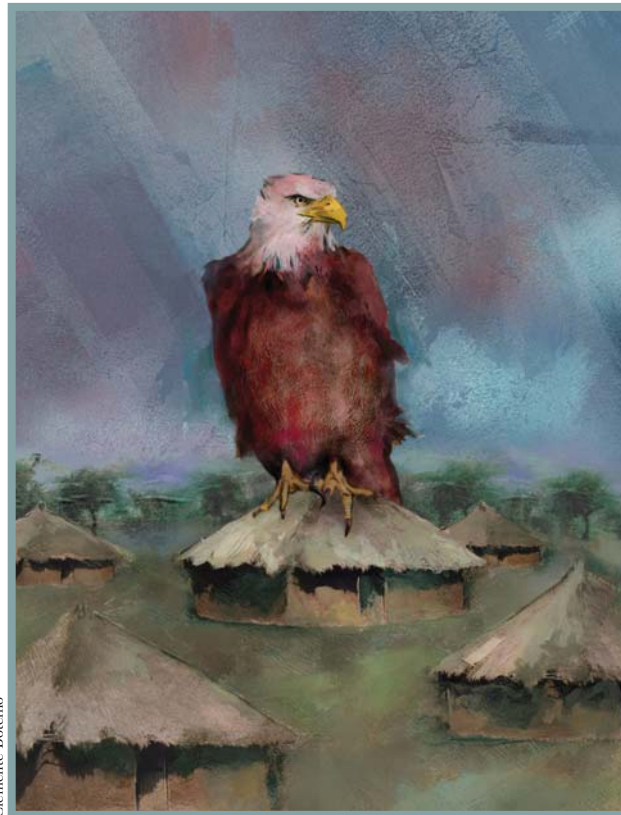


IMPLEMENTING AFRICOM: TREAD CAREFULLY



Clemente Borello

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THE AFRICA COMMAND REPRESENTS A REORIENTATION THAT WILL PROBABLY WORK WELL FOR US, BUT CONFUSE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.

BY ROBERT E. GRIBBIN

On Oct. 1, 2007, the United States Africa Command was established as a sub-unified military command, still subordinate to the European Command, which covers most of Africa. (The Central Command is responsible for U.S. military relations with the Horn, Egypt, Sudan and Kenya, while the Pacific Command covers activities in the Indian Ocean islands.) Headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, AFRICOM will become fully responsible for U.S. military relations with all 53 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa by the end of the current fiscal year (Sept. 30, 2008).

The command is led by General William E. Ward, whose deputies are Ambassador Mary Carlin Yates (an FSO) and Admiral Robert T. Moeller. The FY 2008 transition-year budget is \$75 million; \$392 million has been requested for FY 2009.

The rationale for the new command is that it will improve the U.S. military focus on the continent and enhance American interagency support for the development of African military establishments. AFRICOM's mission is to build local capacity so that African states can manage their own security issues. It is also intended to stimulate professionalization, enhance civilian control and inculcate respect for human rights.

While many African governments embrace the idea of more attention to their military needs, they are concerned about possible great-power militarization of the continent. And they are apprehensive about the perception (as much as the reality) of undermining continental neutrality enshrined in the charter of the African Union (formerly the Organization of African Unity). Others are generally doubtful about of America's intentions.

Even though the Bush administration has articulated a credible explanation for the evolution to the new command, many observers — at home and abroad — remain skeptical. Details are scarce about how AFRICOM's civil and economic objectives will be pursued. President John Kufor of Ghana, for example, seized the occasion of President George W. Bush's recent stop to ask point-blank about U.S. intentions. Clearly, concerns arising from our military posture in Iraq and Afghanistan have provided fodder to critics. They variously decry the initiative as representing the extension of a global war on Islam, a preparation to annex African oil fields, and U.S. military interference in politics, including the threat of regime change for nations that run afoul of Washington's capricious whims.

