

Building Interagency Capabilities at *U.S. Africa Command*

by Steven J. Olson and David A. Anderson

Introduction

The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) is a unique entity. It has been referred to by some Department of Defense (DoD) officials as a combatant command “plus.” Unlike other geographic combatant commands, AFRICOM focuses on building partner-nation security capacity with a priority on par with combat operations. According to its website, AFRICOM’s mission is:

In concert with other U.S. government agencies and international partners, conducts sustained security engagement through military-to-military programs, military sponsored activities, and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy.

In order to promote interagency cooperation and integration, AFRICOM has a complement of non-DoD staff from various U.S. government agencies, notably the Department of State, with Ambassador J. Anthony Holmes as the Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Activities and Raymond L. Brown as the commander’s Foreign Policy Advisor. The command structure of AFRICOM conforms to the 2008 National Defense Strategy, the 2010 National Security Strategy, and the FY 2007-2010 State Department Strategic plan, all of which stress a whole-of-government approach.¹ General William “Kip” Ward, the former Commander of AFRICOM, views the DoD role in Africa as:

...part of a “three-pronged” U.S. government approach, with DoD through AFRICOM, taking the lead on security issues, but playing a *supporting* role to the

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Department of State, which conducts diplomacy, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which implements development programs.²

General Ward's view, as well as AFRICOM's mission, firmly places DoD as a single element within the whole-of-government approach that supports the State Department's lead in U.S. foreign policy.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has advocated the three-pronged method in what she terms a "smart approach" to foreign policy. In the Nov/Dec 2010 issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, she reiterates her belief that the State Department (diplomacy) and USAID (development) must take leading roles in the whole-of-government effort. In the State/USAID strategic plan for fiscal years 2007-2012, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice saw the need for incorporating the military in diplomatic activities, placing the military in the lead for security when needed, and participating in interagency planning. Both Secretary Clinton and former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates have stated the necessity of DoD integrating with the State Department and USAID, yet both maintain that the leadership of interagency efforts and direction of diplomacy is the responsibility of the State Department.³ In other words, AFRICOM does not have the authority to act within an African nation (or any nation) without approval of the U.S. ambassador or chief of mission in that country.

Theresa Whelan, Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, speaking before a panel of the Foreign and Defense Policy Studies at The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research also said of AFRICOM:

The creation of U.S. Africa Command does not in any way subordinate U.S. ambassadors to the command, or the DoD, or put

the command in any position to be able to dictate to those ambassadors what they will or will not do. The command, just like European Command today, Central Command today, Pacific Command today... will continue to be a supporting effort to those ambassadors in regards to peacetime mil-to-mil relations with the countries in which those ambassadors serve. The second piece of that, of course, is foreign policy will continue to be executed through and led by the Department of State. Again, one of the things we've been accused of is militarizing U.S. foreign policy by the creation of this command: that this command will essentially dominate U.S. foreign policy on the continent. The opposite is actually true. If you look at the focus of U.S. policy toward Africa in the last five to seven years,

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the bulk of our efforts on the continent are focused in non-security areas.⁴

Ms. Whelan and AFRICOM officials have continued to make similar statements reiterating the command's role in U.S. foreign policy.

Criticism and concerns persist among African states, in spite of the numerous clarifications addressing the role of AFRICOM in supporting and not leading U.S. foreign policy. Many African states, as well as states outside Africa, believe that AFRICOM is merely a means for the U.S. to establish a military presence on the African continent to promote its own interests with little regard for African

states. Three issues exacerbate this perception of AFRICOM:

- Mission statement confusion/evolution and ongoing military activities.
- Insufficient interagency staffing or integration.
- Lack of interagency integration in planning processes.

If left unaddressed, these issues will significantly hinder the command's effectiveness and intensify the perception of the militarization of U.S. foreign policy in Africa.

