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## US Officials Insist New Military Command To Benefit Africa

By Darren Taylor  
Washington  
22 October 2007

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General William Ward, AFRICOM  
Commander

**United States relations with Africa entered a new era recently, when Washington’s military command for the continent, known as AFRICOM, became operational, and General William “Kip” Ward – one of the most experienced African-American soldiers in the US army – was confirmed as its first commander. For the next year, AFRICOM will be based at the US military headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. The US administration says AFRICOM will train African peacekeepers. In addition, it says the command will assist in enhancing good governance in Africa and will help resolve conflict and respond to natural disasters. But critics say there are sinister reasons behind the United States’ decision to create a separate military installation for Africa. In the first of a five-part series, VOA’s Darren Taylor reports on the reasoning behind the creation of AFRICOM and the possible locations of its headquarters.**

In February, President Bush announced the proposed establishment of what he termed a “unified United States military command for Africa.” The news came as a surprise to many, including African leaders.

Up until now, US military responsibility for Africa has been shared by the country’s three commands in Europe and the Pacific – a situation described by security analysts as a “bureaucratic nightmare” and labeled a “relic of the Cold War” by US Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

US Navy Rear Admiral Robert Moeller, the executive director of the US Africa Command implementation planning team, said the motivation behind AFRICOM was the increasing importance of Africa “strategically, diplomatically and economically.”

AFRICOM is currently operating under US European Command in Stuttgart, but US officials expect it to become “fully operational” – and for “sub-regional headquarters” to be based in various parts of Africa – by October 2008.

But the AFRICOM plans are meeting with great resistance, both internationally and in Africa, as various organizations unite under the slogan “STOP AFRICOM!”

“These civil society groups don’t want American troops in Africa, arguing that this will make the continent a more dangerous place in that the increased US presence will attract terrorists bent on the destruction of anything American,” says Wafula Okumu, an analyst at South Africa’s Institute for Security Studies.

“There are fears that AFRICOM will make Africa the new battleground for America’s war on terror,” he adds.

The anti-AFRICOM lobbyists are also highly suspicious of repeated pronouncements by US officials that the new command intends to involve itself with “development” work – the traditional domain of groups such as USAID and NGOs – and promoting “good governance.” They’re arguing against any “interference” by the US military in African politics and aid to the continent.

### **No “massive” US troop presence in Africa**

Theresa Whelan, deputy assistant secretary of defense for Africa, has helped to plan AFRICOM and says one of the biggest challenges facing it is “myth versus reality.” Contrary to popular belief, she emphasizes, AFRICOM won’t mean a flood of thousands of US troops into Africa or the building of massive bases. Instead, Whelan says, it will be a “distributed command” of a few “sub-regional hubs” that will augment the existing US military base in Djibouti.

“We will have no new bases and we will not be deploying forces or basing US forces on the African continent. We have been in the process over the last seven to eight years of actually pulling US forces back to the United States from places where they have been based overseas.”

AFRICOM will, however, have a permanent presence in Africa, says Whelan, in the form of staff officers, defense attaches and “security assistance officers.”

“We hope to increase the presence of those on the continent,” she acknowledges. “We also intend that the command have a presence at locations that will allow those staff to facilitate our working relationships with each different region and our support of the African standby (peacekeeper) brigade concept.”

Whelan maintains that AFRICOM is very different from other US military commands, in that its main objective is something other than fighting and winning wars.

“The primary mission of this command is to focus on building security capacity in Africa so that Africans can manage their own security challenges and not essentially be importers of security from the international community. What we hope is that African nations will be able to manage security in their own territorial waters, in their own land territories, in their own regions and also across the continent,” she explains.

Whelan says AFRICOM will train African militaries so that they’re more efficient and will expand on existing African anti-terrorism initiatives.

She adds that AFRICOM will provide a “unique” blueprint for better cooperation between the US Department of Defense, the military and the State Department on “security assistance” to Africa.

“This includes peacekeeping training programs, border and coastal security capacity development programs, logistics and airlift support to peacekeeping operations and joint training exercises with African militaries.”

Whelan mentions that in addition to AFRICOM enabling African militaries to be more “technically proficient,” it will also strive to increase their “professionalism.”

“We will do our best to convey through this training respect for human rights, rule of law and the proper role of a civilian-controlled military in a democracy,” she says.

In his reaction, Dr. Francois Grignon, the director of the International Crisis Group’s Africa Program, has told VOA: “We think that if AFRICOM is going to help the US government to become more efficient, better organized, better prepared to support conflict prevention and conflict management in Africa, to support the African Union security architecture, it’s definitely a good thing.”

If the command also gives Africans “additional capacity and knowledge to prevent wars,” Grignon says, that’ll be even better.

### **AFRICOM to “shape” Africa**

Stewart Patrick, who heads the Washington-based Center for Global Development’s project on weak states, expects AFRICOM to concentrate on “shaping efforts” in Africa.

“This means trying to focus less on the use of military force in a reactive sense, than trying to shape the environment on the continent so that the root causes of instability (such as poverty and lack of democracy) are more effectively dealt with by the United States, so that there’s attention to some of the long-term drivers of conflict.”

To that end, General Ward will have as one of his deputies a senior diplomat, and civilians aid experts are also being recruited to serve AFRICOM.

