures. The United States, when working through regional and continental structures, will be able to follow a multilateral approach by engaging the militaries of several African countries simultaneously and by being a silent partner.[44] Being the silent partner may not always serve the media-orientated approach of the US military. However, silent partnership may serve AFRICOM's higher-order strategic objectives in Africa. This may imply, for example, that AFRICOM provides logistical platforms or opportunities for training and education while exploiting the availability of well-trained and educated African instructors.[45]

Confronting African Challenges

There is increasing pressure from within Africa to allow it to solve its own problems. There are even suggestions of a "United States of Africa"—though this may sound, and most probably is, a bit far-fetched.[46] However, the underlying message is one of "we want to take ownership

of our own destiny" and that for too long Africa's future has been dictated by outsiders. This especially concerns the roles of Britain, France, and Portugal during the Colonial era and the United States and the former Soviet Union during the Cold War. It further translates into an increasing uneasiness of the people of Africa with Western and other influences (sometime interferences) in general and US influences (or interferences) in particular. The image of the United States, in particular, as a bully of the small, the weak, the defenseless, or the underdog has been strongly reinforced by the US invasion of Iraq. This is linked to the view of the United States as part of the "haves" and African people as the "have nots."

These views should, however, be tempered with the reality that one of the biggest challenges Africa and other parts of the global community dealing with Africa face is African solidarity. African solidarity most probably reached its apex with the creation of the African Union (AU) where, unlike the European Union, being part of Africa is the only qualification to become a member. This does not mean that there are no differences of opinion in the AU. However, its formation is a reflection of solidarity, especially as far as issues such as anticolonialism and Africanism are concerned.[47] Nonetheless, the road to African solidarity is rife with pitfalls. Africa's inability to address the Zimbabwean issue properly is but one example of the dangers of African solidarity. African solidarity very often results in a tendency to be very critical about what Western governments in particular—including the United States—are doing on the African continent. Yet, at the same time, Africans in general and African governments, in particular, look forward to how they can benefit from Western and US involvement on the continent.

The US government has clearly thought long and hard about the creation of AFRICOM, and aforementioned arguments have undoubtedly been raised in initial deliberations. This is most probably the reason why the focus of AFRICOM will predominantly be on antiterrorist operations and humanitarian aid. AFRICOM, it is stated, would focus far less on preparing troops for major combat in its area of responsibility. The emphasis would rather be on military training programs to help African governments secure their borders, to guard against crises such as Darfur, and to contain deadly diseases such as AIDS and malaria. This is also the most likely reason for why the four-star general commanding AFRICOM is to have a civilian counterpart from the State Department to help coordinate the nonmilitary functions of the US government in Africa.

The people of Africa know that wherever you find the antelope, you will most probably also come across its most serious adversary, the African lion. There is fear in some circles on the African continent that Africa will be Iraqed—that is, that US efforts to protect itself against international terrorism from the African continent will, in fact, exacerbate the problem. This fear is rooted in the notion that a strong US military presence in Africa will draw the attention of its enemies and that, as in the Cold War, Africa will once again become the battlefield for the power and military struggles of the great powers—the United States and China, for instance, and particularly the US military and its international terrorist enemies.[48] This argument should be linked to the plan eventually to locate the command headquarters of AFRICOM somewhere on the African continent. There is no question that the country or countries that will host the headquarters of AFRICOM, or parts thereof, will also expose itself or themselves to the kinds of threats that presently face the United States.

The US way of war and the African way of war are diametrically opposed. US military doctrine is rooted in winning decisive battles through overwhelming use of conventional military technology. As in the case in Iraq after the battle for Baghdad, the US military often finds itself in a situation where the decisive battle or battles have been won, but not necessarily the war. The result is that in at least two occasions during the last 50 years, the US armed forces were sucked into indecisive, low-intensity wars.[49] Most conflict in Africa is unconventional by nature, being fought by second-or third-generation technology. This often results in indecisive, drawn-out, anarchic types of community wars with no decisive outcome.[50] It is precisely this kind of conflict that the US armed forces steer away from, especially since their experience in Vietnam and, even more so, after their more recent experience in Iraq. It is also the kind of conflict that in 1993 resulted in the Somalia syndrome after the catastrophe in Mogadishu and most probably led to US reluctance to become militarily involved in Africa. In Africa this reluctance contributes to a "runaway" image of the US military. This image was reinforced by the United States' unwillingness to become involved in human tragedies such as the Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Darfur crises. Compare that, for example, with US political and military efforts during the 1990s to solve problems in the Balkans—a geographical region in which, it is believed, the United States also did not have much political and economic interests.

