

STATEMENT OF  
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COMMANDER, UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND  
BEFORE THE  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

3 April 2025

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished Committee Members, United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) is committed to and focused on safeguarding the homeland from threats emanating from Africa, protecting vital U.S. interests by countering adversary efforts, and responding to crises across the African continent. We are steadfast in our commitment to the American people, and our method is sound: we work together with likeminded Allies and partners to enable security solutions that protect our interests.

Africa is a “nexus theater” – a continent where global interests converge. The population will grow to 25% of the world’s population by 2050, and currently boasts the largest youth demographic, along with rapidly urbanizing societies. Africa accounted for 11 of the world’s 20 fastest growing economies in 2024, and the 54 sovereign countries make up more than 25% of the seats in the United Nations General Assembly. For these reasons, Africa is a continent from which the United States cannot afford to shift its gaze. It is imperative that we create conditions where terrorist organizations and malign actors are unable to threaten our homeland, while simultaneously creating conditions for American economic interests to flourish.

USAFRICOM will achieve peace through strength by countering terrorist organizations that are increasing their ability to threaten the homeland while countering activities of China and other adversaries. Capabilities like Airborne-Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (A-ISR) and Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (C-UAS) are critical to addressing the increasing threat. We are acutely aware that if ISIS and al-Qaeda groups continue their expansion, they will pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. Given this environment, USAFRICOM will work collaboratively with the intelligence community and interagency partners to keep the risk to U.S. national security interests low.

Our approach is *African Partner-led, U.S.- and Ally-enabled* to build partner capacity for African partner operational independence. At any time, leadership in these sovereign nations may change and our working relationship with them may subsequently evolve. Our legal and policy frameworks should remain flexible to maintain an enduring military to military relationship.

Strengthening the capacity of African partners to address security challenges and enhance regional stability reduces the long-term need for U.S. security assistance. Security cooperation is our primary tool through which USAFRICOM strengthens African security institutions toward operational independence. We achieve this through a wide array of training programs, joint exercises, and information sharing initiatives conducted across the continent. Our programs are unmatched by competitors. Flagship exercises such as FLINTLOCK and AFRICAN LION play pivotal roles in building the operational readiness of African militaries and enhancing interoperability among U.S. forces and African partners. FLINTLOCK, focused on counterterrorism and irregular warfare, brings together special operations forces from more than 30 nations to conduct realistic training, share best practices, and build trust. Similarly, AFRICAN LION provides a critical platform for joint, multinational training in a variety of domains, including land, air, and maritime operations. These exercises not only improve tactical capabilities but also foster stronger relationships between African military forces and their international partners.

## **EAST AFRICA**

Due to its strategic importance and our robust counter terrorism operations, the preponderance of USAFRICOM's deployed forces are in East Africa. The region's proximity to the Arabian Peninsula, and its importance to global trade and commerce, cannot be overlooked;

20% of the world's oil moves through the Red Sea annually. Terrorist organizations also recognize the significance of the region and work to attack us and our allies. Our partnership with the newest Major Non-NATO Ally of the United States, Kenya, given that designation in June 2024, continues to grow stronger. Both USCENTCOM and USAFRICOM have a role to play in the security of East Africa and we work together daily to make sure the seam between our two Geographic Combatant Commands is as inconsequential as possible.

Our main effort in East Africa is collaborating with Partners and Allies to support Somalia's fight against al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia. Our strong relationship with Somali and African Union forces is key to this effort. Al-Shabaab is one of the deadliest terror organizations on the planet and continues to attack U.S. personnel and facilities in Somalia. Just last November, an al-Shabaab operative was convicted of plotting a 9/11 style terror attack on the U.S. For now, ISIS and al-Qaeda groups are focused on local interests, but they continue to expand and recruit fighters from around the world to position themselves to attack the Homeland. The dangerous capabilities of these groups, if not addressed, will continue to threaten U.S. interests.

The terror organizations in the East are well-resourced and enjoy freedom of maneuver. The Houthis, in Yemen, have moved beyond harassing attacks on commercial vessels, to complex, coordinated missile volleys against both commercial and military vessels. I am greatly concerned about indications of Houthi (part of the Iranian threat network) and al-Shabaab collaboration. The Houthis have the capability to attack the Djibouti Base Cluster, should they decide to escalate against the United States. If they establish a foothold in East Africa, the threat to global trade and shipping would increase significantly, bringing a highly capable, belligerent actor into a region already struggling against ISIS and al-Shabaab.

