

AFRICOM, Public Diplomacy, and U.S. Strategy in Africa

***Keynote Address: AFRICOM: The American Military and Public
Diplomacy***

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I. INTRODUCTION.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss American strategy in Africa, public diplomacy, and the role of the new Africa Command, AFRICOM.

Before I start, I'd like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Ernest Wilson for his kind introduction. Dean Wilson and I have known each other for a long time. It is indeed a privilege to be a guest speaker in the institution he leads.

I also want to thank the Annenberg School of Communication of the University of Southern California for organizing this timely conference.

You have established a first-class program in public diplomacy here in Los Angeles, home of the entertainment industry. Your graduate program in public diplomacy deserves the praise and attention of all of us engaged in American foreign policy.

Dr. Wilson, Dr. (Philip) Seib, and Dr. Nicholas Cull: You have contributed immensely to America and the world by raising the intellectual level of the debate about public diplomacy through your work. Each of you exemplifies the very best meaning of the term “public intellectual.”

I want to highlight especially your work with the Department of Defense to educate our military in the area of public diplomacy, traditionally a function of the State Department and civilian agencies. Our presence here tonight is testimony to your efforts, to the respect that you have earned from all of us.

Tonight, I want to draw on my own and the Department of State’s long experience in African affairs to discuss practical lessons learned. I will then address the need for an Africa Command and how it can and should strengthen American public diplomacy.

II. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

First, let me define what I mean by “public diplomacy.” I know there is an internal debate at DoD about its meaning, but at State we’re pretty

clear about it. It's in our National Strategy for Public Diplomacy, issued by the former Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and my good friend, Karen Hughes: "Public diplomacy is, at its core, about making America's diplomacy public and communicating American's views, values, and policies in effective ways to audiences around the world."

I would add that one of the most effective ways to communicate overseas is to reach out to domestic stakeholders – for example, NGOs, business, immigrant communities, and academics – who often know more and have more influence than we in government. That is one reason why I'm here tonight.

III. HISTORY: THE CREATION OF THE BUREAU OF AFRICAN AFFAIRS

Ladies and gentlemen,

Fifty years ago this year, President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorized the creation of the Bureau of African Affairs. It was a bold step to change what had been a Eurocentric policy view of Africa.

The decision came as a result of the intersection of three of the great forces of the mid-20th century: decolonization of Africa, the beginning of the Cold War, and – something whose role is not often understood – the Civil Rights movement.

A. Decolonization

The reality in the State Department was that until 1958, Africa was as an adjunct of European policy, much as the African continent was a political adjunct to Europe. In the late 1950s, most of the continent remained colonized by our allies in Western Europe. Yes, we had consulates scattered around colonial Africa, but as consulates, they reported to and took instructions from our embassies in London, Paris, Brussels and Lisbon.

With decolonization and the independence movement on the continent, we began to have more American embassies in African nations reporting directly to Washington. Creation of the Africa Bureau signaled in a very public way that Americans grasped the meaning of a free and independent Africa. Inside the State Department, the new Bureau opened the door to Africa getting its share of resources and talented personnel. Over time, our senior leadership in African affairs rose out of a corps of Africanists -- officers who devoted their careers mainly to the continent.

B. The Cold War

Europe's great colonial powers were, as I said, our allies. Europe was the main front of the Cold War, and the colonial powers were the heart of NATO. In other words, it was the Cold War and security of Western Europe that mattered most to our embassies in London, Paris, Brussels, and Lisbon.

Eisenhower, and his Vice President, Richard Nixon, however, saw it differently. Nixon, we should remember, traveled throughout Africa as

Vice President, and saw first-hand the dynamic changes underway and recognized Africa's strategic importance: Support for African freedom and development also meant cultivating potential allies against Communism, or at least deterring Communist expansion. Nixon's outreach then is what we, today, would call public diplomacy.