Such conclusions are balderdash, to be blunt, but they do contain kernels of truth. American policy does combat

terrorism and much of the global variety does have Islamic connections. We want the world's oil supplies to be secure and we do criticize autocratic regimes, especially those like Robert Mugabe's in Zimbabwe that egregiously abuse the rights of their people.

Reaching Out to African Militaries

Shibboleths aside, it is worth examining the premise that African military establishments merit American support at all. Even though national defense is regularly cited as their primary task, African armies rarely need to repel foreign invaders. Most African conflicts — e.g., Sudan, Chad, the Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone — arise from domestic issues. Only the unresolved Ethiopia-Eritrea border war, the recent Congolese wars and the Ethiopian presence in Somalia fit the mode of external aggression.

So instead of defense, the primary job of African armies is to protect the ruling regime by keeping the life president in power (by informal count some 15 current leaders initially came to power via military means) and to thwart threats to the status quo mounted by the opposition, democratic or otherwise. To this end, militaries or special units thereof become tribal fiefdoms loyal to the president and dedicated to his well-being.

Yet history shows that this sort of Praetorian Guard has had mixed results in protecting the incumbent. Many, if not most, coups were organized by those closest to the president. The list of chiefs of staff who staged them is lengthy: Amin, Bokassa, Kolingba, Deby, Buyoya, Bagaza, Habyarimana, Barre, Mobutu, Ironsi, Obasanjo, Babangida, Eyadema, Kountche, Bashir and more.

Perhaps recognizing this fact of political life, many presidents — including military men — have been only reluctant supporters of the national army. This hesitancy, reinforced by the impecuniness of most states and the fact of underdevelopment, has kept African military establishments in the last rank. Even so, there is great diversity across the continent. Some are a mere hodgepodge of ill-equipped, untrained thugs who are more of a threat to society than an asset (e.g., the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Sudan). Others are a repository of political support for a regime, either because of ethnic affiliation or because of largess handed out to military leaders (Nigeria, Gabon). In some countries, army personnel are politically astute revolutionary fighters who learned their craft prior to becoming part of the ruling apparatus (Rwanda,

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Eritrea). And a few military establishments are impartial, professional and fairly competent, with limited objectives and responsibilities (South Africa, Botswana, Senegal).

In any case, almost all African institutions suffer from a lack of resources and equipment. Their leadership structure is often internally incoherent and subject to political interference. Still, compared with other national institutions in most of these countries, the military is well organized and adequately funded. Few nations have the wherewithal to operate tanks or fly jet aircraft, but they regularly cough up salaries for the troops. The challenge is sorting out the regime-maintenance function and the brutality that occasionally accompanies that from other defense responsibilities, and then judging when and where to draw the line regarding militaries that merit support.

Over the years, former colonial powers like Britain, France and Belgium, as well as the U.S. and Russia during the Cold War, and now China have sought to modernize and professionalize African militaries, with the aim of turning them into smaller replicas of their own estab-

lishments. In contrast to earlier years when revolutionary ideology constituted the basis for China's military cooperation with countries such as Tanzania, Zambia, Namibia and Zimbabwe, today Beijing is pushing a full range of military assets, weaponry and aircraft to all buyers. At least in part, this broader approach reflects Beijing's perception that Africa constitutes a growing market, as well as a source of sympathetic partners.

Washington continues to provide training and some equipment, such as basic troop kits, communications gear and night-vision devices, but little in the way of sophisticated weapons systems. Such limited access to the African military market is unlikely to change, for our offerings are simply too complex, expensive and unsuitable for the main tasks confronting the continent's armed forces.

Hard Calls

So what can we do? On a case-by-case basis, we already evaluate each country's military forces and offer the sort of help we deem realistic for its situation. This

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ranges from zero assistance for the abusive, nondemocratic regimes, through various types of individual or unit training for the less egregious ones, to communications gear, electronic equipment, transportation assets and a full range of support for peacekeeping units run by more respectable nations. Such aid is predicated on a political assessment that it supports rather than contradicts broader U.S. policy in support of democracy, development and respect for human rights.

