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# The ACRI Command and Control Challenge

SCOTT E. BROWER and ANNA SIMONS

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The African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) was launched in 1996. Its aim has been to help develop African countries' capabilities to keep the peace on the continent. Having grown out of the international community's reluctance to intervene in the genocide and fighting in Rwanda in 1994, ACRI's existence tacitly acknowledges that the United States is unable and unlikely to intervene everywhere. However, this does not mean the United States will not support such efforts undertaken by others. Indeed, US funding of ACRI is proof that the United States is willing to offer certain incentives and assistance to African countries to step into the breach. This has been most recently demonstrated by the deployment of US Special Forces to Nigeria to train Nigerian peacekeepers for deployment in Sierra Leone.

Currently, ACRI is funded only through Fiscal Year 2001. What happens beyond that time will depend on several factors. One is the US presidential election (which has not yet taken place at this writing). Depending on who assumes office in 2001, there may be a shift in American foreign policy. Another issue which is likely to affect future support for ACRI is the performance of the African countries that have already received US training (Senegal, Uganda, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire). For instance, the Cote d'Ivoire military recently staged a coup. Will the US Congress continue to look favorably upon an initiative whose participants have engaged in such anti-democratic behavior? Or, if the countries which have received training do not step up to the plate and volunteer for peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations, will American taxpayers continue to support the idea that this is a worthwhile program? Why train countries to a capability they are then unwilling to use or, worse, too willing to misuse?

## Why Support ACRI?

Despite questions such as these--and this article will raise more--the reasons to continue to support ACRI are compelling. In an ideal world, the desire to provide humanitarian assistance should be reason enough. But the United States also has a self-interest in promoting regional stability efforts in Africa. More than 16 percent of the oil used in the United States comes from Africa, with some experts predicting that "oil imports from Africa could surpass those from the Persian Gulf by 2010." [1] Plenty of other strategic minerals also stream out of Africa, as do a range of profitable raw materials, from diamonds to timber and gold to rubber. In fact, fighting over control of these natural assets is the reason for most of the continent's conflicts. To put it even more bluntly, if there were no corporate buyers fewer battles would be fought.

Without question, transnational syndicates of all kinds manage to profit despite (and arguably because of) rampant corruption and instability in Africa. US citizens, in stark contrast, do not. Narco-traffickers and terrorists have increasingly found safe havens in countries like Nigeria and Sudan. Diseases that no one had heard of two decades ago now threaten people just a plane ride away. Americans can try to bury their heads in the sand and presume that their modernity offers sufficient protection from such dangers. But family members of the victims of the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam embassy bombings would rightfully argue otherwise. And just the name "West Nile fever" should serve as a wake-up call.

Yet those committed to bettering conditions in Africa have tried to prick the consciences and scare sense into the American public by sounding similar alarms for years. Theirs remains a Sisyphean task. [2] Whatever American goodwill there was toward Africans in the aggregate dissipated in Somalia. Also, truth be told, there isn't enough of a political constituency in the United States to support expansive peacekeeping efforts in Africa--which also explains the development of ACRI. [3] In many regards, ACRI represents the living, breathing embodiment of the American

national ambivalence. Standing it up is an admission that the United States is unlikely to commit forces to Africa in the face of future unrest--US forces are already stretched too thin, Africa has too much unrest. Yet because the United States is the world's sole remaining superpower, US leaders feel a responsibility to do something to help Africa relieve its many conflicts and problems. Thus ACRI embodies the US desire to train Africans to keep the peace among themselves.

As a consequence of the US ambivalence toward Africa, however, not even ACRI's future is secure. Critics of the program can correctly point to a number of shortcomings. Also, the sudden decision to train Nigerian soldiers outside the scope of ACRI will no doubt raise a number of questions among those who have signed on for what has been touted as a multilateral effort. The real problem ACRI's existence presents, however, is that not just the United States has committed to it. Numerous African countries have put their faith and trust in the United States to support this initiative over the long haul. It is hard to imagine how it can now be bypassed or discontinued without repercussions.

At best one might say we Americans have a spotty record when it comes to long-term commitments to those who regard themselves as US allies. Yet increasingly the United States relies on international coalitions whenever and wherever it seeks to intervene abroad. Making the most of ACRI can help the United States prove it will uphold its end of such bargains, and could even help in striking more of them. Or, consider: if the United States could empower others so that they not only want to, but can, achieve regional stabilization in the face of state collapse and ethnic strife, the United States and its allies could realize tremendous benefits at minimal cost from such a contribution to the "shaping" strategy. Achieving stability is, after all, a pressing need, and not just in Africa. At the moment, one could argue (as did many world leaders at the UN's Millennium summit) that this goal represents the greatest challenge of the 21st century. Certainly, if unaddressed, that is what it is likely to become.

