

INSIDE VIEW

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



By **Harvey Sapolsky**, left, a professor of political science, and **Benjamin Friedman**, a doctoral candidate in political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

that the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq teach.

The United States has no true interests in Africa. Africa Command will only institutionalize the effort to convince Americans otherwise.

Africa Command is to be the sixth geographic command. Northern Command, created after the Sept. 11 attacks, coordinates the defense of North America. Southern Command deals with South and Central America. Pacific Command has

most of Asia, and Central Command the Middle East and northeast Africa. European Command is in charge of the rest of Africa, along with its namesake continent.

AFRICOM, as the new command has been dubbed in Pentagonese, will hive Africa off from European and Central Commands, except for Egypt, which the latter will retain.

The Pentagon seems to have four goals in creating AFRICOM.

■ The command is to strengthen governance. Military-to-military relations and humanitarian projects overseen by civilians from the State Department and USAID will heighten stability, it is thought. The new command is to have a strong presence from nonmilitary government agencies, and a civilian will be second in command.

■ While it was not emphasized in public briefings, the new command is intended to fight terrorism, not only by ordering lawless regions, but by assisting Special Operations forces and intelligence operatives.

■ The command is supposed to protect Africa's growing energy supply, especially in the Gulf of Guinea.

Modern terrorism results principally from an ideology, jihadism, not civil war or disorder.

■ 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 civilians, 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 military officers and diplomats, who are trained to destroy and relate to 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 acceptance of tribal rulers. They also hide in well-governed European and Asian cities.

Modern terrorism results principally from an ideology, jihadism, 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 far more costly than the problem it is meant to solve.

Fight With Democracy, Capitalism

The best way to fight perverse ideologies is to model our own, letting democracy and capitalism sell themselves. The best way to hunt terrorists is with clandestine forces, not by re-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 spigot open in every 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 Bring Stability

Stability in Africa is ultimately the Africans' problem. Americans owe them only our goodwill and friendship. A military presence only smacks of colonialism, an -ism Africans do know. The antipathy 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 somewhat unified militaries are not as busy 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. ■