

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH VICE ADMIRAL ROBERT MOELLER, U.S. NAVY, DEPUTY TO THE COMMANDER FOR MILITARY OPERATIONS, U.S. AFRICA COMMAND, VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 1:15 P.M. EST DATE: TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2007

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ADM. MOELLER: Good afternoon. Hi. Vice Admiral Bob Moeller here.

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): Yes, sir. Admiral Moeller, thank you for joining us. Welcome to the bloggers roundtable.

ADM. MOELLER: Hey, thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. And Vice Admiral Moeller is the deputy to the commander for Military Operations, United States Africa Command. And sir, do you have an opening statement for us?

ADM. MOELLER: Yeah, there's a few things I'd like to convey up front for everybody. First of all, kind of where we are just by way of background, so everybody has a chance to know a little bit more about me, I was -- prior to getting involved in this, I was the director for Strategy, Plans and Policy at Central Command up until the middle of the summer of 2006. And then as the Navy was working on my follow-on assignment, this issue -- that is to say, the department's desire to start to think differently with regard to internal organization, with regard to how we deal with our African partners, really started to take off. And as much as anything, because I was available and some folks knew me and stuff like that, this ultimately came my way.

And so we started this planning effort last fall, and the planning effort over a course of a couple of months then led to some decisions which the department took. And of course, as you all know, in early February the president announced that we were doing this. And at that point in time, in early February, we stood up what we called the AFRICOM Transition Team, essentially the core of the initial headquarters organization. And I was asked to lead that as well. And of course over the last many months of this year, leading up to the 1st of October, we continued with the more detailed and comprehensive planning to get us to our initial operational capability and leading to our full operational capability 1 October of next year.

Through all that, many issues, as I say, we had to consider and get our arms around with regard to the establishment of this command.

And one of the things, the way I used to kind of characterize this to a lot of folks, is that in many ways this is much like being the plank owner of a new construction ship, which I had the privilege of doing some years ago, but in

addition, we also have to be the shipyard to actually build this thing, and of course there's a tremendous amount of work involved with all of that.

So where we are now at this point in time, a month and a half, getting close to two months into our -- beyond our initial operational capability, we are very, very much still in the building the team, building the command and the command organizational structure. That is a work and an effort that will continue through the course of the current fiscal year. A lot involved in that, not only on the military side but with regard to our structure from the standpoint of bringing on other OSD civilians as well as our interagency partners. And so that will very, very much be one of our major focus of efforts here over the course of the next year.

As we do that, then we will also be looking at those future activities that we look to do with our African partners. And one of our absolute bottom lines in all of this is that all of the activities -- the range of activities that are currently in play across the continent and currently under the responsibility of EUCOM, Central Command and Pacific Command, all of that needs to continue. And we will look, where it makes sense to do so, with our African partners to expand upon those kinds of activities in the area of security assistance, capacity building and those kinds of things. And then also in addition to all that, you know, very much look to build partnerships, strengthen existing partnerships and perhaps build others that are not in place today.

And those are the kinds of things, because now this command, we have one command within Defense that is solely focused on the activities with our African partners, we feel very, very good that we will in fact be able to do as much as and if not more than has been done with our African partners in the past.

So with that, I will turn it over to all of you folks for questions that anyone may have.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much.

And I'd like to remind you guys when I call your name just state your full name and your organization and your publication.

And Christian, you were first on-line, so why don't you get us started.

Q Thanks, Vice Admiral. This is Christian Lowe with military.com. A quick question here -- first quick question, and then sort of a longer-form question. How do you determine -- Africa has been a volatile place, as you know, and how do you make sure that any military assistance you render to these countries isn't used somehow for, like, a coup or a government overthrow or something like that. I mean, what is the vetting process?

And then, my second quick question is, what about your counterterrorism activities that you plan to do in Africa? Is that a big part of the military activity there?

