



AFRICOM WATCH – APRIL 2008

Cometh the Mission Statement?

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Consultancy Africa Intelligence's *AFRICOM Watch* is a complementary, ad-hoc briefing series tracking movements, issues and thoughts surrounding the US Command for Africa – AFRICOM.

In a key briefing to Congress on 13 March 2008, General William “Kip” Ward, head of the US Command for Africa, AFRICOM, devoted only 15 seconds of his four-and-a-half minute opening remarks to a possible humanitarian role. Focusing instead on military training, security and counter-terrorism, his remarks came in sharp contrast to a year ago when officials announced that the command would concentrate on humanitarian assistance, alarming many aid agencies, which were concerned that US military involvement in humanitarian aid would undermine their neutrality.

This has yet again raised concern as to which role will *ultimately* take precedence as the US Africa Command readies itself for deployment on the African continent in October 2008. Despite the obvious attempt to shift emphasis towards more humanitarian-related matters, AFRICOM is, and remains, a military command and will ultimately have to perform the critical functions that a military command invariably finds itself entangled in.

Prior to General Ward's testimony to the US House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Africa and International Security Programme identified four suggested priority areas that the command would have to focus on.² Rightly so, the CSIS report debunked the myth that AFRICOM will be able to continue presenting itself as a *purely* preventative command. In many regions on the African continent there will be ample opportunity and need to become involved as a truly “combatant” command - though *not* pre-emptively, nor unilaterally. Strong coordination on a military-to-military basis, working side-by-side with African states' military and political leadership should be the approach adopted from the very outset.

Another critical priority that has been highlighted by the CSIS is the need for AFRICOM to play a greater role in support of UN peacekeeping initiatives in Africa. In this context AFRICOM should seek to enhance its presence and role in peace support operations, by providing critical support and training to peacekeeping missions on the continent. The US military, while it possesses the military might, will have to ensure that its public diplomacy arm is considerably strengthened, given its overall limited deployment on and limited knowledge of the intricacies and political make-up of the African continent. Therefore while the US military has vast knowledge and experience to impart, they still have much to learn from other countries that have more frequently been deployed in the African theatre of operations.

AFRICOM as such must commit itself to a clearly defined mission statement, based on achievable goals and realistic expectations of what can be achieved. While vast rhetoric abounds, what is needed is rapid reaction to dispel myths, misconceptions and apprehension of the US military's future role and presence in Africa.

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² M Bellamy, K Hicks & J Morrison, Strengthening AFRICOM's Case, 5 March 2008, http://www.csis.org/component/option.com_csis_proqj/task.view/id.1160/



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