Patrick describes this military-civilian convergence in the US government as “revolutionary.” But he doubts whether a military command is the “most appropriate place to integrate US policy with respect to Africa.” Helping to create this controversy, he says, is the “tremendous asymmetry” in resources allocated to the civilian and military branches of the US government.

“There’s much more money available to the military, than to other sectors,” Patrick says. “Given that tremendous imbalance, there’s a legitimate fear that any agenda that AFRICOM has will naturally be skewed toward the military and security side of things. And so, instead of having a real balanced approach to the continent, the fear is that the emphasis will be on, for instance, training the African security forces to be very strong and robust – but not necessarily spending enough time trying to promote good governance and responsible and accountable regimes on the continent, or dealing with some of the underlying sources of underdevelopment.”

But Whelan disagrees and says the US government has always been very focused on human development – especially in Africa.

“The United States spends approximately \$9 billion a year in Africa, funding programs in areas such as health, trade promotion and good governance. In contrast, security related programs receive only about \$250 million a year.”

Another US official involved in setting up AFRICOM, Stephen Mull, acknowledges that the command is also being formed to protect the United States’ “considerable interests” in Africa.

Okumu contends: “The US is increasingly depending on African oil. The countries that are supplying more oil to the US, such as Nigeria, are facing some kind of insurgency. This could easily escalate to the point where (militants) will interfere with the supply of oil to Western markets. So the US is very

concerned that this kind of a threat to its supplies of oil has to be dealt with. And one of the means that is being proposed is through AFRICOM.”

In addition, he says the United States is worried about being “frozen out” of Africa: “The US is very concerned about the penetration of the Chinese on the continent. The Chinese are becoming increasingly aggressive in making deals with Africa, and gaining access to natural resources in Africa.”

Patrick says it’s obvious as well that AFRICOM intends to pursue the Pentagon’s war on terror in Africa – especially through more training of African soldiers in counterterrorism skills.

Kurt Shillinger, a researcher at the South African Institute of International Affairs, says AFRICOM has been set up on the assumption that “instability” in Africa is threatening American security. But, in a recent Congressional hearing, he said this remained contestable.

“Somalia has not emerged as the next Afghanistan, as was the initial assumption (by the US) after 9/11. It doesn’t function as a nursery for transnational terrorism, but for isolated cases. No civil or interstate war has resulted in direct harm to the US. The collapse of Zimbabwe has resulted in floods of immigrants to South Africa, not Florida. And whereas elements linked to terrorist attacks in London and Madrid have African connections, these have been on a smaller scale than the domestic terror threats emerging from within Britain and in France and Spain.”

But Shillinger acknowledges that “weak intelligence and security structures opened the space” in Kenya and Tanzania for the 1998 al-Qaeda bombings of US embassies that killed almost 250 people.

“It’s not a question of whether these problems should be addressed, but how and by whom. Is a military command the most appropriate vehicle? The Iraq war indicates the local and international consequences of preemptive US engagement,” he says.

### **Possible AFRICOM locations**

Whelan says the US government hasn’t spoken “directly” to any African nation about hosting AFRICOM but that a number of countries have expressed interest.

“Most of those indications have been quite private. What’s interesting is that the nations that have said no, have done so quite publicly – obviously they wanted to make some kind of domestic public point, but that’s fine. We certainly don’t want to be any place that doesn’t want us,” she says.

Whelan says in the coming months AFRICOM officials will engage more with African countries “to see whether or not they’re still amenable and interested in hosting. By October 2008, we will know how we are going to manage our presence (in Africa).”

So far, the only country that’s publicly offered to host the command is Liberia, with which Washington has very close ties.

“Generally, there’s been a lot of hostility, and many countries have been reluctant to come out openly and welcome AFRICOM,” says Okumu.

Analysts also mention Botswana - despite its landlocked status - as a possible AFRICOM location. President Festus Mogae’s administration also enjoys a warm relationship with Washington, cooperating with the US in various initiatives. The southern African nation is the base for an

American-sponsored international police training facility, so US security infrastructure is already in place in Botswana.

President Mogae has also sided with Washington in refusing to buckle to domestic pressure to sign an international undertaking that would allow for war crimes charges to be filed against American soldiers.

And despite pronouncements by South African Defense Minister Mosiua Lekota that Africa should reject AFRICOM because it would “destabilize” the continent, security analysts are refusing to write off South Africa as a base for AFRICOM. They point out that Africa’s economic powerhouse has engaged in frequent military exercises with the US.

Kenya and Ethiopia have also been mentioned as contenders to host AFRICOM, as both are key allies in the US’s war on terror. But Okumu says Nairobi doesn’t want another strong link with Washington because it’s still smarting from the 1998 US embassy blast, in which most of the fatalities were Kenyans.

“Kenya is very much still under threat from extremists because it hosts a lot of Western interests. The country’s also very much politically charged at the moment because of the forthcoming national elections, and it’s unlikely that the authorities would want another controversy to erupt before this event,” Okumu says, before adding: “Then you have counterterrorism initiatives that are antagonizing the Muslim population. So if you locate AFRICOM in Kenya, it’s going to create a lot of problems for the government.”

Other African countries that have been cooperating with the United States in terms of terrorism include Algeria, Chad, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia.

General James Jamerson, the former deputy commander of US forces in Europe, advises the authorities not to be hasty in deciding where to situate AFRICOM.

“(This issue) is way overblown; I’m a great believer in not making a decision before its time. We ought to study this for a long time. I worry that we’ll make the wrong decision about where we stick something. There’s no rush to do this.”

