
FEATURE ARTICLES

Welcome to U.S. Africa Command

By

**General William “Kip” Ward
Commander, U.S. Africa Command**

[DISAM wishes to acknowledge the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) website as the source of the below listed information. For complete and updated information on current as well as historical beginnings, the reader is referred to <http://www.africom.mil>.]

As we build U.S. Africa Command, we want to talk to people about what the U.S. military is doing in Africa. Just as importantly, I want everyone on the staff to also listen and learn. So we have launched a new forum called “AFRICOM Dialogue” as a way for members of the Africa Command staff to describe what we’re doing.

In the weeks and months ahead, I have told the staff to focus on a few important points:

1. We are building the team. We have the opportunity, vision, and determination to redefine how the U.S. military cooperates with and complements the efforts of its U.S., international, and non-governmental partners in Africa.
2. U.S. Africa Command will add value and do no harm to the collective and substantial on-going efforts on the continent.
3. U.S. Africa Command seeks to build partnerships to enable the work of Africans in providing for their own security. Our intent is to build mutual trust, respect, and confidence with our partners on the continent and our international friends.

For me, commanding Africa Command is an honor and privilege. I realize the U.S. military plays only a very small role in the international, inter-generational work taking place on the continent and its island nations. But we want our work to matter, and we want to do our work well. Years from now we want Africans and Americans to be able to say U.S. Africa Command made a difference—a positive difference.

U.S. Africa Command

On February 6, 2007, President Bush and Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced the creation of U.S. Africa Command. The decision was the culmination of a 10-year thought process within the DoD acknowledging the emerging strategic importance of Africa and recognizing that peace and stability on the continent impacts not only Africans but the interests of the U.S. and international community as well. Yet, the department’s regional command structure did not account for Africa in a comprehensive way with three different U.S. military headquarters maintaining relationships with African countries. The creation of U.S. Africa Command enables DoD to better focus its resources to support and enhance existing U.S. initiatives that help African nations, the African Union, and the regional economic communities succeed. It also provides African nations and regional organizations an integrated DoD coordination point to help address security and related needs.

A Different Kind of Command

The designers of Africa Command clearly understood the relationships between security, development, diplomacy, and prosperity in Africa. As a result, the Command reflects a much more integrated staff structure, one that includes significant management and staff representation by the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other U.S. government agencies involved in Africa. The Command also seeks to incorporate partner nations and humanitarian organizations, from Africa and elsewhere, to work alongside the U.S. staff on common approaches to shared interests.

Mission

Africa Command, in concert with other U.S. government agencies and international partners, conducts sustained security engagement through military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities, and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy.

Building Partner Capacity

The creation of Africa Command does not mean the U.S. military will take a leading role in African security matters, nor will it establish large U.S. troop bases. Rather, Africa Command is a headquarters staff whose mission entails coordinating the kind of support that will enable African governments and existing regional organizations, such as the African Standby Force, to have greater capacity to provide security and respond in times of need. Africa Command builds on the many African-U.S. security cooperation activities already underway, yet will be able to better coordinate DoD support with other U.S. government departments and agencies to make those activities even more effective.

Presence

Africa Command will be headquartered at Kelley Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany, for the foreseeable future. The command inherits a small but meaningful U.S. military presence already existing in several African nations, to include Camp Lemonier in Djibouti, as well as liaison and administrative offices co-located with U.S. Embassies and diplomatic missions to coordinate Defense Department programs supporting U.S. diplomacy. Any additional presence on the continent will take place only in full diplomatic consultation and agreement with potential host nations.

The Way Ahead

The Africa Command began initial operations in October 2007 and became an independent unified command on October 1, 2008. The focus during its first year was to build a unique organization dedicated to long-term partnerships. Now the Africa Command will focus on synchronizing hundreds of activities inherited from three regional commands that previously coordinated U.S. military relations in Africa.