### **The Command and Control Challenge**

To nip destabilization in the bud, then, would seem to require programs like ACRI. However, even with the initial training iterations having been completed at the battalion level, ACRI as a whole has yet to be put together. As a capability it remains incomplete. Intended as it is to be multinational in nature, major questions still loom: How will battalions be called up? Who will call them up? How will they be supplied? Who will command them? It seems vital that answers be found to these and other unresolved issues before there can be a first deployment. Each one of these issues, meanwhile, is thorny. Take, for instance, the business of command and control (the subject of the bulk of this article). For ACRI to have a fighting chance, this aspect had better be addressed sooner rather than later.

Timing is itself a critical factor. Current responses to crises in Africa are reactive rather than proactive. Rwanda demonstrated just how quickly 800,000 people can be murdered--in less than four months. Too often it takes longer than that to even agree to, let alone deploy, peacekeeping forces. Many factors can be cited to explain away the lack of effective responsiveness on the part of the UN and other actors, but the real lesson to be drawn is that if nations are unwilling to provide troops, money, and timely logistical help, no multinational force can be constituted, let alone committed. As Secretary General Kofi Annan has acknowledged, this is the principal stumbling block for the UN.[4]

That is why additional steps need to be taken to promote the maturation of the kind of peacekeeping mechanism which ACRI, at least conceptually, promises. We might accept NATO as the exemplar of a well-established international organization, with an elaborate command and control structure already in place, but even NATO requires considerable time to decide whether and how to act and react. This is in part because a consensus must be built prior to action, and consensus-building always takes time. Europe is also fortunate, however, in that NATO is institutionalized. Africa has nothing remotely comparable. While the Organization of African Unity (OAU) does have a Crisis Management Center, this body has proven to be largely ineffective in solving the types of disputes that would call for peacekeepers. Not designed to undertake such operations, the OAU nonetheless now finds itself in a situation where it may be asked to do so. In large measure this is because the OAU is the only overarching organization on the continent with a presence in all member states.

One question worth pondering, then, is whether an effective command and control (C2) node for peacekeeping should be established under OAU auspices, assuming one should be established at all. If the United States is truly serious about helping African countries develop their peacekeeping capabilities, a C2 node must be established somewhere.

Otherwise, the likelihood that a multinational coalition could gather itself quickly is doubtful.

### *Why C2 Matters*

As poor as communications are within most African countries, they are even less reliable between them. For instance, in 1996 the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) invited contingents from Namibia, Mozambique, Malawi, and Lesotho to participate in training as part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Flintlock exercise series. The BDF received confirmation from Namibia, Malawi, and Lesotho. But as the exercise began, the Lesotho group still had not appeared, while the Mozambicans showed up at the border unannounced.[5] Once under way, the training proceeded relatively smoothly, but getting it started turned out to be difficult, and this is just one example of the kind of trouble that often can't be avoided at the sub-regional level during a training exercise. There is no reason to believe that the situation would improve at the regional level during a crisis.

Compounding communications difficulties are transportation nightmares. In many parts of the continent road and rail networks may exist. But they also might be in disrepair. This means some areas will be isolated and unreachable by vehicle or train. Even if locations can be reached, the length of time required to get there can be prohibitive. In such cases, when time is of the essence or the area is simply too difficult to traverse on the ground, the mission may require airlift, a capability which will likely have to come from the United States or Europe. Again, this will require time, especially if none of the arrangements are in place and nothing has been institutionalized--or even considered--prior to a crisis.

Having a C2 node up and functioning could, at the very least, mitigate some of these problems by ensuring that certain basic contingencies would be planned for. Timely decisions could be made more easily at the outset since critical personnel would already be together. Additionally, participating in an established C2 cell would mean that members from different countries would become more familiar with each other, reducing the likelihood of potential misunderstandings and miscommunications. This would certainly assist in the consensus-building process. It would also reduce the ability of one hegemonic power to take unilateral action or domineer.

### *A Permanent C2 Cell*

With a centrally located C2 cell established on a permanent or semipermanent basis, data could be centrally stored and updated. Pertinent data might include the location of units available for peacekeeping duty; a record of their prior peacekeeping experience; contact information; and lists of potential commanders, liaisons, and interpreters.