## **NORTH AFRICA**

Through a variety of operations, activities, and investments in North Africa, USAFRICOM continues to advance U.S. interests by nurturing strong partnerships in a region that sits at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Exercise AFRICAN LION, led by the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF), stands out as USAFRICOM's premier annual exercise. The 2024 edition of AFRICAN LION took place from April 19 to May 31 across Morocco, Ghana, Senegal, and Tunisia, involving over 8,100 participants from 27 nations, including NATO contingents. The exercise showcases realistic, dynamic, and collaborative readiness training in challenging environments. AFRICAN LION takes place along multiple seams between geographic combatant commands—USAFRICOM, USEUCOM, and USCENTCOM—in close proximity to key maritime chokepoints and global shipping lanes, all of which magnifies the exercise's significance. AFRICAN LION not only strengthens multinational cooperation but also enhances readiness across all domains, highlighting USAFRICOM's commitment to training African partners for operational independence. Our training brings a level of lethality and professionalism that is unmatched from our competitors, which is why our U.S. training is valued so highly.

USAFRICOM aims to push Libyans to better stand on their own to build a unified military, subordinate to civilian control, which safeguards Libyan sovereignty, increases border security, and combats illegal migration and trans-regional terrorism. The competition between East and West Libyan security actors impacts both the country's development and stability, a situation which occasionally jolts global energy markets. While national re-unification must ultimately come from the Libyan people, through modest, calculated steps, USAFRICOM can

support multilateral security integration efforts to reinforce favorable conditions for U.S. interests and U.S. businesses.

North Africa is home to two highly capable Major-Non NATO Allies - Morocco and Tunisia, both of whom support our regional objectives. This past year, Tunisia hosted the 19<sup>th</sup> iteration of PHOENIX EXPRESS, a 12-day exercise that brought together North African, European, and U.S. naval forces as part of a global network to enhance cooperation and expertise in maritime security operations in the Southern Mediterranean Sea. Tunisia also hosted SILENT WARRIOR 2024, an event dedicated to enhancing operational effectiveness and mission success of African Special Operations Forces.

Morocco serves as a regional leader by exporting security and economic development throughout Africa, providing training to more than 1200 African partners annually, often at zero cost to the trainees. The training provided includes every level of military education from basic training to War College, spans all services, and includes professional medical, intelligence, airborne, and special operations training. Further, Moroccan trainers travel to neighboring countries using U.S.-produced C-130 aircraft to transport and train partner personnel in a myriad of tasks and skills.

This strong security exporter role is rooted in Morocco's position as a significant contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Over 1700 Moroccan troops per year participate in UN peacekeeping missions in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. September 2025 will witness the inauguration of a state-of-the-art Peacekeeping Center of Excellence in Morocco, with the capacity to train thousands of personnel in critical skills, while also having the ability to host strategic-level defense engagements,

diplomatic summits, and senior leader peacekeeping training and discussions. This center is co-funded by the United States and will train thousands of Moroccan and other African partners.

Tunisia is another security exporter in North Africa; it remains a strategic partner on military cooperation, counter-terrorism, and broader regional security. As a growing regional military training hub, Tunisia is emerging as a key partner espousing and projecting Western military standards. Tunisia supports peacekeeping operations across Africa, primarily through strategic airlift capability with its growing C-130 fleet. Expertise within the Tunisian Counter-IED School, hard won in Tunisia's own counterterrorism fight during the prior decade, is sought after by African forces deploying to UN peacekeeping missions and now hosts African students regularly. In all, Tunisia has a significant capability to influence militaries throughout the Sahel and West Africa.

North Africa is also home to Algeria, traditionally a non-aligned nation but where the defense industry continues to make significant headway with direct commercial sales of defense articles, such as C-130 aircraft. In January 2025, the United States and Algeria signed a Military Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding – illustrating our two countries' shared vision to strengthen regional and international peace through strategic dialogue.

## **WEST AFRICA**

West Africa is a dynamic region that includes both multi-party democracies and Sahel nations that experienced coups over the last few years. West African partners broadly welcome U.S. security cooperation despite our withdrawal of forces from the Sahel. The Global Fragility Act, being implemented in Coastal West Africa (as well as Libya and Mozambique) serves as a model for countering terrorist organizations and leveraging investments from allies towards this initiative.

A crucial moment in our partnerships and presence in West Africa in 2024 was the multi-national collaborative effort in the OBANGAME EXPRESS exercise, one of three annual regional exercises conducted by U.S. Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF) and sponsored by USAFRICOM. Hosted by Gabon, the event brought together military delegations from 13 nations across West Africa, Europe, and North America over the course of five days. Participants were from Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Liberia, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Togo, and the United States. They engaged in lectures, practiced maritime security tactics, and conducted joint drills to enhance regional collaboration, maritime security capabilities, as well as counterpiracy cooperation between the African states in the naval and maritime domains. This exercise showcased the United States' unmatched convening power to bring together diverse nations for cooperative security initiatives.

