

# WebMemo



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## Congress Should Support the U.S. Africa Command

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Africa is an increasingly important region to the U.S. It is a growing source of U.S. energy imports, a rising economic and trade partner, and an influential region that can use its representation in international organizations to support or frustrate U.S. policy priorities. Africa has also been beset by instability and conflict that can affect international peace and security or rile international markets, and its ungoverned regions provide attractive venues for terrorist groups. In deference to Africa's rising significance, President George W. Bush announced in 2007 the creation of a new combatant command that had previously been divided among three commands.

Guided by America's unique interests in the region, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) is focused less on fighting wars than a traditional combatant command. Instead, it will focus its efforts on:

- Enhancing America's military relationships with African countries;
- Increasing the capabilities and professionalism of African militaries; and
- Bolstering development and stability in the region.

This non-traditional mission has led some to mischaracterize AFRICOM as an attempt to militarize U.S. foreign policy toward the region. Based in part on these concerns, Congress cut about 30 percent of the funding for AFRICOM requested by the Administration for fiscal year (FY) 2009.

Opposition to AFRICOM is misguided. America's interests in the region remain with or without the command. U.S. military activities and engage-

ment in Africa existed before AFRICOM and would continue without it—albeit with more difficulty and less effectiveness. By undermining AFRICOM, however, opponents of the command inhibit the best available means of ensuring that U.S. policy toward Africa is conducted in a manner that supports African interests as well as those of the U.S.

With AFRICOM standing up on October 1, 2008, as an independent unified combatant command, Congress should provide it the resources necessary for it to assume and fulfill the responsibilities placed upon it.

**Standing Up AFRICOM.** Until relatively recently, Africa was deemed a secondary or tertiary priority by the Department of Defense (DoD). Since 1983, security responsibilities in the region were split among U.S. European Command, Central Command, and Pacific Command. However, Africa's strategic importance has risen sharply in recent years, and the weaknesses of dividing the security responsibilities among three separate military commands have become increasingly obvious.

Subsequently, on February 6, 2007, President Bush announced that the U.S. will create a new, unified combatant command for Africa to:

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- Oversee security, enhance strategic cooperation;
- Build partnerships;
- Support nonmilitary missions; and
- Conduct military operations as necessary.

The new command's area of responsibility will cover the entire continent except for Egypt, which will remain the responsibility of Central Command. AFRICOM was launched as a sub-unified command under European Command on October 1, 2007, and is scheduled to assume its responsibilities as a stand-alone unified combatant command by October 1, 2008.

The focus of AFRICOM leaders and staff over the past year has been one of process: to staff and stand up the new, regional combatant command with significant interagency presence and buy in.

According to the Government Accountability Office, AFRICOM will achieve "full operational capability" when the command is capable of assuming responsibility for ongoing missions. Leaders have been actively reviewing ongoing military activities in the U.S. European, Central, and Pacific commands that now fall under AFRICOM's area of responsibility, ranging from the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa and Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans Sahara to the Joint Combined Training Exercises (JCETs). Staff has also been reviewing State Department-led programs supported by the DoD.

The new command, identified by many as a "combatant command-plus," has a traditional commander, General William Ward, coupled with unique dual deputy positions consisting of a deputy to the commander for military operations, Vice Admiral Robert Moeller, and a deputy to the commander for civil-military activities, Ambassador Mary Yates. DoD officials have noted that staffing

the command positions is a critical precursor for the planned October transition. Indeed, one of the largest challenges for the nascent command has been to staff AFRICOM with DoD military and civilian personnel, as well as significant numbers of personnel from other federal government agencies necessary to round out the command's non-traditional model.<sup>1</sup> Initially, DoD determined that 25 percent of AFRICOM's headquarters staff would be supplied by non-DoD personnel.<sup>2</sup> Reportedly, this goal was not vetted by civilian agencies, nor was it possible considering resource limitations. These early estimates have since been dramatically scaled back to a planned total of 54 positions—or 4 percent of all AFRICOM staff—of which only 13 have been filled.<sup>3</sup> AFRICOM leaders, however, have been working diligently, and Pentagon officials estimate that roughly 980 military and civilian command positions of the 1,300 approved—or 75 percent of the total—will be filled by October 1, 2008.