## **New US Military Command For Africa Stirs Intense Emotion**

By Darren Taylor  
Washington  
22 October 2007

*Taylor report (MP3 1.94mb)* 

*Listen to Taylor report (MP3 1.94mb)* 



**When President George W. Bush announced plans for a US military command for Africa – AFRICOM – in February, there was an uproar on the continent, and the controversy has yet to die down. Critics say AFRICOM is a poorly disguised attempt by the United States to gain access to African resources, to fight its war on terror on the continent and to interfere politically in African affairs by propping up governments that support US interests instead of their peoples'. But US officials insist that AFRICOM's primary mission will be the training of African peacekeepers and that it will also help reduce poverty and corruption. In the second of a series on the command, VOA's Darren Taylor focuses on the African reaction to AFRICOM.**

**South Africa's Defense Minister Mosiua Lekota says AFRICOM will 'destabilize' Africa**

AFRICOM continues to be the subject of much skepticism across Africa, especially in regional economic powerhouses such as South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. Critics see the US command as yet another attempt by the United States to enhance its global hegemony. Rather than being “for the good of the African people,” they argue, AFRICOM is part of a sinister and selfish strategy designed to gain increased access to Africa’s resources – most notably West African oil – to hunt down alleged terrorists who are thought to be hiding on the continent; and to buffer China’s growing influence in Africa.

Wafula Okumu, an analyst at South Africa’s Institute for Security Studies, says Africans continue to view AFRICOM with “deep suspicion” because US officials are “always putting a humanitarian mask on” what is in fact a military command and emphasizing that it’ll be used to “develop” the continent.

“We’re concerned, because why use the military? Why not use other effective methods, like USAID, or even the Peace Corps, who used to be very effective in winning the hearts and the minds of the African people. The African people right now are not very friendly to the idea of the (US) military taking a lead role in terms of promoting an ideal like human development,” Okumu says.

General Tsadkan Gebretensae, the former commander of Ethiopia’s Defense Force, says Africans have “legitimate grounds” to be skeptics, and explains that the cynicism about AFRICOM exists even in countries with security policies that are aligned with Washington’s.

Liberia’s president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, is the only African leader so far to publicly offer her country as a base for the new US Command. She has described AFRICOM as “recognition that long-term African security lies in empowering African partners to develop healthy security environments, to embracing good governance, building security capacity, and developing good civil-military relations.”

But South Africa, the leading player in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) bloc of nations, has said explicitly through its defense minister, Mosiua Lekota, that AFRICOM is not welcome on the continent.

Lekota told the media after a recent gathering of southern African defense chiefs: “Africa has to avoid the presence of foreign forces on its soil, particularly if any influx of soldiers might affect relations between sister African countries.”

But Theresa Whelan, one of the US officials involved in setting up AFRICOM, says it won’t represent a massive influx of American troops into Africa.

“We estimate that no more than 20 per cent of the entire command will actually be physically present on the continent and will maintain a presence on the continent. Roughly 80 per cent of the command will be off the continent. So our presence will be small,” says the US’s deputy assistant secretary of defense for Africa.

And, contrary to media reports, Whelan maintains that African leaders are prepared to support AFRICOM.

“We have discussed (it) with the African nations, and they were very supportive actually...of the concept. In fact, many of them reacted by saying: ‘Well, maybe if you guys actually lived here on the continent with us, you might start to understand what the challenges are that you face, and not sort of bring your western perspectives, but be able to understand a little bit better where we’re coming from.’”

Also, despite South Africa’s insistence that the continent has rejected AFRICOM, some African leaders are clearly open to the idea of enhanced military cooperation with Washington.

Botswana’s president, Festus Mogae, has told VOA: “At the level of heads of state, we have said that we should continue to engage the American government on this thing, as to exactly what it is, and so on. We have said that we will maintain an open mind, until we know exactly the nature of the thing, but we will of course have to engage the region, too.... We have no ideological objections to cooperating with Americans.”

In a brief interview with VOA, African Union Deputy Chairperson Patrick Mazimhaka said: “As a concept we’ve talked about it with the US officials. Its strategies have been explained to us. We’ve discussed its form and its objectives. But all we’ve had is tentative discussions; we have yet to work out details. Now the next step is to take what has been presented to us about AFRICOM and to present it to our member states in a way that is clear to them and to see what they think. This is part of a process, and it’s only the beginning of the process.”

Asked whether AFRICOM would soon be based in Africa, Mazimhaka replied: “It will happen. Yes. I don’t foresee a problem.”

He pointed out that many African countries are “willing partners” with Washington in combating terrorism.

### **III Feeling for US in Africa**

But security analysts say there are still significant obstacles to increased US military involvement in Africa.

“Africans have long memories,” says Okumu. “When they hear the US spouting off about AFRICOM, they recall all the occasions that America destabilized their continent, through its support for despotic regimes, such as that of Mobutu Sese Seko’s in the Congo, and it’s lack of action to stop tragedies such as the genocide in Rwanda and the war in Liberia. There’s still ill feeling for the US.”

Africans are also concerned, says Okumu, that Washington – through AFRICOM – intends “taking control of African security issues.”

Whelan insists that the US government’s intent is very different.

“The purpose of AFRICOM is to encourage and support African leadership and initiative – not to compete with it or discourage it. US security is enhanced when African nations themselves endeavor to successfully address and resolve emerging security issues before they become so serious that they require considerable international resources and intervention to resolve.”