Reluctance to contribute in solving complex emergencies in Africa reinforces the view in Africa that the United States is quick to showcase its successes and contributions to African security. However, the United States is not seen as a power with the courage to commit itself to deal with complex security and other challenges in Africa on a sustainable basis. Linked to the notion that it will only become involved in a region if it can gain economically, the general image of the US military in Africa is one of disdain. The US military lacks credibility in some parts of Africa and very often is seen as a legitimate target. In the past, this frequently resulted in the US military becoming the victim of bad publicity in Africa. AFRICOM may become an important vehicle to sustain US involvement in Africa and, by doing so, to contribute towards a more positive image of the United States and its military in Africa. As a result, the creation of AFRICOM may be the first real test for sustainable US involvement in Africa.

The creation of AFRICOM is eventually closely linked to the question as to whether there is recognition by the US government and its military that the future of war in the "age of terror" would primarily be irregular. During the 1990s, the United States was in the exceptional position that, as the world's only remaining superpower, it could choose where and for whatever reason to intervene militarily. There was at the same time no lack of opportunity to act as the world's policeman since widespread conflict of an anarchic nature appeared all over the globe, from the Balkans to Central Africa, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union (Chechnya). In most cases, these conflicts did not really impinge on vital US interests, nor did they have the potential to ignite the outbreak of a third world war.[51] As a result, there was no real conflict that was important enough for the United States to act decisively. That was until 9/11—the day on which the United States became part of the "coming anarchy."[52] It may be good to remember that the initial article on the coming anarchy by Kaplan in the Atlantic Monthly was primarily based on his experiences as a journalist in Africa.[53] This led to an obvious conclusion for this argument. If the United States really wants to be successful in its war on

terror, Africa has to be part of the solution. In the end, Africa's problems—whether the United Sates and its military like it or not—have indeed became America's problems. The creation of AFRICOM may be a small recognition of this reality.

Some Implications

Africa presents a challenge to any modern conventionally minded military force. The creation of AFRICOM makes military sense if the US military wants to be successful in its military endeavours on the African continent. There are also other strategic advantages for the United States and its military in creating AFRICOM. For the United States, the most obvious advantage will be the close interaction with African realities as well as with the people of Africa. It is hoped that such interaction will translate into a better understanding of African dynamics and intricacies both in the US bureaucracy and amongst the US public at large. It will most definitely allow the United States the ability to develop a better intelligence picture of Africa. Included in this intelligence picture will be a better interpretation of the threats that confront the United States in and from Africa.

The most obvious advantage that flows from the United States having a better intelligence picture of Africa is the opportunity to exploit market and other opportunities that arise. Furthermore, it will be able to better secure itself through a proactive, preventative approach to international terrorism in Africa—dealing with problems before they arise. US military presence on the African continent will empower the United States to better communicate with Africa on a military-diplomatic level and, in doing so, will ensure greater understanding in Africa and African militaries of US military endea-

vours in Africa and the world over. There is no question that antagonism may develop in certain parts of Africa as a result of a US military presence on the continent. Judging by the recent comments by the South African minister of defense, these antagonisms may have their origins in certain African countries and regional structures that, for historic reasons, are very critical of what the United States is doing in the world, and particularly in Africa.[54] These antagonisms may also have their origins outside of Africa. This specifically relates to the growing Chinese diplomatic and economic involvement in Africa. A cloud of vagueness surrounds Chinese military involvement in Africa, and more so the extent to which it is undermining US military involvement in Africa. The question is whether African political and strategic culture will allow African leaders the room to exploit the best of what China and the United States bring to the African table.

The creation of AFRICOM will raise Africa's strategic profile in the United States as well as other parts of the world. African militaries are to benefit from the creation of AFRICOM in terms of military-diplomatic opportunities and the transfer of military expertise and other more tangible military means. This includes help that the US armed forces may provide in the development of a unique military professional ethos in African militaries, the transformation of African defense management to be more accountable and transparent, and the further enhancement of African peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction capabilities.