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Mission Statement Evolution and Military Activities

The evolution of the AFRICOM mission statement between 2007 and 2008 took the command from a point of emphasizing the whole-of-government approach to focusing on more traditional military activities. When first announced, the draft mission statement read as follows:

U.S. Africa Command promotes U.S. National Security objectives by working with African states and regional organizations to help strengthen stability and security in the area of responsibility. U.S. Africa Command leads the in-theater DoD response to support other U.S. government agencies in

implementing U.S. government security policies and strategies. In concert with other U.S. government agencies and other international partners, U.S. Africa Command conducts theater security cooperation activities to assist in building security capacity and improve accountable governance. As directed, U.S. Africa Command conducts military operations to deter aggression and respond to crises.⁵

The wording implied that AFRICOM would be leading efforts in Africa. Terms such as “combatant command” seemed to emphasize a war-fighting role, and Africa “command” led Africans to believe that the U.S. was looking to command Africans. The wording confused even officials within the State Department. As such, they had difficulty in responding to African concerns regarding the intent of AFRICOM.⁶ In much the same way, the draft AFRICOM mission statement conjured concerns and confusion; high-profile military activities on the continent reinforced the impression of many Africans that the U.S. military was to lead U.S. efforts in Africa. For example, when AFRICOM became an independent unified command on October 1, 2008, it inherited over 100 activities that had previously been under the direction of three separate combatant commands.⁷ The two most prominent and high-profile activities are Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, which is the U.S. effort to combat piracy and terrorism in East Africa, and the African Partnership Station (APS), which trains partner nations on maritime law and security. Although each program has extensive involvement from the State Department and the interagency as a whole, because they are primarily security-based operations they are viewed as U.S. military activities independent of diplomacy and development.

State Department and USAID personnel as well as some U.S. congressional representatives have also expressed concerns that AFRICOM's

non-military activities are indeed blurring the lines between defense, development, and diplomacy. For example, Representative John Tierney stated, “If we’re going to have an integrated approach, why is the United States leading with the Department of Defense in charge as opposed to leading with diplomacy... why are we leading with our fists...?”⁸ Finally, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have expressed concerns that AFRICOM will use humanitarian aid as a means to promote its own goals and interests further militarizing activities on the continent. As such, NGOs feel that they will be put in danger if their efforts are perceived to be associated with military efforts.⁹

Interagency Staffing and Integration

By October 1, 2008, AFRICOM had only thirteen staff and leadership positions filled.¹⁰ Agencies represented included the State Department; USAID; Departments of Homeland Security, Treasury, and Commerce; and Director for National Intelligence. The most notable leadership position was the Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Activities (DCMA). The DCMA is responsible for many civil-military programs, some security cooperation initiatives, initiatives that support U.S. foreign policy, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response.¹¹

AFRICOM would like to add non-DoD civilian senior leadership positions, senior advisor positions, and subject matter experts to its command structure and has taken steps to identify these needs, as well as how to best integrate them. However, it has yet to determine to what extent is necessary. On a positive note, U.S. government agencies are sending personnel to AFRICOM on a temporary basis to better understand the command in order to assist in identifying proper staffing and integration requirements. In the past, DoD requested State Department input only after the positions had been established.¹²

As of June 2010 the interagency representation on the AFRICOM staff has grown to 27 personnel, which constitutes merely 2 percent of the headquarters overall staff.¹³ AFRICOM has reported that it plans to integrate an additional five State Department foreign policy advisors, and that it has signed memorandums of understanding with nine federal agencies to incorporate additional personnel.¹⁴ The command currently would like to include as many as 52 interagency positions

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within the command structure beyond those traditionally assigned to combatant commands.¹⁵

In addition to problems creating appropriate staff positions, AFRICOM has had difficulty staffing its headquarters with already authorized personnel. Reasons for this include the lack of perceived career enhancement of an AFRICOM assignment, incompatible personnel systems, and a shortage of interagency talent. Furthermore, a recent interagency survey highlighted interagency personnel dissatisfaction with their roles/contributions and the military culture within AFRICOM, likely making assignments with AFRICOM even less desirable.¹⁶

Embedded interagency staff members have stated that there is little incentive to take a position at AFRICOM because it will not enhance their careers upon return to their parent agencies.¹⁷ AFRICOM positions are outside the normal career path for many interagency personnel assigned there. Exacerbating the career enhancement issue are the personnel systems within interagency organizations.