She’s adamant that African leaders will continue to decide what’s best for the continent’s security.

“We have made it very clear that our intent with the Africa Command is not to come in and reinvent the wheel and provide some American solution to African security problems, but rather to take what the Africans have already built and assist them in making it a reality. So they will continue to dictate the course of African security priorities on their continent and our hope is that we can simply help them in achieving those goals,” Whelan explains.

But Okumu says many Africans feel insulted because the United States never consulted continental leaders during the “conceptualization” of AFRICOM.

“It has been presented as a fait accompli around the continent,” he says.

Whelan denies that African leaders haven’t been sufficiently consulted about the command. She points out that the US government has visited 13 African countries thus far to inform them about AFRICOM and intends to visit more before the command is expected to base itself in Africa by October 2008.

But Kurt Shillinger, a researcher at the South African Institute of International Affairs, says Africans basically “don’t trust” the United States. He’s convinced that the continent identifies far more strongly with countries such as Iran and the struggles of the Palestinian people against the US-backed Israelis. Africans, he says, “resent the US control of the global security sector” and consider Washington to be a “bully” that’s oppressing weaker nations. This is why he expects resistance to AFRICOM to continue to grow among African populations.

### **Colonial And Cold War Hangover**

Okumu says Africans, in hearing US officials couch AFRICOM in humanitarian terms, remember that colonialism was preceded by “philanthropic missionaries who came to fulfill ‘God’s will of rescuing Africa from the clutches of barbarism.’”

He continues: “Africa’s colonial history was characterized by brutal military occupations, exploitation of its natural resources, and suppression of its people. After decades of independence, these countries are now jealously guarding their sovereignty, and are highly suspicious of foreigners, even those with good intentions.”

Africa also suffered a lot as a result of the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union and their allies.

“It wasn’t Africans by themselves that brought all this horrible conflict to the sub-continent,” says Paul Wolfowitz, former World Bank president and US deputy defense secretary. “The US and the Soviet Union played a fairly big role in supporting their various allies in the Cold War. The Congolese are still dealing with the consequences of what was...extraordinary support given to President Mobutu and the generals that he left behind are still a major problem for the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo)... And so the reluctance of Africans to see foreign militaries turn up (on their continent) is fairly understandable.”

Stewart Patrick, who manages a program on weak states for Washington's Center for Global Development, says one of the main fears with regard to AFRICOM is that it will encourage a "greater use of American forces" in Africa and will spur the US to "cozy up to repressive regimes that rely very heavily on their own military forces to remain in power."

Some analysts say this is, in fact, already happening. They point to Washington's support for an Ethiopian administration that has been jailing and allegedly torturing opposition politicians, human rights activists and journalists.

Whelan responds: "The fact that we have diplomatic or bilateral relations with a country doesn't give us control over their actions.... We're never going to control countries, but that doesn't mean that you don't try to work with their militaries and help them to develop the competence to be able to manage security in their own backyard."

She's also repeatedly stressed that AFRICOM will not be a "war-fighting command," but rather a strategy to prevent conflict in Africa. Critics, though, say recent US actions on the continent contradict her stance. They cite US air strikes in Somalia against supposed al-Qaeda targets. In the future, they say, Washington will use AFRICOM to eliminate anyone in Africa considered to be an enemy of the United States.

Whelan acknowledges that in the event of Americans being threatened in Africa, the authorities will not hesitate to act to protect them.

"If the United States were confronted with a specific situation like that again where we had the ability to go after someone that had attacked us, and either capture them or in some way eliminate them, we're certainly going to do that."

But she says the US will consult African leaders before launching any military actions.

### **Concern AFRICOM Will Foment Terrorism**

General Gebretensae says the war on terror is a national security priority for Washington but certainly doesn't enjoy the same importance in Africa. Okumu says AFRICOM shouldn't force the continent into a sphere where it doesn't belong.

Gebretensae comments: "Every (US) policy is very much tied to the war against terror, and all other issues that are pertinent to Africa are being undermined. The possibility of undermining the whole relationship (between the United States and Africa) I think is very high. There is fear that the US military will mainly focus on its own interests."

Another concern, says Patrick, is that AFRICOM will create targets for militants and lead to a wave of terrorism in Africa.

"By actually placing it on the continent and by conceivably creating a number of regional and sub-regional hubs, the impact will actually be to create a number of targets for those who are discontented with US policy – and these will be actual practical targets for attack by terrorist organizations. And also symbolic targets that can be invoked to justify anti-American policies or attitudes," Patrick says.

Okumu agrees, pointing to the 1998 al-Qaeda bombings of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

“The perpetrators of the terrorist bombs – when they were arrested, they were put on trial. One of them said the reason they targeted Kenya was because Kenya is a friend to the West. And that’s why they hate it, because it represents Western interests.”

If Africa embraces AFRICOM, warns Okumu, it should steel itself for some “dark days” ahead and a “more dangerous” environment, and the possible revitalization of a “new Cold War” should China also insist on becoming involved militarily on the continent.