C. Civil Rights Movement

Eisenhower and Nixon also understood another changing reality: How American domestic affairs affected international relations. Jim Crow – legalized racism at home – undermined America's credibility as the leader for freedom and democracy. Jim Crow contradicted the powerful idealism of the American Creed.

Nowhere was this contradiction more clearly perceived than in Africa. Soviet propaganda took full advantage of this depiction of American racism in the struggle with the United States for African hearts and minds.

In 1954, the Supreme Court outlawed public school racial segregation in the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education*. It is not commonly known that the State Department contributed to the proceedings in the form of an amicus brief, submitted formally by the Justice Department, that spelled out segregation's damage to the U.S. image worldwide. The *Brown* decision was a classic example of the diplomacy of deeds, actions speaking louder than words: America was finally living up to its ideals.

Three years later, Eisenhower faced another civil rights crisis: Little Rock. The White House took account of official embassy reports from Africa and elsewhere about how foreign publics were closely following the crisis as a test of American intentions to enforce Brown v. Board of Education. Eisenhower's decisive handling of the crisis further strengthened the image of an America living up to its creed.

It was in the immediate aftermath of Little Rock and Brown that the Bureau of Africa Affairs was born.

D. Why the AF Experience Should Matter to AFRICOM

I have gone into this history because it is extremely relevant to our topic today, AFRICOM. Like the State Department five decades ago, the Department of Defense is addressing a long-standing gap in its global structure. It has done so by what may on the surface appear to be a bureaucratic realignment . But what the Department of Defense seeks to remedy is much deeper: the need to build African expertise and informed African capacity in our military, plus a structure to coordinate with the lead policy agency, State, and other civilian agencies.

In the past 50 years, the Bureau of African Affairs has built up that expertise. Our 44 embassies and four consulates in sub-Saharan Africa know what is happening on the ground because they listen.

They have broad contacts inside and outside of government because they are in Africa and they are there for years, not days, weeks, or months.

They understand what Africans think and feel because they have taken the time to know them, to win their respect, and gain their trust, relational qualities that cannot be measured in quantitative terms, but that pay dividends in mutual understanding and cooperation.

State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Peace Corps are the vanguard of the U.S. Government in Africa, and have much to teach our military colleagues about the continent as AFRICOM stands up. AFRICOM's unique integration of civilians and civilian agencies flows from the reality of this expertise and the public diplomacy success of our 50-year presence in Africa. Opinion polls consistently show that Africa is the only continent where publics are overwhelmingly favorable to the U.S.

III. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY LESSONS LEARNED

A. Lessons Learned

We have viewed the creation of AFRICOM as an opportunity to provide further coherence to U.S. policy in Africa. In our discussions with the Department of Defense, we have been frank. And I will be frank with you: public diplomacy in Africa should flow from four basic lessons we have learned:

--Lesson #1: Personal relationships are crucial. Everything is personal, and this means being on the ground in Africa among Africans.

--Lesson #2: Listen, listen, listen...Talk is cheap. Listening is priceless in terms of understanding gained and respect given and received.

--Lesson #3: It's for the long-term, not short rotations or arbitrary timelines. Nothing happens quickly in Africa. Much will go wrong. Commitment and perseverance are essential.

--Lesson #4: Understand that actions speak louder than words. The image of America in much of Africa is that of a 20-something Peace Corps volunteer who lives among Africans, learns their language, earns little, and is eager to learn. It is a USAID-funded NGO. It is a Fulbright university professor or student working in a local university. It is a missionary who has dedicated a lifetime to teaching, healing, or ministry.

B. Strategic Communication Plan

Apply these lessons to a realistic strategic communication plan. Most important, know who the stakeholders are and reach out to them.

Africa: The first set of stakeholders is in Africa: African governments. Listen to them, ask them questions, find out what they want and need. You may not convince them to join up, but you just might deter them from opposing you. Remember, too, that there are influential elites that you must consider, whether intellectuals, journalists, religious leaders, or civil society activists.