Many of the systems do not recognize the interagency positions within AFRICOM outside of traditional, liaison positions. As a result, assignments are not seen as developmental. Additionally, the personnel systems do not recognize these non-standard positions and fail to fund them.¹⁸ However, the most significant issue is the shortage of available talent, particularly from the State Department.

When planning for the level of interagency participation, AFRICOM failed to take into account the shortfalls within the very agencies it expected to draw from. In 2009 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that according to State officials “they would not likely be able to provide active employees to fill the positions requested by AFRICOM because they were already facing a 25 percent shortfall in mid-level personnel.”¹⁹ As noted above, AFRICOM is working to revise their interagency personnel requirements; however,

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shortfalls still exist. Prized personnel with desirable skill sets and experience needed by AFRICOM are often needed to fill other State Department assignments.²⁰

Congress has approved funding for 1,108 new foreign service and civil service officers and USAID is doubling its development staff by hiring 1,200 new foreign service officers.²¹ It remains to be seen if any of these new hires will be sent to work in interagency positions within AFRICOM and whether the command will be able to effectively integrate them into operations.

Integrated Interagency Planning

AFRICOM must do a better job including the interagency in its planning processes, not only with interagency personnel within the command, but also with the parent agencies themselves.

DoD’s 2010 *Quadrennial Defense Review* states that the department will continue to advocate for an improved interagency strategic planning process. However, several federal agency officials said that AFRICOM tends to plan activities first and then engage partners, rather than including interagency perspectives during the initial planning efforts.²²

Although AFRICOM has improved its inclusion of the interagency in planning, results have been mixed. Two examples of interagency planning, APS and Operation Natural Fire 10, provide a negative and positive example of the current state of affairs. APS did not include interagency planning, which caused unnecessary delays, confusion, and turmoil with the U.S. embassy in Ghana during a 2009 port visit by the *USS Nashville*. The ship arrived in port prepared to provide partnership training to the Ghana Navy unbeknownst to the embassy team. In other words, DoD efforts were underway without the chief of mission’s knowledge or approval. As a result, the embassy had to work with AFRICOM to create a new training plan because the scheduled training did not meet the needs of the Ghana Navy.²³ This situation could have been avoided if AFRICOM and APS had worked with the embassy team in the formative stages of the planning process.