## **Doubts Deepen About Acceptability of New US Military Command For Africa**

By Darren Taylor

Washington

23 October 2007

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AFP Photo

US officials say AFRICOM will boost African peacekeeping missions, but the command has been the subject of heated debate on the continent

**The new US military command for Africa – AFRICOM – recently became operational, but will be based in Germany for the next year. After this, it’s expected to have headquarters in various African regions. However, AFRICOM has already been condemned by many Africans as an attempt by the United States to interfere politically in the continent’s affairs, to create a new arena for its war on terrorism and to compete with China for access to African resources, such as oil. American officials insist that while AFRICOM does indeed intend to serve US interests, its primary aim is to make the world a safer place by giving better training to African militaries. Nevertheless, observers say Washington faces an uphill battle to make**

**AFRICOM acceptable to Africans. VOA’s Darren Taylor reports, in the final part of a series focusing on AFRICOM.**

Wafula Okumu, of South Africa’s Institute for Security Studies, is just one of many observers of the AFRICOM process who describe it as a “public relations catastrophe” for Washington.

General James Jamerson, the former deputy commander of American forces in Europe, says the key to AFRICOM is obviously its acceptance in Africa itself.

“We have to be on the ground (in Africa), working from the bottom up, talking to Africans about this concept. I think we just don’t do this well. But it’s a recoverable kind of thing – if we just get out there and do it,” he says.

**But the US, says Stewart Patrick who leads a project on weak states at Washington’s Center for Global Development, has so far failed to “sell” AFRICOM – primarily because of “bad communication.”**

Instead of being “direct” and acknowledging that the primary motivation behind AFRICOM is the protection of US interests in Africa – such as oil supplies and its war on terror - says Okumu,

American officials have instead concentrated on insisting that the command will promote “good governance” and boost human development in Africa.

If Africans consider AFRICOM to be a threat to their sovereignty, and a political threat, the initiative will fail, Okumu maintains.

Patrick says: “The heads of the AFRICOM transition team, US diplomats and also folks at the Department of Defense have actually not been particularly good at explaining why AFRICOM is needed, and how its mission will affect the other streams of US engagement on the continent.”

In order to ensure that Africans accept the command, he says, the US will have to do a “much better job” of explaining its mission.

“I have been struck, in Washington, despite having attended multiple discussions about AFRICOM – including with officials from the Department of Defense, State Department and elsewhere in government – at the lack of clarity as to what practical difference it will actually make (in Africa) on a day-to-day basis,” Patrick comments.

But observers agree that there’ve been notable improvements in the public relations skills of AFRICOM officials in recent times. Those tasked with presenting the command to the world have appeared far more relaxed in public, and far more candid in their public addresses.

Theresa Whelan, a key planner of AFRICOM and US deputy secretary for African affairs at the Department of Defense, recently told a forum at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington: “I think it’s important for everyone to understand that we do not believe that we’ve gotten this right. We are firmly convinced that we’ve probably screwed it up somehow – but we’re not quite sure exactly how.”

Frankness such as this, says Okumu, is essential to AFRICOM’s acceptance in Africa.

Kurt Shillinger, of the South African Institute of International Affairs, says the “critical element” is “local buy-in. In building a case for AFRICOM by African states, Washington is its own predecessor – and in some cases, its own greatest obstacle.”

He’s convinced, though, that better US public relations won’t necessarily result in Africans embracing the new command.

“Given the nature of the suspicion and the prevailing distrust of the US in Africa, it’s unlikely that any amount of public relations will fully quench anti-imperialist concerns that AFRICOM is fundamentally an attempt to create a bulwark in Africa against transnational terrorism, or China’s appetite for Africa’s oil, minerals and timber,” Shillinger explains.

He does, however, expect that the “dust will settle. The proposed structure of AFRICOM, consisting of four to five relatively small bases with no force deployments, means that these will be largely invisible – even in their host countries and societies. That bodes well for viability.”

Analysts say the command stands a much better chance of acceptance if Africans are convinced that AFRICOM – as its officials have stated repeatedly - won’t result in deployments of thousands of US troops to the continent.

Patrick says the US will have to go to “great lengths” to try to make sure that the creation of AFRICOM does not result in a “very large military footprint” on Africa.

“One way to do that would be to devote less energy to creating actual standing military installations on the continent, and instead go in the direction of negotiating a number of arrangements that would allow US forces to deploy in existing installations under the control of African governments in crises – dependent on the approval of the host government,” he counsels.

If concessions such as these are given to Africans, says Patrick, it could ease their fear that AFRICOM will result in terrorists increasingly targeting Africa.

Okumu says the command’s establishment must secure an “African consensus” – especially through the African Union, and that there should be a guarantee that the sovereignty of African states will not be compromised or undermined by AFRICOM. If such a “formal” assurance is not given by the US, Okumu says, “new and grave threats and challenges to the continent’s peace and security agenda” will occur.

He also advises Washington to make it a “high priority” to open dialogue about AFRICOM with African civil society groups. Many of these organizations, says Okumu, have greater power even than politicians in setting the tone for public debate, and many of them remain vehemently opposed to AFRICOM.

Okumu appeals to Washington to “broaden” its consultations about the command in Africa, arguing that talks about the US military plans have so far been “very limited to bureaucrats within the AU” and that news about AFRICOM hasn’t filtered down to the public. This has created room for opponents of AFRICOM to “speculate” about the nature of the command, he adds.

Okumu says AFRICOM officials have had insufficient contact with the Pan African Parliament, as well as with regional bodies such as the Southern African Development Community.