A second challenge has involved establishing the headquarters and regional offices for AFRICOM. Originally, DoD leaders planned to place the headquarters on the African continent for the geographic and political benefits that only close proximity could provide. Skepticism by numerous African nations over the intentions of the command and poor communication by U.S. government officials, however, have continued to delay the establishment of a headquarters on the continent. Moeller and Yates recently reflected on lessons learned while standing up the command, admitting that "the consultations held prior to IOC [Initial Operating Capability] were insufficient to ensure our partners understood the intent and purpose of the command."<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the State and Defense Departments have failed to agree on plans to establish new offices at 11 U.S. embassies to strengthen military

1. Lauren Ploch, "Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, updated August 22, 2008, p. 8, at [http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL34003\\_20080822.pdf](http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL34003_20080822.pdf) (September 30, 2008).
2. Government Accountability Office, *Preliminary Observations on the Progress and Challenges Associated with Establishing the U.S. Africa Command*, GAO-08-947T, July 15, 2008, p. 12, at <http://nationalsecurity.oversight.house.gov/documents/20080715125721.pdf> (September 30, 2008).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
4. Robert Moeller and Mary Yates, "The Road to a New Unified Command," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 51, 4th Quarter 2008, p. 69, at [http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq\\_pages/editions/i51/17.pdf](http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq_pages/editions/i51/17.pdf) (September 30, 2008).

relationships and to stand up five regional offices throughout the continent.<sup>5</sup>

The current focus now rests on establishing an interim headquarters in Germany by renovating existing facilities at a cost of approximately \$40 million, with another \$43 million needed for command and control and intelligence infrastructure.<sup>6</sup>

**Creeping Militarization?** Some members of Congress, civilian government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and African nations have criticized the command as a “militarization” of U.S. foreign policy in the region. One reason for such criticism is the lack of clarity concerning the role and responsibilities of AFRICOM and its relationship with other U.S. civilian departments and agencies operating in the region, particularly the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Some critics feared that AFRICOM represented a Pentagon effort to assert authority over all U.S. agencies that would infringe on traditional roles.<sup>7</sup>

Defense Secretary Robert Gates recently addressed concerns regarding “what’s seen as a creeping ‘militarization’ of some aspects of U.S. foreign policy.”<sup>8</sup> Gates argued:

In recent years, the lines separating war, peace, diplomacy, and development have become blurred and no longer fit the neat organizational charts of the 20th century... The challenges facing our institutions [are] to adapt to new realities while preserving those core competencies and institutional traits that have made them so successful in the past.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, the 2008 National Defense Strategy, which contains an entire subheading devoted to the

necessity of agency integration, stresses that “a whole-of-government approach is only possible when every government department and agency understands the core competencies, roles, missions, and capabilities of its partners and works together to achieve common goals.”<sup>10</sup>

During testimony before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Theresa Whalen, deputy assistant secretary of defense for African affairs, emphasized that DoD believed that its organizational structure for dealing with security issues on the African continent was suboptimal and that a newly formatted DoD-led command was best-suited for this environment. Whalen emphasized this point by highlighting the purpose of incorporating other civilian government organizations in AFRICOM’s command structure:

We sought to make the command structure friendly to this kind of communication, not just through liaison relationships but through hopefully importing knowledge—not authority—but importing knowledge from these other government agencies to help inform DoD personnel in AFRICOM as they were developing DoD plans for DoD activities related to DoD mission on the continent in terms of our military relationships.<sup>11</sup>

The views of Gates and Whalen do not endorse a new step toward the militarization of America’s foreign policy but rather recognition that a joint effort is increasingly necessary across all levels of government. Such an effort is critical for success in addressing interconnected and overlapping security challenges that do not fall into one federal government agency’s sphere of responsibility.

5. Government Accountability Office, *Preliminary Observations on the Progress and Challenges*, pp. 16–17.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

8. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, “U.S. Global Leadership Campaign,” speech delivered to U.S. Global Leadership Campaign (Washington, D.C.), July 15, 2008, at [www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1262](http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1262) (September 30, 2008).

9. *Ibid.*

10. U.S. Department of Defense, “National Defense Strategy,” June 2008, p. 17, at [www.defenselink.mil/news/2008%20National%20Defense%20Strategy.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/2008%20National%20Defense%20Strategy.pdf) (September 30, 2008).

11. Hearings, *AFRICOM’s Rationales, Roles and Progress on the Eve of Operations*, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, 110th Cong., 2nd Sess., July 19, 2008, at [www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=1921](http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=1921) (September 30, 2008).

