Letter No. 1 to AFRICOM

Environmental Security and Engagement in Africa

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Relations between the United States and Africa reached a defining moment with the activation of Africa Command (AFRICOM). The poignant question concerns whether the relationship represented by this command will focus on American security priorities or a broader range of security issues important to both the United States and African nations. To meet the latter objective, the new command must emphasize one thing critical to African nations—the environment. To assist AFRICOM, this letter and the following three letters spell out a range of policy and environmental issues and advance recommendations that will allow the command to pursue these goals.

In October 2008, AFRICOM officially became a separate combatant command within the United States' Department of Defense (DOD). Even before the official activation, many African officials and other commentators greeted this new organization with questions and concerns about what they perceived as the militarization of American-African relations.[1] Formation of this command came in the wake of the 2003 American-led invasion of Iraq and the spread of the American-led global war on terrorism to the African continent. At the same time, it reawakened the historical memory of the military's role in Africa during the colonial era as well as the postcolonial military regimes. Creation of a new command, thus, was bound to raise concerns, even if merely a bureaucratic reorganization within the American structure.

Since the majority of African states attained independence in the 1960s, American involvement on the continent has ranged from supporting Cold War allies to an ever-increasing variety of post–Cold War interventions. In the 1990s, the US military intervened in Somalia, assisted Rwandan refugees in the postgenocide months, carried out evacuations of US embassies in times of crisis, and performed humanitarian operations such as those in flood-ravaged Mozambique and Tanzania. These post–Cold War activities tended to be planned reactively, without evidence of a coherent, thought-out American policy in Africa. The only enduring strands seemed to be minimal security-assistance programs,

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occasional training deployments, and small medical-, dental-, or veterinarian-assistance missions.

AFRICOM is now an independent organization searching to define a coherent, long-term mission. In this regard, stressing environmental security as its mission would increase the probability of success because it would benefit both the United States and African nations. The AFRICOM mission statement itself makes a clear call for involvement in this area:

> United States Africa Command, 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.[2]

This mission calls for "sustained" engagement with the goal of creating a "stable and secure African environment." Although this use of the term *environment* does not relate directly to the natural world, one must consider that for the security situation to be stable, the US military and its partners in Africa must consider the natural world and its importance to the African partners. Focusing on the environment would help both sides achieve policy objectives and nurture growing relationships. AFRICOM must, at one level, focus on the generalities of a growing US-Africa relationship. Usually, Africa should not be treated as a single entity. Each of the 53 nations on the continent must be regarded independently. However, common positions shared by most African nations are important because they constitute the basis for clear, understandable justifications for the general public without getting bogged down in nation-specific issues.

Environmental Security

AFRICOM can organize its relationship with the African continent around the idea of environmental security. This concept is still evolving in its meaning and practical application, but, in general, it addresses the relationship among the environment, national security, and conflict. Issues related to environmental security that would provide an inroad for AFRICOM range from the consideration of conflict caused by competition over scarce natural resources to the global question of climate change and its impact on stability and national security.

Discussions of environmental security do not always concern breakdown and ensuing conflict. Indeed, many people see a positive correlation among cooperating on environmental matters, increasing bilateral confidence, and enhancing the potential for peace (i.e., environmental peacemaking).[3] Perhaps best symbolizing this growing attention on the links between the environment and peace is the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya. This prize emphasized the contribution of a movement to producing conditions of democracy and easing conflict through reforestation. The movement recognizes that "peace on earth depends on our ability to secure our living environment."[4]

The potential of environmental security is very important for AFRICOM's relations with Africa. By adopting this as a guide to engagement with African nations, AFRICOM can generate a confluence of interests and positions in the United States and Africa. Environmental security creates a vortex for cooperation because of the criticality of the environment to African states, the majority of whose population depends directly on

the environment for life-sustaining essentials such as food, fuel, and drinking water. For example, over 57 percent of Africans are still employed in agriculture, with the percentages within individual countries varying widely from about 90 percent in Rwanda to only about 9 percent in South Africa.[5] Only by recognizing this criticality and integrating it with elements of US foreign policy can AFRICOM fulfill its mandate and truly help Africans find solutions to African problems.

