



Chinese engineers working for UN-African Union Mission in Darfur arrive in Nyala, Sudan, July 2008

By EDWARD MARKS

UN (Stuart Price)

# Why USAFRICOM?

**T**he new geographic military command for Africa—U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM)—is an attempt to provide a solution to a felt problem. With laudable intentions, its creators are attempting to improve U.S. Government efforts in Africa by coordinating military activities with the Department of State and other agencies. Unfortunately, it is an idea deformed at birth, as it cannot produce the result desired but instead will only exacerbate the problem of over-militarization of U.S. policy and programs. It is a case of the cure being worse than the disease.

Why are we doing this to ourselves? There appear to be a number of doubtful assumptions underlying this decision.

*That Security Comes Out of the Barrel of a Gun.* Security is clearly a problem in

Africa today, but it is questionable if the contemporary problems in Africa are primarily security related in the Department of Defense (DOD) sense. This is not the Africa of the “Winds of Change” era where U.S. Government policy interests included Cold War concerns and where there was a great similarity of challenges facing the newly independent African governments taking over reins from their former colonial masters. Security in Africa today is *not* a military problem but a symptom of lack of effective governance. It cannot be resolved by more military training and equipment. Trying to use the military tool would be equivalent to resolving the Thirty Years’ War in Europe by injecting more sol-

diers and training and equipment rather than pursuing a political settlement (albeit one based on exhaustion).

While power may come out of the barrel of a gun, security comes from competent and legitimate governance. The Human Security Brief 2007 by the Simon Fraser University Human Security Center explains that the sub-Saharan African security situation was transformed between 1999 and 2006 with the number of armed conflicts and people killed dropping dramatically. This result was produced by a significant improvement in the form of governments and a number of conflict prevention initiatives (humanitarian missions, peacekeeping, and peace-building

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operations, largely pursued by diplomacy and international organizations). Little if any of this change was due to military engagement and institution-building.

Military engagement and institution-building are, of course, useful and often necessary. However, they should be consciously and carefully integrated into our overall policy and programs, not the other way around. Arguably, armies and police forces in Africa today are a significant part of the security problem because they do not belong to competent and responsible governments. Therefore, military-to-military programs in Africa will be counterproductive unless firmly subordinated to broader political and economic developments. It is difficult to see how this can be done when a military organization is put in charge.

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#### **That a “Whole-of-Government”**

**Approach Requires a Uniform.** While security concerns are given as one justification for creating USAFRICOM, much of the justification focuses on political, economic, and social programs requiring planning and implementation in a “whole-of-government” or integrated agency approach. This justification for USAFRICOM argues that there is a need for new and innovative organization for dealing with Africa—and there may be—in which case we should be looking for a whole-of-government approach, not the tweaking of a military model designed primarily for warfighting (compare the Goldwater-Nichols reform of the combatant command system). How can we adopt a whole-of-government approach by putting it in uniform? Adding a few civilian officials to a military command will not meaningfully change the military character of the organization, which will have a staff of 1,300 people (according to USAFRICOM deputy commander Vice Admiral Robert Moeller in a briefing at the Brookings Institution on May 28, 2008) and be headed by a four-star general. No matter how we dress it up, a hammer is a hammer and should not be used to perform other tasks.

Apparently those designing USAFRICOM have fallen victim to an ethnocentric

American perspective on the military. Americans view their Servicepeople as fellow citizens and feel a strong bond with them—and quite rightfully so, as this has been the American experience. However, this history and this attitude are not shared by many in the world regarding their own militaries, much less foreign soldiers. That our hearts are pure cuts no ice, and putting a uniform face on what should be largely a civilian relationship will hinder if not destroy the possibility of success in fostering that relationship.

**That New Organizations Will Provide Greater Effectiveness.** Presumably there is an underlying assumption of greater efficiency in the USAFRICOM proposal. However, USAFRICOM as the primary organizational interlocutor with African countries will obviously introduce a new stovepipe into government operations. By the iron law of bureaucracy and the influence of professional deformation, the command will inevitably pursue its own cultural policy perspective and will create a new organizational claim on resources. Led by a very senior military officer, it will inevitably encourage an emphasis on military perspectives and programs in internal government deliberations and processes.