Usurping the authority of other agencies is not the intention of DoD officials. Instead, defense leaders believe that incorporating the varying skill sets residing outside of DoD in different agencies to tackle complex problems—as DoD is attempting to do with its newest combatant command—is critical to addressing U.S. security interests in Africa.

**Congress Must Be a Partner, Not a Hindrance.**

AFRICOM's budget was \$51 million in FY 2007 and \$157 million in FY 2008. The President's budget for FY 2009 requested \$390 million for the command, primarily for headquarters operating expenses in Stuttgart, Germany; supporting a command intelligence capability; establishing a Theater Special Operations Command; and training, exercises, and theater security cooperation activities.<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, the House appropriations defense subcommittee chose to provide only \$80.6 million for AFRICOM—nearly an 80 percent reduction from the President's budget request. The subcommittee justified its cuts, citing the “disproportionate burden of U.S. policy in Africa on the Department of Defense,” due to “current funding, staffing, and organizational configuration.”<sup>13</sup> As a result of these findings, the subcommittee concluded the “current interagency division of labor is not optimal for meeting U.S. foreign policy goals.”<sup>14</sup>

In the defense appropriations bill passed by the House of Representatives last week, funding for AFRICOM was increased to \$266 million from the \$80.6 million passed in the subcommittee. However, this figure was still \$123 million less than the amount requested in the President's budget.<sup>15</sup>

This congressional funding cut will hamper AFRICOM leadership by possibly slowing the continued effort to staff the command and hinder the

transfer of ongoing U.S. military operations and activities in the region.

If Congress believes that “the current interagency division of labor is not optimal for meeting U.S. foreign policy goals,” as the House appropriations defense subcommittee has stated, Members must then be willing to address this problem by providing the necessary resources and authorities to the U.S. civilian government agencies consistent with the responsibilities tasked to them. This is not an extraordinary leap of faith by Congress; U.S. Southern Command officials—led by Admiral Stavridis—are already implementing an interagency, international, public-private approach to the transnational challenges in the Southern Hemisphere.

AFRICOM officials are rightly looking to the non-military expertise that can be provided by the interagency as a way to tackle many of the problems inherent to Africa. The problem with such an approach, however, is that personnel possessing these skills are in high demand.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the State Department has expressed concerns regarding its ability to fill positions left vacant by those leaving to work for AFRICOM, and many U.S. embassies in Africa are already plagued with shortfalls of mid-level Foreign Service officers.<sup>17</sup>

This problem is compounded by the fact that the current total of non-DoD staffers approved for AFRICOM is only slightly larger than the number of civilian agency members working at other regional combatant commands throughout the world.<sup>18</sup> The lack of desired interagency manpower was so debilitating that AFRICOM officials were forced to incorporate innovative solutions such as short-term introductory assignments, where personnel were tasked to work temporarily at the command, usu-

12. Ploch, “Africa Command,” p. 8.

13. “FY 09 House Defense Appropriations Bill,” House of Representatives Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, September 24, 2008, pp. 102–04.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Shashank Bengali, “The Pentagon's New Africa Command Raises Suspicions About U.S. Motives,” McClatchy Newspapers, September 29, 2008, at <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/world/story/53234.html> (September 30, 2008).

16. Government Accountability Office, *Preliminary Observations on the Progress and Challenges*, pp. 12–13.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

ally between two weeks and two months.<sup>19</sup> While these emergency maneuvers are effective in meeting immediate staffing needs, such measures are by no means a long-term substitute for manning a combatant command with professionals.

It would be disingenuous for Congress to continue insisting on one hand that DoD and AFRICOM must strike an appropriate interagency balance, and then on the other not provide the resources to the State Department to expand the Foreign Service officer corps necessary to meet this demand. If Congress desires to support AFRICOM in its effort to build a whole-of-government command, it should begin by providing the resources necessary for civilian agencies to meet the requirements the nation has placed upon them.

**Congress Should Support AFRICOM.** Africa is increasingly important to U.S. economic, military, and political interests. Moreover, as indicated by the

attention lavished on the region by China, Russia, Japan, and other countries, U.S. policies and interests face growing competition and challenges. AFRICOM is a critical step in recognition of the region's rising stature among U.S. national interests. The new command promises to be a useful tool for future administrations in bolstering U.S. military and government relations in the region, enhancing stability, and cementing alliances. Congress should give AFRICOM the support and funding it needs to fulfill its mission.

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19. Moeller and Yates, "The Road to a New Unified Command."