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Creating an Africa Command: Bush Administration Makes the Right Call

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On February 6, 2007, President George W. Bush announced that the United States will create a new unified combatant command for Africa (AFRICOM) to oversee security, enhance strategic cooperation, build partnerships, support nonmilitary missions, and conduct military operations as necessary. The President's decision to establish AFRICOM is long overdue. Under the current combatant command arrangement, security concerns and challenges in Africa receive insufficient attention from the three separate combatant commands responsible for parts of the region, whose primary focus is not on the African continent.

The Heritage Foundation has long advocated an independent command for Africa.¹ AFRICOM is necessary to address the increasing importance of the region to U.S. national interests and better equip the U.S. in meeting the unique challenges of that region. In an increasingly globalized world, the U.S. cannot afford to ignore Africa or relegate it to a tertiary priority. Africa is a vital source of energy and other mineral resources. Weak and failed states in the region offer fertile ground for the spread of terrorism. And the underdeveloped states in Africa are often incapable of addressing transnational health and environmental concerns that could affect the U.S. and its allies. The President's plan to establish an AFRICOM will help U.S. policymakers focus more closely on Africa's problems, support regional efforts to address mutual concerns, and bolster capacity to tackle regional problems.

Strategic Importance of Africa. Africa is no longer a distant region that can be ignored by the U.S. As articulated in the National Security Strategy, the need to expand and ensure America's access to energy resources, prevent the spread of terrorism in weak or broken states, and address transnational health and environmental concerns has transformed Africa from a strategic backwater into a priority region for U.S. economic, political, and military interests.² America has become increasingly involved in the region since the end of the Cold War, with over 20 U.S. military operations in Africa between 1990 and 2000 and another 10 since 2000.³ These concerns and operations, combined with a rising expectation by many in America and other countries that the U.S. should intervene in internal and regional African conflicts more frequently and actively, assure that the U.S. will become more involved in the region in coming years.

The likelihood of U.S. involvement is enhanced by the lack of regional capacity to respond to threats. Although the African Union and other regional groupings like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) have

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demonstrated a willingness to support regional interventions and peacekeeping missions, the region's capacity—in terms of troops and support personnel, interoperability, training, equipment, logistics, and other necessary elements of peacekeeping or other military intervention—is inadequate. Even regional powers with substantial capabilities, such as Nigeria and South Africa, face enormous challenges in fielding and sustaining a sizable operation. A key example has been the African Union's presence in Darfur, which has proven too small and ineffectual to stop the atrocities.

While the security concerns of Africa may not demand the same attention as other national security priorities, they are complex. Africa is subject to political and economic volatility that creates or contributes to border disputes, corruption, famine, internal conflicts, poverty, weak internal security capabilities and porous borders, poor infrastructure, natural disasters, and vulnerability to terrorism.⁴ These problems make addressing U.S. security and economic concerns in the region a complex combination of bolstering stability,

encouraging political pluralism, enhancing the military capabilities of African peacekeepers, promoting development and economic growth, building institutions, and addressing short-term natural disasters and other crises.

