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America's New Approach to Africa:
AFRICOM and Public Diplomacy

by Philip Seib

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Abstract

Unlike most military commands, AFRICOM, the U.S. military command for Africa that was created in 2007 and became operational in late 2008, has officially embraced public diplomacy as an essential part of its mission. Questions remain, however, about whether a military command can and should engage in public diplomacy.

The military's communication capabilities are being tested by the task of convincing African publics that AFRICOM is something other than a neo-colonial enterprise designed primarily to ensure continued American access to the continent's natural resources.

Beyond the question of whether the military possess the communication skills necessary for this effort is the larger question of whether the military should be in the public diplomacy business at all. The argument has been made that military endeavors in this field endanger the credibility of more traditional public diplomacy work.

This paper examines the public diplomacy aspects of AFRICOM as defined by the U.S. government, the debate about the appropriateness of this venture, and what this means for the future American presence in Africa. Despite the potential significance of AFRICOM as public diplomacy and security actor, it has so far received little attention from the academy or the news media, so this paper will draw primarily from the limited public record available.

AFRICOM: What and why?

President George W. Bush and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced the creation of AFRICOM, the U.S. Africa Command, on February 6, 2007. Previously, military responsibility for Africa had been divided among the Central, Southern, and European Commands, with the result that African matters rarely received high priority or specialized attention. The command was formally activated October 1, 2008.

AFRICOM's approach differs from that of other U.S. military commands in that it has heightened emphasis on incorporating traditionally non-military duties within its mandate and on taking a holistic view of "security." Accompanying this approach to the command's role is a reappraisal of Africa's standing among U.S. global interests. One of those at the top of the chain of command is a civilian, Ambassador Mary Carlin Yates, who is deputy to the commander for civil-military activities. She has said that AFRICOM represents "an acknowledgement of the growing strategic and global importance of Africa. The decades when our primary objectives in Africa were only humanitarian are over," and now the priorities for the United States include institution-building that will address conflict and lack of stability, health issues, crime, climate change, and other matters.[1] General William "Kip" Ward, commander of AFRICOM, underscored the innovative approach of the command "AFRICOM recognizes the essential interrelationship between security, stability, economic development, political advancement, things that address the basic needs of the peoples of a region, and importantly, the requirement to do those efforts and in as collaborative a way as possible, not to take over the work of others, but to ensure

that the work that's being done complements the work that others are doing in pursuit of those same objectives."[2]

These comments about AFRICOM's mandate reflect the views of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who in July 2008 said: "[T]he overall posture and thinking of the United States armed forces has shifted away from solely focusing on direct American military action, and towards new capabilities to shape the security environment in ways that obviate the need for military intervention in the future." He added that this perspective "informed the creation of Africa Command, with its unique interagency structure [and] a deputy commander who is an ambassador, not a general." Concerning the assumption of previously non-military duties, Gates said:

> "Overall, even outside Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States military has become more involved in a range of activities that in the past were perceived to be the exclusive province of civilian agencies and organizations. This has led to concern among many organizations … about what's seen as a creeping 'militarization' of some aspects of America's foreign policy. This is not an entirely unreasonable sentiment. … But that scenario can be avoided if as is the case with the intelligence community today there is the right leadership, adequate funding of civilian agencies, effective coordination on the ground, and a clear understanding…of military versus civilian efforts, and how they fit, or in some cases don't fit, together."[3]

In another speech, Gates acknowledged that the Department of Defense had taken on tasks "that might have been assumed by civilian agencies in the past." Emphasizing the importance of military-civilian partnerships, he added that "having robust civilian capabilities available could make it less likely that military force will have to be used in the first place, as local problems might be dealt with before they become crises."[4]

The principals in AFRICOM's development are fairly forthcoming about the military-civilian linkage, but they are less so about the

rationale for AFRICOM's existence. Most frequently offered is the argument that Africa deserves exclusive focus, rather than receiving only partial (and often minimal) attention in a shared command structure. This has self-evident merit; African issues have been relegated to secondary status by military commanders who have been preoccupied by events in Iraq and Afghanistan, and so pulling Africa out of that mix should increase the likelihood that African interests will be more promptly and thoroughly addressed. But beyond the high-sounding words about parity for Africa are matters that are widely, if unofficially, acknowledged: safeguarding Africa's important resources, especially its oil (West Africa provides 15 percent of U.S. crude oil imports, and that is expected to rise to 25 percent by 2015)[5]; preventing Africa from becoming a haven for Al Qaeda-related terrorists; and counterbalancing China's increasingly assertive presence in the continent.

