

CENSA-Notes

Africa Command: Security and Stability, not Oil or Confrontation

February 2007

by Derek Reveron

Derek S. Reveron is an associate professor at the U.S. Naval War College. His books include: *America's Viceroy: the Military and U.S. Foreign Policy* (2004) and *Flashpoints in the War on Terrorism* (2006). He can be reached at Derek.Reveron@nwc.navy.mil.

After several months of speculation, President Bush directed the Secretary of Defense on February 7 to establish a new military command for Africa “to strengthen our security cooperation with Africa and help to create new opportunities to bolster the capabilities of our partners in Africa.” With an establishment goal of September 2008, the next 18 months will be critical to crafting the command’s engagement strategy, locating the command in Africa, and staffing the command with personnel to deliver the kind of assistance to reduce conflict, improve security, and support crisis response. Some have interpreted the creation of this new command as recognition of the strategic importance of West African oil or as preparing for a future cold war with China, but the change is more about smoothing existing bureaucratic lines and focusing U.S. assistance to the 52 countries in Africa. The Defense Department sees that this newest geographic combatant command or COCOM will “integrate U.S. interagency efforts and assist diplomacy and development efforts.” While it may seem strange to create a military command to promote development, the military has been fulfilling an important role in diplomacy and conducting non-warfighting missions for decades.

As I explored in *America's Viceroy* (2004), it was General Anthony Zinni who maintained relations with countries in Central Asia long before Afghanistan became important to the United States after the 9/11 attacks. It was General Charles Wilhelm who assisted Bogotá’s efforts to stabilize Colombia. And it was Admiral William Crowe who created diplomatic opportunities throughout the Asia-Pacific region to promote U.S. interests. There are many more examples of military leaders proving they can broadly represent the United States, negotiate difficult treaties, and meet the challenges civilian leaders designate. With the shortcomings of the Washington, D.C.-based bureaucracies and limitations of other governments to respond to major security and development challenges, military leaders have a distinct advantage over their civilian counterparts. These officers are endowed with large planning staffs, solid command and control capabilities, and an infrastructure to move personnel, equipment, and supplies. I expect the first combatant commander of Africa Command to bring these resources and skills to promote security and to facilitate development in Africa.

While I witnessed how civil-military relations have been transformed when it comes to diplomacy, it has not resulted in rogue commanders, proconsuls, or even viceroys, as I suggested in my book’s title. The trendy term “proconsul” used to describe the power of military commanders is overstated and misleading. They are neither autonomous nor pose a threat to the center as the Roman proconsuls once did. The President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Congress ensure that military leaders act within U.S. law and promote U.S. interests. There should be no reason to fear American military activities or even suggest that there is a new Cold War in Africa between the United States and China as one European newspaper suggested. Rather, the creation of

Africa Command suggests that the United States is committed to its goal of championing human dignity and the Defense Department is serious about its efforts to improve its capabilities for stability, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR). It was only in 2005 that the Secretary of Defense directed the military to treat SSTR as seriously as major combat. The non-warfighting missions of Africa Command will be consistent with DOD Directive 3000.5 that requires the military services to produce capabilities “to provide the local populace with security, restore essential service, and meet humanitarian needs.” While it is trendy to assign blame to “other elements of national power” for reconstruction shortcomings in Iraq, stability operations are a core mission for the U.S. military now and its ability to respond to the operating environment in Africa will be a test for military services postured for major combat.

The U.S. military is a proven contributor to foreign policy and is a perennial favorite of Congress to secure the resources necessary to promote security and stability in Africa. While the boundaries will be finalized in the next iteration of the Unified Command Plan, Africa Command will become the sixth geographic combatant command. It appears the command will encompass the entire continent minus Egypt, which will likely shift to Central Command. Its initial location will take advantage of existing infrastructure in Germany, but the goal is to move the command to Africa. The question of where will be debated during the next 18 months, but good candidates include Addis Ababa to co-locate it with the African Union headquarters, Djibouti to benefit from existing infrastructure at Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, or even in Ghana to be near the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center. Since the United States does not have a colonial legacy in Africa and generally has favorable relationships there, U.S. presence will likely be warmly welcomed. Several countries to include Morocco have already extended an invitation to host the headquarters and it’s likely many more will offer. Given the enormous size of Africa (three times the area of the continental United States) and its diversity (52 different countries), we should expect to see more than one major command to ensure that the United States works with individual countries and avoids one-size-fits-all approaches.

Ultimately, President Bush sees “Africa Command will enhance our efforts to help bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy and economic growth in Africa.” It is with these goals the command should be organized and the command should be evaluated. To be successful, the first commander must develop a sound theater strategy that recognizes the diverse security and development challenges, takes account of the historical and political differences of 52 countries, and develops innovative ways to work with non-governmental organizations, other governmental donors, African states, and regional organizations. If the command becomes overly focused on terrorism or fails to take account of African perspectives, then the President’s goal will not be met.

You may forward this email as you like provided that you send it in its entirety, attribute it to the Council for Emerging National Security Affairs (CENSA), and include our web address (www.censa.net). If you post it on a mailing list, please contact CENSA with the name, location, purpose, and number of recipients of the mailing list.

If you receive this as a forward and would like to be placed directly on our mailing lists, send email to query@censa.net. Include your name, address, and affiliation. For further information, contact Angela Sapp at angelasapp@censa.net.

About CENSA: The Council for Emerging National Security Affairs (CENSA) is a non-partisan, non-profit 501(c)(3) research organization established in 1999. Its membership is a diverse international group of public sector foreign policy specialists, military officers, private sector professionals, and accomplished academics. CENSA's mission is to contribute to the ongoing dialogue shaping national security policy through formal discussions, graduate level teaching programs, virtual collaboration, frequent publications, and high quality research programs. Please visit www.censa.net