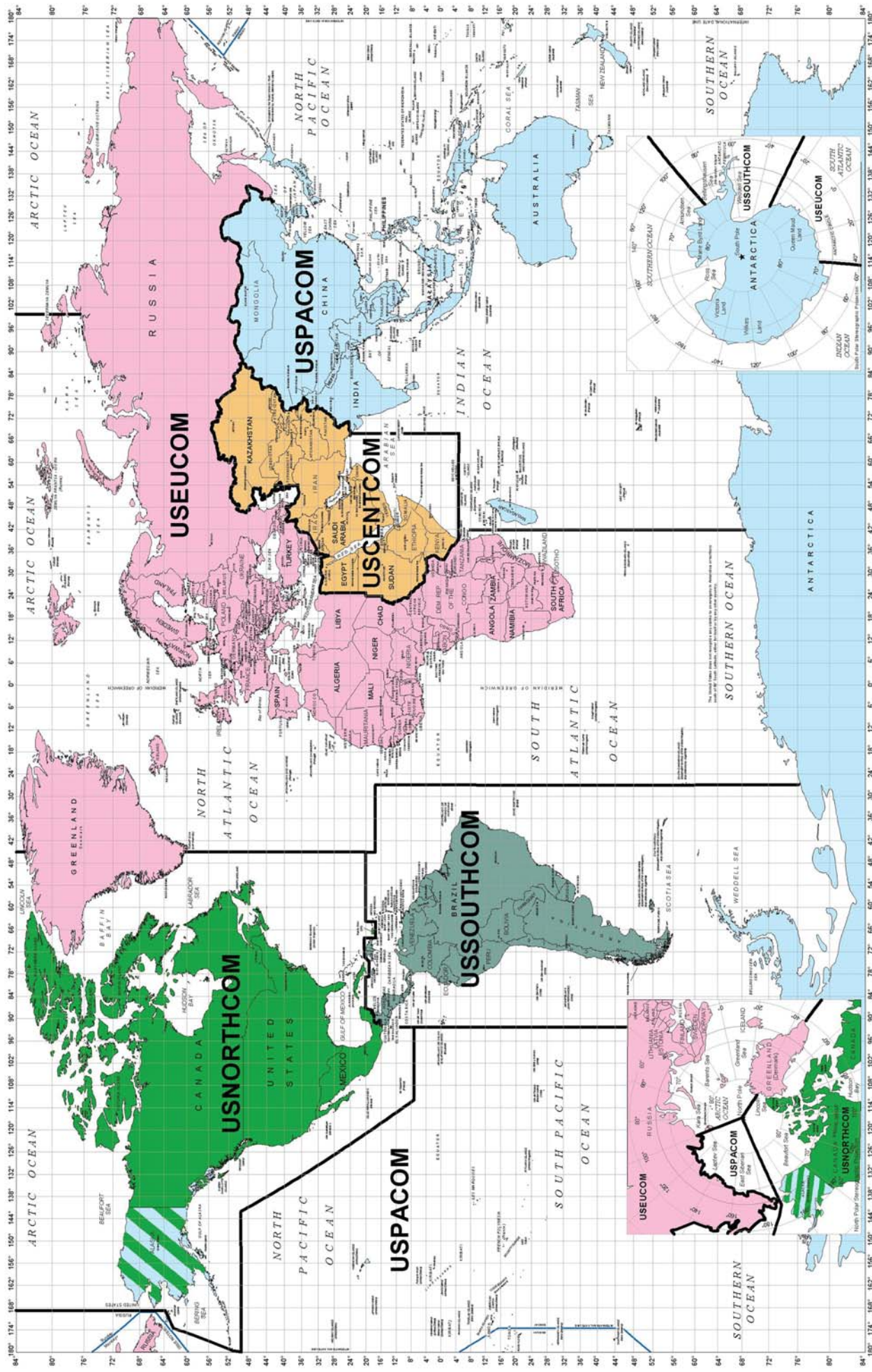
Long Neglected. Africa has long been ignored in America's regional combatant command structure. Sub-Saharan Africa was not included in any geographic combatant command until 1983 and, once included, was an often-overlooked component of the existing commands.⁵

Under the current combatant command structure, the U.S. Department of Defense has five regional unified combatant commands covering all regions of the world, with Africa split between three commands:⁶

- Central Command's (CENTCOM) area of responsibility includes most of Southwest and Central Asia and seven countries in the Horn of Africa.⁷
- European Command's (EUCOM) area of responsibility includes over 90 countries encompassing all of Europe, 42 countries in Africa, and Israel.⁸