American Justification for an Emphasis on Environmental Security

By employing environmental policy as a focus, AFRICOM would be in line with emerging American security policy, illustrated in a number of public statements from the US president on down. Environmental security is a relatively new, evolving concept and would not automatically find resonance with the American public. Thus, it is important for AFRICOM to fit the elements of environmental security and their application to relations with Africa within that public's general understanding of the evolving international security dilemma.

Since the end of the Cold War, the US government's primary focus on major armed aggression has been slowly evolving and expanding to include the consideration of homeland defense and emerging threats such as terrorism and cyber attack.[6] US policy documents are slowly catching up to this changing understanding, and environmental security is now in the policy lexicon and is considered important in policy considerations. However, these ideas are still emerging, and there is no common understanding of their meaning and application within the US government. Thus, AF-

RICOM has the unique opportunity to help define policy in this area.

The most recent US national security strategy, released in March 2006, discusses several areas closely related to environmental security. For example, the strategy describes conditions in Africa from the following perspective:

> Overcoming the challenges Africa faces requires partnership, not paternalism. Our strategy is to promote economic development and the expansion of effective, democratic governance so that African states can take the lead in addressing African challenges. . . . We are committed to working with African nations to strengthen their domestic capabilities.[7]

Further on, the document emphasizes two relevant environmental challenges emerging from globalization:

- Public health challenges like pandemics. . . that recognize no borders. . . .

- Environmental destruction, whether caused by human behavior or cataclysmic mega-disasters.[8]

The first quotation emphasizes the US goal of partnership with African nations in order to promote economic development and address African challenges. The following two globalization challenges are very closely tied to the environment. Public health and the spread of disease are symptomatic of environmental conditions and are of particular concern in the mushrooming urban areas of Africa. Disaster relief provided by the US military has often met the problem of environmental destruction in the past. One of AFRICOM's challenges in this area is to turn its focus from "putting out fires" to building long-term partnerships which address the issues that provoke the fires.

This national security strategy originates with the past administration, but it

remains the official strategy until a new one comes out in 2010. However, when the Obama administration releases a new strategy, it will assuredly contain similar, if not stronger, statements dealing with US-African relationships and the environment. These policy themes currently in effect are fairly general and only set the stage for the rest of the government. With a sense of purpose and direction, AFRICOM can meaningfully bridge the gap between the general policy of 2006 and the emerging polices of a new administration in regard to environmental security.

Below the White House's strategy comes the DOD's attempt to translate the national security strategy into a strategy for the military. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates's national defense strategy, issued in June 2008, emphasized issues similar to those in the national security strategy, but in a context closer to the military:

> Over the next twenty years *physical pressures*—population, resource, energy, *climatic* and *environmental*—could combine with rapid social, cultural, technological and geopolitical change to create greater uncertainty. . . .

> Whenever possible, the Department will position itself both to respond to and *reduce uncertainty*. This means we must continue to improve our understanding of trends, their interaction, and the range of risks the Department may be called upon to respond to or manage. We should act to reduce risks by *shaping the development of trends* through the decisions we make regarding the equipment and capabilities we develop and the security cooperation, reassurance, dissuasion, deterrence, and operational activities we pursue.[9] (emphasis added)

In this document, Gates sees the pressures closely related to the environment and the sustainable use of its resources. He would like to position the DOD in a proactive position of shaping trends in order to avoid the riskier, potentially more expensive, and less effective method of reacting to those trends. The secretary does not specifically refer to Africa here, but this does leave AFRICOM the possibility of orienting the mission around Gates's concerns.

A refinement of Secretary Gates's position can be seen in Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 3000.05, which discusses stability operations. This instruction places stability operations on par with combat operations as a core US military mission with the goal of establishing order—often with indigenous forces—that advances US interests and values. These operations "may range from small-scale, short-duration to large-scale, long-duration" with the goal to "establish civil security and civil control, restore essential services, repair and protect critical infrastructure, and deliver humanitarian assistance until such time as it is feasible to transition lead responsibility" to another American or foreign agency.[10] DODI 3000.05 helps to bring the strategy discussion down to the operational level and encourages the military to reorient its focus from purely traditional combat operations to a wider variety of tasks to proactively prevent armed conflict. The significance of this directive to AFRICOM is that a stability operation, which could include environmental security, is a valid type of military operation that the new command could adopt as its primary focus.