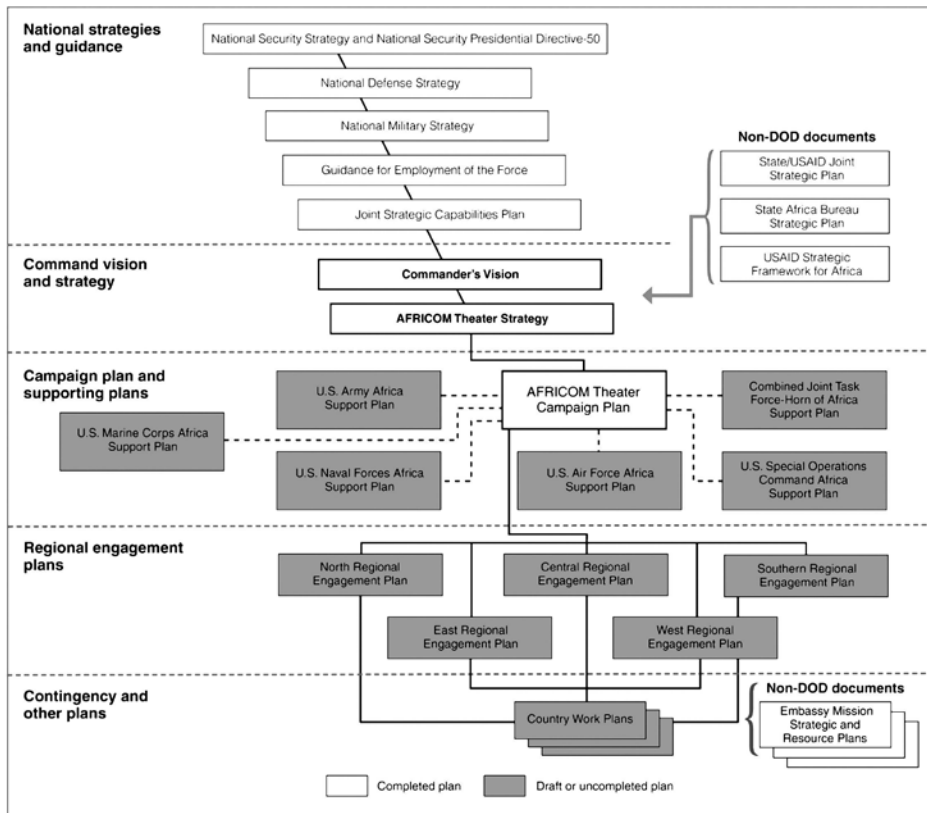
On the other hand, the 2009 Operation Natural Fire 10 exercise, a humanitarian and disaster relief exercise (influenza pandemic), in Uganda is considered a success. Prior to planning, DoD and USAID signed an interagency agreement to streamline collaboration in enhancing African military capacity to respond to an influenza pandemic. USAID was included in all stages of

planning along with the Uganda embassy team. The exercise was considered a success because it had a long-term focus and was conducted more like a USAID than a DoD operation.²⁴

Government Accountability Office (GAO) report 10-794 released July 28, 2010, noted that although AFRICOM has established a comprehensive strategy, many of the supporting plans remain unfinished (see Figure 1). U.S. Africa Command completed its theater strategy and theater campaign plan in September 2008 and May 2009 respectively; however, supporting plans from the component commands, AFRICOM's regional engagement plans, and supporting country work plans remain incomplete or have not been approved. The GAO report goes on to say that many of the supporting plans were postponed for over two years.

Regional engagement plans and country work plans ensure the inclusion of the interagency in planning, and that planning supports U.S. diplomacy and development efforts. Regional plans support the theater campaign plan that includes regional planning guidance, a two-year calendar for security cooperation engagements, and the country work plans. The work plans are critical operational documents that provide unity of effort and include a list of detailed activities and a resource plan to accomplish objectives that support State Department goals. The lack of completed strategic guidance and supporting plans may also be a factor in the integration, staffing, and expertise issues surrounding the interagency component of the command.

According to the July 2011 GAO report, interagency participation within AFRICOM is also not well coordinated, leaving many personnel unsure of their roles or contributions. The report



Source: GAO presentation of DOD data.
 Note: State = Department of State; USAID = U.S. Agency for International Development.

Figure 1: AFRICOM Strategic Guidance and Plans

thus concludes: “By conducting activities without having specific plans in place to guide activity planning and implementation, AFRICOM risks not fully supporting its mission or objectives.” One USAID employee formerly embedded in AFRICOM expressed his frustration saying, “USAID-embedded officials have to ask how they can help the command.” Even though he believed, “military officials should be asking how AFRICOM can provide support to USAID.”

Because of its stark contrast to the more collaborative and informal nature of the interagency process, interagency personnel have also expressed dissatisfaction with AFRICOM’s hierarchical structure and decision-making process. Personnel feel they have to forcefully inject themselves into the planning and decision-making process.²⁵

Conclusion

AFRICOM is a unique organization that has been touted as a model for interagency and the whole-of-government approach in support of U.S. foreign policy. However, AFRICOM is not living up to expectations regarding interagency integration, staffing, and coordinated planning. This situation has led to persistent criticism that AFRICOM is militarizing U.S. foreign policy.

