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African Horizons: The United States Army Working Toward a Secure and Stable Africa

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Violent extremists exploit upheaval across the Middle East and North Africa. Fragile and conflict-affected states incubate and spawn infectious disease, illicit weapons and drug smugglers, and destabilizing refugee flows. Too often, failures in governance and endemic corruption hold back the potential of rising regions.

U.S. National Security Strategy, February 2015¹

Introduction

Today's security environment is more volatile and unstable than ever before. The velocity of change within certain regions of the world is quite evident; the nightly news vividly captures the images. There are, however, regions that are just as volatile but do not receive the attention they require; Africa is one such region. Long-term stability in Africa is essential to U.S. interests. However, the priority that the United States places on the African region when compared to Europe, the Middle East or the Pacific is low. If ignored, the security environment in Africa could quickly deteriorate to a quagmire similar to the Middle East.

Indeed, 18 of the top 25 most fragile states in the world are in Africa. They suffer from poor governance, economic and environmental challenges and threats from violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and transnational criminal organizations (TCOs).² Additionally, the continent is plagued with a growing number of youth, extreme poverty, corruption and social tensions from the ethnically diverse population. In spite of these challenges, Africa democratically and economically is on the rise.³ Therefore, to promote the transition toward a secure and stable Africa, the United States must use a whole-of-government approach to develop long-lasting partnerships that employ all of the elements of national power toward well-defined U.S. interests.

The size and diversity of the African continent results in a complex environment that requires not only a whole-of-government approach but a synchronized one. The population of Africa exceeds a billion people who speak more than 2,000 languages, belong to 400 ethnic groups and occupy a land mass more than three times the size of the United States. The continent is divided into 54 sovereign nations and is religiously divided between Christians (48 percent or 495.8 million) and Muslims (41 percent or 423.5 million). Underdeveloped African countries collectively contain 13 percent of the world's oil supply and vast natural reserves.⁴ To influence the complex and unstable African environment to achieve U.S. interests, the United States must leverage all of the elements of national power.

Diplomacy

With embassies in more than 45 countries on the continent, the Department of State (DoS) leads the U.S. effort in developing partners in Africa. Therefore, the United States must align the guidance in its strategic documents to

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ensure the synchronization of the elements of national power. The DoS strategy focuses on four pillars: strengthening democratic institutions, supporting African economic growth and development, advancing peace and security and promoting opportunity and development.⁵ The DoS support in Africa includes reducing the spread of AIDS, containing the Ebola virus, enhancing economic development and strengthening democratic institutions and security. Within the DoS framework, the Department of Justice (DoJ) International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) has employed a “whole of police force” strategy to deliver technical assistance and specialized training in at least 18 countries in Africa since 1994.⁶ The DoS provides U.S. organizations diplomatic access to African partners through binational and multinational agreements, the African Union (AU), the United Nations and European allies with interests in Africa.

Information

If the United States positions itself as the partner of choice, it can pursue its interests and counteract extremist organizations, promote economic development with American businesses and support young democratic governments. The response to Ebola in Liberia was an informational success for the United States because as other countries abandoned Liberia, they moved in to assist. The growing population of African youth is more informed than ever through the Internet and expansion of cell-phone coverage on the continent. Therefore, they demand of their governments a secure environment with access to economic progress. If weak governments fail to meet their expectations, the populations can violently protest, thus providing to extremist organizations an opportunity to further destabilize the region.

To promote stability in Africa, the United States intends to enable African institutions to overcome their own challenges, provide democratic leadership and protect the citizens of their countries with support from U.S. agencies. A dynamic information campaign in Africa may limit the amount of violence and promote the peaceful transition to a stable continent. This requires the United States to develop and promulgate a concerted message through all agencies and organizations in the region. As the lead in this effort, the DoS should establish the strategic communication baseline and synchronize the messaging efforts.

Economy

Expansion of information networks into Africa enables its growing middle class to capitalize on natural resources. With improved access to the global economy, investments from international businesses provide advanced drilling, mining and agricultural techniques. As Africans invest in these new technologies and techniques, access to their oil, mineral and agricultural resources combined with the ability to sell their products internationally boosts their economies and attracts investors for continued growth. Investments from foreign business not only benefit Africa but are also in the best interest of the United States to influence stability and security and advance the economy.

The lack of investment from American businesses allows China, India and others to benefit from the progress.⁷ As a result, China leads as the economic investor in Africa’s natural resources. In 2012, China doubled its financial commitment to Africa, providing \$20 billion over three years.⁸ The amount of trade between China and Africa is three times higher than Africa’s trade with the United States. The large gap between Chinese and American spending in Africa provides China a clear advantage in benefiting from the growing economy.

