



## **AFRICOM Frequently Asked Questions**

Africa Human Security Working Group

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### **What is AFRICOM?**

AFRICOM is the name of the U.S. Africa Command, the U.S. military's combatant command responsible for overseeing all military and security programs and operations in Africa. It was fully launched in 2008 in response to America's growing strategic interest in the continent and to replace the previously disjointed military oversight of Africa (U.S. military involvement in Africa was divided between the European, Pacific, and Central Commands).

In its publicity materials, AFRICOM emphasizes "partnership" and its commitment to promoting a "stable and secure Africa." However, high-level officials in meetings, briefings, and statements have made clear that AFRICOM was launched in order to improve U.S. capacity to 1. counter terrorism on African soil, 2. ensure access to natural resources (especially oil), and 3. offset China's growing influence on the continent. It does so by implementing security assistance and training and equipping programs with those who are considered strategic allies of the U.S. government.

AFRICOM's creation also embodies the Department of Defense's (DOD) movement toward an approach to security that recognizes the role of diplomacy and development alongside defense in predicting and preventing conflict - often known as the "3D" approach. Yet, instead of supporting improved development or diplomacy efforts, the U.S. launched AFRICOM as the first combatant command "plus" with an "inter-agency" structure and an increased "soft power" mandate. In practice, this has meant a dangerous blurring of the lines between the roles and responsibilities of civilian and military branches of U.S. government abroad and a mixing of mandates that has confused and troubled those conducting oversight of U.S. foreign policy.

### **What does AFRICOM do in Africa?**

Originally, the Bush administration intended to base AFRICOM headquarters somewhere on the continent, but due to resistance and outrage from African civil society and leaders, AFRICOM decided instead to base its headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany.

AFRICOM's main operational presence in Africa is the 1,800 troops at the Camp Lemonnier base in Djibouti. The base was established before AFRICOM was created, though it is now under the command's oversight. It hosts various U.S. train and equip and "hearts and minds" programs in and around Somalia, as well as intelligence gathering and targeted killings aimed at combating terrorism on the Horn of Africa.

Otherwise, AFRICOM conducts numerous training operations and programs all over the continent - including "Operation Flintlock 2010" in Mali as part of the "Trans-Sahel Counterterrorism Partnership," efforts to create a model battalion in the DRC, and various regional training programs in Uganda and the broader Great Lakes Region. Finally, most security assistance and arms sales programs, even if they are funded from the State Department budget, are carried out by the Department of Defense.

### **How does AFRICOM fit with other parts of U.S. Africa Policy?**

Officially, AFRICOM is the vehicle for carrying out the defense and security components of U.S. policy in Africa. Though it has a military commander, like other military programs it is officially directed by civilian leadership, both at the White House level and at the level of embassies on the ground.

Yet, the notoriously understaffed and underfunded Bureau of African Affairs at the Department of State and Agency for International Development (USAID) do not wield the same power and influence as their military counterparts. AFRICOM claims to respect that, in the field, the “chief of mission” authority rests with the ambassador, though in reality, numerous reports have claimed that embassy staff and USAID officials have felt overwhelmed by the presence of military authorities on the ground. Furthermore, AFRICOM’s model of actually placing civilian employees under the authority of AFRICOM’s commander implies that civilian leaders are not the ones calling the shots. Overall, even as the Obama administration speaks of the importance of a balanced foreign policy, Obama’s increased funding requests for AFRICOM’s ongoing activities represent a continued militarization of U.S. Africa policy.

### **Does AFRICOM do humanitarian work? Is that bad?**

Yes, along with an increased Defense Department recognition of the importance of “soft power” there has been a significant increase in the number of humanitarian projects - such as digging wells or building schools - carried out by the military. And yes, this is a problem.

First and foremost, U.S. soldiers and defense personnel are trained to engage in security operations, not effective development or humanitarian work. Although AFRICOM employs State Department and USAID personnel (which is in itself problematic, implying that somehow diplomacy is “under” the military), the Defense Department controls all AFRICOM operations and dictates how and where the money is spent. Humanitarian work should be left to the experts, and those in civilian clothing. A soldier who is one day shooting an alleged terrorist and the next day operating a dental clinic is a conflict of interest and confusing to those in the affected communities. It also sets a poor example for African militaries, which often have little respect for human rights and more often need to be tempered rather than empowered. The U.S. does not allow its military to build roads and vaccinate cattle in the United States except in severe humanitarian catastrophes - why should it encourage such activity in Africa?