The US military has to overcome a number of obstacles in the creation of AFRICOM, both in Africa and the United States. On one side of the Atlantic, the United States has to deal with an aggressive, militarized image of US foreign policy linked to the history of unsustainable US military involvement. This image is rooted in a very

real fear in certain parts of Africa that it may become the victim of Iraqization. This undermines US military credibility and makes it a legitimate target. On the other side of the Atlantic, given the bad publicity of the US military in Africa in the past, the Somalia syndrome may still dictate US military thinking and attitudes. Fortunately (or unfortunately), this is the world of strategy where policy, emotion, and change reign.[55]   ❏

Notes

1. The author would like to thank Dr. Dan Henk from the USAF Air War College for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of the article.

2. Wyndham Hartley, "Southern Africa: More U.S. Soldiers Not Welcome in Africa, Says Lekota," *Business Day* (Johannesburg), 30 August 2007, http://allafrica.com/ stories/ 200708300344.html. The ambiguity or dualism, to be precise, in the South African government's position towards the US military is, of course, reflected in the reality that at the same time the minister of defense was making these statements, the South African Navy was involved in exercises off the South African coastline with a contingent of the US Navy. These exercises between the South African and US militaries follow in the wake of the announcement on the creation of AFRICOM.

3. Michael Clough, *Free At Last? US Policy toward Africa and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992), 1.

4. Lauren Ploch, *Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 16 May 2007), 10.

5. The White House, "President Bush Creates a Department of Defense Unified Combatant Command for Africa," Office of the Press Secretary, 6 February 2007, http://www. whitehouse .gov/news/releases/2007/02/20070206-3.html.

6. Ibid.

7. Clough, *Free At Last?* 3.

8. For example, see Richard G. Catoire, "A CINC for Sub-Saharan Africa? Rethinking the Unified Command Plan," *Parameters* 30 (Winter 2000–01): 102–17.

9. Jackie Northam, "Pentagon Creates Military Command for Africa," *NPR* (*National Public Radio*), Morning Edition, 7 February 2007, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story .php?storyId=7234997.

10. US Department of Defense, "DoD Establishing US Africa Command," *DefenseLink*, American Forces Press Service, http://www.defenselink.mil/News/News-Article.aspx?id=2940.

11. Ibid.

12. Northam, "Pentagon Creates Military Command for Africa."

13. Jim Lobe, "Africa to Get Its Own US Military Command," Antiwar.com, 1 February 2007, http://www.antiwar .com/lobe/?articleid=10443.

14. Sally B. Donnelly, "Exclusive: The Pentagon Plans for an African Command," *Time*, http://lib.store.yahoo.net/lib/ realityzone/UFNAfricancommand.mht. 15. Bryan Bender, "Pentagon Plans New Command to Cover Africa," *Boston*

15. Bryan Bender, "Pentagon Plans New Command to Cover Africa," *Boston Globe*, 21 December 2006, http:// www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2006/12/21/ pentagon_plans _new_command _to_cover_africa.

16. Simon Tisdall, "US Moves in on Africa," *Guardian*, 9 February 2007, http://www .guardian.co.uk/usa/ story/0,,2009098,00.html.

17. Gary Leupp, "We're Taking Down Seven Countries in Five Years: A Regime Change Checklist," *Dissident Voice*, 17 January 2007, http://www.dissidentvoice.org/ Jan07/Leupp17.htm.

18. Jim Fisher-Thompson, "U.S. Official Dispels 'Alarmist Views' of China in Africa," *USINFO*, Bureau of International Information Programs, US Department of State, 16 February 2007, http://usinfo.state.gov/xar-chives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=Febr uary& x=200702161420311E JrehsiF0.6760828.

19. Philippe D. Rogers, "Dragon with a Heart of Darkness? Countering Chinese Influence in Africa," *Joint Force Quarterly* 47 (4th Quarter 2007): 22–27.

20. This was confirmed in a presentation by Amb. David H. Shinn, adjunct professor of international affairs, George Washington University (lecture, South African Military Academy, Saldanha, 28 August 2007).

21. M. Rossouw, "Mbeki Verdedig China se Involved in Afrika," *Die Burger* (Cape Town, South Africa), 4 June 2007, 6.

22. Northam, "Pentagon Creates Military Command for Africa."

23. Hartley, "Southern Africa."

24. J. Ferreira, "Terrorisme Beleef Oplewing in Noord-Afrika," *Die Burger*, 13 April 2007, 6.

25. James Jay Carafano and Nile Gardiner, "US Military Assistance for Africa: A Better Solution," The Heritage Foundation, 15 October 2003, http://www.heritage. org?Reasearch?africa/bg1697.cfm.

