

## What “Right” Looks Like in the Interagency:

# *A Commander’s Perspective*

**by William “Kip” Ward**

Since the time of the Presidential announcement that the Department of Defense (DoD) was establishing the U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), touted as an interagency command with a mission, purpose, and composition unlike any previous military command, it has drawn a lot of attention. It is true that USAFRICOM is markedly different from other geographic combatant commands (COCOMs), such as U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) or U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). Rather than interagency, USAFRICOM might better be termed interagency-oriented because of its design charter that emphasized support to an integrated “3-D” approach of diplomacy, development, and defense activities. This approach recognizes that the efforts of the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the DoD are mutually supportive and complementary.

The design charter included key non-DoD members serving in leadership and advisory positions within the command to operationalize the concepts of diplomacy, development, and defense activities. Some functions that other non-DoD agencies provided were now leveraged through a robust, liaison network. The command’s initial organizational design and modifications over the past two years demonstrate how to effectively organize to achieve unified action across the U.S. government.

This article will present a brief introduction of how DoD built USAFRICOM to institutionalize interagency perspectives into its mission and activities. DoD has made progress, but there is still much to do, and further progress will require more robust resourcing of this unique COCOM. The article will then address five important functions of a cross-agency nature that are beyond the scope of current COCOMs.

### **Background**

DoD designed USAFRICOM to account for the unique strategic environment in Africa. The continent and its island nations face country-specific and transnational threats and challenges

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that span the full spectrum of irregular, asymmetric, and catastrophic challenges, such as government instability, failed and failing states, food insecurity, corruption, atrocities, terrorism, piracy, trafficking, disease, and expansive ungoverned spaces. However, Africa also offers tremendous opportunities for greater diplomatic, economic, and developmental relationships with the U.S. African leaders want African solutions to African problems, and it remains clear that any approach that portends a unilateral, military approach will not be well received.

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These challenges and opportunities are very broad and inherently long-term in nature and, thus, not conducive to traditional military solutions. So the initial concepts of the command included a greater orientation toward interagency perspectives. Before USAFRICOM, interagency structures and linkages within COCOMs were ad hoc and tended to focus on specific matters, such as USSOUTHCOM's Joint Interagency Task Force-South's counterdrug focus. This specific-focus approach would not have been an effective model to further U.S. interests in Africa, as nearly all COCOM activities there have cross-agency involvement or implications. DoD had to institutionalize the interagency orientation for USAFRICOM.

USAFRICOM's mission focuses primarily on building partner security capacity in order for partners to provide for their own internal and external security issues. To provide this

capacity, the command adopted a functional organizational design that fostered security force assistance activities. The design called for a blend of civilian expertise integral to the staff to foster longer-term relationships and sustain continuity of effort. Using civilian expertise mitigates the inherent turbulence of military rotations. Civilian experts include senior officers from State and USAID, as well as a senior Foreign Service officer who serves as the civilian deputy to the commander. Additional personnel from other U.S. government agencies are integrated throughout the staff.

The enhanced information sharing and collaboration brought about by this structure is a step forward toward institutionalizing interagency-orientation within the DoD. The interagency staff members offer non-DoD perspectives, ideally during the initial planning stages of activities, and foster a climate conducive to looking at Africa's security from a holistic perspective. The combination of diplomacy, development, and defense activities provide a unique opportunity to maximize effectiveness and efficiency.

In terms of overall mission and activities, USAFRICOM must still possess the inherent capabilities of a COCOM for the full spectrum and range of military operations. It does not plan, direct, or control the activities of any other agency. Rather, it informs and coordinates its efforts with the diplomatic and developmental efforts, while developing feasible, supportable, and executable military activities. The command exercises control only over DoD programs and activities and serves in a traditional support and advisory role to other agencies, especially U.S. embassy country teams. This is in keeping with approaches in other COCOMs. Striking this balance is necessary, as DoD does not empower the command to take a leading position in matters of policy and development. Instead, as USAFRICOM formed and matured, the command saw that many of these functions

are appropriately integrated at the national level through enhanced interagency processes with inherent ability to decide and direct the diplomacy, development, and defense activities.

At the same time, the command learned many lessons in developing an interagency orientation at the COCOM level. The remainder of this article will present these lessons along with five broad areas where opportunities exist to further the institutionalization of interagency-oriented approaches.