Yet this new organization is being installed just as the longstanding concern about the complexity and rigidity of the national security structure in a rapidly changing world is producing spirited discussion about the need to transcend bureaucratic stovepipes and create a more flexible bureaucracy. The phrase *whole of government* is intended to encapsulate that approach. Numerous studies and commissions, such as the high-powered Project on National Security Reform, are currently in the process of plotting new paths for a redesigned and more effective national security structure.

**That Regionalism Is the Default Geopolitical Perspective.** Regional names such as Africa and Asia are historical legacies. Large government bureaucracies have taken them on as sensible bureaucratic organizational constructs. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with that. However, the most striking aspect of the contemporary geopolitical environment is that it is not driven so much by geographic regionalism—however defined—but rather by globalization (political, economic, social, and technological) and localism (identity

politics, nationbuilding, and economic development).

Many of these challenges, of course, manifest themselves in geographic areas below globalization and above individual countries, hence the interest in regionalism. There are also political, economic, and cultural areas or regions, for instance, that compose the European Union. But many if not most of these characterizations are either subsections (for example, Korea) of the traditional geographic classification (Asia) or, as in the case of North Africa, are more closely tied to other regions (Mediterranean, Middle East). Also, many of these regions of U.S. Government interest cross traditional geographic boundaries, such as India-Pakistan-Afghanistan. In other words, policy concerns rarely coexist with the traditional geographic names, or, as the old military saying has it, battles often take place on the edges of maps. Therefore, no matter how you organize the U.S. Government, many if not most of the problems to be dealt with will require crossing organizational boundaries. This is especially true with respect to what are classified as nontraditional transnational threats.

In other words, it is not clear that “regional,” however defined, is a sufficiently discrete classification to require a formal bureaucratic structure to manage policy and programs. Whatever boundaries are adopted, they will only introduce new seams and



Ambassador Edward Marks

overlaps that can only act as obstacles in our attempts to deal with a world where *regional* is only a variable set of points on a continuum from *local* to *global*.

**That Africans Will Consider US-*AFRICOM* a Compliment.** Whether or not Africans wish greater American involvement in their affairs is an open question, but in a region where the most toxic charge one can lay on someone is “neocolonist,” it is difficult to understand why anyone in Washington would believe that creating a military U.S. Africa Command would be welcome. Do people not understand the history of colonialism? That the proponents of USAFRICOM have found a handful of African personalities to support the idea proves nothing, if one is aware that a handful of Africans can still

The geographic combatant commands are intended to do what the military calls the operational art of war, whereby strategy is processed into tactics. Implementing the operational art has led the military to create the geographic combatant commands that are large bureaucracies located between the strategic headquarters (the Pentagon and the President) and the actual deployed military forces. These forces are then responsible for concrete actions within a defined geographical area in a stipulated timeframe, all in accordance with the military deliberate planning process and procedure.

However, there is no theory or doctrine or demonstrated need for a civilian equivalent to the “operational art.” In fact, even the military has moved away from it. Following

threat. Given this decision, why are we now adopting the geographic combatant command model for Africa, given the increasing globalization and localization of the geostrategic environment?

These engagement tasks for USAFRICOM are largely justified on two grounds: fighting terrorism and nationbuilding. As noted above, the Pentagon itself has decided that the geographic combatant commands are not the appropriate organizational mechanism for the war on terror. In addition, it might be useful to remember former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s almost *esprit de l’escalier* query: “Are we creating more terrorists than we are killing?” I doubt if the *we* he was referring to is the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), or the Peace Corps.

But there is the argument that US-*AFRICOM* will be a new innovation in bureaucracy, heavily “civilian” in character, and will pursue largely civilian, nationbuilding types of programs. This is wishful thinking, as very large bureaucratic organizations do not assume the character of their smaller partners. In fact, according to a *Washington Post* article of July 18, 2008, a Government Accountability Office report noted that US-*AFRICOM*, which is to have 1,300 employees, is having difficulty integrating a mere 13 staff members from the State Department and other agencies. Even without an “integration problem,” it is hard to understand how 13

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be found who wish that colonial days would return and one remembers that individual public figures in every country can be found who respond favorably to perceived personal or organizational advantage.

**That Geographic Combatant Command and USAFRICOM are Consumer-friendly Terms.** By the way, who thought up the name Africa Command or USAFRICOM? USAFRICOM will seriously handicap American public diplomacy and strategic communication as long as it exists; it will be used forever as a stick to beat us with.

