No to Africa Command
U.S. Presence Would Irritate, Add Nothing to Security

The Pentagon's proposal to establish a U.S. Africa Command as part of the U.S. command structure is a mistake. Creating an organization with the express mission of bringing stability to that sadly unstable continent flies in the face of the limits of state-building lessons of past and present.

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It is said that the command will close seams between the regional commands that shared the continent. All four justifications are confused.

No matter how well it integrates itself with civilian, the Pentagon cannot stabilize unruly regions with military training and a few humanitarian missions. The problems that prevent successful government in parts of Africa stem from deep political fractures in societies. Building a few wells and roads and improving the professionalism of the local military will not hurt in most cases, but it also will not attack the fundamental causes of disorder. That would take social engineering beyond the reach of any military officers and diplomats, who are trained to defend and resist by foreign governments, respectively, not to run them.

The notion that failed states and civil war lead to terrorism needs reconsideration. Afghanistan, the nation that produced this hypothesis, allowed al-Qaida to flourish because its government, the Taliban, allied with it, not because there was no government. Terrorists do hide in Pakistan's lawless northwest, but they do so with the support of tribal rulers. They also hide in well-governed European and Asian cities.

Modern terrorism results principally from an ideology, jihadi, not civil war or disorder. The notion that fighting terrorism requires eliminating these problems, which have plagued civilization since its inception, leads to an imperial solution for more costly than the problem it is meant to solve.

Fight With Democracy, Capitalism
The best way to fight pervasive ideology is to model our own, letting democracy and capitalism sell themselves. The best way to hunt terrorists is with clandestine forces, not by ordering states.

Without AFRICOM, American Special Operations and related units are already chasing terrorists in Africa. And American troops are not needed on the ground to keep the Niger open in energy-supplying region of the world. Just consider Nigeria, where producers manage to export oil despite a barely functioning government.

The argument that we need new military commands to close seams between old ones is absurd. There are seams under any scheme. Isn't North Africa more tied to Europe than sub-Saharan Africa, making the Mediterranean a seam under the proposed plan? But the best way to avoid seams between military commands in Africa is to not have them there in the first place.

Africans Must Be In charge
Stability in Africa is ultimately the Africans' problem. Americans own them only our good will and friendship. A military presence only smacks of colonialism, an -ism Africans do not know. The narrative it creates will undermine Africa Command's mission.

If anyone should set up a headquarters in Africa to provide stability, it is its former European colonizers, whose sense unified militaries are not as easy as ours. Under the Pottery Barn rule — you break it, you own it — popularized by Colin Powell and proved by the occupation of Iraq, the European Union has a greater moral debt to Africa than we do.