26. Lt Col Gary Lloyd (chief military observer for the African Mission in Sudan), interview by the author during visit to the South African Military Academy, Saldanha, 23 August 2007.

27. Gen Barry R. McCaffrey, USA, retired, to Col Michael Meese, professor and head, Department of Social Sciences, US Military Academy, West Point, NY, internal memorandum, subject: After-Action Report: Visit [to] Iraq and Kuwait, 9–16 March 2007, (submitted) 26 March 2007, http:// media.washingtonpost.com/wp-rv/nation/ documents/McCaffrey_Report_032707.pdf.

28. Chietigj Bajpaee, "Sino-US Energy Competition in Africa," *Power and Interest News Report*, 7 October 2005,

http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=378&language_id=1.

29. Tisdall, "US Moves in Africa."

30. Carafano and Gardiner, "US Military Assistance for Africa."

31. Lobe, "Africa to Get Its Own US Military Command."

32. See, for example, the discussion by John Garnett, "Defence Policy-Making," in John Baylis et al., *Contemporary Strategy II* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 2.

33. This particular point was raised by a number of US delegates at the 33rd International Congress of Military History in Cape Town, 13–17 August 2007, where an earlier draft of the paper was read.

34. Clough, *Free At Last?* 2.

35. Peter J. Schraeder, *United States Foreign Policy toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis, and Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.

36. See the discussion of this phenomenon in Dan Henk, "The Environment, the US Military, and Southern Africa," *Parameters* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 98–117.

37. Dr. Dan Henk, Air War College, e-mail message to author, 30 July 2007.

38. Bender, "Pentagon Plans New Command."

39. Testimony by Mark Malan, "AFRICOM: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?" before the Subcommittee on African Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, at the hearing entitled *Exploring the U.S. Africa Command and the New Strategic Relationship with Africa*, 110th Cong., 1st sess., 1 August 2007, http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2007/MalanTestimony070801.pdf.

40. A concern that was expressed by Col Johan van der Walt (senior staff officer, Peace Support Operations [UN] of the South African National Defense Force), telephonic interview by the author, 28 August 2007.

41. Herbert M. Howe, *Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States* (London: Lynne Rienner Pub., 2001), chap. 2.

42. Mluleki George, South African deputy minister of defense (speech, official opening of the 33rd International Congress of the International Commission for Military History, Cape Town, South Africa, 13 August 2007).

43. Lloyd, interview.

44. The US military, fortunately, does understand the importance of working through regional and continental structures. For an example in this regard, see "Africa: U.S. Military Command to Seek Value-Added Capabilities for Africa," *The News*, 4 October 2007, http:// allafrica.com/stories/200710040767.html.

45. Ibid.

46. Liesl Louw, "Verenigde State van Afrika: AU Begin Praat," *Beeld*, 2 July 2007, 10.

47. For an excellent exposition of the tension in South African foreign policy between democracy on the one hand and Africanism and anticolonialism on the other, see Laurie Nathan, "Consistency and Inconsistencies in South African Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 81, no. 2 (March 2005): 361–72.

48. L. Scholtz, "Sal Afrika se Gras Weer Trapplek Word?" *Die Burger*, 9 February 2007, 8.

49. See the discussion of this phenomenon in Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 129–33.

50. CAPT Larry Seaquist, US Navy, retired, "Community War," *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute, August 2000, 56–59, http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/seaquist_community_war.htm.

51. Colin S. Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 223.

52. Robert D. Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreamsof the Post ColdWar* (New York: Random House, 2000).

53. Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, Tribalism, and Disease Are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of Our Planet," *The Atlantic Monthly* 273, no. 2 (February 1994): 44–76, http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/prem/199402/ anarchy.

54. The South African minister of defense stated explicitly that more US soldiers are not welcome in Africa. See Hartley, "Southern Africa." The roots of this anti-American sentiment by the South African government are not very clear. It may have an ideological connection with the ruling party in South Africa, the ANC, having its roots firmly "on the other side of the hill" during the Cold War era. It may also have a historical dimension with the US support to Euro-African minorities clinging to minority rule in many African countries during the Cold War. Current policies may also be of influence with the US strategy of preemption and other more aggressive and militarized approaches in its foreign policy that are seen as neo-imperialism in Africa. From an economic perspective, it is possible to argue that South Africa may view growing US influence in Africa as unfair competition. From an international political perspective, South Africa has some strange "friends" and is clearly aligning itself with countries that the United States will not be comfortable with, including Cuba and Iran.

55. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 89.