ADM. MOELLER: Well, let me answer the second part first. I mean, it'll be some time yet before we become responsible for any particular activity on the continent and particularly with our counterterrorism activities. But I would say -- and it's probably so -- it's premature at this point to get into those kinds of details. All of that will be things that we will assess and look at in much greater detail over the course of the year, and then to kind of get a

sense -- and ultimately, the degree to which we get involved in one thing or another will very, very much be a function of our U.S. foreign policy with regard to the continent. And then -- and that, of course, remains in the lead with the State Department in terms of how we would pursue any of that kind of stuff. So this is -- these are the kinds of things and that level of kind of operational detail is still very much in our future. We will certainly be looking to that, but we haven't gotten to the point yet in our formative stage where we're looking at those kind of details.

With regard to your first question about building capacity and then the potential of it perhaps being employed in a(n) untoward kind of way, that is part and parcel of the engagement activity and in our working with our African partners on the role of the military instrument; the fact that our approach is one of -- you know, where the military is subordinate to civilian authority, et cetera.

And so part and parcel of that entire process of capacity building is key to making sure that the results are not what you allude to. That is something that we will be very, very mindful of as we work with our partners.

MR. HOLT: Thanks.

And Clay.

Q Yes.

Admiral, I was hoping -- well, there's been a lot of discussion regarding AFRICOM in terms of maritime security as a mission, and I was hoping you would comment on the African Partnership Station Initiative, you know, this being an example of maritime security operations, and how you see those continuing in the future or possibly growing.

ADM. MOELLER: Yeah, we're going to look very, very carefully as the partnership station evolution unfolds here over the next several months, look at the range of activities involved there, and draw upon that to see how we can either continue to sustain that, perhaps change some of the mix of the activities where it makes sense to do so.

I would say, though, that certainly from the idea of sustaining that, it is our sense now -- and again, that falls in the category of something that at this point in time we at AFRICOM are not responsible for that; that's still under the auspices of European Command and Naval Forces Europe in execution. We will become responsible for that later in the fiscal year, in addition to other things that European Command is responsible for across the continent.

But we will -- as I say, we will be looking very, very carefully at the mix of activities involved to see -- to look at those where we want to build upon some of those things, perhaps change the mix a little bit where it makes sense to do so and where it's in the interests of our African partners to do so. But I think it is very, very fair to say that sustaining that level of activity in other places is something that we're going to be very interested in doing.

MR. HOLT: Okay, thank you.

And Bruce. Q Yes.

Admiral, Bruce McQuain, QandO.net.

Reading over your website and just from the remarks you've made about - concerning how integrated the staff structure is going to be with OSD and interagency folks, it hits me that AFRICOM is sort of a prototype of what we may see elsewhere in the future. I'm wondering how you're going to capture this experience and be able to get that out to other commands as they try to do what you are so we don't reinvent the wheel.

ADM. MOELLER: Well, great -- great question.

And our formation is going to be something that, you know, as you can probably anticipate, is certainly reviewed, and we discuss this with the department on a fairly regular basis as we continue to put this together. I think that, you know, quite frankly, there is a sense that what it is that we're putting together is viewed by many as a model for the future of our defense organizations.

And we will continue to -- I mean, we've kind of built this structure based on our current understanding of our mission, and as we continue to evolve and then get into the business of having the lead responsibility -- defense responsibility for defense activities across the continent, and as we assume responsibility for those activities from European Command, Central Command and Pacific Command, that as we get smarter about what it takes to do our mission from an organizational standpoint, we fully anticipate that we may well -- you know, we'll further evolve our organizational structure to make it best suited for what it is that we're trying to do with our African partners.

And so to some degree, the structure that we're starting out with may look fundamentally different a few years down the road. And there are a lot of people, as I think you can imagine, in the department that are very interested to see how this will evolve, as well as our other unified command colleagues around the globe looking at what -- as we learn lessons about aligning -- better aligning organizational structure to our mission to see what may make sense from their vantage point that they can adapt.

MR. HOLT: And Sean Meade.

Q Hey, Admiral, thanks for being here. This is Sean Meade with Aviation Week. And I wanted to ask you -- while we were waiting for you to come on, Jack alluded to -- somebody asked a question about where are you going to place the command and headquarter the command, and one of the things that he mentioned was you're moving things around and what's the logistics challenge going to be.