1. James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., and Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., "U.S. Military Assistance for Africa: A Better Solution," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1697, October 15, 2003, at www.heritage.org/Research/Africa/bg1697.cfm.
2. Africa remains strategically important as a source of natural and mineral resources. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 18.6 percent of U.S. oil imports in 2005, compared to 17.4 percent from the Middle East. Within the next decade, Africa's production is expected to double, and U.S. imports of oil from West Africa alone are forecast to increase to 25 percent of total U.S. oil imports. See Brett D. Schaefer, "America's Growing Reliance on African Energy Resources," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1944, June 20, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/Africa/bg1944.cfm.
3. CDR Otto Sieber, "Africa Command: Forecast for the Future," *Strategic Insights*, Volume VI, Issue 1, January 2007, at www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2007/Jan/sieberJan07.asp.
4. No other region of the world is in more dire need of development than sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa's 719 million people face tremendous challenges, including the world's highest incidence of HIV/AIDS, deep poverty, unemployment, political instability, and a host of related problems. Unfortunately, about half the countries in sub-Saharan Africa experienced negative growth in real per capita incomes despite hundreds of billions of dollars in aid invested over the past two decades. Instead of desperately needed economic growth, sub-Saharan Africa as a region saw a decline in per capita GDP from \$575 in 1980 to \$536 in 2004 (in 2000 dollars). See Brett D. Schaefer, "How Economic Freedom Is Central to Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 922, February 3, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/TradeandForeignAid/hl922.cfm.
5. CDR Otto Sieber, "Africa Command: Forecast for the Future."
6. The other two regional combatant commands are Northern Command (NORTHCOM), which has an area of responsibility that includes the continental United States, Alaska, Canada, Mexico, and surrounding waters, and Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), which has an area of responsibility of more than 30 countries, including all of Latin America south of Mexico, the Caribbean nations and territories, and adjacent waters. See United States Northern Command, "About Us," at www.northcom.mil/about_us/about_us.htm, and United States Southern Command, "Area of Responsibility," at www.southcom.mil/home.
7. GlobalSecurity.org, "U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM)," at www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/centcom.htm.

The Current U.S. Combatant Command Structure



- Pacific Command's (PACOM) area of responsibility extends from the west coast of the United States mainland to the east coast of Africa and includes 43 countries. PACOM is responsible for the island nations off the coast of eastern Africa.⁹

Under this arrangement, responsibility for Africa is spread awkwardly among the three different commands. CENTCOM has responsibility for Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan. PACOM has responsibility for the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, and the Seychelles. And EUCOM has responsibility for the rest of the continent. This organizational arrangement is largely a vestige of Africa's colonial legacy and the Cold War, during which the concerns of Africa were subordinated to interests in Europe.

While each of the commands includes dedicated experts among their staff and remains engaged in the African nations under their responsibility, Africa generally receives less attention than other regional command priorities. For instance, CENTCOM rightly focuses most of its attention and resources on U.S. security priorities in Iraq and Afghanistan. EUCOM is preoccupied with NATO, relations with European allies, and Russia. Similarly, PACOM is justly preoccupied with the burgeoning regional powers of China and India and the unpredictable belligerence of North Korea. As a result, U.S. strategic policy toward Africa has been inconsistent, driven by emergencies and crises and differing priorities among the commands, rather than by a considered strategy.

The New Africa Command. The decision to establish an independent Africa command—to be called AFRICOM—will increase the profile of Africa

at the Pentagon and enable the U.S. military to keep closer tabs on the region, improve intelligence and contingency planning, and enhance military-to-military relationships and training. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates explained, a new Africa Command “will enable us to have a more effective and integrated approach than the current arrangement of dividing Africa between Central Command and European Command, an outdated arrangement left over from the Cold War.”¹⁰ It is time that the combatant command structure reflects today's strategic realities.

In a welcome decision, the Administration will reportedly give AFRICOM an area of responsibility that includes all nations on the continent and all the islands around Africa, with the sole exception being Egypt, which will remain within the area of responsibility of Central Command. The decision to consolidate Africa under a single command is logical and will enable AFRICOM to exercise a consistent policy over the region rather than inconsistent or multiple policies arising from having two or more combatant commands, with different priorities, responsible for the region. That situation creates seams in policy, programs, and activities that make operations more difficult.¹¹ As Rear Admiral Robert Moeller said, “We want to work with our African partners on building their capacity to be able to deal with some of the many challenges that they face across the continent. By having one command that is focused on the entire continent, we believe that we can address those issues and those challenges much more coherently than with three existing commands today.”¹² The exception of Egypt is understandable, given its historical and strategic ties to the Middle East.