Although China is the largest investor in Africa, the relationship is not mutually beneficial.⁹ To bolster its domestic economic growth, China mobilized investments to Africa, but instead of providing jobs to Africans, China moved more than one million of its citizens to exploit Africa’s natural resources. Additionally, the Chinese methods of extracting the resources are polluting and destroying the environments of the population centers in Africa. Although the Chinese invest in the African economy, they do not attempt to improve governance or security; this instability provides China the opportunity to take advantage of corrupt governments and businesses and strip Africa of its natural resources.¹⁰ China’s disregard for regional security threatens U.S. interests as it undermines the ability to prevent influence from VEOs and TCOs; therefore, America needs to assume the economic lead in Africa.

Military

The broad and continuing mission within this region dictated the establishment of a U.S. unified command to oversee U.S. interests. United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) is the geographic combatant command responsible for planning and executing the U.S. military role in 53 of the 54 countries in Africa. Egypt, due to its close

cultural ties to the Middle East, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, remains in United States Central Command's (USCENTCOM's) area of responsibility, but the two combatant commands coordinate closely on regional challenges. USAFRICOM's strategy for Africa focuses on building partner capacity through security force assistance (SFA) by:

- neutralizing al Shabaab;
- degrading violent extremist organizations in Sahel-Maghreb/containing instability in Libya;
- containing Boko Haram and interdicting illicit activity in the Gulf of Guinea and Central Africa and building peacekeeping/humanitarian assistance and disaster response capacity with African partners.¹¹

Although the military solution in Africa is a joint one, the U.S. Army is the primary service building partner capabilities; only six countries in Africa have naval forces with more than ten major vessels and even fewer countries have an air force. The Army is partnering with more than 18 countries and is present in every region of Africa conducting engagements in support of U.S. interests.

There is a dynamic and complex assortment of security threats—al Shabaab, Boko Haram, Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant (ISIL) expansion, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Murabitan and Ansar al-Din and their links to criminal organizations—that require U.S. attention. Africa's economic rise, susceptibility to natural disasters and history of tragic human-rights offenses are critical to U.S. interests because of the opportunities they provide to global extremist organizations.

There is still time for the United States to positively influence the rise of Africa through a concerted effort of financial investment, diplomacy and military assistance. Although the United States is behind with investing in Africa, it is taking the lead in providing military assistance, promoting democracy and attempting to stabilize the continent. Even though the security challenges in Africa are not as dire as in Europe, the Middle East or the Pacific, if insufficient attention is paid to the challenges and opportunities in Africa now, that could change, resulting in the need for increased military presence.

African Security Challenges

Africa, historically known as the "Dark Continent," requires an increase in investment from the United States. With the new moniker "a Rising Africa," this is an opportune time to increase U.S. influence in the region. If ignored, ISIL, al Qaeda and their affiliates will continue to geographically extend their influence and threaten U.S. security; China may lead the economic rise from oil, minerals and agriculture and the United States would miss the opportunity to support democracy and expand its coalition of partners and allies. Although Africa's role is more significant than in the past, the reduction in U.S. military force structure and constrained defense budgets threatens the joint force's ability to address these challenges.

Eastern Africa

In Somalia, al Shabaab remains the primary threat to U.S. interests.¹² Instability caused by the extremist group complicates the young democratic government's task of achieving security in a country recovering from years of lawlessness and tribal warfare. For Somalia to conduct elections, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somali government forces (with support from the United States) must neutralize al Shabaab, thus creating a secure environment conducive to free and fair elections. However, due to the current volatile security environment, the Somali president recently announced the delay of the 2016 elections until conditions no longer threaten voter participation.¹³ Al Shabaab's negative influence in Eastern Africa requires the development of the security forces in Nigeria, Niger and Chad. The whole of government approach in this region promotes the Somali government and security forces through the AU to enable African forces to neutralize al Shabaab.

Sahel-Maghreb

The instability in Libya caused by an ongoing civil war and multiple organizations fighting for control of the country's resources is another example of the security challenges in Africa. Exploiting these ongoing domestic conflicts, ISIL recently expanded its control in Libya, conducting mass executions and other human atrocities.¹⁴ Although there is a multinational effort to combat terrorism in the Sahel-Maghreb region, VEOs continue to build networks and create instability that threaten U.S. interests. Unless ISIL and other violent organizations in Africa are contained, countered and defeated, the security situation will continue to degrade.