International: The second set of stakeholders is international. This includes the former colonial countries where ties to Africa remain strong. Those same countries happen to be NATO allies, who know us well. They are home to NGOs that figure significantly in Africa. Their media cover Africa. This group also includes the new foreign investors in Africa – Brazil, Russia, India, and of course, China. Each has growing influence over governments and elites.

Domestic U.S.--Government: The third set of stakeholders is domestic American. The most obvious is within the U.S. Government. AFRICOM aspires to be an interagency structure. The first stakeholders are those very agencies: State and USAID most obviously, but every other agency that has a presence on the continent, including Justice (FBI and DEA), which tracks international crime; the Department of Homeland Security (Coast Guard), and Health and Human Services, which is present in a number of African countries in the form of the Centers for Disease Control.

Domestic U.S. –Non-Government: Outside of the government there is a long-standing and growing constituency for African affairs. It is no coincidence that African-Americans and African-American institutions have been a core constituency of our Bureau from the beginning. We have maintained close ties with Howard and other historically black colleges and universities. For five decades, we have cultivated African-American media, religious institutions, cultural and professional groups because it is there that the American interest has been greatest and most sustained.

But the constituency has expanded far beyond its roots in the African-American community. Universities across America have grown deep African roots; to name one influential Africanist right here -- Dr. Jerry Bender of USC has been a leading expert on Angola for a generation. American church missions entered Africa beginning almost two centuries ago, and serve as a major link between American and African grassroots communities. American business has its own connections with Africa, like the Corporate Council on Africa.

Finally, let's not forget Hollywood, since we are in Los Angeles. Africa has caught Hollywood's attention in terms of a series of serious and commercially successful movies. Celebrities have taken up the cause of Africa. Whatever you may think of their advocacy, they have succeeded in attracting mass attention to Africa, especially among young people. Turn any of them against you, and your job becomes all the harder.

IV. THE VISION OF PARTNERSHIP

A. Changing Course for the Better

As all of you know, initial messages about AFRICOM were mixed. On the one hand, AFRICOM was merely a bureaucratic realignment within the Department of Defense, while on the other, AFRICOM was a radical new experiment in how the U.S. Government conducts foreign policy on the continent. This miscommunication, combined with the lingering memory of U.S., Soviet, European, and Chinese proxy competition in Africa

during the Cold War, leads to continued negative perceptions of AFRICOM. It also threatens the generally positive perceptions of America, Americans, and the U.S. Government as a whole.

I can say that AFRICOM has corrected its course. Like the creation of the Bureau of African Affairs at State fifty years ago, AFRICOM signals U.S. recognition that Africa's strategic importance requires a single focal point in the Department of Defense. AFRICOM's establishment will grant African security challenges greater visibility within the U.S. and put Africa on equal footing with all other regions to receive American resources. Like the struggle against Communism, the War on Terrorism is global and Africa is vulnerable because of its underdevelopment and a frustrated generation coming of age.

But the global nature of that struggle should not blind us to the unique African conditions. AFRICOM will do for DoD what the Africa Bureau did for State; it will free Africa from the demands of other commands focused on other regions. And it will encourage the development of a cadre of military Africanists who will see clearly the reality of the continent

The U.S. has always provided humanitarian, disaster, and technical assistance in a range of areas, particularly peace-keeping, when asked by African nations to do so. We have done this for more than 35 years. What is happening today with AFRICOM is a strategic positioning of all this assistance and capacity-building to one location, Stuttgart, Germany, as opposed to the three locations where this assistance and capacity-building were housed before. This was important in order to

better coordinate our resources and respond to African nations' requests to have these resources in one location (Stuttgart, Germany).