AFRICOM's military role is more clear-cut than its public diplomacy plans. The command's structure is aligned with the civilian-military integration model described in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps counterinsurgency manual, which underscores the importance of the military taking on political development responsibilities.[6] Examples of this approach can already be found in Africa. The Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa is intended to prevent terrorism from fomenting in the Horn—in the countries of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen—and to promote regional stability through humanitarian assistance. Based at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti, CJTF-HOA uses "military training, humanitarian aid and intelligence operations to keep northeastern Africa and Yemen from becoming the next Afghanistan." This joint task force, which was run out of Central Command before being transferred to AFRICOM, was originally established with a counterterrorism mandate to prevent the flow of jihadists across the Horn, but it later evolved to incorporate humanitarian goals and security promotion. Recent CJTF-HOA public diplomacy initiatives have included distributing shoes and toys to orphans in Djibouti, inocu-

lating more than 20,000 animals in Ethiopia, building schools, and providing instruction on the laws of war. In addition to military personnel, the CJTF-HOA's more than 1,400-person staff includes civil engineers, doctors, nurses, and veterinarians. With goals similar to those of CJTF-HOA, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership works with Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal to combat terrorism, expand existing public diplomacy campaigns in North Africa, promote democratic governance, and provide development assistance. The TSCTP has developed specific public diplomacy messages to ensure that the local citizens recognize that these training and assistance programs are sponsored by the United States. To that end, the TSCTP has created Military Information Support Teams (MIST) and Civil Military Support Elements (CMSE) in order to craft public diplomacy messages that underline the depth and longevity of U.S. commitment to North Africa. MIST and CMSE promote moderate political messages, provide textbooks for local schools, and seek to generate support for both the United States and moderate Islamic viewpoints.[7]

Regardless of what reasons are proffered for AFRICOM's importance, public diplomacy is often cited as an essential element of the command's work. Ryan Henry, principal deputy undersecretary of defense for policy, has stated that "AFRICOM, at its core, is about public diplomacy, which is critical to its mission and how we as a nation compete not only in Africa but in the wider marketplace of ideas concerning governance and security facing key regions, critical indigenous peoples, and global stakeholders throughout the world today. Whether you want to call it 'soft power' or 'smart power,' or even just 'the right power,' the bottom line is we have created, for a variety of reasons, a national security structure that today is currently out of balance and is biased toward the military toolset." He added:

> "AFRICOM is a risk-laden experiment on the part of government and the Department of Defense specifically on how to

> more holistically engage the continent of Africa, a specific region of emerging interest. And public diplomacy is a fundamental element of its success. We cannot continue to pursue 21st century missions in an information digital network age with bureaucratic constructs and thinking laid out as part of the Industrial Age in the aftermath of World War II."[8]

Despite efforts by Gates and his deputies to assuage concerns about further militarization of U.S. foreign policy, such worries cast a shadow on AFRICOM's prospects. As the Barack Obama administration begins, the Pentagon's role in public diplomacy is still being defined. So too is the American view of Africa and Africa's perception of America.

AFRICOM and new thinking about Africa

In an interview two weeks after the 2008 U.S. elections, Desmond Tutu, the archbishop of Cape Town, voiced Africans' optimism about the new American president:

> "We believe he can make more accountable the leaders, especially in Africa. Because he can be rough with them in a way that Bush, or any other Caucasian, could not have been. They won't be able to say, 'Oh, no, this is neocolonialism,' when they're referring to someone who is part Kenyan.… The other side of it is that one hopes so very much that he will be able to make Africa be taken a little more seriously. And perhaps he will even increase aid to Africa, remembering his African roots."[9]

Taking Africa more seriously is presumably what AFRICOM is about. A hoped-for facet of the command's public diplomacy activity, noted Ryan Henry, will be America adopting "a more multilateral, supporting and less dominating way of dealing with African partners" and improving the Africans' self-sufficiency in security

matters so that it will be possible to "keep American combat troops off the continent for at least the next half-century."[10]