Peter Pham, the Director of the Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs at James Madison University in the US, also warns that Africans remain “heavily scarred by the role that African militaries have played in their countries’ politics, and that has to be taken into consideration” as well, and could influence AFRICOM’s acceptance on the continent.

Ultimately, says Okumu, the US command will be accepted if it complements existing African initiatives.

But Patrick is convinced that Washington will have to demonstrate action, rather than mere words, if Africans are to eventually accept AFRICOM.

“If the US Department of Defense and other US officials are able to show how, in practical terms, AFRICOM can make a difference in reducing internal conflict, in bringing hope and fighting some of the underlying causes of underdevelopment and misery in different parts of the continent, then I think it stands a decent chance of getting wider acceptance.”

But Jamerson says the US shouldn’t spend too much time on trying to gain “universal” acceptability for AFRICOM.

“There are currents that flow in Africa that are just not going to buy the concept. It doesn’t mean you can’t work with the leaders of Africa; it just means that the public face.... is not going to be as positive as getting the work done. But that doesn’t mean you quit trying,” he states.

General Tsadkan Gebretensae, former Ethiopian Defense Force chief, warns that AFRICOM is at a “crossroads.”

“There is the potential to have a very constructive engagement (between Washington and Africa), and there is a great deal of potential for a very negative effect....”

Okumu agrees that the months ahead will be “critical” for AFRICOM, and will forever change the US’s relationship with the continent.

## US Officials Acknowledge Obstacles to Success of African Military Command

By Darren Taylor  
Washington  
23 October 2007

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AFRICOM intends to provide better training to African militaries

**The United States’ new military command for Africa, AFRICOM, recently became operational. For the next year, it will be based in Germany, but the US administration is seeking to establish headquarters in various African regions by October 2008. Washington says AFRICOM’s main mission will be to train African peacekeepers. It will also expand on anti-terrorism programs on the continent, cooperate with civilian groups to establish good governance and participate in other forms of development. But before all that, AFRICOM will have to overcome a number of significant challenges. In the third part of a series on the new command, VOA’s Darren Taylor reports on some**

**obstacles to the latest US military initiative.**

General James Jamerson, former deputy commander of the US European Command, argues for a fundamental shift in American attitudes towards Africa. He says up until now, US authorities have not paid enough attention to Africa but he’s pleased that with AFRICOM, the United States appears to be according far more importance to a continent that’s often viewed as hopeless and relatively insignificant in world affairs.

South Africa-based security analyst Wafula Okumu says the major challenge for AFRICOM will be “getting Africans to believe that it intends doing good and not dominating them.”

Observers, though, agree that resources will be a problem for AFRICOM. They point out that the United States is in the process of downsizing its military commands.

Says Paul Wolfowitz, former World Bank president and US deputy defense secretary: “If you worked inside the Pentagon, you’d realize the big concern in the US Defense Department is not how to get

involved in Africa but how to stay out of involvement in Africa and how to support others in doing the job.”

Observers of AFRICOM ask how it’s expected to fulfill its mandate of making Africa – and thereby the world – a safer place, if the necessary money isn’t available. Many millions of dollars will be needed if the command is to train more African soldiers in peacekeeping and counterterrorism and for the other initiatives that AFRICOM intends to become involved in.

“We’ve got to make sure we resource this organization to get the job done. If not, we’re going to stumble around and not be nearly as good as we could be,” says Jamerson.

Wolfowitz emphasizes that AFRICOM must be based upon “mutualism” and argues that too often US authorities have met in Washington to discuss Africa – without African interests being adequately represented. Embracing Africa to a far greater degree than has previously been the case, he says, will be integral to AFRICOM’s success.

Analysts say it’s essential for Washington not to be seen as “dictating” to Africa and preparing an “invading army.” They say even semantics will prove a challenge to AFRICOM’s acceptance on the continent, as it was when the United States established an “Africa Crisis Response Force” in the 1990s.

“The term ‘force’ did not sit well with Africans. But we sort of roared in (to Africa), like we are wont to do on the US side on occasion and said kind of: ‘Slam bam, here’s the plan.’ We should be smarter than that (with regard to AFRICOM). I’m not saying that that’s what has happened in this case; there’s been an awful lot of bad information flowing,” Jamerson says.

The negative publicity surrounding the command, he points out, will hinder it immensely.

Even Wolfowitz says his first reaction to AFRICOM was that it was “not a good idea” -and he’s still not convinced. But he’s of the opinion that “it can be made into something that can work and that can be useful.”

Nevertheless, like Jamerson, Wolfowitz is concerned about AFRICOM having to deal with “perceptions” rather than reality.

He says another challenge for AFRICOM will be to “transform” African militaries, many of which are presently constructed to suppress political opposition to the government of the day and not to protect their populations.

Jamerson says AFRICOM’s structure is also extremely complicated – with elements from the military, State Department and USAID, most of whom will be based in places other than Africa, joining the command. It’s going to be very difficult to maintain coordination to ensure AFRICOM’s success, he maintains.

“If you look at all the different moving parts, for things in Africa, it is exceptional. I don’t think we yet have a grip on how to bring it together to the best benefits of everybody. We haven’t figured it out...in Iraq; we haven’t figured it out yet quite in Afghanistan. It has to do with (bureaucracy) in Washington.... You need to bring all of these things together through a lens and get control of what’s going on so we all know what the various interagency outfits – and beyond – are doing.”