And I wondered if you speak in a little more detail about that for a minute.

And then -- I don't know if this is too specific, but you know, over at Aviation Week we're watching the C-17 line that Boeing is thinking about closing. And we had a recent article where we said, you know, AFRICOM's need for transport could affect a C-17 line, and if you could just speak to that, I'd appreciate it.

ADM. MOELLER: Well, let me say that we are, you know, early in the process of -- with regard to presence on the continent. And that certainly is one of the issues that we are working our way through. It has been expressed to us from our African partners that there would be value added in having a

presence on the continent. Where that ultimately turns out to be very, very much remains to be seen.

Even -- but above and beyond that, of course, that -- the where of our presence on the continent is a -- is less of a priority issue than some of the things that I was talking about up front with regard to maintaining the level and building upon the level of activities our African partners. All of that needs to proceed apace while we figure out the where that our presence may be at some point in the future on the continent.

That said, it very, very much is tied closely to logistics and the support of our activities. We absolutely agree that certainly before we get to a point of establishing presence on the continent, and wherever that turns out to be, logistics demand to support our activities will certainly be keen, and likewise when we -- ultimately we get to that point in time where we can determine where the presence will be on the continent, logistics will play significantly in that equation as well.

We probably at this point in time are not in a position to know enough about what that looks like in the future with regard to, you know, the specifics about C-17 support and those kinds of things. However, given the immensity of the continent, movement around could, you know, in some ways certainly be supported from time to time and would lend itself to the kind of capacity that C-17s bring to particular mission sets, et cetera.

So -- but very, very -- you know, again, where we are in all of that work is -- it is probably premature to talk about specifics with regard to C-17 requirements, et cetera. But clearly where we are today and will be at for some point into the future with regard to movement back and forth, logistics and logistic support for our activities is absolutely key and is going to be a big driver for -- you know, for the foreseeable future. That's for sure.

Q Thanks for your answer.

MR. HOLT: And Matt.

Q Admiral, thank you. This is Matt Armstrong with the MountainRunner.

Sort of building on what Bruce was saying about the prototype, AFRICOM is the face of the new diplomacy in many ways: cross-border, connecting the continent, drawing outside the lines of the artificial, permeable, colonial, political borders. You mentioned that you're very mindful of your position in this. The superdiplomats, if I might call them that, of the people of AFRICOM, both military and civilian, are the last three feet in the face of American more often, facilitators of U.S. ideas, et cetera.

As literally a student of public diplomacy as well as a blogger, I'm very mindful of how this plays out and I have two questions. One, you're working with, but it sounds at oftentimes you're leading, State. Can you speak on the organizational changes you, AFRICOM, are pushing onto State? And two, in Africa, we're perhaps most clearly in competition with China. And in January of last year, they issued their Africa policy which, in many regards, is a model document in public diplomacy, as they speak about mutual benefit, reciprocity, common prosperity, support, et cetera, et cetera. I was wondering if you'd speak to both of those.

ADM. MOELLER: Sure, upfront with regard to the organizational piece, I mean, we have very, very much, I think, as you may be aware, my -- I am the deputy for -- deputy to the commander for Military Operations. And my co-deputy, Ambassador Mary Yates, is the deputy to the commander for Civil Military Activities. We have a very collaborative working environment, and that's what we're working to instill across the staff. It is our intent, as we continue to build our organizational structure, that our interagency partners will be positioned across the entire organizational structure, not in just one section of the command headquarters organization. Because for all the things that we are looking to do, having interagency expertise across all the directorates of the organization will be key.

And then but at the same time, this gets back to a point that I think I made up front. But I want to certainly -- if I did not, I want to make sure. What we have in creating this command is it is the intent such that we will be more effectively able to work with our African partners on all the defense kinds of things that heretofore European Command, Central Command and Pacific Command has done with our African partners in the military lane.

We are not looking to take the lead for any particular other government agency work that they are doing today across the continent, or our international partners. What we are hoping to do, by virtue of consolidating the activities of three unified commands into one, is be in a much better position to support our interagency community where it makes sense to do so.