These three important documents, which call for sustained engagement with African countries with an emphasis on environmental issues, can help guide development of the US-African relationship through AFRICOM. Although this stress may change with President Obama's administration, all indications suggest that his interest in multilateral options and engagement with other nations will tend to make

any subsequent documents even more emphatically in favor of environmental security. The American emphasis on environmental security, however, is only half of the equation; the other half concerns the views of potential African partners.

Engaging an African Perspective

The evolving mission of AFRICOM must be able to justify American policies by seeing them from another perspective—that of potential partners in Africa. As mentioned previously, the specifics of bilateral and regional relationships are important, but it is equally critical to understand some of the general, publicly articulated continental views. The latter bolster an American environmental security strategy by showing the confluence of interests and positions in which all partners, American and African, can gain. In the evolving post–Cold War security landscape, African countries themselves often emphasize the importance of the environment within many of the programs of international organizations. Examples from the United Nations (UN) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) follow. Similar themes emerge within the goals of other continental organizations or regional groupings such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the Southern African Development Community (SADC).[11]

At the global level, under the umbrella of the UN, all nations of the world have formulated and endorsed the eight general UN millennium development goals. The UN bills this as a blueprint for action to be completed by 2015. Of significance here, African nations have pledged to work in cooperation with others in order to, inter alia,

- eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,

- reduce child mortality,

- combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, and

- ensure environmental sustainability.[12]

All of these goals have clear environmental connections to and implications for Africa. In rural areas, poverty and hunger usually relate closely to farming practices and use of the land, while in urban areas, poverty and hunger are generally concentrated in the expanding shanty towns with little infrastructure and few services. However, urban poverty and hunger stretch to the surrounding rural areas due to urban use of rural resources such as firewood and frequent travel back to families outside the cities. Environmental dangers such as unhealthy living conditions, malnutrition, and climatic conditions contribute to high child mortality, while diseases such as malaria and, to a lesser extent, AIDS tend to be associated with environmental conditions.

The UN has further defined the fourth millennium development goal of achieving environmental sustainability by listing four targets by which to measure progress:

Target 1: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes [*sic*] and reverse the loss of environmental resources

Target 2: Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss

Target 3: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

Target 4: By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers[13]

Although the first goal will tend to be a prerogative of the national governments, AFRICOM could easily contribute to the attempts of African states to meet the other three objectives. The key here is that AFRICOM personnel must be willing to consider the goals of their African partners in setting up programs and be willing to devote themselves to these programs over the long term.

Moving from the global to the continental level, one can see an additional African perspective by looking at the NEPAD, an African initiative. This partnership, which has the general goal of reducing poverty and underdevelopment on the continent, states its four primary objectives as follows: "to eradicate poverty; to place African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development; to halt the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process and enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy; [and] to accelerate the empowerment of women."[14]

The first two objectives of eradicating poverty (as in the UN program, above) and encouraging sustainable growth call for addressing environmental issues, especially given the large proportion of the African population dependent on the environment. Historically, African countries have been producers of primary resources rather than manufactured products. Globalization has reinforced this tendency, putting a large strain on the environment, whether through agricultural monocropping, unregulated production in mines, or the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources such as fisheries and forests. Lastly, female empowerment and the environment also are tightly intertwined since women tend to be farmers or family breadwinners and thus are hostage to agricultural production. The 2004 Nobel

Peace Prize awarded to Wangari Maathai is significant in this regard since it connects empowerment, environment, and women's position of supporting their families.

These first two examples of the millennium development goals and NEPAD illustrate the positions of African national governments, which cover the political spectrum ranging from functioning, multiparty democracies to totalitarian states. Ideologically, the United States prefers to cooperate with democracies, but the American military often works with nations from across the spectrum. As such, it is important for the United States to consider the opinions of the African people themselves. American engagement with less-than-free nations can still bear fruit for American policies when the United States is pursuing not only the goals that the government supports, but also goals that the African people tend to find admirable.