One critical area that a permanent C2 body would be better suited to address than any other entity would be in determining which countries should constitute the peacekeeping or humanitarian relief force, depending on such variables as where the crisis occurs and who is deployed elsewhere. Often, every country that volunteers for service is needed. But heads of state seldom act selflessly. Political leaders are likely to commit forces only if they feel they have something to gain. This is to be expected. But what isn't acceptable is intervention in order to interfere in a dispute. US, UN, and other officials who are not steeped in local and regional politics may not be able to adequately screen potential participants for their ulterior motives. Ideally, a professional C2 node would have its own stake in ensuring that an operation be well-conceived from the outset.

Although early on in the discussion phase of ACRI it was determined that a standing force not be established, this does not preclude the need for a standing C2 element. In fact, the lack of a ready force only accentuates the need for a permanent coordinating body. Again, where such a node should be located is a matter for debate. Founded in 1963, the OAU has long-established credibility as an international organization, with regional offices in Maputo, Lusaka, and Luanda, along with headquarters in Addis Ababa and an office near the UN headquarters in New York. Unfortunately, the OAU has yet to live up to what many regard as its potential. Instead, as William Thom recently noted, its inaction encourages the development of subregional groupings.[6]

Subregional groups themselves pose a challenge for ACRI. Almost by definition, subregional economic unions like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which then generate military branches (like the Economic Community's Monitoring Group, ECOMOG), are interested in unrest within their areas. Whether or not they start off as neutral or impartial participants, soldiers sent in by subregional organizations rarely have the training or

wherewithal to stop a conflict in short order, while the longer they are involved the more embroiled they become in the political, social, and economic nuances. Subregional organizations also tend to be dominated by subregional powers, as has been the case with Nigeria in ECOMOG, or South Africa in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). ACRI offers an antidote since, in theory, units from one part of the continent could be sent to keep the peace in a region where they have no local interests. This would presumably alter the incentives for all involved. It would also, though, require considerable logistical coordination--requiring, again, a permanent C2 node.

## **The Institutionalization Challenge**

How to institutionalize a C2 cell is not the only aspect of ACRI's command and control structure which requires further consideration. Several levels of what is still an inchoate structure merit attention if ACRI is to ever prove to be more than the sum of a series of disparate parts. These levels range from the tactical to the strategic, and while it is vital to ensure that a workable command and control structure exists at all levels, each presents its own particular set of challenges.

At the battalion level, command and control should be relatively easy to structure. In most instances, countries will deploy and operate as organic elements. This allows each military to use its own command and control techniques and procedures. The ACRI training program currently addresses leadership and staff training at this level. Where training lags is at the next level--that of the brigade--where, not surprisingly, real coordination dilemmas are bound to occur.

Several different models for command and control structures at the brigade level are possible, any of which might prove suitable depending on the particular nature of the mission. Because of such uncertainties it makes little sense to lock in a set structure ahead of time. Instead, decisions about which specific brigade command and control structure to adopt should probably be deferred until the mission has been approved, units committed, and a commander designated. Even so, certain factors can be taken into account in the training of C2 elements, and should be presented as factors worthy of leadership consideration.

For instance, the current ACRI brigade training plan of instruction places emphasis on staff responsibilities and interactions with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and private voluntary organizations (PVOs). This is important since there is bound to be a humanitarian concern in any peacekeeping mission. But other vital areas for ensuring harmony across the operational landscape often receive short shrift. Five factors in particular are discussed below. Not each of these factors is likely to surface in every deployment, but all will likely appear over the course of numerous deployments, and any one could undo a mission. In light of many of the challenges that have plagued peacekeeping operations in the past, brigade-level leaders must learn to take each of these into account and make the right assessments before the first battalion deploys.

- *Composition of forces.* The brigade commander may have little choice about the forces provided to him, but he must still take into account their composition. He must determine whether units assigned to him have ethnic or cultural ties to any of the warring factions. He must also know whether existing animosities are present among the peacekeeping forces themselves.

Given the population dislocations generated throughout Africa by conflict, famine, and urbanization, as well as deep-seated patterns of labor migration, soldiers might well carry different passports or wear different uniforms but practice the same customs and possess the ability to speak the same language as people from a different country. This can present a commander with distinct advantages, but it also can cause potential problems in terms of maintaining unit integrity.