But I really want to emphasize that we're not looking to take over from any other U.S. government agency what they do. That remains in their hands. What we hope to do is, again, be much better able to effectively support their activities such that they become more successful in the doing of those activities, and then by virtue of their being more successful, we're better able to achieve our strategic effects.

With regard to your second question, about China, I think, you know, we want to look for opportunities where we can work with the Chinese in areas where it makes sense to do so. And I anticipate -- again, this ultimately becomes a matter for policymakers, but we're going to be -- you know, from our standpoint I think, you know, we want to try to look for those opportunities to figure out where the kinds of things that we're looking to do with our African partners makes sense for us to work with the Chinese.

MR. HOLT: And Paul.

Q Hi, Admiral. It's Paul McLeary from CJR. Since AFRICOM command is going to be an interagency command and you're going to be working with State and other civilian institutions, I'm curious -- and you're going to have a pretty small military footprint on the continent -- I'm curious if you're looking into trying to build out a new way to deal with security contractors. Are you going to rely on State's guidance for this or are you going to -- are you drawing up new proposals or new ways of working with them?

ADM. MOELLER: You know, those are one of the many issues that we will be looking at here over the next several months throughout the course of the fiscal year, and seeing, you know, what's -- given, again, what our mission is and what is kind of the right mix between military and contractors to do some of those kind of activities.

We will -- I mean, one of the questions that we're frequently asked about, and we continue to stress this, is that the establishment of AFRICOM is not about the deployment of forces to the continent or the establishment of bases. And that is exactly the case. From time to time, you know, folks in uniform will be working with our -- and will go to the continent to do those theater security cooperation activities in terms of helping to build the capacity of our African partners. And depending on the particular circumstances and the particular activities, from time to time that will be folks in uniform, but that may also be where we will look to defense contractors to do some of that work on our behalf. What that mix is over time as we, again, look to maintain the current level of activity or in the future look to expand some of those activities where it makes sense to do so, what that mix is remains to be seen, but I certainly anticipate that it will be a mix of one sort or another as we go forward in the future.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And any follow-up questions?

Q I have one. Admiral, I'm Gerry Gilmore. I'm a reporter with American Forces Press Service, DOD Public Affairs. How are you doing?

ADM. MOELLER: Good.

Q Sir, you know, Africa is strategic importance to the United States, obviously, and AFRICOM is going to assist our African partners to confront poverty, disease, terrorism and other challenges. What would you say are two of the key challenges that you see early on, or is it too early to ask that -- or two key challenges you see for AFRICOM?

ADM. MOELLER: I think one of the challenges up-front is, of course, is continuing to work, quite frankly, to convey that our role here is not about kind of taking over from other government agencies what it is that they do because I think that, you know, unfortunately, there's a sense out there that that is what we're about, and therefore, somehow, that that's going to undermine all other things going on across the continent. Again, we are very, very much in support and looking to support in the best way it makes sense to do so other government agencies.

So I would say up-front we want to -- and ultimately, probably the best way that we're going to be able to do this is that once we become responsible for those mil-to-mil activities across the continent with our African partners, people will see in the doing that -- that that is the case. Clearly, you know, working with our African partners -- I mean, the challenge -- and we will look to support, again, where it makes sense to do so and the best of our ability some of the issues with regard to the many medical challenges that confront many of our African partners in terms of HIV/AIDS, the challenges of malaria and those kinds of things; because clearly to be able to develop capacity in the forces of our African partners requires a force that is physically capable of, you know, our being able to work with and support them, to have the capacity to do the kinds of things that we want to do with them and we believe that they would want to do -- but that requires a relatively healthy armed force to be able to do those kinds of things. So that's probably, you know, just the -- some of those medical challenges across the continent and probably some of the up-front, you know, biggest things that we're going to try to look to support -- all those other government agencies that are involved in that in one way or another. And of course, DOD has had a role for some period of time in working

directly with African militaries, and we certainly want to do whatever we can to certainly maintain, if not increase, support for that kind of stuff.