AFRICOM’s theater strategy and theater campaign plan have been completed with input from the State/USAID Joint Strategic Plan, State Africa Bureau Strategic Plan, and the USAID Strategic Plan for Africa; however, none of the subordinate plans are complete. This poses a fundamental problem, since the theater campaign plan only provides overarching guidance and is devoid of any detail on planning of subordinate efforts. The lack of completed plans adversely affects how subordinate commands support the theater campaign plan; how AFRICOM will interact in each African region and with each partner country; and ultimately, how AFRICOM will build its staff and supporting directorates.

Although there is no compulsory mandate for the interagency to provide personnel, agencies appear willing to assign professionals to AFRICOM for properly vetted positions. Steps are being taken to do just that, which should lead to interagency personnel system adjustments that facilitate/accommodate AFRICOM staffing. Part of the vetting process should be the concurrent development of career enhancement criteria for serving with AFRICOM and other combatant commands. Funding justification for these added personnel assignments will emerge naturally from the process. Finally, if the aforementioned issues are properly addressed, an AFRICOM culture will emerge that truly represents the whole-of-government aspirations of U.S. leaders and the perceptions of a militarized AFRICOM will fade away. **IAJ**

Notes

1 Whole-of-government approach is defined by U.S. Army Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations*, as “an approach that integrates the collaborative efforts of the departments and agencies of the United States Government to achieve unit of effort toward a shared goal.” Agencies must be willing to share resources to accomplish these efforts. Resources include but are not limited to financial, military, intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic, developmental, and strategic communications.

2 Lauren Ploch, “Africa Command: U.S. Strategic Interests and the Role of the U.S. Military in Africa,” *Congressional Research Service*, April 3, 2010, p. 5.

3 Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Leading Through Civilian Power, Redefining American Diplomacy and Development,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2010, p. 13.

- 4 “Africom,” Foreign and Defense Policy Studies at American Enterprise Institute, Podcast, September 21, 2007.
- 5 Ploch, p. 1.
- 6 John Pendleton, Director Defense Capabilities and Management, “Force Structure: Preliminary Observations on the Progress and Challenges Associated with Establishing the U.S. Africa Command,” Testimony Before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives, GAO-08-947T, Washington, D.C., July 15, 2008, p. 15.
- 7 Report to the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives, “Defense Management: Improved Planning, Training, and Interagency Collaboration Could Strengthen DOD’s Efforts in Africa,” GAO-10-794, Washington, D.C., July 2010, Highlights Page.
- 8 House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Key Leaders Discuss AFRICOM’s Lessons-Learned: Hearing on National Security and Interagency Collaboration,” 111th Congress, 2nd session, 2010, p. 12.
- 9 Report to the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives, “Defense Management Actions Needed to Address Stakeholder Concerns, Improve Interagency Collaboration, and Determine Full Costs Associated with the U.S. Africa Command,” GAO-09-181, February 2009, p. 14.
- 10 Ibid., p. 4.
- 11 Ploch, p. 9.
- 12 Ibid., p. 19.
- 13 GAO-10-794, p. 29.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 John H. Pendleton, Director Defense Capabilities and Management, “National Security: Interagency Collaboration Practices and Challenges at DOD’s Southern and Africa Commands,” Testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives, GAO-10-962T, Washington, D.C., July 28, 2010, p. 11.
- 16 GAO-10-794, pp. 36-37.
- 17 Ibid., p. 36.
- 18 Ibid, p. 13, AFRICOM has committed to paying the salaries for these positions.
- 19 GAO-10-794, p. 36.
- 20 GAO-08-947T, p. 13.
- 21 Clinton, p. 13.
- 22 GAO-10-794, pp. 31-32.
- 23 Ibid., p. 33.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid., p. 35.