The word "combat" in that last sentence from Henry is significant because it touches on a principal question about how, precisely, AFRICOM plans to operate. During the first year after AFRICOM was created, many African politicians and news organizations reacted with sharp skepticism to the idea of an expanding U.S. military presence on the continent (in addition to the existing U.S. base in Djibouti). At its birth, AFRICOM's headquarters was in Stuttgart, Germany, home of the U.S. European Command, but the assumption was that it would move to somewhere in Africa. No one, however, with the possible exception of Liberia, wanted to be the host. AFRICOM's response, as articulated by Major General Herbert Altshuler, the command's director of strategy, plans, and programs, was: "Our intent was never to put forces or bases or garrisons on the continent of Africa. We are willing to have a presence if we are invited to have a presence."[11] AFRICOM's headquarters has remained in Germany.

Despite such protestations of benign intent, criticism of AFRICOM remained persistent, particularly in southern Africa, where the United States is remembered to have backed colonial regimes in Mozambique, Angola, and Rhodesia during the Cold War and the minority government in South Africa during apartheid.[12] As recently as January 2009, a Nigerian newspaper columnist wrote that the Obama administration "must reconsider the plans for AFRICOM, which most Africans consider to be subversive and a plan to militarize the continent—part of a heightened 21st century global resource war of which Africa is, once again, the vital battleground."[13]

The opposition AFRICOM has encountered underscores the difficulty the military facewhen trying to undertake even non-military projects. As Kristin Lord of the Brookings Institution has noted, "The message foreign publics receive—not the message the U.S.

sends—changes when the Pentagon is the messenger."[14] The hostile reception can also be taken as a failure of public diplomacy, in that the U.S. government did not convey a convincing message about AFRICOM's mission to African publics. Ambassador Mark Bellamy, a fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, observed in early 2008 that "the main public diplomacy task that AFRICOM is going to face for the next year or so is really going to be one of explaining its mission."[15]

Part of the difficulty may be that AFRICOM has not adequately articulated what it means by public diplomacy either to African or other audiences. There has also seemed to be uncertainty among the command's leadership about just what AFRICOM will do. General Ward, AFRICOM's commander, did not mention "public diplomacy" or, regardless of the terminology, any plan for reaching African publics when he presented the command's first posture statement to Congress in March 2008. That kind of omission does not go unnoticed by AFRICOM's critics (and there are plenty of them) in Africa, the United States, and elsewhere.

Nicole Lee, executive director of the TransAfrica Forum, has addressed what she considers to be the anomaly of the military undertaking non-military efforts. "Soft power," she said, "by definition is the use of economics, diplomacy, and information to support national interest. It is supposed to be the opposite of military hard power, the opposite of tanks, aircraft carriers, other tools of war that basically break things and kill people. Soft power is supposed to be about engendering cooperation through shared values. It is not something that we believe can be accomplished by the U.S. military or, frankly, any military regardless of specialized training, cooperation with experts, and their good intentions."[16]

When President George W. Bush announced the creation of AFRICOM, he said it would work with Africans to "promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and

economic growth in Africa." That worries some aid professionals, such as Paul O'Brien of Oxfam America, who said: "Our fundamental belief is that U.S. development aid toward Africa should be civilian-led. We're worried that AFRICOM may put a military face on what should be a non-military goal—long-term development."[17] Giving additional substance to such concerns was the imbalance between military and civilian personnel within AFRICOM. Of the 1,300 initial headquarters jobs for the command, fewer than 50 were for nonmilitary staff.[18]

These concerns were also addressed by columnist David Ignatius in *The Washington Post.* "The U.S. military," he wrote, "is so powerful—so blessed with money and logistical skill and leadership—that it's easy to make it the default answer to problems that are otherwise in the 'too hard' category. That's my worry about AFRICOM. Its nation-building goal sounds noble, but so did European imperialism of 150 years ago to its proponents. Before American sends its soldiers marching off to save Africa, we need more discussion about what this mission is all about."[19]

Another side of this argument has been propounded by Abiodun Williams of the United States Institute of Peace, who has written, "Public diplomacy is too important to be left entirely to civilian agencies, particularly as the actions of the U.S. military critically affect the way other countries and their citizens view the United States."[20] Williams points out that on occasions ranging from the Berlin Airlift to the response to the 2004 tsunami, the U.S. military has successfully undertaken soft power operations. Further, the Pentagon's share of Official Development Aid (government assistance for the economies and welfare of developing countries) expanded from 3.5 percent in 1998 to about 22 percent in 2005. (During the same period, USAID's share shrank from 65 percent to 40 percent.)[21]