B. U.S. Foreign Policy Vision

It is important to understand that AFRICOM comes as one part of a broader vision of U.S. foreign policy. In 2001, the U.S. changed its foreign policy strategy, a move long overdue with the close of the Cold War. We decided not to rank U.S. interests according to the traditional hierarchy of regions. In that ranking, Europe was considered a vital national security interest, Asia and the Middle East important, and Latin America and Africa mainly of humanitarian interest. We no longer operate according to this hierarchy.

9/11 brought home the need for a strategy to operate more effectively in a world where non-state actors, and illegal trans-border activity, can threaten even the most powerful of countries. That fundamental reality of today's world has moved Africa from the margins to the center of American foreign policy.

To implement this shift, Secretary of State Rice has called on us to establish "strategic partnerships". The goal is to develop a network of well-governed states capable through responsible sovereignty of protecting themselves and contributing to regional security.

In this context, this Administration has elevated Africa's place in American foreign policy, a change of historic proportions. We are developing important new strategic relationships with key partners in the region.

I have just returned from an African Union summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We consider the African Union a force for continent-wide conflict resolution and support for the rule of law. Today AU peacekeepers are in place in Somalia and Darfur.

Likewise, we have supported sub regional organizations like ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) as they expand their leadership roles in promoting and maintaining African security. It was ECOWAS forces, led by Nigeria, who did so much to stabilize Liberia and pave the way to successful elections won by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in 2005.

This vision dovetails with Africa's own growing emphasis on the values of freedom, the rule of law, and collective security, as embedded in the African Union's New Partnership for African Development. The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) Peer Review mechanism reinforces African leaders' own efforts to promote democracy and good governance among their peers.

The establishment of a separate Africa Command, focused on Africa and Africans, is an important and natural part of this strategic vision. Thus,

we in the State Department have strongly supported the creation of AFRICOM. We believe AFRICOM will be an important asset in our overall African policy, and we welcome the Department of Defense's interest, resources, and participation in African issues.

V. AFRICA'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE TODAY

But, to go back to what I said earlier, Africa is ever more important today because we are living in a world where non-state actors and illegal trans-border activity, can pose essential threats to even the most powerful of countries. What happens there affects all of us here. Africa became a front in the fight against terrorism nine years ago the when Al Qaeda bombed American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Piracy has afflicted Africa's coastlines, and nowhere more than in the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea.

When disease ravages Africans, it threatens all of us. The HIV/AIDS pandemic in southern and eastern Africa has already cut lifespans in half and is killing millions in the prime of life. Its path of destruction threatens the progress many countries have made. That instability breeds exactly the conditions that lead to disorder, despair, and terrorism. President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief is a \$15 billion, five-year interagency response in 15 countries --12 in Africa --the largest humanitarian foreign assistance program ever by any country. The president has called for a doubling of this program, to \$30 billion over a ten-year period.

The No. 1 killer in Africa is not AIDS, however. Nor is it war. It is malaria. The tragedy of malaria lies in the fact that we know how to control it. We did it a long time ago here in the U.S., but not in Africa. We have begun to right that wrong.

In 2005, President Bush announced a 1.5 billion dollar initiative to fight this disease in fifteen African countries. Tackling malaria means saving lives – young lives, mostly -- reducing despair. Reduce despair and you prevent a breeding ground for violence.

Fighting poverty, disease, building infrastructure, educational institutions, and economic development are not activities normally ascribed to the Department of Defense. They are in fact the domain of USAID and State. AFRICOM, unique among the commands, is involving the civilian agencies in its structure.

V. AFRICOM AND STATE WORKING TOGETHER

In fact, from the inception of AFRICOM, the State Department has been part and parcel of the planning process. The result, to date, is the development of a framework that is supportive of both U.S foreign policy interests as well our regional security objectives.

The Department of State will continue to exercise full foreign policy primacy and authority in Africa, and I am confident that no one in the Department of Defense disagrees with this. I as Assistant Secretary for African Affairs will continue to be the lead policymaker in the U.S.