Stewart Patrick, of the Weak States Project at Washington's Center for Global Development, adds: "It strikes me that the administration moved to create this structure and has begun to staff it without a really clear idea about how the different pieces will fit together."

Wolfowitz voices concern that US officials dedicated to development are expected to cooperate with the American military with regard to AFRICOM.

"It is the case in fact that in development agencies, including the ones that I know best, USAID and the World Bank, there's a kind of allergy to even talking to military of any stripe, including even the ones with the blue berets (UN peacekeepers) - much less the (soldiers from the) evil United States."

Yet he emphasizes that these "barriers" will have to be broken down if AFRICOM is going to help develop Africa and create peace and stability on the continent.

Another challenge facing the command, says Jamerson, is for it to constantly cooperate and consult with Washington's international allies in shaping AFRICOM policy. He says the command's plans should not conflict with especially European interests in Africa, otherwise the US will boost rather than decrease crises.

"There's an awful lot of positive financing, management firepower; logistics support - a lot of things can happen if we work internationally, together. We'll waste a lot of time and energy if we don't do that," Jamerson warns.

He foresees that bureaucracy on a large scale will be one of AFRICOM's biggest trials in its cooperation with the various continental organizations in Africa.

"We have to understand the complexities that (African) regional and sub-regional structures - SADC (Southern African Development Community), ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States); all of these things - (bring). These are complex mechanisms under a complex mechanism of the African Union. It's going to take a lot of time and energy just to understand it and to understand how to work in there (Africa)," Jamerson explains.

Okumu predicts "intense frustration" for AFRICOM officials in their dealings with African leaders, who prefer "myriad" negotiations before action is taken. Analysts wonder whether the Americans have the patience required to function effectively in Africa.

Theresa Whelan, a senior AFRICOM official, acknowledges also that the command can't use the same blueprint for security in all regions in Africa - something the US deputy secretary for African affairs says African leaders have frequently told her during her visits to the continent.

"They emphasized to us repeatedly that one size does not fit all on the continent and that East Africa's problems and challenges are not the same as West Africa's, and West Africa's are not the same as Central's or Southern's or North's; etcetera, etcetera. We heard that in each place. We hope that we will avoid the tendency to use a one-size-fits-all approach."

The former chief of the Ethiopian Defense Force, General Tsadkan Gebretensae, cautions Washington that the main causes of conflict in Africa are "social, economic and political" and that the strife is caused mainly by "ethnic and religious diversities."

If AFRICOM gets "mixed up" in such internal fighting, which is fueled by age-old prejudices, there'll be "very dangerous" consequences for the United States and the world, Okumu warns.

He also says as long as an estimated 300 million people out of 600 million are living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, the region will continue to be “fertile breeding ground” for war. Okumu says unless such dire underdevelopment is addressed, AFRICOM will fail to prevent widespread conflict in the region, no matter how “noble” its mission.

## **Analysts Concerned New US Military Command To Hamper African Development**

By Darren Taylor  
Washington  
23 October 2007

*Taylor report (MP3 1.70mb)* 

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**USAID official Michael Hess says the US military has been cooperating with relief workers for a long time**

**There’s anxiety in the international aid community that the United States’ new military command for Africa, AFRICOM, will hurt development on the continent. AFRICOM is to be based in Germany for the next year, after which it’s expected to be headquartered in various African locations. US officials say through the new initiative, the US military will train larger numbers of African peacekeepers. But they also say AFRICOM intends to cooperate with civilian aid agencies to fight poverty and enhance “good governance” in Africa. Analysts question why the American military needs to become involved in developmental and political initiatives. VOA’s Darren Taylor reports, in the fourth of a five-part series on AFRICOM.**

“Africans are suspicious, because US officials are constantly stressing that the command will help to improve governance in Africa and to get involved in the aid sector. This makes Africans think the US is sugarcoating what is in fact a bitter pill and that there is something bad behind the creation of AFRICOM. Because why should a US military command become involved in aid?”

The views of Wafula Okumu, an analyst at South Africa’s Institute for Security Studies, reflect the deep mistrust on the continent over the United States’ latest military initiative in Africa.

Concerns about US military involvement in the international aid sphere have increased ever since President Bush announced the formation of AFRICOM in February.

At a recent congressional hearing, Donald Payne, a member of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the chairman of its subcommittee on Africa, said he found the AFRICOM proposal “disconcerting.”

He expressed concern over what he termed the increased involvement of the US Department of Defense in foreign aid and assistance. Payne warned of the “militarization” of US aid to Africa, with extremely detrimental consequences for the United States’ image and standing on the continent.

Payne’s skepticism is mirrored by that in Africa itself.

Under AFRICOM, officials of key civilian US government agencies, such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID), will for the first time be integrated into a military command. Yet analysts such as Okumu point out that cooperation between the US military and civilian departments has in the past been “very bad.”

Michael Hess, a retired US army colonel with more than 30 years of military experience, is considered in some quarters to be the embodiment of international fears that the American humanitarian aid sector is undergoing “militarization.”

Hess came out of retirement in June 2005, when President Bush appointed him to a senior position at USAID. In justifying his presence as a career soldier, albeit retired, at what is the world’s leading civilian aid agency, Hess pointed out at a congressional hearing that USAID had for decades cooperated with the US military in providing humanitarian assistance to African countries wracked by disasters, conflicts and poverty and “engaging in democratic reforms.”