The nexus of two competing objectives is where the hard calls arise. For example, an African nation's commitment to counterterrorism might entice U.S. policymakers to seek closer ties to further such activism. However, recognition that the forces in question are blatant abusers of the rights of a struggling democratic opposition ought to dampen the prospects for American support. Which side do we want to be on in such cases?

The current crises in Chad and Kenya pose policy questions that might be answered differently in a robust AFRICOM era. We have not meddled in Chad (leave it to the French!), but would we do so if we were focusing greater attention on its army? And in Kenya, except for one brief foray into Naivasha, the army has thus far stayed in the barracks — in part because it, too, is riven by tribal divisions, so any deployment might well result in internecine violence. While we can applaud this restraint, it raises the question: What use is a national military in such a crisis? And what is the value of our investment in training it?

Both situations certainly fall under the rubric of maintaining continental security, one of AFRICOM's stated objectives. Yet it is hard to see how any direct U.S. involvement, via our military or theirs, could be productive in resolving these crises. Although U.S. policy eschews direct military involvement in such situations, American attacks against purported terrorist elements in Somalia, for example, suggest a likelihood that we would use those assets if we had them available.

It is important to keep in mind that DOD and State intend AFRICOM to be different from other combatant commands (e.g., EUCOM, CENTCOM and PACOM). It has still-undefined responsibilities and tasks beyond the purely military sphere. For example, staffing plans call for an FSO as lead deputy (Amb. Yates is already in place)

AFRICOM's mission is to build local capacity so that African states can manage their own security issues.

and up to a hundred or more interagency personnel. If nothing else, this demonstrates a clear intent to develop programs that focus on humanitarian and development issues.

Some American advocates of paying more attention to Africa, particularly in the NGO community, dismiss AFRICOM as a ruse to do that without really providing more resources.

But it is a near-certainty that once the command is in place, more resources will flow to it. Pentagon cynics would add that one more four-star billet and all the accompanying support translates into more opportunities for advancement.

Do Something Dramatic!

U.S. spokesmen have said that the new command will be oriented toward humanitarian issues and military improvements. It will respond to catastrophes, help build competent national militaries, sustain nascent regional organizations, support economic development and political democracy.

What appears to be missing in all the hoopla is an unequivocal response to Africa's pressing security needs: the elimination of warlords, reduction of ethnic strife, achievement of internal peace and creation of a safer regional neighborhood. More tangible support for the continent's armed forces, including training and some equipment, is indeed desirable, both for its own sake and to facilitate effective participation in African peacekeeping operations — to wit: Sudan, Somalia, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But while this is a laudable objective, the U.S. contribution has a long lead time, leaving dangerous situations to fester. Why not move faster?

Three opportunities come to mind. Fortunately, the first is already under way: using the U.S. Navy to combat piracy in the Red Sea and off the Horn of Africa. A broader effort to patrol the sea lanes off West Africa in order to halt illegal oil bunkering would be similarly aimed at restoring the rule of law. Clearly, this would entail enlisting the support of littoral states.

The most dramatic initiative would be the provision of U.S. helicopters to UNAMIS, the United Nations peacekeeping operation in Sudan. The U.N. is seeking a squadron of several dozen choppers, most for lift, as well

as several gunships. Efforts to find helicopters have so far come up empty, posing the risk that the whole operation will be scuttled.

Offering up such support would indeed reinforce our intent to help Africa. But howls and arguments against the idea would be loud: we cannot bleed Iraq for Sudan; the U.S. should never participate in U.N. peacekeeping operations; Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir would never accept American forces. Undoubtedly, these are legitimate issues, but if AFRICOM wants to respond to security needs in Africa, no better task awaits. The mere willingness to fight the policy battle within the U.S. government, and with the U.N. and Sudan, to implement such assistance would show solid commitment to Africa and underscore the legitimacy of the new command.

Ambassadorial Responsibility

From the State Department perspective, we need not fear AFRICOM's advent. Not only does it have positive elements that should advance U.S. interests in various African nations, but seconding FSOs to the command will help ensure that DOD has broader thematic perspectives. However, AFRICOM does pose some issues that, if not sorted out early, might become irksome.

