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U.S. to create new military command for Africa

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President George W. Bush has approved a Pentagon plan to create a new military command for operations in Africa to coordinate action and counter potential threats from the continent, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said on Tuesday.

"This command will enable us to have a more effective and integrated approach than the current arrangement of dividing Africa between Central Command and European Command -- an outdated arrangement left over from the Cold War," Gates told a congressional panel.

The U.S. military assigns responsibility for specific parts of the world to regional commands, such as Central Command, which handles the Middle East, Central Asia and Horn of Africa.

Responsibility for Africa is now divided among three commands -- European Command, Central Command and Pacific Command.

Pentagon officials increasingly point to the growing strategic importance of Africa and raise concerns about potential threats, including terrorist threats, that could emerge in war-torn areas, such as Somalia.

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