

**Remarks by
Louis Mazel, Director
Office of African Regional and Security Affairs
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**I just want to second my colleagues on the panel and extend my
Thanks to the “Two Annenbergs” for organizing this event and
the wider discussion series on major public policy issues. It is just
these types of events that I missed so much while serving overseas
for the past 15 years.**

**Let me begin by saying that the State Department strongly
supports AFRICOM and its mission. The Department of State
views the creation of AFRICOM as an important tool for
supporting our comprehensive Africa policy and engagement
strategy. Since AFRICOM’s inception, we have worked closely
with the Department of Defense to develop and establish this
command. The process has occurred in a cooperative and**

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collaborative atmosphere, that we believe has resulted in the development of a more focused and cohesive framework that is supportive of U.S. foreign policy interests as well as our regional security objectives.

We at the State Department are partnering closely with our colleagues in DOD to make AFRICOM a success. We have two senior State Department officers seconded to AFRICOM. One, Ambassador Mary Yates, has taken on the role of Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Activities; the second is a Foreign policy Advisor or “POLADs” as we call them, to AFRICOM, who performs the more traditional role of advising the commander on foreign policy considerations impacting the command. Two additional detailees have been identified to fill State positions in AFRICOM and we will be making additional appointments in the future as positions and candidates are identified. We at State very much view this as a marriage of State’s expertise and authorities

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with the military's resources and security experience and we are excited about this union.

Let me turn now to the more central theme of this discussion today, the central role of public diplomacy in AFRICOM's mission. I want to be honest with you today, from a public diplomacy perspective, the announcement of AFRICOM has generated mixed reactions from African elites as well as questions from American and international stakeholders.

Messages about AFRICOM have been mixed thus far – Starting out it was described as merely a bureaucratic realignment within the U.S. government; then it was described as a “radical new experiment” in how the U.S. government conducts foreign policy on the continent. The mixed messages coupled with the innate suspicions that many African opinion leaders have had about the

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motives of this new command have led to misconceptions and negative perceptions.

Where AFRICOM should have sent a message of partnership and cooperation, which is at the heart of our policy in Africa, instead the creation of this new and more focused military command has provoked fears of militarization of American policy, new large military bases in Africa, and American assistance and bilateral policies being directed from the Pentagon. The fact that President Bush was forced to parry questions about AFRICOM during his recent visit to five African countries and reassure African journalists that there were no U.S. plans to build new military bases in Africa, demonstrates the depth of misunderstanding regarding AFRICOM and its mission.

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Rather than backpedaling and declaring what AFRICOM “is not,” the command needs to communicate more effectively “what it is” and how it will support and deepen the partnerships that have already been developed with African militaries and their civilian leaders. Opinion polls consistently show that Africa is the only continent where publics are overwhelmingly favorable to the U.S. The President’s recent visit to Africa and the very warm reception he received affirm the sincere friendship and deep-seated support we enjoy on the continent. The United States enjoys a very deep reservoir of good will on the African continent, a reservoir that has been replenished over the past fifty years by active outreach by American diplomats, creative and far reaching public diplomacy programs that have identified and cultivated emerging leaders and promoted exchanges, legions of Peace Corps volunteers who have developed the very personal relationships that are so valued in Africa, and major initiatives such as

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PEPFAR, the President's Malaria initiative, AGOA, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, ACOTA, and our Diversity Visa Lottery program.

Like the State Department five decades ago, when President Eisenhower created the Bureau of African Affairs to deal with the convergence of the decolonization of Africa, the beginnings of the Cold War and the emergence of the Civil Rights movement and an African-American "conscience" in American foreign policy, so too today, the Department of Defense is addressing a long standing gap in its global structure. It has done so by what may appear on the surface 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.

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State, USAID, and the Peace Corps are the vanguard of the U.S. government in Africa and they have much to teach our military colleagues about the conduct of public diplomacy in Africa. I would like to share with you today, a few key aspects of what we have learned from our African partners.

Lesson 1 – Personal relationships are crucial and you have to be on the ground to establish these relationships. African greetings are long and sincere. Saying hello in Mali in Bambara includes questions about family and ancestors. This takes time and goes against the grain of American impatience. My suggestion is “take the time” to explain AFRICOM’s mission to key African partners. General Ward did this very effectively at the recent African Center for Strategic Studies Seminar for ECOWAS military and civilian leaders in Bamako last month. He spent an entire day engaging with military leaders from throughout the region.

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Lesson 2 - Listen, Listen, and then Listen. Listening is priceless in terms of understanding gained and respect given and received. Listen to what African leaders are saying about AFRICOM and then craft a public diplomacy strategy to address these concerns.

Lesson 3 - Understand that actions speak louder than words. The image of America in much of Africa is that of a twenty-something peace corps volunteer who lives among Africans, speaks their language, shares their food and is eager to learn about their culture. It is of a missionary who has spent a lifetime translating the bible into the local dialect or working in a community hospital; of the Fulbright professor teaching at the university; or the American working for an NGO who is drilling a well in the village or helping start a tilapia farm. All of these people have learned lesson 4.

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Lesson 4 – Nothing happens quickly in Africa; be in it for the long term and don't set arbitrary timelines. Commitment and perseverance are essential for success. Build the kind of working level partnerships that will build understanding and trust for AFRICOM over the long haul.

In closing I would like to note that stability and prosperity in Africa are important long-term interests of the United States. A stable, healthy, and more prosperous Africa will contribute to global security and a stronger world economy.

Now that the U.S. Africa Command has achieved initial operating capacity, outreach must shift from “announcing” to “educating” – educating ourselves (and this includes all U.S. agencies as well as Congress) as well as educating others – our African partners, regional organizations, international and local NGOs, and the

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nations with whom we partner in Africa on peace and development.

We have learned from the initial reaction to AFRICOM that the educational phase of outreach must emphasize the “whole of government approach” to our Africa policy. AFRICOM must be presented as an integral part of U.S. policy toward Africa.

Viewing the African Command’s creation in a vacuum leads to confusion, suspicion, and the mistaken belief that AFRICOM is the “new face” of USG policy toward Africa instead of supporting the truth, which is that AFRICOM is a supporting element of existing policy that will in fact improve DOD’s ability to support other USG programs in Africa through its Civilian-Military Activities Directorate and will bring greater focus and attention to

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the very fruitful military to military relationships that DOD has already established on the continent.

As General Ward has noted, “what this is about is merely doing the same things the U.S. military was doing already, but doing them in a better coordinated and more cohesive way.”

Once this is clearly understood by our partners I am confident that the U.S. African Command will be welcomed on the continent as warmly as our nation’s other public faces – our diplomats, our development specialists, our peace corps volunteers, our NGO representatives, our missionaries, and our business representatives - have been welcomed in Africa.

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