The attack on the embassy in Benghazi, Libya, and the deaths of Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans in September 2012 resulted in Operation New Normal.¹⁵ Operation New Normal provides the military the capability to respond anywhere in Africa to prevent the loss of American lives. The success of Operation New Normal was demonstrated in South Sudan as U.S. forces quickly deployed and evacuated 20 people from the embassy in Juba.¹⁶ The ability to protect American citizens in Africa is exceptionally difficult due to the geopolitical environment and requires access and infrastructure. Therefore, the joint force is working with the DoS to establish access through agreements that enable rapid response to protect American lives if required.

Western Africa

In Nigeria, the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram is the largest threat as it challenges the ability of the government to provide security and essential services to its citizens. Boko Haram's affiliation with ISIL appears to link the terrorist organization to the attempted expansion of the caliphate centered in Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, the human rights violations by Nigerian security forces as they attempt to quickly counter Boko Haram threaten to discredit President Muhammadu Buhari's government. The importance of stability in Nigeria goes beyond the global threat of Islamic terrorist organizations as Nigeria is the largest and most populous country in Africa and the economic powerhouse in the region. If U.S. support to Nigeria results in a stable government capable of securing its citizens and expanding its economy, it could promote progress and democracy in the region.

Gulf of Guinea and Central Africa

The Gulf of Guinea and Central Africa suffer from similar challenges. Both regions lack strong governments and significant security forces and struggle with criminal organizations. In the Gulf of Guinea, the threat is primarily maritime; pirates and other maritime criminal organizations conduct armed robbery in the littorals. Central Africa is also plagued with TCOs dealing in trafficking of drugs, people and wild animals. The weak institutions and potential linkages between extremist organizations and criminal networks require significant engagement by the U.S. Army to prevent further deterioration of regional security. This region requires close coordination among the Army, Navy and Marines because the criminal networks span the land and maritime domains.

Southern Africa

The most promising region for establishing secure democracies is Southern Africa, which includes the 12 southern countries in the continent. The region's security situation enables relatively free and fair elections although, without support from the United States, this could quickly change. The regional security forces are more credible than the rest of Africa because they can control the minimal threats in the area with limited assistance from the United States. The primary challenges to the Southern African region derive from high unemployment and food shortages. Similar to the rest of the continent, Southern Africa requires a whole-of-government approach. The U.S. Army's role in this region is to continue to build the capability of the security forces to enable economic development and stabilization of the young democratic governments.

Continental Threats

The threats in Libya, Somalia and Nigeria are not contained by boundaries. ISIL, al Shabaab, Boko Haram and other threat organizations employ violence and conduct human rights offenses in the neighboring countries to expand their influence and further destabilize the region. Widespread violence in Africa has added to the already unmanageable refugee problem for the Middle East. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated Africa to have approximately 15 million people of concern—refugees or displaced persons—in 2015.¹⁷ The millions of displaced citizens are mistreated by extremist, criminal organizations and corrupt security forces as they flee to avoid endemic violence and abuse. The solution to the refugee problem is security and stability, which is the focus of American efforts.

The Army in Africa

The U.S. Army in Africa plays a critical role in building defense capabilities, responding to crises, deterring transnational threats in support of U.S. interests and promoting security, stability and prosperity.¹⁸ Regional security is essential to enable increased U.S. economic development of Africa's vast resources; to promote stable governance and the expansion of democracy; and to protect people by reducing the impact of manmade and natural disasters.

The integration of active, National Guard and Reserve forces results in partnerships to disrupt, contain and defeat extremist organizations and to promote the stability required for African development.

Since 2008, the U.S. Army has continued to expand the United States' influence on Africa's ability to protect innocent citizens who are caught in the crossfire between unstable corrupt governments and violent extremist and criminal organizations that promote regional instability and threaten American interests. The Army's primary tool to promote security, fight corruption and contain jihadists is its support to partner-nation security forces through security force assistance. The goal is to enable the individual states to build the requisite capabilities with enough capacity to defend and secure their citizens domestically and internationally from both state and non-state actors. Theater security cooperation conducted by the Army's limited regionally aligned forces, National Guard State Partners and Reserve enablers maximizes benefits to Africa while minimizing the drain of resources from higher-priority challenges globally.

The limited U.S. investment in Africa is framed through United States Army Africa's (USARAF's) strategy—African Horizons. Partnerships, time and echelons are the three horizons the Army uses in its strategy. African Horizons is the key component to the decisive effort in USAFRICOM's Theater Campaign Plan, "build capacity of and strengthen relationships with African partners."¹⁹ The Army's plan is to bring stability to Africa and protect U.S. interests through the innovative sponsorship of partners over time at every level—tactical, operational and strategic.