He stressed that USAID missions in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya had cooperated on educational projects with the US army. The military built the schools, Hess recalled, and USAID officials provided schoolbooks and teacher training.

Thus, maintains Hess, US civilian-military cooperation is “nothing new,” and AFRICOM’s proposed objective of providing humanitarian assistance to Africa as one of its primary missions should not be regarded as a “cover” for a more “sinister” aim.

Hess emphasizes that AFRICOM will be “more civilian in nature,” rather than the US aid sector becoming “more military,” as some African leaders and analysts fear. Certain top leadership positions in AFRICOM, he says, have been reserved for civilian aid experts.

Theresa Whelan, the US deputy assistant secretary of defense for Africa and one of the planners of AFRICOM, has also tried to assuage concerns about its entrance into developmental affairs.

She dismisses fears that “AFRICOM represents a militarization of US foreign policy in Africa” and that it will “somehow become the lead US government interlocutor with Africa” as “unfounded.”

“AFRICOM will support, not shape, US foreign policy on the continent,” Whelan insists. “The secretary of state will remain the chief foreign policy advisor to the president, and the secretary of defense will remain his chief advisor on defense matters.”

She denies that AFRICOM will supersede USAID or the State Department in areas where those agencies have “clear lines of authority as well as comparative advantages” to lead initiatives. Military commanders aren’t aid experts, she acknowledges.

But Stewart Patrick, an expert on weak states at the Center for Global Development in Washington, says AFRICOM’s aspiration to “influence development” in Africa continues to raise “hackles, particularly within the US foreign policy and development communities. Even within the State Department there is, under the surface, quite a bit of rumbling about the potential danger that AFRICOM will end up undermining the authority of the chiefs of mission – that is, the US ambassadors in the field, who actually coordinate US policy there.”

Whelan says AFRICOM doesn’t intend to usurp the authority of American ambassadors in Africa.

But Mark Malan of Refugees International in Washington says aid workers won't support the command as long as AFRICOM presents itself as a "humanitarian actor and promises to subsume humanitarianism within the ambit of military strategy."

The experienced South African aid worker maintains that humanitarian action is "more than the act of restoring basic living standards to individuals and communities who have been deprived of them by circumstance. It should be motivated by humanitarianism; a powerful assertion of the universal sanctity and dignity of human life, and a practical manifestation of the need to provide protection to civilians in times of crisis and conflict."

Malan says a military command like AFRICOM isn't geared towards fulfilling these objectives, that there are "differences in philosophy" between military personnel and aid workers and that it will be very difficult for them to cooperate effectively with one another, given the diversity of their missions.

"There can at best be good liaison and perhaps coordination between humanitarian, developmental and military actors – but not integration," he emphasizes.

Patrick also questions "whether or not a military command is the right place to have policy integration occur, as opposed to US embassies in the field, or in Washington itself. There are major questions as to whether the military should really be in the lead in trying to undertake these efforts."

Malan says USAID and many large NGOs have far more experience than the US military in implementing development and humanitarian programs.

"Where the military is the only agency with the capacity to provide humanitarian and development assistance, the solution should lie in allocating adequate resources to USAID, rather than reinforcing and expanding the military's role in this sphere," he says.

Patrick is convinced that the US military wants to see much more investment to combat the drivers of conflict in Africa, such as poverty and poor governance. But he says the US administration hasn't made sufficient provision for this.

"Given the current imbalance in the federal budget, it's hard to see how (AFRICOM) could be anything less than military top-heavy," Patrick says.

"This could conceivably send some dangerous signals to regimes in the region. One could imagine that a country such as Central African Republic, for instance – if it became a very large beneficiary of US military assistance, and yet its governance assistance and development assistance was much less – that it could skew some of the incentives for that regime (to improve democracy) and also its understanding about what Washington is really concerned about."

But Okumu says: "The thinking that...AFRICOM must somehow play a role in aid and development and foster good governance in Africa is what is disturbing and insulting to many Africans, because the thinking is that Africa is composed of rotten and failing and failed states, and that failed states are breeding grounds for terrorists, and terrorists are a security threat to the West. So what you're talking about here is securitizing development. And that's not the reality in Africa right now. I don't think Africa is composed of failed or failing states."

Rather, he says, Africa is mostly composed of states that don't have the capacity to provide for development of their people, and they're generally not "incubators" for terrorists.

“There are much better ways to provide for Africa’s needs than through a military command. And given the history of militaries in Africa, it’s not a good idea to introduce the military into either African politics or continental development,” Okumu says.

The analyst adds that he’s had discussions with “senior officers in the US military” who are set to train AFRICOM personnel.

“They have said that even the US military is concerned. They are concerned that they are being prepared to do work that they’re not trained for. They think that they should not be engaged in humanitarian or development work.”

US military officials, says Okumu, share his concerns that “specialist” aid groups “must be left to do their jobs, without interference from things like AFRICOM. This new command will just create confusion. Who is in charge of aid? The US military?”

He says the US military should be devoted to assisting, for example, the African Union to “build its capacity in peacekeeping” and should stay away from politics and human development.

In addition, Kurt Shillinger, a researcher at the South African Institute of International Affairs, warns that any “overt indications of synergy between military and development initiatives will seriously undermine the credibility and acceptance of the latter, particularly in those states with large Muslim populations.”

Okumu says: “At the end of the day, the central purpose of an army command is to fight, not to help people. And to think that Africans don’t realize this is, frankly, another insult to all Africans.”