Existing chief-of-mission authority is adequate for AFRICOM, so long as serving and future ambassadors exercise their responsibilities pursuant to the presidential letter of authority and under National Security Decision Directive 38, and the military components follow their own chain of command. In short, the ambassador has absolute authority over personnel and operations in his or her country of assignment. We should think about and treat non-resident AFRICOM personnel exactly as we did previous command elements.

All visitors, military and civilian, will still require country clearances. All programs, whether involving exercises (JCET), training (IMET and ACOTA), sales (FMS) or counterterrorism (TSCTP), are subject to ambassadorial approval. The only exception is the forces of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, some 1,500 troops stationed at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, who currently fall under the operational control of CENTCOM (but will eventually shift to AFRICOM). In accordance with existing practice, such combat elements enjoy a separate chain of command, but their in-country, non-combat activities — drilling wells in Djibouti, for example — all remain subject to ambassadorial oversight. Because the

new Africa Command does not anticipate stationing any additional combat personnel on the continent or setting up other bases, there should be no other exceptions to chief-of-mission authority.

As an aside, let me note that Africa Contingency Operations Training Assistance, the program that provides training and equipment to African units scheduled for deployment as multilateral peacekeepers, will not — at least initially — become an AFRICOM responsibility. ACOTA (formerly known as the African Crisis Response Initiative) is America's most successful and useful military program in Africa, one that has helped prepare contingents from Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Ghana and other countries for service in Darfur, Somalia, Liberia and the Congo. ACOTA is funded via the peacekeeping account administered by the State Department, and State does not intend to relinquish control.

Where to Set Up Shop?

Various soundings around the continent have shown that the time is not ripe for the establishment of a large military headquarters in Africa. The issue is apparently too emotional and too tied up in the uncertainties of what AFRICOM is all about. Logistics issues also constrain a move. Whenever a relocation from Germany is approved, facilities for it will have to be built from the ground up. Only Liberia, perhaps understanding the positive economic impact of such an installation, has stepped forward to seek emplacement of the headquarters on its soil.

Even though the headquarters will remain in Germany for now, AFRICOM anticipates standing up three or four sub-headquarters around the continent to get at least some personnel into the theater of operations. About 30 personnel on standard tours of duty would be assigned to each unit. Although locales have yet to be determined, logically they would correspond to the geographic regions of Africa. Djibouti already takes care of East Africa, but sites will still be needed in the west (Ghana or Liberia are leading candidates), the south (probably Botswana) and the north (Tunisia or Morocco) — although this idea has less traction. While the structure will be important for the countries concerned, what is most crucial from an inter-agency perspective will be the interaction between the regional headquarters elements and the host embassy.

Note that such regional offices will be a new global element to be invented in Africa. The sub-commands of other combatant commands — Diego Garcia, Okinawa,

Korea, etc. — include operational forces that are exempted from chief-of-mission authority.

On the whole, we should consider such offices similar to USAID's Regional Economic Development Services Offices: i.e., they and their personnel fall under COM authority. Thus, when they operate in a particular country, the U.S. ambassador there is in charge. And when they travel regionally, they come under the purview of the ambassador to each nation being visited.

It is worth noting that both USAID and DOD already deal separately with African regional organizations, such as the Southern African Development Community or the Economic Community of West African States. But what if ECOWAS wants to conduct a military exercise in Togo with U.S. input, with the planning, logistical support, etc. coming from its headquarters in Abuja? Which ambassador has authority? The answer is both, but this will require coordination on the U.S. side. Such multilateral coordination will loom even larger and become more complex as AFRICOM expands its cooperation with the African Union.