Partnerships

The U.S. Army partners with more than 15 of the 53 African nations in the USAFRICOM area of responsibility. The Army prioritizes its resources to maximize impact in the countries and regions that affect U.S. interests and are in the greatest need. With the most limited resources of any command and no assigned forces, the strategy must focus on bilateral, regional and international partnerships that are supported by the Total Army.

Building partner capacity is not unilateral as each country faces a unique set of challenges and requires specific capabilities to improve. USAFRICOM categorizes capacity development as Executive Direction (national policy and military function), the Generating Force (functions necessary to sustain the operating force) and the Operating Force (the warfighting functions).²⁰ The Army is simultaneously developing all three categories with willing partners.

USARAF engages in hundreds of security cooperation events annually and the number continues to increase. The Total Army has invested heavily in this critical region. The National Guard has ten states partnering with 12 African countries through its State Partnership Program. With New York's partnership with South Africa dating back to 2003, the Army had a head start in establishing partnerships with African states. The active Army and Reserve use the program to expand the work started by the National Guard. The program continues to expand; two of the 11 partnerships began in 2015 when the Kentucky National Guard partnered with Djibouti and Massachusetts with Kenya.

With their close ties to the public, the National Guard and Reserve have unique capabilities that are crucial in Africa and not readily available in the active force. With 78 percent of Army sustainment capabilities residing in the Guard and Reserve by 2017, their partnership with USARAF and the African states provides generating-force capabilities.²¹ The Wyoming National Guard has partnered with Tunisia since 2004 and is assisting with the development of the Tunisian military emergency reaction plans for natural disasters. The Army National Guard has the majority of the capabilities and resources for response to domestic natural disasters; hence, exporting their expertise to Africa assists a continent that is regularly threatened by natural disasters. Moreover, the military relationship spawned U.S. engagement in other mutual interests, including wind, power, agricultural irrigation and tourism.²²

The Army Reserve also provides medical, civil affairs and sustainment support to Africa through the USARAF Accord exercise series and Medical Readiness Training Exercises (MEDRETEs). In 2015, the Reserve participated in the Eastern, Central, Western and Southern Accord exercises and completed five MEDRETEs. They have supported nine countries in Africa with high-demand capabilities, enabling the active Army to focus on the operating-force functions.

The regionally aligned forces provide the majority of the operating-force capabilities. Countering extremist threats requires expertise in command and control, maneuver, intelligence and other essential warfighting skills. The African security forces require organization, training and equipping, but USARAF is aware that the U.S. level of capability may not be appropriate for smaller, less developed countries like Chad, with its 30,000-soldier army.

By leveraging the Total Army, each partner receives the appropriate support to meet the challenges specific to their country.

The U.S. Army in Africa partners with Africa states, the United Nations and the African Union. By employing a whole-of-government approach through their exercise program, the Army maximizes the impact of their exercises. The exercises range from African Endeavor, a ten-day communications exercise, to Flintlock, an exercise focused on training for counterterrorism. With limited resources, USARAF is having strategic impacts in Africa. Although building partner capabilities enables Africans to overcome their challenges, it is a slow process that is hindered by corruption, the desires of the foreign governments and their lack of trust in the United States.

The goal is to develop institutions and capabilities and expand capacity with limited or no support from the United States. Incentive plays a key role in success. When allocating support to a country, the side effects of investment can result in providing income to corrupt leaders. Thus, the incentive to become self-reliant may not exist.

Time

The challenges in Africa may take decades to overcome and require an approach that shapes the environment until the opportunity arises to effect lasting change. The U.S. Army in Africa has dissected its strategy into three time horizons: short-term (2015–2017), mid-term (2017–2020) and long-term (2020 and beyond). In the short term, African Horizons focuses on immediate threats and setting the theater for growth in the future.

The short-term objectives include countering transnational terrorist and criminal networks, providing mission command and developing disaster response, peacekeeping and logistics capabilities. In 2014, the Ebola crisis benefited from the short-term focus of African Horizons. USARAF was able to respond with an initial command and control headquarters and thus provided the relationships to support the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) efforts. Additionally, due to the development of warfighting capabilities, Nigeria has witnessed success against Boko Haram and AMISOM against al Shabaab. Although short-term success is important, it is not enough to establish long-term stability in the region.