In the best of circumstances, successful peacekeeping requires a great deal of finesse. A commander needs to be able to read people and not just terrain. Presuming that he is honest about his own attitudes, it is vital that he make every effort to discern those of his subordinates in order to achieve harmony within his organization. This is not only the arena in which he had better be able to exert control, of course, but the more controlled, responsible, and professional he can keep the actions of the peacekeepers, the likelier it is that locals will respond in kind. To achieve and thus project harmony, a commander might separate forces he suspects will not get along by segregating them geographically or by assigning them different, non-overlapping missions. Alternatively, he may find himself better off

emphasizing commonalities or interpersonal ties in order to forge stronger inter-battalion or even civil-military bonds.

In other words, the significance of recognizing ethnic and cultural fault lines, and the degree to which these may cross national boundaries, cannot be overstated. To be able to prevent detrimental enmities from surfacing, a commander needs prior knowledge not just about the country from which a peacekeeping battalion hails, but more detailed, sociological information about the soldiers comprising his constituent battalions.

- *Composition of staff.* The ability of a commander to make correct judgments will depend largely on the composition of his staff. Since it is unlikely for him to have detailed personal knowledge regarding the capabilities and limitations of the various contingents available to him, he will have to rely on his staff for their assessments. It is therefore crucial, both for his sake and for the sake of the contingents, that each of the contingents is well represented at the brigade level.

Yet, as important as it is that a staff be composite (and sometimes transparently so), this in and of itself creates a new set of challenges. It will inevitably take some time for the various staff members to learn to work together cohesively. Also, from the contingents' point of view, a composite staff will be expected to act in a more representative manner than would a staff dominated by the commander's own people. As a result, there will be a greater need for consensus-building rather than unilateral decisionmaking if the expectations of all of the constituent units are to be fulfilled. In the long run this should prove beneficial, since each contingent will feel that its point of view has been taken into consideration. But initially this could generate the kinds of difficulties which a sensitized commander would be well-positioned to preempt.

- *Filling all staff positions.* In building such a staff, all positions should be filled. This includes positions such as that of the Public Affairs Officer, for example. The Public Affairs Officer may well prove to be one of the staff's most important members, since he or she is often perfectly positioned to help foster goodwill and support at home. Yet few African countries have a well-trained public affairs element. ACRI should consider ways to redress this shortcoming.

- *Civil-military relations.* In the realm of civil-military relations more generally, the ACRI training plan has devoted considerable attention to the need for peacekeepers to be able to work with external agencies such as humanitarian relief organizations, NGOs, and PVOs, as well as with civilians from the sponsoring body who are responsible for financial oversight of the mission. However, thus far there has been no consideration for the role of civilian police, even though this is one asset that time and again has proven absolutely critical to success in peacekeeping.

There are several reasons why this aspect of keeping the peace has been neglected. One has to do with the legal ramifications of US military personnel training civilian police forces. But even if local civilian police are restricted from participating in the training, there may be other ways to bridge this gap. For instance, key members of various police agencies could be invited to attend ACRI training as observers. At the same time, ACRI training should, at a minimum, include information about the historical use of civilian police units in peacekeeping operations. This would assist the military force commander to better understand how he should properly engage with (or engage) civilian police. As with NGOs and PVOs, civilian police forces are bound to appear on the scene if they are not already present.

- *Liaisons.* Another lesson learned from previous peacekeeping operations concerns the indispensability of liaisons. US doctrine considers the use of liaisons critical in multinational operations. A peacekeeping operation that employs ACRI-trained battalions could well wind up with troops from countries as far removed as Senegal and Botswana, with all of their attendant linguistic, ethnic, religious, and other differences compounding those inherited from two very different sets of military traditions. It should not be assumed that just because all of the forces deployed are African, battalions will have anything more in common than the supplies and training that ACRI has provided. Thus, liaisons are important. Their selection and positioning should be addressed at the highest levels of command for each mission.