U.S. government’s own researchers have expressed concern about the ineffectiveness of military-led humanitarian work in Somalia. The Government Accountability Office put out a report late spring 2010 about the expanding and evolving work of the “Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa” (CJTF-HOA), AFRICOM’s main presence in Somalia. It highlighted the confusion and disorganization around CJTF-HOA’s mission in general and their attempts to do humanitarian work in particular, pointing to numerous cases where projects were forgotten or abandoned to disrepair, or where local leaders were improperly consulted and projects lead to further tensions and conflict among local clans. Overall, the report warned of the perverse impact of humanitarian work done by the military, arguing even that “their short-term nature or unintended long-term effects could potentially promote unfavorable views of the U.S. military among partner nations.”

Finally, allowing military personnel to conduct humanitarian work presents a serious danger to committed humanitarian workers and organizations who rely on their neutrality for access and effective use of aid dollars.

### **How does AFRICOM affect the local African militaries?**

The policy of training and equipping African militaries dates back to the Cold War when the United States allied itself with countries that were anti-communist in pursuit of foreign policy goals. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States distanced itself from Africa again, leaving weapons scattered throughout the continent. Many of these weapons, supplied by both the United States and the then Soviet Union, are still being used by rebel groups in Africa today.

Since the advent of AFRICOM, train and equip programs for African militaries have again increased substantially. This trend runs the risk of not only training armies with poor human rights records, but also over-militarizing small and underdeveloped African countries. Significant increases in aid and support for the building blocks of a stable society (infrastructure, education, job creation, etc.) are sorely needed instead of expanded military training.

### **Isn't helping professionalize militaries a good thing? And doesn't AFRICOM provide human rights training?**

AFRICOM does engage countries in human rights training, particularly through the IMET (International Military Education and Training) program. Officially, “human rights considerations and the respect for human rights in military operations will be incorporated in each aspect of the training.” (US AFRICOM Public Affairs on the training of Congolese soldiers in Kisangani)

Yet in practice, it takes much more than a few seminars on respecting human rights, seminars which are often optional, to prevent human rights violations. It takes strong rule of law and democratic institutions to check the power of strong militaries. Many of the militaries AFRICOM trains, such as those in Uganda and Rwanda, have a history of human rights violations. They also belong to undemocratic governments with heavy-handed leaders who stand to benefit politically from a stronger, more “professional” military at their disposal. Furthermore, in many instances, including in Somalia most recently, soldiers in government armies trained by the U.S. end up defecting to rebel groups, a pattern that fuels the conflict instead of “creating stability.”

African people have faced a long history of strong militaries, often backed by Western powers, with a disregard for human rights, rule of law, and the democratic process. Again, what most African nations need is genuine support for the building blocks of a stable society, rather than expanded military training.

### **Doesn't the U.S. try to ensure that funds are not supporting human rights abuses?**

It doesn't. There is a law on the books – the “Leahy Law” named after Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) – that prohibits any military assistance or training to security “units” with a poor human rights record. However, its enforcement depends on vaguely defined “vetting procedures” and has not seen sufficient political will on the part of U.S. leaders to make it a reality. It also applies only to assistance given by the State Department, not to that from the Department of Defense. Most military aid is given through the State Department; however, AFRICOM itself, which delivers or implements most security assistance programs, is overseen by the U.S. Defense Secretary, further exacerbating problems of oversight and accountability.

In the meantime, the U.S. has shown little concern over the Ugandan army's poor human rights record, or the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia's record of recruiting child soldiers. In both cases, the United States has provided significant funding, training, and support.

### **How is AFRICOM funded?**

Every year, the administration submits budget requests to Congress for State and Defense Department funding. Since its inception as an independent command in 2008, AFRICOM has received more funding each year than it did in the prior year, despite the transition from George W. Bush - who created AFRICOM - to President Barack Obama. Officially, the AFRICOM line item in the defense budget funds the operation and maintenance of the base in Stuttgart, Germany (\$278 million in the FY2010 budget request), not other security assistance programs carried out by the State Department or the Department of Defense. However, other programs such as Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and the International Military Education Training (IMET) program in sub-Saharan Africa receive separate funding but are also technically carried out by AFRICOM.

### **How much does AFRICOM cost?**

The AFRICOM headquarters alone costs almost \$300 million for operation and maintenance, with an additional \$263 million for support and \$200 million for the base in Djibouti. Furthermore, additional funds are spent on the annual military and security programs that the U.S. has long operated in Africa but that are now largely implemented by AFRICOM. These programs include FMF, IMET, Peacekeeping, Narcotics-control programs, and Anti-terrorism and Nonproliferation programs.