One can identify the opinions of the African populations in many ways, such as examining the press, statements by African nongovernmental organizations, or positions of religious groups. However, if one wishes to see which issues African publics tend to consider important, the *Afrobarometer* provides insight. This series of public opinion polls, taken in a number of African countries since 2000, illustrates that the environment is important to the public—*not just the African governments* in international forums. The majority of African people responding to these polls see unemployment as the main problem in Africa. Health comes next in priority, followed by the fast-rising problems of poverty and hunger with the parallel problem of food security.[15] In the rural areas, as discussed above, unemployment, poverty, hunger, and food security are all intimately connected with the health and sustainability

of the environment since the majority of these rural residents are subsistence farmers. Rural unemployment often means that subsistence farming must be accompanied by family members holding jobs to earn cash—often connecting rural to urban areas.

Intersection of American Justification and the African Perspective

AFRICOM can use knowledge of the priorities of African leaders *and* African populations to help adjust its engagement programs. As the command evolves, it can get the most mileage out of its engagement dollars by investing wisely to solve African problems that not only are important to the people locally, but also further American democratic interests on the continent. The question then is, how can AFRICOM effectively marry the importance of environmental security as voiced in American strategy documents with the African perspective on the area's problems? The answer lies in two important areas—true interagency operations and devotion to a public diplomacy effort. On the one hand, AFRICOM must have the right mix of American experts who can effectively relate to their African partners and problems. It is crucial to show that the relationship is not purely a military venture. On the other hand, the command needs to work on a two-way communication process with African partners in order to truly understand how African governments *and* the continent's people perceive AFRICOM's actions. It then must be willing and able to adjust its programs, based on this feedback.

Since the first proposals to establish AFRICOM, the DOD has been looking at a "command plus" structure, incorporating a wide range of interagency players along with military personnel. In trying to do this, AFRICOM has experienced only a degree of success—partly due to budgetary problems and partly due to the reactions of potential interagency partners.[16] However, AFRICOM needs to think beyond the bounds of the usual interagency partners—Department of State, US Agency for International Development, Treasury Department, and so forth—to those who would provide additional synergy for emphasis on environmental security. AFRICOM should look towards the Department of Agriculture, the Forest Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other agencies involved directly in environmental issues. Not only would this pull in a wider range of government officials with different types of expertise, but also it would present a more coherent face to African partners relating security to environmental issues. AFRICOM must look at security as the US administration now views it: as a wide range of issues with the primary goal of *preventing* rather than *reacting* to problems.

Public diplomacy, the second way to integrate American policies with African perspectives, emphasizes communicating with African governments as well as with the various publics so they can understand American aims and, potentially, support American actions.[17] This is not just a one-way street; rather, it calls for the development of long-lasting relationships with key individuals, groups, and organizations. This conscientious development provides a means for long-term feedback to AFRICOM leaders, which will help the command adjust its activities over time to truly meet African needs. Furthermore, this adjustment will help the policies survive over the long term, showing America's commitment to its African partners as well as providing evidence to the American public

that the money being invested is well spent.[18] To effectively meet its goals of supporting an environmental security policy, AFRICOM needs to openly inform and engage African counterparts, seeking feedback and true collaboration.

Conclusion

Both American and African policy statements and opinions support the engagement of AFRICOM with African nations to help strengthen the continent's environmental security. With this as a background, the remaining letters turn to three potential areas of engagement. In the next letter, John Ackerman looks at the various dimensions of environmental degradation in Africa that can lead to conflict. He provides two short case studies illustrating the ends of the spectrum. The first, Sudan, shows how degradation can help provoke conflict, while Niger, on the other end of the spectrum, illustrates how projects that conserve the environment have lessened the potential for conflict. In the third letter, Rob Sands analyzes environmental security from an added dimension, describing the role of conservation zones as a mechanism for resolving and potentially preventing conflict. Finally, Linda Dennard and Eric Stilwell argue in the fourth letter that AFRICOM can leverage the stewardship of natural resources in Africa by using capacity building as a central element of peaceful, stable national and international relationships. Each author offers practical recommendations on how AFRICOM can engage with African partners in these areas of environmental security.   ❏

Notes

1. US Government Accountability Office, *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 (Washington, DC: US Government Accountability Office, February 2009), 16ff, http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09181.pdf (accessed 9 July 2009).