While commanders are invariably hesitant about allowing their best people to be pulled away, it is vital that every liaison be someone who has his commander's full confidence and the authority to speak on his behalf. Liaisons must

also have sufficient rank to ensure that wherever they are positioned they will be listened to. US doctrine states that the senior liaison should be equal in rank to the gaining element's operations officer.[7] This grants the liaison the ability to keep his commander informed of all actions that pertain to, or could possibly affect, his unit, along with assisting the gaining commander and his staff in learning as much as possible about the capabilities and limitations of the unit the liaison represents.[8] The fact that there is no set rule for where liaisons should be located offers commanders considerable flexibility in assigning them where they are most needed. In multinational operations, usual locations are with other contingents, various government agencies, NGOs and PVOs, and international organizations.[9]

Although the topic of liaisons is addressed in the ACRI battalion level plan of instruction, the focus is (again) on conducting liaison operations with NGOs and PVOs. There is no mention of liaison operations between various headquarters or contingents. There would be immeasurable benefits, however, in their inclusion at all levels.[10]

## Conclusions

Ensuring that liaisons are more effectively incorporated is suggestive of the approach those steering ACRI should now take if the program is to have any chance of success. At the moment, ACRI remains an initiative. Its aim is to provide battalions with a capability. The United States is not helping Africa form a peacekeeping body or field a peacekeeping force per se. Even if it were, Americans could not unilaterally configure a command and control node. Nor could the United States dictate which international body should oversee a credible, permanent command and control cell. However, without a plan for how to establish such an element, the efforts of all military units, no matter how well trained, are likely to prove worthless. Given the fact that battalions comprising a multinational force will be drawn from different (and not necessarily compatible) militaries, a controlling element must be in place to ensure mutual cooperation. Without some preconceived, easy-to-adopt method of coordination, even the best-intentioned forces are all too likely to go astray.

ACRI provides the United States a perfect opportunity to nudge participants (and others) toward this next phase of peacekeeping and humanitarian relief management. Although a popular current view is that Africans must solve Africa's problems, any assumption that Africans would have a better understanding than Americans of the coordination issues raised by multinational peacekeeping operations in Africa is mistaken. Africa contains more than 50 countries stretching over a land mass that is more than three times the size of the continental United States. Africa is unbelievably diverse. This diversity itself will likely render peacekeeping efforts contentious, if not touch and go. Thus there is a need to build up those elements that will foster cross-cultural, multinational, and inter-battalion cooperation.

The US military has substantial experience with combined operations. We should share that expertise, just as our expertise in peacekeeping techniques and procedures, with those African countries that are willing to commit a portion of their forces to train to keep the peace. This would be particularly helpful since it is often a lack of trust, cooperation, and a shared sense of responsibility that leads to conflict in the first place.

Working to make cooperative operations a reality in Africa also would help allay the concerns of critics of ACRI who worry that "security assistance and training provided by the United States will strengthen the government's resolve to use military solutions and thereby influence domestic political outcomes." [11] While the United States can never guarantee that the forces it trains won't be misused, the more collective ACRI can be made to be and the more integrated and professional its command and control structure, the greater will be the commitment of its constituent battalions to peacekeeping. This, ultimately, is what ACRI should be shooting for, both so Americans don't have to deploy to an African hot zone, and so Africans can but perhaps one day will no longer need to.

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## NOTES

1. John Stremlau, "Ending Africa's Wars," *Foreign Affairs*, 79 (July-August 2000), 122.

2. See, for instance, Jeffrey Goldberg's 2 March 1997 *New York Times Magazine* article, "Our Africa," in which he strives to appeal to American self-interest regarding narco-trafficking, terrorism, and what he calls "biological national-security issues: environmental destruction, explosive population growth, the rapid spread of disease and the emergence of entirely new diseases" (p. 35).

3. Although, as Mora McLean recently pointed out in an op-ed piece in *The Washington Post* (27 August 2000), "Fully 13 percent of Americans trace their lineage to Africa and derive an important part of their personal identity from this association" which could be taken to represent a political constituency, a strong, coherent lobbying effort has yet to materialize. See also George B. N. Ayittey, *Africa Betrayed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).
4. Jim Hoagland, "More Muscle for the Peacekeepers," *The Washington Post*, 4 August 2000, p. A29.
5. Major Brower was working with the BDF during this exercise, and witnessed these events firsthand.
6. William Thom, "Africa's Security Issues Through 2010," internet, <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev/English/JulAug00/thom.htm>, p. 5.
7. See US Army, Field Manual 90-41, *JTF Liaison Handbook, Multiservice Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Joint Task Force (JTF) Liaison Operations* (Fort Monroe, Va.: US Army Training and Doctrine Command, August 1998), p. III-1.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. v-vi.
9. *Ibid.*, p. I-1.
10. FM 90-41, *JTF Liaison Handbook*, provides a solid basis from which lesson plans could be derived for inclusion in the brigade plan of instruction.
11. Paul Omach, "The African Crisis Response Initiative: Domestic Politics and Convergence of National Interests," *African Affairs*, 99 (January 2000), 92.

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