The Army in Africa's robust exercise program is the pinnacle of the mid-term horizon. Through the execution of joint, interagency, bilateral and multinational exercises, agreements exist that expand U.S. access geographically, economically and politically. The access established through exercises is invaluable to crisis response and the protection of U.S. citizens in Africa. An additional benefit to the mid-term focus is increased interoperability between the United States and its partners and internationally within Africa. Although USARAF has trained thousands of Africans as part of their short-term and mid-term activities, the development of institutions is the key to attaining stability and security in Africa.

In Malawi, the Army supported the successful development of a sergeants major academy. The venture was a result of USAFRICOM's partnering with U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. Three years later, the academy now includes noncommissioned officers from across southern Africa.²³ The establishment of institutions similar to this academy provide the opportunity to bolster state and interstate security capable of stabilizing the region, securing its citizens, countering extremist and criminal organizations and enabling fair democratic governance.

Echelons

To develop enduring capabilities and effect state, regional and continental stability, the Army is engaging African security forces at every level of war. The tactical relationships developed during the training of 4,500 African soldiers on peacekeeping operations in 2014, annual exercises and crisis responses like Ebola laid the groundwork for operational and strategic progress.²⁴ It is imperative that the engagements at the tactical level achieve goals focused on attaining strategic end states.

Operationally, the Army continues to expand U.S. influence through intelligence-sharing agreements, Acquisition Cross Service Agreements (ACSAs) and agreements that provide access and basing within Africa. The sharing of intelligence is important to counter the geographic expansionism of ISIL and the cross-border networks of criminal organizations. Without robust sustainment capabilities, the equipment sold or provided to U.S. partners is ineffective and short-lived. The generating force is the toughest category to advance in USAFRICOM's campaign plan because it does not directly relate to overcoming the challenges faced in Africa.

The Army in Africa partners with ministries of defense to build the institutions necessary to empower African defense forces to protect their sovereignty and citizens. USARAF's leadership is partnering with the Democratic Republic of the Congo to build a logistics school. Institutions, over time, can result in strategic cultural changes in the professionalism and overall stability in Africa. The difficulty in Africa is its size and complexity. Africa is not just a U.S. challenge. The threats in Africa have global effects and require a global approach. The U.S. Army is working with the AU, UN and Europe at every level to develop Africa.

The Way Ahead

To overcome corruption, promote democracy, contain or neutralize extremist organizations and ensure a stable and secure environment requires dedicated commitment—years to decades. Partnerships are the key and the United States must limit its support until opportunities arise that promise evolutionary changes. The Army's approach in Africa focuses on long-term changes that achieve U.S. interests and protect the human rights and dignities of the African population. USARAF's positive influence on the continent is essential in preventing Africa from becoming the next Middle East. To be the partner of choice in Africa and secure its interests, America must stay the course.

If not contained or defeated, the expansion of ISIL and its affiliates in Africa could result in the need for increased American military presence. Therefore, to reduce the need for future use of American Soldiers in Africa, the Army promotes the United States as the partner of choice and empowers African forces—an African solution for African challenges. The Army's "ounce of prevention" requires two primary elements to ensure success.

The first is an understanding of U.S. goals in Africa. The United States needs to identify not only the military's role but also what the future African security environment looks like if successful. The issues in Africa should not be framed in predetermined timelines similar to the withdrawal from Iraq. Leaders need to realize that success in Africa will take decades and will ebb and flow with changing political and security challenges. The key to success is a whole-of-government approach that is characterized by diplomatic access so the joint force can promote stability throughout the continent to enable economic development.

The second element focuses on the promotion of stable democratic governments capable of providing security. USARAF's African Horizons strategy is a herculean effort attempting to manage the chaos and promote growth and stability across a continent more than three times the size of the United States. To manage this complex environment, it is essential to ensure the Army has access to forces, enablers and funds to proactively build the capacity of U.S. partners, extend support to crisis response and protect Americans. The right combination of intelligence, sustainment, mission command and maneuver capabilities is essential for building partner capacity, supporting efforts of the AU, UN and U.S. governmental agencies and ensuring a timely response anywhere on the continent.

Economics and democracy are expanding in Africa, but so are the impacts of extremists and criminal organizations. This is a critical time in the development of the African continent and the United States' best opportunity to influence this important region. With limited resources, the Army in Africa is battling the challenges of state instability, terrorist network expansion and disaster response. The Army is setting the theater to respond to current crises and take advantage of future opportunities. As the military lead for the whole-of-government approach in Africa, the Army is the cornerstone of the joint force and requires the capability and capacity to accomplish its mission and facilitate expansion from the other elements of national power. The U.S. Army in Africa is already making strategic impacts with small investments. Just think what they could accomplish with a modest increase in resources.

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