Q But we've assisted African nations with humanitarian needs before, haven't we, sir?

ADM. MOELLER: Yes.

Q In the past we've done that. And you're saying, basically, the creation of this command is going to bring more efficiency, effectiveness to that effort, then, for future challenges?

ADM. MOELLER: That would -- exactly. That would be our hope by the fact that we will be able to focus on this on a full-time basis, and so by doing so, we would hope that we would be more effective in that kind of support.

Q And one more thing --

ADM. MOELLER: Yes.

Q -- you said we're not going to muscle in and we're not going to take over any of the U.S. agency's role, are you're talking about State Department or USAID or -- is that what you're referring to, basically?

ADM. MOELLER: Exactly. They retain the lead for -- you know, the activities that they currently do with our African partners -- they retain the lead for all those kinds of things, as well as all other U.S. government agencies that are involved in activities of one sort or another across the continent. All those agencies retain the lead. There's no intent on our part to take away from them the lead for that. What we will look to do is, where it makes sense for Defense to be able to support some of those things, we'll look for ways and opportunities to do so, again, if it makes sense to do so.

Q Okay. Well, thank you, sir. And again, we're acting as helpers or assistants to help these African nations. They're taking the lead. We're merely -- we're helping them to help themselves.

ADM. MOELLER: That's exactly right. That is exactly right.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Jack --

MR. HOLT: Yes?

Q -- it's Christian Lowe again.

MR. HOLT: Yes.

Q I have a quick follow-up.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Vice Admiral, your -- in your comments there, you were talking -- I understand you're trying to put the best face on this interagency cooperation, all that kind of stuff. But you know, for years the U.S. Special Force has been going in and helping African militaries, you know, become modern militaries and

structure themselves so they're not sort of tribal and that sort of thing. There's been a lot of mil-to-mil cooperation.

What happens, though, when the inevitable conflict comes up where State Department doesn't agree with DOD policy on that? Does that mean that you're basically at the -- does that mean basically that AFRICOM's military involvement is determined by State Department and that you can't go train those guys in Mali if the State Department disagrees? ADM. MOELLER: Well, I think -- I mean, you know, if you -- you know, probably if you look around the world, I mean, ultimately what we do on a mil-to-mil basis with anybody is ultimately, you know, a subset of what our foreign policy objectives are, which, you know, are set by the State Department.

So, you know, we would probably have a conversation about the pros and cons of one thing or another, but ultimately, again, what we're able to do in any particular country is a subset of ultimately our foreign policy.

And another thing, too, that your question allows me to address is the fact that in any particular country across the continent, the activities that we would do will clearly be done with the approval of that chief of mission, that ambassador in that particular country.

Q Okay, thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

And sir, thank you very much for joining us today. Do you have any closing comments, closing thoughts for us?

ADM. MOELLER: Well, I guess all I would like to say at this point is, again, you know, first of all, I very much appreciate this opportunity to be -- to join you all for this session this afternoon and would -- you know, this is going to be an evolving process. And as we continue to mature as an organization here over the next several months and start to get in the business of having the lead -- that is to say, you know, assuming responsibility from European Command and Central Command and the Pacific Command of these activities -- this will be very, very much an evolutionary process and continue to unfold. So I would very much look forward to an opportunity a few more months down the road to kind of, you know, link up again with you all and we can kind of talk about where we are as this process continues to unfold, because it will be ever changing in the months ahead.

MR. HOLT: Sir, we look forward to that opportunity as well. And you can bet we'll be requesting another interview here in a few months, basically an update, operational update, see how things are going.

ADM. MOELLER: That's great.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Vice Admiral Moeller, who is deputy to the commander for Military Operations, United States Africa Command, thank you very much for being with us this afternoon, sir. And we look forward to speaking with you again. ADM. MOELLER: Very good.

Q Thanks, sir.

Q Thank you.

ADM. MOELLER: Thank you all very, very much. Take care.

Q Thank you.

ADM. MOELLER: Right. Bye-bye.

END.