Williams suggested that AFRICOM must convince African publics that it will add real value to African security by building "ef-

fective security mechanisms that are beneficial to African countries and the African public" and that it will address "African interests as fully as it does U.S. interests." Further, wrote Williams, AFRICOM must "recognize the challenges and opportunities in public diplomacy promotion posed by emerging technology. Given the democratization of information dissemination, AFRICOM needs to capitalize on all of these forms of communication to engage with African civil society."[22]

Finding a public diplomacy role for AFRICOM

AFRICOM cannot realistically be portrayed as a purely soft power enterprise. It more likely falls within the category of "smart power," which has been defined by Ernest Wilson as "the capacity of an actor to combine elements of hard power and soft power in ways that are mutually reinforcing such that the actor's purposes are advanced effectively and efficiently."[23] Regardless of the command's commitment to humanitarian projects such as medical care, disaster relief, and the like, its principal identity will always be that of a body capable of using lethal force as an instrument of U.S. policy. Assuming that this core military identity will color AFRICOM's public diplomacy efforts, and that a significant level of skepticism will continue to exist about the good faith of these efforts, the question arises: Will other soft power ventures be tainted? This is a significant concern for NGOs and other providers, including those within the U.S. government. Henrietta Fore, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, cited the danger that already shadows aid workers: violent attacks against groups providing humanitarian assistance grew to 837 incidents between 2003 and 2007, compared to 437 incidents between 1997 and 2002.[24]

It is hard to imagine government without interdepartmental tensions, and AFRICOM has fostered concerns among civilian agen-

cies that the military is invading their territory. Mark Bellamy observed:

> "In some of the earlier iterations, AFRICOM was presented as something entirely new, radically new, as something entirely novel, as an experiment in the application of soft power and of whole-of-government approaches to a particular geographic region. That explanation, which was meant to be reassuring, has also triggered a whole separate set of concerns within the U.S. government and places like the State Department, USAID, and others about whether the DoD was proposing to get out of its lane and take over activities that belonged to other agencies of government. It has provoked some concern in the NGO community about DoD coming in and perhaps crowding NGOs out of the humanitarian and development space that they occupy in Africa. I think AFRICOM is at a point where it's best to start dedramatizing its mission."[25]

In response to such worries, AFRICOM's top civilian official, Ambassador Mary Carlin Yates, said:

> "Much of the interagency debate and much of the public diplomacy debate is that AFRICOM is getting out of its lane, that we ought to stay in the security lane and not act like we are going to do development work, and not act like we are going to be the foreign policy arbitrators on the continent. The State Department has the lead in foreign policy. USAID has the lead in assistance programs. NGOs have their portal into the U.S. government traditionally through the State Department. None of that changes. We want to build a structure and a headquarters so we can find ways for complementarity. I must say that it is very exciting when you have people like the Treasury and Homeland Security and Agriculture coming to these meetings and they want to be part of this. As far as promoting public diplomacy, that stays pretty solidly in the State Department lane."[26]

How much responsibility the State Department can assume remains open to question. Although Secretary of Defense Gates has lamented the disproportionate budgets of his department and the De-

partment of State, adjusting the balance is a politically delicate task. In early 2009, Ward Casscells, the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, announced that Secretary Gates wanted to cut his budget and transfer the funds to the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. But Casscells argued that activity in the health sector is a legitimate role for the Defense Department because it is "essential in improving security in troubled nations and minimizing conflict in others."[27]

AFRICOM participates in this medical diplomacy with projects such training African militaries in care of battlefield casualties and conducting an HIV/AIDS prevention program for African military personnel. Because of the high penetration of cell phones in Africa, AFRICOM has also developed a program for sending "telehealth" cell phone messages about health issues to members of African militaries. These health projects dovetail with the Defense Department's disaster response capability. AFRICOM's command surgeon, Colonel Schuyler Geller, asked, "We are not the lead agency for disaster response, but when the disaster is way out in the hinterlands and you don't have the logistics to get there, who are you going to call?"[28]

Despite Gates's efforts to shift some responsibilities to the State Department, interdepartmental cooperation remains a work in progress. A Government Accountability Office study in 2008 found that the State and Defense Departments had not developed adequate unified approaches to reconstruction and stabilization projects, and the Defense Department had proved slow to integrate non-Defense agencies into their planning.[29]

