



A NEW U.S. COMMAND FOR AFRICA

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The establishment of a new U.S. combatant command for Africa—U.S. Africa Command, or AFRICOM—announced by President Bush in February 2007 and launched on October 1, 2007, has generated considerable debate both in the United States and abroad. At the center of the controversy is the planned scope of the military command and the potential benefits and pitfalls of an expanded and more permanent U.S. military presence in Africa.

Those supportive of AFRICOM's establishment view it as a welcome opportunity for deeper engagement on security issues that matter to both Africans and Americans. They also see it as a testing ground for a more integrated military-civilian approach to address some of the long-term, underlying causes of insecurity on the continent. Security sector reform, military professionalization, training for African peacekeepers, who are in ever-greater demand—all of these are almost universally recognized as critical components of Africa's future democratic development that warrant greater attention and support from the international community.

Skeptics, on the other hand, argue that the Africa Command gives military authorities too great an influence in driving U.S. policies in Africa and ultimately risks subordination of long-term foreign policy investments and interests to short-term energy security and counterterrorism priorities. In addition, some on the continent worry that the United States and China, which has grown increasingly active in Africa, are gearing up for a colonial-era competition, with negative consequences for the region.



Some of these fears could have been allayed by earlier and more systematic planning for AFRICOM by the Department of Defense and a clearer articulation of the new command's mission. The Defense Department's establishment of AFRICOM, although approved by President Bush, was finalized with little outside consultation. According to the president's February announcement, AFRICOM was established to "enhance our efforts to bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa." This and subsequent explanations of the new command's purpose left many in Africa and in Washington with the impression that the U.S. military would be taking on humanitarian and developmental responsibilities and tasks traditionally—and more appropriately—undertaken by civilian or nongovernmental organizations. Without substantial advance discussions—with African governments and opinion leaders, nongovernmental organizations, and the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—to ease those perceptions, opposition to the new command grew.

Today, official pronouncements about AFRICOM's mandate are more narrowly defined. As a result, AFRICOM appears to represent a much less dramatic or ambitious departure from the status quo than some

may have wanted or others feared. AFRICOM's Web site describes the new command's role as enabling "DOD to better focus its resources to support and enhance existing U.S. initiatives that help African nations, the African Union, and the regional economic communities succeed. It also provides African nations and regional organizations with an integrated DOD coordination point to help address security and related needs."

AFRICOM's greatest virtue is indeed this unification of U.S. military programs for Africa. To date, those various programs and initiatives have been divided among the U.S. European Command, based in Stuttgart, Germany; the U.S. Central Command, based in Tampa, Florida; and the U.S. Pacific Command, based in Hawaii. That arrangement has left Africa at best a part-time concern for commanders whose areas of responsibility are already exceedingly broad and complex. A primary impetus for the new command has been to avoid the artificial divisions between, for example, the Horn (currently under U.S. Central Command) and the Sahel (under U.S. European Command). Further, a command devoted solely to Africa will allow commanders and staff to focus full-time on engaging African regional and national partners and understanding the continent's complex security challenges.



Many of the new command's activities are already well established in Africa—training programs such as International Military Education and Training, Joint Combined Exchange Training, and the Global Peace Operations Initiative; engagement in regional maritime security efforts; counterterrorism capacity-building initiatives in the Sahel, East Africa, and the Horn; support for African Union peacekeeping efforts; and even some promising military-to-military initiatives on health and HIV/AIDS. The U.S. military will of course maintain its ability to undertake targeted direct action campaigns in the Horn or the Sahel. AFRICOM's establishment may improve the actionable intelligence to and command and control of such operations, but it will not expand the forces available. AFRICOM consists solely of nonoperational headquarters personnel and, according to plans, will have a small initial footprint—no more than 500 military and civilian personnel across the continent.

State Department and USAID officials remain wary of the Defense Department's motives for establishing AFRICOM, but tensions have eased somewhat with the Pentagon's scaled-back description of the command. The command structure for AFRICOM consists of a four-star commanding officer with two deputies—a senior Foreign Service Officer to oversee all assistance and development affairs and a three-star

military officer charged with operational oversight. The unprecedented creation of a senior, non-Defense Department civilian official in the headquarters chain of command bears observation. It should portend better integration of defense assistance and programs with those provided by civilian agencies and improved linkages between the regional command and associated U.S. embassies.

As AFRICOM proceeds through its first year of operation, the United States will need to carefully calibrate the balance of military versus civilian presence and activities, explicitly link defense programs to African security priorities, and ensure that military initiatives are well integrated with other U.S. and African civilian-led policies. The United States must make it clear, in practice and in appearance, that the new command's mission is subordinate to a broader, integrated, and civilian-led U.S. Africa policy. Once launched, AFRICOM will need to demonstrate quickly that the interagency process indeed works, that civilian and military lines of authority are clear, and that the endeavor enhances U.S.-African security engagement without undermining longer-term governance and development goals. Civilian policymakers, in turn, must expand and mature their own agencies' capability and capacity to coordinate and lead U.S. activity in Africa. ■