Practical Constraints

According to Pentagon sources, each AFRICOM regional office should consist of about 30 personnel; some uniformed, some not. These staffers will need a lot of office space that is clearly not available inside any existing embassy. Thus, pending expansion of chancelleries or building annexes, facilities will have to be leased. These personnel and their families will also need substantial administrative support: housing, health care, shipping, transportation, contracting, cashiering and educational opportunities for dependents. Virtually all these services will place an immense burden on receiving embassies. Although many AFRICOM personnel might be assigned on a TDY basis initially, the required logistical support package is just as intimidating as for those on longer tours, except perhaps for housing.

While all concerned will do their utmost to make this work, it won't be easy. A key principle at stake is equity: keeping the playing field level so that no one gets more, better or different services at post than anyone else. The new influx of staff — particularly military personnel who are accustomed to a global standard of support — will challenge that approach, but adherence to that principle will be key to making AFRICOM offices and personnel part of the country team.

An augmented in-country military presence also raises thorny operational issues like communications. Initially, AFRICOM offices can utilize existing embassy networks, but they will soon want their own separate systems. How can this be accommodated? Similarly, AFRICOM will want its own security force, which will affect the embassy's regional security office. Who will do the hiring? How will State and DOD practices be melded? Will there be military police alongside Marine security guard detachments? And then there is the question of weapons, an operational issue related to force protection in the wake of terrorist threats. Which members of the country team can bear arms and under what circumstances?

Then we come to responsibilities for reporting, intelligence collection and analysis. Most ambassadors have existing understandings with defense attachés as to which DAO messages need clearance by the political-economic section and the front office. But a larger military element at post will necessarily intrude upon such understandings. It will be incumbent upon the ambassador and the AFRICOM chief to work out these parameters. To ensure consistency, written guidelines should be developed.

Striking a Balance

With the Africa Command's advent, turf issues will intensify — and not just in the countries hosting those personnel. Already, U.S. military resources and projects are crossing ministerial lines across the continent. While the key local client for AFRICOM remains the ministry of defense, U.S. military resources already go toward projects in various civilian ministries, including water development, women's affairs, health, interior and aviation. Undertakings include a full gamut of activities ranging from humanitarian succor and HIV/AIDS prevention to democracy promotion and public diplomacy.

Obviously, military programming risks duplication where USAID, the Centers for Disease Control, Peace Corps Volunteers and others are already engaged. That said, host governments are quick to realize where the money is, so they will increasingly address their requests to U.S. military elements.

The proposed structure of AFRICOM responds to this reality. Although the number and type of interagency billets has yet to be finalized, it is clear that the command will have a significant civilian element, including experts in economic development and complex humanitarian emer-

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gencies. But the U.S. already does a pretty competent job of economic development and humanitarian relief. What additional benefits — besides money — can the new command bring to those tasks?

Initially, AFRICOM wants several dozen FSOs for a range of political/military and economic jobs. Although such assignments would certainly reinforce the interagency character of the new command, it is unlikely that the Department of State can spare many personnel for such excursion tours in light of service demands for Iraq.

Washington policymakers, as well as ambassadors in the field, need to decide how much militarization of non-military assistance is wise and ensure that such undertakings are properly vetted. Such discussions will become increasingly important when (not if) AFRICOM gets more resources to play with.

In conclusion, the Africa command represents a re-orientation of American bureaucratic responsibilities that will probably work well for us, but confuse local governments. Having nothing else to distract it, the new

entity will undoubtedly focus on institutionalizing programs. This augurs well for a more consistent partnership with the continent, but how it evolves remains to be seen.

I suspect that African governments will adjust to progress and that press-stoked fears of U.S. hegemony will diminish. However, the temptation on the American side to do too much is real. Even a small AFRICOM looms large compared to host-country military establishments.

Furthermore, the command's initial resources will dwarf a number of national budgets. We should bear in mind the fact that Africa's absorptive capacity is limited and, as noted above, few of its leaders really want competent generals commanding capable forces.

To misquote Teddy Roosevelt, we don't need a big stick in Africa, but we do need to tread carefully. Although Washington (as usual) will have the ultimate say, it will be up to U.S. ambassadors in the field to guide all these new boots into careful paths. ■

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