Government on African issues, including regional security policy. Each Chief of Mission in the field in Africa will continue to act as the President's personal representative in the country to which he/she is accredited, and to exercise full authority over all the U.S. Government's peacetime activities.

State therefore will continue to provide leadership for, and exercise authority over, the embassies in the AFRICOM area of responsibility, with personnel on assignments of two or three years, whose responsibility it is to understand the host country government and people, and to both influence and implement foreign policy.

The Department of Defense will continue to support the Department of State in the pursuit of U.S. foreign policy goals, while we at the Department of State will continue to strongly support the military in its efforts to promote the security and safety of the United States and its African partners.

VI. AFRICOM AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

I began my remarks by discussing the creation of State's Bureau of African Affairs in 1958. I did so because I think there are important lessons there and in the ensuing five decades, for DoD's own realignment. In 1958, the term "public diplomacy" did not even exist. We used such terms as information, propaganda, outreach, and public affairs. Inasmuch as we did public diplomacy, most was not even

through the State Department, but through the independent U.S. Information Agency.

But State was very much aware of the need for public diplomacy in Africa, and for what now we call a strategic communication plan that encompassed all stakeholders, in Africa, in the U.S., and in other parts of the world. AFRICOM now is applying those lessons.

A delegation of senior officials from the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development recently has conducted two extensive trips to Africa to consult with many key African states on AFRICOM and have found a generally positive reception in sub-Saharan Africa.

We will continue to conduct consultations with African states and with allies who have strong interests in Africa in the near future.

Consultations are also ongoing with various international organizations and non-governmental agencies on AFRICOM. As one would expect with a subject of this importance and scope, the reactions have been varied and diverse. And General Ward, the four-star AFRICOM commander, has begun to reach out to domestic American stakeholders.

VII. CONCLUSION

Let me return to the vision of a strategic partnership in Africa: A partnership of equals contributing to common objectives.

The Department of State views the creation of AFRICOM as an important tool for supporting our comprehensive Africa policy and engagement strategy. It is, in many ways the marriage of State's expertise and authorities with the military's resources and security experience, and we are excited about it.

From a public diplomacy perspective, it has generated mixed reactions from African elites and questions from American and international stakeholders where it should have sent a message of partnership that was and is at the heart of our policy. Instead, it provoked fears of militarization of American policy, fears resulting as much from images of Iraq as from anything actually communicated by AFRICOM.

Perhaps had AFRICOM been launched in 2002, before images of the war in Iraq flooded the airwaves, it would have happened without such a negative reaction. Probably, in two or three years, this wave of hostility will have passed. The reality will sink in of an Africa Command, overseeing such popular and effective bilateral programs as peacekeeping training, ship visits, the International Military Education Training program, and more effective humanitarian assistance.

The model for AFRICOM may well be the Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), based in Miami and responsible for all Latin America and the Caribbean except Mexico. SOUTHCOM, after its own teething process, changed tack to focus on its role in support of overall U.S. policy and supporting bilateral relationships in a region with a long history of unwanted U.S. military interventions. SOUTHCOM learned the importance of listening to stakeholders, and it now weaves PD seamlessly into its strategic plan.

One aspect in particular that would resonate in Africa is the emphasis on links with a shared culture. This shared culture come in the form of 40 million African Americans, 13 percent of our population; major influences in music, art, literature, and film -- Hollywood images that reach every corner of modern Africa; a shared language – English – with much of the continent; shared religious traditions; and a shared history that began 400 hundred years ago when African bondsmen arrived not only to build the America we know today, but who would define the very essence of who we are as a people.

This shared culture is an extension of what we have come to call soft power, one that we in the Bureau of African Affairs have used to great effect and for mutual benefit for so long for half a century. AFRICOM would do well to emulate SOUTHCOM's model and emphasize the shared culture of Africa and the U.S., working with State's own gifted and experienced public diplomacy corps.

Thank you for this opportunity. This ends my prepared remarks. I would be glad to take any questions that you might have.