Beyond health matters, one of AFRICOM's principal tasks will be to work with African militaries to strengthen mutual respect between military and civil authorities. By enhancing stability, the United States hopes to allow African governments to make more

rapid progress in social development. Charles Minor, Liberia's ambassador to the United States, underscored the importance of this:

> "African governments, non-government institutions, and their peoples will be able to concentrate their material resources much less on maintaining security and far more on the development of our human capital and our infrastructure to facilitate the advancement of our people.… Africa has had too many military interventions in the overthrow of elected governments. We do hope that those military interventions are part of our past and are no longer in our future. We hope that AFRICOM, in whatever training they help to implement in our security sector, will help to make the personnel in that sector truly professional, and support the establishment of a culture that underscores the fact that the military is always subordinate to civil authority and that it is through the ballot box and not the barrel of a gun that things are to be changed."[30]

Clearly, AFRICOM's public diplomacy role has not yet been precisely defined, and that has been a factor in the criticism of the command. But the notion of linking development to security makes sense, as Ambassador Minor argued, although this approach may require an expansion of conventional definitions of public diplomacy.

None of this, however, directly addresses the concerns of NGOs, which fear that their own credibility may be compromised by the presence of military providers of services similar to those offered by the NGOs. The NGOs that have worldwide reach and substantial resources, such as Doctors Without Borders, the International Red Cross, Refugees International, and the International Rescue Committee, are capable of reaching disaster scenes quickly and delivering comprehensive assistance. They do not have to weigh political concerns as carefully as governments do. Only in exceptional cases, such as the 2004 tsunami, has military assistance been indispensable. Given the capabilities of non-military providers and the suspicions about ulterior motives that inevitably attach—rightly or

wrongly—to military involvement, the question that can be asked of the U.S. government is, Why not keep the military, in AFRICOM and elsewhere, in its traditional role and provide greatly expanded financial assistance to civilian governmental and non-governmental agencies that deliver humanitarian assistance? Mark Malan of Refugees International has argued, "The U.S. military is moving rapidly to fill the vacuum created by shrinking civilian capacity, in pursuit of short-term solutions to stabilization problems that do not address the vexing and enduring challenges facing the world's billion most impoverished people."[31]

That kind of question has not yet received an answer from AFRICOM officials, but it may be presumed that U.S. policy makers see security and other national interests as best pursued by a bifurcated military mission that addresses conventional security issues through standard military practice and takes on broader responsibilities by fostering stability within the states where the U.S. military has, at least on call, a reliable presence. That reasoning might not satisfy the NGO community, but it seems in line with pronouncements to date about the role of AFRICOM.

Finding a place for the military in public diplomacy theory

Most considerations of public diplomacy have not incorporated a role for the military. This may be because the military does not seem to fit in with public diplomacy's reliance on soft power, which Joseph Nye has defined as "getting others to want what you want," and which rests on "the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences of others." Nye also wrote: "Soft power is crucial, but alone it is not sufficient. Both hard and soft power will be necessary for successful foreign policy in a global information age. Our leaders must make sure that they exercise our hard power

in a manner that does not undercut our soft power."[32] If, as Nye states, hard power must accompany soft as circumstances dictate, might it make sense to rely on a single actor that can provide both kinds of power? The military obviously can generate hard power, and if it could perform certain soft power tasks as well, would that not make it a valuable public diplomacy player? Nye has noted that the military "can sometimes play an important role in the generation of soft power" through officer exchanges, training programs in democracy and human rights, and other efforts that can take advantage of what Nye has called "the aura of power that is generated by its hard power capabilities."[33]

Perhaps, however, that is asking too much from publics that retain suspicions about even the most benign-seeming public diplomacy projects, and therefore portraying AFRICOM as a soft power mechanism is not appropriate. But that is not to say that there is no room anywhere within public diplomacy for a military presence. "Collaboration" as a form of public diplomacy, according to Geoffrey Cowan and Amelia Arsenault, "refers to initiatives in which participants from different nations participate in a project together … such as side-by-side participation in natural disaster reconstruction efforts."[34] This is the kind of approach AFRICOM has suggested that it will implement.

