



www.IPOAworld.org

1634 I St., NW | Suite 800 | Washington, D.C. 20036 | U.S.A. | T +1 (202) 464-0721 | F +1 (202) 464-0726

AFRICOM & the Role of the Private Sector CONNECTING CAPACITY

Doug Brooks and Jennifer Brooke

Published in Africa Journal, Fall 2007
http://www.africacncl.org/AfricaJournal/2007_FALL.pdf

Split off from other U.S. regional commands, AFRICOM is the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD) new command for Africa and this new customized organization offers enormous opportunities for the continent, particularly if it is able to fully harness the capabilities of the private sector to support its goal of enhancing African stability. The private sector has long supported international policies in Africa with logistics, peacekeeping support, peacekeeper training, demining, heavy aviation, security and many other services. With AFRICOM's greater focus on African problems, it is likely that the unique capabilities of private companies will be utilized to an ever-greater degree to improve and expand policies that have been helping to provide stability to the African continent.

Rather than simply creating a 'xeroxed' version of other military commands, AFRICOM's design is uniquely tailored for Africa. It offers greater coordination and focus due to its partition from other commands, and because it has been fashioned after significant input and dialogue with the diplomatic, humanitarian and NGO communities. Although some still fear that AFRICOM will be overly focused on counter terrorism and hard military operations, DoD has been very clear that AFRICOM will not be a 'kinetic' command. It will not have operational combat units within its configuration, and the command structure includes an unprecedented number of diplomatic slots that should provide the direction to ensure it is more responsive and useful to civilian concerns and governments. This new DoD focus has been welcomed by some African leaders such as Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who stated,

The Association of the Stability Operations Industry

"AFRICOM is the recognition that African growth can only occur in an environment where security, development and good governance are integrally linked. There is no substitute for boots - and eyes and ears - on the ground."

AFRICOM's value will be a focus on conflict prevention and alleviation over conflict intervention and in line with that, DoD has reached out to the NGO community to ensure dialogue and cooperation. While there is still suspicion about the goals of AFRICOM from some, the command is a *fait accompli*. AFRICOM is selecting a location to base the headquarters in Africa and deciding how to best accomplish its goals in cooperation with the other key international actors. An NGO or humanitarian organization willing to engage could have a great deal of long-term influence if they weigh in with their concerns and suggestions at this critical juncture.

The private sector's experience and capabilities concerning international and African peace operations can only benefit AFRICOM's goals. Donor states interested in supporting peace operations rarely have enough political will to send their own soldiers and military logistics units to humanitarian operations. As a result, the West is generally limited to supporting militaries from less developed states that make up the bulk of today's international peace operations. Most often, this support is in the form of private companies that can rapidly source the missing skills and capabilities necessary to make international peace operations successful. Unlike states, the private sector does not require a critical mass of political will and popular support to deploy personnel to internationally sanctioned operations in risky conflict and post conflict situations. This makes the private sector of particular value to AFRICOM.

From the International Peace Operations Association's (IPOA) perspective, AFRICOM is a move in the right direction and we expect our member companies will be very much engaged with the new command. Private firms will be doing much of the work required and ensuring client satisfaction. It makes perfect commercial sense to seek advice and coordinate effectively with NGOs and relief organizations that also work in Africa. IPOA maintains a public code of conduct and a mechanism that allows anyone – including

NGO's, journalists, or individuals - to bring complaints against member companies based on alleged infractions of the code. Clients that contract with IPOA members thus gain an extra level of confidence and redress, beyond legal and contractual means. Private companies should be expected to supply their essential services in an accountable and transparent manner, and clients should demand the highest levels of performance from their contractors and IPOA was created to facilitate this practice.

Many analysts do not fully comprehend the scale and value of the Peace and Stability Operations Industry in supporting peacekeeping and military training in Africa. In addition to creating a force multiplier effect for UN and other missions, private firms are increasingly supporting the preparation and training of peacekeepers. Private companies are building bases for peacekeepers, maintaining infrastructure, operating water purification systems and airfields, and managing transportation systems and immensely complex logistics systems. Private security companies are protecting UN field offices, warehouses and personnel, as well as assisting with security at refugee or IDP camps. Most of the heavy aviation assets that move peacekeepers and equipment are private, and private helicopters frequently travel to places considered too risky by the UN's own pilots.

Critically, private sector deployment times are invariably faster than those of militaries supporting peace operations and private firms are often more robust. UN peacekeepers have rarely been able to deploy effectively in less than six months after the passing of a peacekeeping mandate. The private sector usually operates on a two- to six-week deployment timeframe, sometimes less. In addition, blue helmets (especially those from Western states) have an unfortunate reputation for frailty in the face of potential risk and casualties, although they can show impressive resilience as MONUC has in the chaotic east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. More often, private firms working in support of international peacekeepers have actually proven more willing to enter and remain in chaotic, hostile environments than Western troops hamstrung by political concerns. Companies in the Peace and Stability Operations Industry have proven their

capability to move quickly to marshal resources, and do not shun risk so long as they have an ability to ‘manage’ that risk.

Ninety percent of companies in the Peace and Stability Operations Industry provide logistics and support services for NGOs, relief agencies, militaries and peacekeepers. The rest of the industry includes security and Security Sector Reform and Development (SSR&D), including training police forces, border guards, court systems and peacekeepers, reconstruction and development in conflict and post conflict environs. Moreover, as a rule of thumb, the private sector will use as many local staff as allowed to within their contracts. The use of local employees brings enormous benefits to peace and stability operations, including capacity building, training, salaries, developmental skills and professionalism. Many contractual requirements are subcontracted to local firms spreading the benefits of AFRICOM efforts even wider. These sorts of local benefits brought by private firms are recognized by locals and can reflect well on the larger mission.

The private sector is revolutionizing peace and stability operations globally and this capability must be harnessed by AFRICOM. The international community is growing increasingly aware of the value and capacity that the private sector offers to stability efforts in Africa, and increasingly reliant on critical private sector support to ensure that peace and stability operations are successful. In fact, peace and stability operations simply could not take place on the African continent without utilizing private capabilities, underlining the value of working with associations like IPOA to ensure ethics and value. AFRICOM’s decisions to coordinate and cooperate with the private sector support should be made confidently, and with the knowledge that the partnership will strengthen the long-term stabilization and development of the African continent.

Doug Brooks is the President and Founder of the International Peace Operations Association (IPOA). He is a specialist in African security issues and has written extensively on the regulation and constructive utilization of the private sector for international stabilization, peacekeeping, and humanitarian missions. Jennifer Brooke is a publication associate at IPOA and is finishing up her Honors in Geography double Major in Political Science degree at the University of British Columbia, Canada. The IPOA is a nongovernmental, nonprofit, nonpartisan association of service companies dedicated to improving international peacekeeping and stabilization efforts through greater privatization. Contact Doug Brooks at Dbrooks@IPOAonline.org, or visit the IPOA website at www.IPOAonline.org