

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-646](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

A House Armed Services Committee report accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 mandated GAO to conduct an analysis of options for the permanent placement of AFRICOM headquarters. While GAO's work was ongoing, DOD announced its decision to keep AFRICOM's headquarters at its current location in Stuttgart, Germany. This report addresses the following questions: (1) What courses of action did DOD consider for the permanent placement of AFRICOM headquarters? and (2) To what extent was DOD's decision to keep AFRICOM headquarters in Stuttgart based on a well-documented analysis of the costs and benefits of the options available to DOD? To meet these objectives, GAO analyzed documents provided by and interviewed officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense; the Joint Staff; and AFRICOM and other combatant commands.

What GAO Recommends

To meet operational needs at lower costs, GAO recommends that DOD conduct a more comprehensive and well-documented analysis of options for the permanent placement of the headquarters for AFRICOM, including documentation on whether the operational benefits of each option outweigh the costs. DOD partially concurred with GAO's recommendation, stating that the decision was based primarily on military judgment but that it will perform additional analysis of the location of the headquarters if the Secretary deems it necessary. GAO continues to believe such analysis is needed.

View [GAO-13-646](#). For more information, contact John H. Pendleton at (202) 512-3489 or pendletonj@gao.gov.

September 2013

DEFENSE HEADQUARTERS

DOD Needs to Reassess Options for Permanent Location of U.S. Africa Command

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has considered several courses of action for the placement of the headquarters for U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) but decided in early 2013 to keep it in Germany. When AFRICOM was created in 2007, DOD temporarily located its headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany, with the intent of selecting a permanent location at a later date. DOD's initial goal was to locate the headquarters in Africa, but this was later abandoned in part because of significant projected costs and sensitivities on the part of African countries. Subsequently, in 2008, DOD conducted an analysis that found that several locations in Europe and the United States would be operationally feasible and less expensive than keeping the headquarters in Stuttgart. A final decision, however, was deferred until 2012, when the Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation office completed its analysis. Subsequent to this analysis, in January 2013, the Secretary of Defense decided to keep AFRICOM's headquarters in Stuttgart. In announcing the decision, the Secretary noted that keeping AFRICOM in Germany would cost more than moving it to the United States but the commander had judged it would be more operationally effective from its current location, given shared resources with the U.S. European Command.

GAO's review of DOD's decision to keep AFRICOM headquarters in Germany found that it was not supported by a comprehensive and well-documented analysis that balanced the operational and cost benefits of the options available to DOD. The 2012 study that accompanied the decision does not fully meet key principles for an economic analysis. For example, the study is not well-documented and does not fully explain the decisions that were made. Although details supporting DOD's cost estimates were not well-documented, the analysis indicated that moving the headquarters to the United States would accrue savings of \$60 million to \$70 million per year. The 2012 study also estimated that relocating the headquarters to the United States could create up to 4,300 additional jobs, with an annual impact on the local economy ranging from \$350 million to \$450 million, but it is not clear how this factored into DOD's decision. Beyond costs and economic benefits, the study lists several factors to be considered when determining where to place a headquarters. It ranks two of these factors—access to the area of responsibility and to service components—as critical. However, little support exists showing how the factors were weighted relative to each other. Moreover, the study describes how a small, forward-deployed headquarters element such as the ones employed by other U.S.-based combatant commands might mitigate operational concerns, but the study is silent about why this mitigation plan was not deemed a satisfactory option. In discussions with GAO, officials from the Central and Southern Commands stated that they had successfully overcome negative effects of having a headquarters in the United States by maintaining a forward presence in their theaters. In sum, neither the analysis nor the letter announcing the decision to retain AFRICOM headquarters in Stuttgart explains why these operational factors outweighed the cost savings and economic benefits associated with moving the headquarters to the United States. Until the costs and benefits of maintaining AFRICOM in Germany are specified and weighed against the costs and benefits of relocating the command, the department may be missing an opportunity to accomplish its missions successfully at a lower cost.