But again, skepticism abounds. The United States is presumed to like its partnerships lopsided in its favor. The American invasion of Iraq, wrote Peter van Ham, "reinforced the image of U.S. unilateralism driven by realpolitik and based on military superiority." That approach may fall too far on the hard power side to work effectively in partnership-building in Africa. As van Ham noted, "the wheels of hard power can only function smoothly with the lubricant of soft power, of which public diplomacy is a key element."[35] According to this argument, the military has no choice but to adopt a soft approach toward its prospective African partners. But is the military capable of doing so? If soft power is an integral element of public

diplomacy, it may be that AFRICOM's critics make a valid point when they contend that the military *has* jumped out of its lane and into an inappropriate role.

Part of the importance of public diplomacy derives from the increased importance of publics, as well as governments, in international affairs. Jan Melissen has written, "The democratization of access to information has turned citizens into independent observers as well as assertive participants in international politics, and the new agenda of diplomacy has only added to the leverage of loosely organized groups of individuals." Melissen adds: "Working with 'ordinary people' is a formidable challenge for diplomatic practitioners who feel more comfortable operating within their own professional circle. Traditional diplomatic culture is slowly eroding and sits rather uneasily with the demands of public diplomacy."[36] If diplomats are having trouble adapting to this emerging political dynamic, it is likely that the military will have even more problems. As inflexible as traditional diplomatic culture may be, military culture is even slower to change—maybe not in terms of adopting new weaponry, but certainly when there is a need to alter the traditional mission to include direct dealing with the "ordinary people" Melissen mentions.

Another perspective on this has been presented by Brian Hocking, who wrote that "public diplomacy is increasingly defined as diplomacy *by* rather than *of* publics. Here, individuals and groups, empowered by the resources provided by the CIT [communications and information technology] revolution—and particularly the Internet—are direct participants in the shaping of international policy and, through an emergent civil society, may operate through or independently of national governments." Expanding on this, Hocking added that "public diplomacy is now part of the fabric of world politics wherein NGOs and other non-state actors seek to project their message in the pursuit of policy goals."[37] Again, professional diplomats have considerable difficulty adapting to such shifts in the workings of global politics and it stands to reason that military pro-

fessionals, relatively unaccustomed to dealing diplomatically with publics, would have even more. Given these substantive changes in how public diplomacy works, the challenges to the wisdom of military involvement grow weightier.

Scholars and professional diplomats who have tried to articulate a comprehensive theory of public diplomacy have found it difficult to do so. Significant research is similarly scarce. Eytan Gilboa observed, "Despite the growing significance of public diplomacy in contemporary international relations, scholars have not yet pursued or even sufficiently promoted systematic theoretical research in this field."[38] This means that AFRICOM must develop without some of the tools that research can provide. Perhaps this will change as public diplomacy gains further traction as an academic discipline, as well as being what Bruce Gregory has called "a political instrument with analytical boundaries and distinguishing characteristics."[39]

Looking Ahead

AFRICOM remains something of an enigma. As a traditional military command, it would make perfect sense; Africa's strategic importance is growing and has for too long been neglected by U.S. policy makers. As an instrument of public diplomacy, however, AFRICOM has yet to prove that it is capable of performing this role and convincing skeptics that it will be beneficial to Africans and U.S. security interests.

In their public statements, AFRICOM officials have not produced a consistent definition of what they believe public diplomacy is and how they conceive of their mission beyond traditional military duties. During the first year after the command's creation was announced, AFRICOM's leaders held numerous meetings in Africa and elsewhere to describe their benign intentions, but those efforts

never coalesced into an explanation of how they would be public diplomats as well as soldiers. AFRICOM officials are by no means the only people with a fuzzy notion of what public diplomacy is supposed to do, but given the emphasis on AFRICOM's innovative mandate, more and earlier effort might have been expended on definitional matters.

Meanwhile African publics, NGOs, and others who worry about further militarization of U.S. foreign policy processes (including some within the U.S. government) remain concerned that AFRICOM may become a magnet for trouble. Authoritarian regimes may try to use U.S. power to retain control, insurgent groups may find Americans to be politically useful targets, and non-political aid organizations may find their credibility compromised by having a military doing similar work. This is not what public diplomacy is supposed to bring about.

Many of those involved with AFRICOM mean well. They want to see Africa healthier, in many senses of the word. But the appropriateness of the military as public diplomats, in this case and others, merits further consideration by practitioners, scholars, and the numerous publics involved.

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