## **Integration**

Reflecting on my time in Sarajevo and working with Jim Locher (one of the authors of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols legislation) as we worked the new security reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there was a clear distinction between having joint structures and culturally embracing jointness. For the DoD, the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols legislation introduced the structures, but it was only the beginning of the process of achieving jointness. One factor that ultimately facilitated the associated cultural changes was placing the joint structures—the Joint Staff, the COCOMs, and the joint supporting elements—at the top level of the defense hierarchy. Generations of joint leaders asserted greater authority in charting the overall direction of the U.S. military, and over time, the added value of integration became apparent to the point where many of today’s service members no longer question it.

At the time of concept development for a new COCOM for Africa in 2006, there was increasing interest in pursuing a similar institutionalized path for interagency integration. Operationalizing that concept was one of several major tasks for the Implementation Planning Team, an interagency group chartered to develop the plan for establishing the command. Meanwhile, USAFRICOM’s establishment attracted the attention of groups, such as Jim Locher’s Project on National Security Reform,

who were interested in seeing the development of true interagency structures and saw USAFRICOM as an opportunity and a test case. As a result, speculation and rumors grew about the details of the command’s interagency make-up, including postulations for up to 25 percent non-DoD civilians within the structure. Other estimates publicly discussed ranged from 20 to 100 personnel.

Unfortunately, too many latched on to the numbers as the measure of interagency orientation rather than the added value to the COCOM’s planning and activities. Certainly, the larger estimates of interagency staffing were infeasible, as few other departments had the resources to provide a robust presence. Instead, each agency had to be engaged deliberately in order to sell the concept, determine the levels of staffing the agency could absorb, and decide on the functions the staff would perform. This last point cannot be overstated—U.S. government

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agencies other than the DoD are strapped for personnel and simply cannot afford to provide large numbers of its members outside the agency. The military is a manpower-intensive organization compared to other federal agencies. In terms of U.S. employees, DoD is about 100 times larger than the State Department and more than 1,000 times larger than USAID.

On the other hand, the integration of members of other agencies within the staff versus having them serve merely in liaison

roles presented a step forward. The inclusion of these interagency members in operational and planning teams brought important perspectives on how to nest the command's military activities more effectively with the efforts of other agencies, particularly in civil-military activities. USAFRICOM cultivated relationships with partner agencies, which increased the willingness of these agencies to provide personnel. From the agencies' perspective, the downside of forfeiting a highly-skilled worker for extended periods of time was offset by their ongoing relationship with USAFRICOM. Some agencies were able to permanently assign personnel immediately, while others could only send personnel on a

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temporary basis for limited periods until they were comfortable with a more formal and enduring arrangement. In the end, USAFRICOM sustained between 20–30 interagency members from 7–10 non-DoD agencies during its first three years of existence. An additional 8–10 temporary-duty members were routinely in the headquarters representing another 2–5 agencies during this period.

The limits on resources available to other agencies will continue to constrain them in the near term. To ensure these agencies continue to provide personnel to USAFRICOM, they must be satisfied that providing personnel does not just add value to the USAFRICOM effort, but

also adds to their value as agencies. In some cases, this means that roles and responsibilities of non-DoD personnel will evolve over time, and the set of participating agencies may grow or shrink. Absent true institutionalization and adequate provision of such staffing at the agency level, the levels of interagency-orientation at USAFRICOM, much less other COCOMs, will likely remain more ad hoc than hoped.

## **Strategic Communication**

Strategic communication remains a serious weakness of the U.S. government. The explosion of media forums, technology innovations, the news cycle, and the cyber world have created an environment where messaging, regardless of purpose, has become considerably more complex. As a result, the U.S. government often fails to set the strategic dialogue at the speed of the information environment and to be sufficiently informed for all government institutions to send clear, synchronized, integrated, and timely messages. The U.S. government is wedded to an analog process in a digital age, which usually finds it reactively versus proactively focused. The interagency processes to develop, vet, and decide policy and messages is not keeping pace with this cycle. Likewise, the government has a tendency to over-communicate, react to every event, and create issues when none exist. Adversaries and competitors exploit weakness in this area because they can quickly and efficiently vet and release their narratives or messages, thus beating the U.S. inside the information cycle.

After 9/11, the DoD sought to establish a strategic communication capability in the context of defining what many called the War on Terrorism. This capability was analogous to the Cold War-era U.S. Information Agency (USIA), but the initiative was widely rejected for fear it might restrict the media and become a propaganda tool.