8. United States European Command, “Area of Responsibility (AOR),” at www.eucom.mil/english/AOR/main.asp.

9. United States Pacific Command, “About U.S. Pacific Command,” at www.pacom.mil/about/aor.shtml.

10. Pauline Jelinek, “Pentagon to set up new command in Africa,” Associated Press, February 6, 2007, at www.chron.com/dispatch/story.mpl/ap/politics/4530336.html.

11. As noted by CDR Sieber, “If the DoD insists upon keeping the continent divided as it currently is, the commands that cover the region will require two sets of experts, both commanders and staffs that must be intimately familiar with all the issues pertaining to the border regions. For example, consider U.S. support to African peacekeeping efforts. The African Union (AU) forces sent to Sudan (which falls within USCENTCOM) required USEUCOM assets to transport the peacekeepers from Nigeria and Rwanda. The reasons for this were twofold: USCENTCOM had more pressing priorities (Iraq and Afghanistan), and therefore fewer available assets to assist in the given mission, and Nigeria and Rwanda both fall within USEUCOM's AOR.” See CDR Otto Sieber, “Africa Command: Forecast for the Future.”

The Africa command will be set up no later than September 2008, and a transition team will be in place in Stuttgart, Germany, at the European Command headquarters to manage the transition until details of staff and headquarters are finalized. The Administration has recognized the value of placing the AFRICOM headquarters in the African continent, and plans are underway to find a suitable location. This arrangement would signal America's commitment to enhancing regional security, improve accessibility to the region, and promote cultural and working relationships with partners in the region. Moreover, the command would be better positioned to communicate concerns to the political leadership in Washington and provide more cogent advice to policymakers.

The U.S. should intervene militarily in Africa only where U.S. vital interests are threatened, but it should be prepared to quickly assist regional or international efforts to address instability, conflict, or humanitarian crises. Better information and planning resulting from an Africa command would decrease the likelihood of ill-advised or unsound operations. As the President said, "This new command will strengthen our security cooperation with Africa and create new opportunities to bolster the capabilities of our partners in Africa."¹³

U.S. interests in Africa extend beyond those normally considered strategic, and the President made clear that he sees the new command as having more than simply military responsibilities: "Africa command will enhance our efforts to bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa."¹⁴ Because of the complex nature of addressing U.S. concerns in Africa, AFRICOM should adopt and maintain a close working relationship with other U.S. government entities working in the region,

such as the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to ensure that regional strategies and efforts complement one another. According to news reports, AFRICOM will incorporate officials from other parts of the Administration, not just the Department of Defense, to reflect these broad concerns, including reserving the Deputy Commander position in AFRICOM for a State Department official.¹⁵

Conclusion. Most Americans view Africa as a region plagued by instability, poverty, and poor governance. Although accurate for portions of the continent, this picture is far from complete and fails to recognize the region's growing importance to U.S. national security and economic interests. Economic opportunities, instability, terrorist threats, and humanitarian disasters will likely be enduring concerns for America and prompt calls for U.S. intervention.

Africa is distinct from other regions in the nature and variety of its challenges. Creating an independent African command gives the region the focus and attention that it deserves as an increasingly important area for U.S. national and economic security. President Bush has demonstrated foresight in calling for an Africa command, and Congress should work to support the implementation of the restructuring of regional combatant commands and standing up AFRICOM.

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For additional information, please see:

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12. Sgt. Sara Wood, "Africa Command Will Consolidate U.S. Efforts on Continent," American Forces Press Service, February 7, 2007, at www.army.mil/news/2007/02/07/1736-africa-command-will-consolidate-us-efforts-on-continent.

13. Pauline Jelinek, "Pentagon to set up new command in Africa."

14. *Ibid.*

15. Jackie Northam, "Taking on the U.S. Military's Africa Command," National Public Radio, February 7, 2006, at www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7234997, and Vince Crawley, "Africa: US Creating New Africa Command to Coordinate Military Efforts," AllAfrica.com, February 7, 2007, at allafrica.com/stories/200702070072.html.

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