Based on the FY 2010 budget requests, this would total to around \$1.4 billion that AFRICOM has at its disposal. This can be contrasted with the \$53.9 million requested for the entire State Department in FY 2010.

### **How do the local Africans feel about AFRICOM?**

In general, African civil society is strongly opposed to AFRICOM and U.S. military involvement on the continent. In large part due to the prevalence of African criticisms of AFRICOM, the U.S. was not able to headquarter the command on the continent. This is a huge victory for Africans, and one that should be sustained through the next round of base negotiations.

Despite the Liberian government's initial interest in hosting the command, Liberian civil society spoke out against it. Ezekiel Pajibo of the Center for Democratic Empowerment in Liberia calls AFRICOM "a deadly plan of U.S. military expansion on African soil." Writers, bloggers, academics, and citizens across Africa echo this sentiment, seeing AFRICOM as a neocolonial attempt to gain control of Africa's natural resources.

### **What is the relationship between AFRICOM and local African governments?**

When AFRICOM was unveiled in 2007, African governments expressed near-unanimous opposition to hosting the command headquarters within their borders. The Department of Defense neglected to thoroughly consult with African countries, civil society, and even the United States Congress. SADC, the Southern Africa Development Community, was the first to voice significant concerns about AFRICOM's negative effects on Africa.

AFRICOM argues that the initial criticism was a result of poor public relations efforts, and it has since stepped up its liaising with governments and civil society. The Public Affairs department puts a friendly face on AFRICOM and hails its benefits for Africans - that AFRICOM "helps Africans help themselves." While African government opposition hasn't been quite as strong of late, possibly as a result of AFRICOM's unrealistic advertising, the reality, of course, is that AFRICOM will continue to destabilize communities around the continent.

### **Is AFRICOM violating any international laws?**

While no legal case has been brought against AFRICOM, groups like the National Council of Black Lawyers have argued that the role the U.S. plays in training, arming, and equipping militaries in order to protect U.S. national interests is in violation of the sovereign equality of all nations as defined by the UN Charter. Furthermore, the use of unmanned drones and other means of targeted assassinations of those deemed "terrorists" by the U.S. has been the subject of concern and scrutiny by numerous organizations and offices at the UN. Such activities are ongoing under AFRICOM in the Horn of Africa, and could likely expand to other parts of the continent if the U.S. continues to assert its right to self-defense against whomever else it deems a "terrorist."

Furthermore, despite the fact that the U.S. is not a state party to the International Criminal Court (ICC), the court has called upon AFRICOM to support its enforcement capacity on the continent. Chief Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo has suggested that the ICC, without a police force of its

own, must rely on a “coalition of the willing” to apprehend indicted individuals, most of whom can be found in Africa. He invited the U.S. to be a leader in that regard, and, not surprisingly, the U.S. expressed an eagerness to comply. An additional veil of justice is the last thing we want granted to military operations such as [Operation Lightning Thunder](#), where, without exhausting all non-violent options or considering the long-term consequences of military aid, the U.S. provided significant support for our political allies in the Ugandan government’s attempt to root out the Lord’s Resistance Army (whose leaders are indicted by the ICC). This operation ended with many disastrous consequences in terms of human displacement and lives lost.

Overall, that AFRICOM, by definition a branch of the U.S. government and thus a tool for the pursuit of U.S. national interest, can be simultaneously considered exempt from and an enforcer of international law, should be of serious concern to all those interested in human rights and international justice.

### **If the U.S. wants to support security in Africa, what should it do instead of AFRICOM?**

First, the U.S. should examine and halt security assistance to militaries and leaders that are currently undermining security in their own or neighboring countries. Then, recognizing that poverty, inequality, and the marginalization of certain groups are often at the root of conflicts, the U.S. should focus on developing a foreign policy that supports the building blocks of a genuinely secure society - things like infrastructure, education, and health care. Development and diplomatic resources can also be directed in support of strong government institutions such as independent judiciaries, which must be capable of conducting oversight and holding militaries accountable. The U.S. needs to ensure that the appropriate agencies have the sufficient man-power and resources for such work. Finally, through a genuine partnership with the AU, African governments, the African diaspora, and most importantly, African civil society, the U.S. can truly prioritize the needs of those most affected by insecurity; addressing those needs today is a powerful way to prevent conflict down the road.