2. "U.S. Africa Command," http://www.africom.mil/AboutAFRICOM.asp (accessed 12 June 2009).

3. See Robert R. Sands, PhD, "Letter No. 3 to AFRICOM," p. 27 of this issue. Two collections of essays further discuss this topic: Ken Conca and Geoffrey D. Dabelko, eds., *Environmental Peacemaking* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002); and Saleem H. Ali, ed., *Peace Parks: Conservation and Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

4. "The Nobel Peace Prize 2004," *Nobelprize.org*, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/press.html (accessed 9 July 2009).

5. United Nations Environment Programme, *Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment* (Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Environment Programme, 2008), x, http://www.unep.org/dewa/africa/AfricaAtlas/PDF/en/Africa_Atlas_Full_en.pdf (accessed 8 February 2010); and CIA, *The World Factbook*, 2009, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html (accessed 27 July 2009).

6. See, for example, Donald Rumsfeld, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 6 February 2006), http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/dod/qdr-2006-report.pdf (accessed 8 February 2010).

7. George Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, March 2006), 37–38, http://www. strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/nss.pdf (accessed 8 February 2010).

8. Ibid., 47.

9. US Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, June 2008), 4, 5, http://www.defense.gov/news2008%20National%20Defense%20Strategy.pdf (accessed 8 February 2010).

10. DODI 3000.05, *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations*, 16 September 2009, 2, http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/300005p.pdf (accessed 19 Feburary 2010). Note that the forerunner to this instruction (i.e., Department of Defense Directive 3000.05) was actually released in 2005, before publication of the *National Defense Strategy*, but it certainly illustrates how the thinking within the DOD is evolving.

11. For example, the mission of ECOWAS "is to promote economic integration in all fields of economic activity, particularly industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, *agriculture*, [and] *natural resources*" (emphasis added). "Discover ECOWAS," http://www.comm.ecowas.int/sec/index.php?id=about_a&lang=en (accessed 19 February 2010). One of the important divisions within ECOWAS is the Office of the Commissioner of Agriculture, Environment, and Water Resources. See "The ECOWAS Commission," http://www.comm.ecowas.int/dept/index.php?id=p_p1_commission&lang=en (accessed 19 February 2010). In comparison, the "SADC vision is one of a common future, within a regional community that will ensure economic well-being, improvement of the standards of living and quality of life, freedom and social justice, peace and security for the peoples of Southern Africa." "SADC Profile," http://www.sadc.int/index/browse/page/52 (accessed 9 July 2009).

12. See United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals," http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/ (accessed 31 July 2009).

13. United Nations, "Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability," http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/environ.shtml (accessed 2 June 2009).

14. "New Partnership for African Development," http://www.nepad.org/AboutNepad/lang/en/sector_id/7 (accessed 31 July 2009).

15. Michael Bratton and Wonbin Cho, comps., *Where Is Africa Going? Views from Below: A Compendium of Trends in Public Opinion in 12 African Countries, 1999–2006*, Afrobarometer Working Paper no. 60 (Cape Town, South Africa: Institute for Democracy in South Africa, May 2006), http://www.afrobarometer.org/papers/AfropaperNo60-trends.pdf (accessed 9 February 2010).

16. US Government Accountability Office, *Defense Management*, 16ff.

17. The US military often refers to public diplomacy as strategic communications. The latter often takes the meaning of expanded public relations (i.e., a more nuanced approach to *informing* others about what the United States is attempting to do). Compare James G. Stavridis, "Strategic Communication and National Security," *Joint Force Quarterly*, issue 46, 3rd quarter (2007): 4–7, http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq_pages/editions/i46/JFQ46.pdf (accessed 9 July 2009).

18. Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 2008): 94–109, http://ann.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/616/1/94.pdf (accessed 9 July 2009).