Regardless, the lack of narrative is itself a

major challenge. A narrative is an expression of the U.S.'s identity, history, role in the world, and future. While one may assume that policy statements expressed at the highest levels of the Executive should suffice, such policy statements should be rationally derivable from the narrative. So too would all other communications. A narrative internalized across the government would reduce the need to explicitly synchronize messages. It would amplify precisely those values and messages upon which all Americans agree, regardless of whom they vote for or how they pray. The former USIA was adept at remaining apolitical as it communicated America to the world, and U.S. military members pride themselves for staying out of party politics and representing Americans from all backgrounds and walks of life.

One might look back to the “simpler” days of the Cold War and claim today’s complex environment makes developing such a narrative impossible. This is untrue. Instead, the U.S. must double its efforts in this area. Much of the narrative from the Cold War that expressed America’s values and beliefs in freedom still applies. Developing that narrative and applying it must be an interagency effort, whether led by a new USIA-like agency or not.

Each agency should embrace and apply that narrative in its own way, but it should remain synchronized at every echelon. COCOMs, such as USAFRICOM, should continue to collaborate and harmonize specific themes and messages with its partners at State, country teams in Africa, DoD and the Joint Staff, and appropriate State Department regional and functional bureaus. Providing a national narrative would eliminate the difficult process of generating the message and give this process a solid head start.

## **Contributing to Policy Development**

Policy development is a vital process that is by nature complex and difficult. Discussions

on improving the interagency process normally focus on the government’s problems of framing timely, understandable, strategic policy; developing executable directives and decisions; and managing and prioritizing resources. Having coherent, flexible, and adaptable strategic policies should drive well-reasoned and appropriate diplomacy, development, and defense activities supported by appropriate resources. Because of its many influences on international players, one of the unique challenges of policy development is its iterative; multi-tiered; and, in some cases, “stove-piped” processes that rely heavily on stakeholder perceptions. The process is not perfect, and sometimes it fails to address important regional matters with timely national policy decisions. This failure can lead to missed opportunities to influence or support partners or leverage fleeting situations. A second significant challenge ensues when a policy decision is

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not sufficiently supported with resources for effective implementation.

One of the early discussions within the command was how to help mitigate these challenges. In declaring USAFRICOM an interagency-oriented command, the premise was that integrating multiple U.S. government agencies into the command would result in greater collaboration. Building consensus quickly could lead to an accelerated policy

decision-making effort. This fusion of effort would strengthen the case for quick decisions and providing necessary resources, as much of the analysis and deliberate planning would theoretically have already been done.

While these ideas were attractive, they also generated a considerable amount of criticism and concern about loss of control, decentralized decision making, and undue influence on the application of resources. USAFRICOM's formation occurred during a period of DoD resource supremacy (contributed in part by operations in Iraq and Afghanistan) and concerns over the "militarization of foreign policy," a theme the command continues to confront. From the beginning, the command reassured U.S. government partners that it played strictly a supporting role to the established

a national-level challenge.

## Resourcing

Unquestionably, the distribution of resources among U.S. government agencies has been a topic of serious discussion in recent years. Secretary of Defense Gates has testified to Congress and made numerous public statements decrying the imbalance of resources that disfavor agencies doing diplomatic and developmental work overseas. Also, there is limited flexibility in the process of building new programs to address partner security force assistance requirements that arise within the normal budgeting cycle, such as when policy decisions are made that allow the U.S. government to immediately engage with a new partner.

Today's strategic environment includes threats to stability and security that cannot be addressed by defense means alone. Often, turning requirements into security assistance programs in Africa requires considering options that combine defense (Title 10) and non-defense (Title 22) appropriations. Rarely are these arrangements sustainable over time. For example, the at-sea training platform, Africa Partnership Station, USAFRICOM's first major security assistance program, involved the cobbling of over a dozen different funding sources from Titles 10 and 22 to resource its first three years of missions. This process made administering the program a challenge until it was established as a program of record in 2010. This strict compartmentalization of funding sources can impede unity of effort, especially since much of the Title 22 budget tends to be earmarked for very specific purposes by Congress. The answer is not to call for changes to the legal differentiation between Title 10 and Title 22, which exists for important historic reasons regarding the separation of military and non-military matters. Rather, other U.S. government agencies need both adequate

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policymaking processes and fully respected the authorities vested in other agencies. Since 2007, the command has maintained it has no policy development role; however, it does see a role in advising and helping to inform policy when appropriate through the Secretary of Defense, who does have a deliberate role in the formulation of policy.

