

Statement of John F. Tierney
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

“AFRICOM: Rationales, Roles, and Progress on the Eve of Operations – Part 2”

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Good morning. Today we conduct our second oversight hearing on the U.S. military’s newest combatant command, AFRICOM.

These hearings represent a year-long, bipartisan investigation into AFRICOM, which is to reach full operating capability just a few short months from now by September 30, 2008.

On the exact day that we were holding our first AFRICOM hearing – Tuesday, July 15 – Defense Secretary Gates was delivering an important – and candid – speech to the U.S. Global Leadership Campaign. I’d like to compare a few things our Subcommittee was told by our Department of Defense witness versus those statements made by Secretary Gates.

Theresa Whelan, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, stated to us, and I quote:

There are fears that USAFRICOM represents a militarization of U.S. foreign policy in Africa and that USAFRICOM will somehow become the lead U.S. Government interlocutor with AFRICA. This fear is unfounded.

Secretary Gates, in contrast, stated, and I quote:

Overall, even outside Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. 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 American’s foreign policy. This is not an entirely unreasonable sentiment.

Ms. Whelan continued:

The intent is not for DOD generally, or for USAFRICOM at the operational-level, to assume the lead in areas where State and/or USAID have clear lines of authority as well as the comparative advantages to lead.

Secretary Gates stated:

In recent years the lines separating war, peace, diplomacy, and development have become more blurred, and no longer fit the neat organizational charts of the 20th century.

These dueling assessments – given on the very same day by top officials from the very same Department – offer an interesting juxtaposition that could only happen in Washington, DC. They also underscore the fact that our first AFRICOM hearing raised more questions than it answered, and that’s why we’re having this second hearing today.

As became clear at our first hearing, AFRICOM presents traditional oversight issues – like costs, personnel, and infrastructure. But AFRICOM also presents broader questions about how the United States should best organize itself so that – to use Secretary Gates’ words – we may “act with unity, agility, and creativity” in pursuit of our national security and foreign policy goals.

AFRICOM presents these fundamental questions during a post-Cold War, post-9/11 environment in which we continue to grapple with the “asymmetric” threats of terrorism and potential breeding grounds in ungoverned spaces, as well as in relation to a continent that has been wracked by poverty, disease, and war.

Despite the testimony by the Defense Department’s Theresa Whelan that, “[w]hen assisting in non-military activities like humanitarian assistance, we will do it in support of another USG agency so we ensure we meet their requirements and achieve their desired effects,” concerns remain over AFRICOM’s role.

As noted by Lauren Ploch with the Congressional Research Service, some question whether the Defense Department’s actions will remain ancillary in nature or whether the military will “overestimate its capabilities as well as its diplomatic role in Africa or pursue activities that are not a core part of its mandate.”

Highlighting this concern is a newly-released Refugees International report authored by one of today’s witnesses that explores, what it terms, the current “civil-military imbalance for global engagement.” Refugees International notes that “between 1998 and 2005, the percentage of Official Development Assistance the Pentagon controlled exploded from 3.5% to nearly 22%, while the percentage controlled by the U.S. Agency for International Development shrunk from 65% to 40%.”

The issues AFRICOM highlights go to the heart of how the U.S. agencies primarily responsible for achieving U.S. national security objectives – the State Department, the Defense Department, and USAID – will and should interact in foreign contexts.

Today, we have convened a distinguished panel of non-governmental experts in order to advance the dialogue on these critical questions, including:

What are the consequences of establishing AFRICOM?

What missions should AFRICOM undertake? What are the implications of so-called “phase zero” operations – that is, those aimed at building and maintaining a stable security environment?

How might the interagency work within AFRICOM, as well as among AFRICOM and the State Department, USAID, other government departments, and the various, bilateral embassy country teams throughout Africa?

How might AFRICOM interact with non-governmental organizations that are involved in humanitarian and development work? What are the risks to NGOs, and what can be done to avoid them?

Are we experiencing a broader “militarization” of our foreign policy? Is that a problem and, if so, why? And what are we going to do about it?

And, finally, how should the U.S. government organize itself to achieve a “whole of government” approach to national security strategy? In other words, what is the right model, platform, and government structures required to achieve that “unity, agility, and creativity” echoed recently by Secretary Gates?

Thank you all for being here. I look forward to our discussion.