**That the Geographic Combatant Command Is a Useful Organizational Model.** Even if the desirability of a new regional bureaucratic structure is accepted, the military geographic combatant command is not the obvious choice for a model. Geographic combatant commands are a refined version of World War II combat commands designed for the Cold War. In that confrontation, where we mainly avoided actual combat, the combatant commands expanded beyond their primary war planning and warfighting role into what are called engagement activities. The military tasks mentioned (briefly and vaguely) for USAFRICOM are of this engagement character with an “emphasis on capacity building,” with a careful statement that no warfighting duties are envisaged. (In which case, who is to do the warfighting in Africa if the need should arise?)

9/11, the U.S. Government decided that the primary security threat to the United States was violent radical Islamic terrorism. After making that decision, the Pentagon decided that the geographic combatant commands were not the appropriate organizational instrument and accordingly designated U.S. Special Operations Command (a global organization) as the lead military organization responsible for managing the terrorist

U.S. Marine Corps (Rocco DeFilippis)



Marines deliver humanitarian relief supplies in Monrovia, Liberia, as part of West African Training Cruise 2008

civilian employees would give USAFRICOM a “civilian character.”

Even if one accepts the need for a regional approach to partnership and collaboration with African countries, the question immediately arises as to why that is not done with existing organizations that already have that mission and, more importantly, have civilian characters. If these civilian institutions are not equipped or funded to do these jobs, then the more sensible and obvious answer is to make them equal to the task. A more useful approach would appear to be to empower, with people and resources, the relevant departments and agencies in the Departments of State and Agriculture, USAID, Peace Corps, and so forth. For example, the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization in State is still without meaningful operational funds 3 years after being created with a great deal of publicity. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently noted that USAID had 16,000 employees at the height of the Cold War, and now has about 3,000. Properly resourced, the relevant African bureaus and offices around the Federal bureaucracy could be networked to provide the integrated program called for.

The support to civilian engagement activities promised in USAFRICOM literature could certainly be provided by a well-staffed (and properly authorized) military coordinating staff. A more modest approach would appear to be in order. For instance, USAFRICOM could be restructured as

*properly resourced, the relevant African bureaus and offices around the Federal bureaucracy could be networked to provide the integrated program called for*

a Washington-based support organization responsible for security assistance in Africa. After all, its proponents insist that its primary function is not warfighting and that it will not have component combat forces. In that case, why the high-visibility geographic command structure and leadership? Renamed something such as the Africa Security Assistance Organization, placed in a symbiotic relationship with State and USAID's Africa divisions, it could pursue a very active and constructive support and

coordinating role. This would seem a more rational approach, especially as we are told that USAFRICOM will not have much in the way of component forces.

The USAFRICOM approach confuses the need for internal bureaucratic organization for management purposes (State's geographic bureaus, DOD's geographic commands, and the equivalents in other departments) with policy perspectives. This is certain to introduce a stovepipe perspective into a governmental structure that in today's world needs to move the other way—toward a holistic whole-of-government approach.

There are other problems with the USAFRICOM idea, most notably the persistent desire to physically locate the headquarters or a set of subordinate offices in African countries. Apparently the proponents of the command have neither noticed that, nor asked why, only U.S. European Command (a unique historical instance) is located outside of American territory.

Most importantly, there should be widespread concern about the use of a military instrument to manage our continent-wide political and economic relations. There is currently a great deal of concern about the alleged over-militarization of our foreign policy. Our political leadership persists in calling upon our large but overworked military Services to do ever more just because they exist, and it appears easier to load new jobs on them rather than do the harder work of creating more appropriate capabilities elsewhere in the bureaucracy.

The reactions to USAFRICOM coming out of Africa are only the surface manifestations of the continuing adverse political aspects of the widespread U.S. external military presence. That presence is seen by many as a visible sign of an imperial structure, and no amount of protestation of innocence or adding a few civilian staff will change that impression. The widespread deployment of the American military is often desirable and often necessary—for others as well as for us—but there is no need to rub people's noses in the fact.

The increasing militarization of our foreign relations is already painfully obvious: why then are we expanding it even further in Africa? Creation of U.S. Africa Command is a retrograde move, fulfilling H.L. Mencken's observation that there is always a well-known solution to every human problem—neat, plausible, and wrong. **JFQ**

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