At the COCOM level, USAFRICOM has worked to ensure the process is better informed, so the best and most timely decisions can be made. Collaboration has been good among USAFRICOM, U.S. embassies and country teams in Africa, and the Africa bureaus of other agencies. However, the overall prioritization and timeliness of African-related policy decisions is

resources and increased flexibility and versatility to turn short-fused opportunities into potentially long-term and successful programs that when combined with DoD efforts represents a holistic approach to security among U.S. partners.

The U.S. government must recognize how its internal processes affect its ability to support partner nations seeking security force assistance. When requirements are given that involve the services of both DoD Title 10 and State Department Title 22 programs, the barriers between those sources become all too visible to U.S. partners. Federal bureaucracy can cause U.S. agencies to appear unresponsive and unsympathetic, sometimes even pit one agency against another or cause an agency to try to convince a partner to adjust its requirements for the agency's convenience. Greater unity of effort should encourage better communications with partners and shield them from overexposure to internal program development processes. U.S. agencies can then build greater trust and confidence in their ability to deliver security assistance.

Resource management oversight, however, should remain at agency or interagency level. Prioritization, flexibility, and the level of decision-making are the main concerns. As an example, USAFRICOM's only sustained troop presence in Africa is the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. Its mission is to counter violent extremism by helping build partner capacity in the ten countries of the Horn of Africa. For other activities, USAFRICOM often requests forces assigned to other COCOMs. As forces must be globally available, the command must balance gaining reliable access to the required forces and capabilities to meet the mission against the competing demands of the commander who has command and control of those forces on a day-to-day basis. Commands without assigned forces tend not to gain the required capability based on competing priorities. This inequity in

the system degrades the ability of the command to meet its objectives, especially in flexible, timely ways.

The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) under USAID is a good example of how things can and should be done. OFDA personnel are assigned to a particular location but are always globally available whenever a major disaster strikes and U.S. policy decisions direct assistance. OFDA personnel at USAFRICOM have participated in disaster response activities in the Republic of Georgia and Haiti.

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## Geography

A common theme in discussions of broader interagency integration is the desire to standardize how U.S. government agencies geographically subdivide responsibilities for their programs and activities outside the U.S. For example, the State Department established an African Affairs Bureau that addresses sub-Saharan issues, while the north African nations and the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East were included in the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau. On the other hand, USAFRICOM addresses DoD issues for all African nations (including Egypt for matters pertaining to the African continent). Hence, USAFRICOM works with two regional bureaus at State, one of which has priorities elsewhere. Meanwhile, all the other U.S. government agencies divide their global responsibilities differently, raising the question of whether or

not the plethora of mismatched boundaries adds unnecessary complexity to interagency efforts.

The answer is, no. Agencies should inculcate a culture that avoids preoccupation with seams. The DoD has been moving in this direction for some time. For example, the level of coordination between U.S. Central Command and USAFRICOM in addressing security issues between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula has been outstanding. Cultivating close relationships with both the African and Near Eastern Bureaus allowed USAFRICOM to develop and enhance counterterrorism programs and activities involving both Maghreb and Sahel nations at the diplomatic and defense levels. Programs and activities involving all Mediterranean countries, including those aligned with USAFRICOM, USCENTCOM, and USEUCOM, have continued uninterrupted.

A particularly useful vignette surrounds the question of Egypt at the time of USAFRICOM's founding. A healthy debate ensued as to whether Egypt should be aligned with USCENTCOM or USAFRICOM, and there were great concerns over the second- and third-order effects of the decision with respect to the COCOM. The concerns were unfounded. After the decision was made to align Egypt with USCENTCOM, early contacts with the Egyptians led to a simple solution that all parties were comfortable with. Egypt would address Middle Eastern interests with USCENTCOM and African interests with USAFRICOM. The seam melted away quietly.

### **A Step in the Right Direction**

As with Goldwater-Nichols' impact on jointness, interagency integration is about how disparate agencies work together to accomplish their respective missions under unity of effort. The interagency-oriented approach of USAFRICOM was a step in the right direction, helping to meet the defense needs of African partners in ways better informed by the efforts of other U.S. government agencies. It also highlighted some opportunities at the national level that if leveraged can bring this interagency orientation more broadly across the government and improve U.S. responsiveness to the needs of its partners. **IAJ**