West Africa has a complex mix of challenges. The region has recently experienced a wave of military coups, with countries like Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger facing upheaval as military officers ousted elected governments. These disruptions stem from entrenched corruption, slow economic development, weak democratic institutions, and limited strategic patience. Terrorist groups linked to al-Qaeda and ISIS have exploited these vulnerabilities, thriving in poorly governed regions and preying on underserved populations. Public discontent has intensified, fueled by lingering frustrations with former colonial powers. Central governments, often overstretched, have struggled to counter insurgencies, address corruption, deliver essential services, and resolve inter-ethnic disputes over limited resources.

In 2024, amid this challenging environment, USAFRICOM successfully conducted a safe, orderly, and responsible withdrawal of U.S. forces from Niger. This complex, multi-month



operation required seamless coordination across the Department of Defense, its service components, numerous partners, allies, and our Department of State colleagues, particularly at the U.S. Embassy in Niger. Through meticulous planning and execution, over 1000 personnel along with equipment worth over \$213M were safely redeployed in 133 flights. Without a persistent presence in the Sahel, we are limited in the ability to monitor the expanding influence of terrorist organizations in the region. Our assessment indicates that, if left unchecked, these organizations will continue to grow and their threat to regional stability, as well as to U.S. national security interests, will only intensify. We are increasing our efforts in intelligence sharing and information operations to monitor the growth of these groups and expanding relationships with willing partners elsewhere in West Africa like Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria.

Along the southwest coast of the Gulf of Guinea, recent developments in Gabon underscore the importance of U.S. leadership to counter China's efforts in West Africa. Our military support to Gabon includes plans to improve port security measures, enhance the country's coastal radar infrastructure, and improve Gabon's ability to monitor and protect its territorial waters. Additionally, collaboration with the U.S. Congress will enable the provision of maritime patrol vessels to Gabon, accompanied by comprehensive maintenance and operational training. Gabon's new collaboration with the West Virginia National Guard through the State Partnership Program will foster collaboration across all aspects of civil-military affairs and encourage meaningful people-to-people ties at the state level, including valuable training, exchanges, professional development, and economic projects. These efforts will not only further U.S. national security interests, but also help Gabon safeguard its natural resources and strengthen its overall maritime security capabilities, aligning with broader regional stability

goals. Our security cooperation approach in Gabon is a good example of our approach in all of West Africa – one geared towards encouraging independent operations and nations leading the way for their own security.

### **CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA**

Since the war in Sudan broke out in 2023, Sudan is host to the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. There is no U.S. military solution to the conflict in Sudan and Defense Department opportunities to contribute are limited following the military-assisted departure from Embassy Khartoum in April 2023. The Sudanese people bear the brunt of this crisis. Outside influences are pouring fuel on the fire in Sudan and all efforts need to focus on building conditions for a negotiated resolution to the conflict.

USAFRICOM has strong and growing partnerships in Southern African states like Botswana, Malawi, Zambia, and Angola, and closely monitors regional developments in Central Africa. Security cooperation programs focus on leadership and education so that partners can actively and independently contribute to regional crisis response. This year, Malawi hosted the first Africa Senior Enlisted Leader Conference on the continent of Africa, marking a major step forward in enlisted development. Malawi was an ideal host as they have the only Sergeant Major Academy (mirroring the U.S. Army) on the entire continent of Africa. Botswana co-hosted the 2024 African Chiefs of Defense Conference in Gaborone in June, attended by 33 African Chiefs of Defense from 32 countries, including representatives from East and West Libya. Bringing African military leaders together demonstrates our commitment to driving African solutions to shared security challenges.

Central and Southern Africa are well known for their wealth of critical minerals that serve as foundational materials for emerging technology products used in military and defense systems. The FY24 NDAA enabled the Office of Strategic Capital (OSC) to market financing solutions for critical projects that meet African partner and U.S. national security interests. USAFRICOM is establishing a Defense Economics Branch to collaborate with OSC and proactively target investment opportunities in priority countries and towards strategic objectives. What was known as a “blood diamond” in the past has turned into “blood tantalum” this century. Tantalum concentrated in the DRC is contributing to competition and conflict among state and non-state actors. The DRC has struggled for decades to effectively manage its natural resources for the benefit of its population. Rwanda’s activity in the east, China’s opaque business practices, and entrenched corruption and mismanagement have frustrated DRC’s efforts at reform in this key sector. To counter China’s harmful practices, the United States interagency is investing to improve the business enabling environment and to facilitate new investments in mining and infrastructure. USAFRICOM is supporting U.S. efforts to increase investments for responsible and mutually beneficial mineral supply chains in Africa.

### **CHINA’S INFLUENCE IN AFRICA**

China increased their military and security activities in Africa, presenting new challenges to U.S. interests and partnerships. China seeks to expand security partnerships to protect its extensive infrastructure investments, loans, and economic partnerships under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While these investments contribute to Africa’s development, they also bring concerns regarding the debt servicing burden, public contract transparency, infrastructure quality and sustainability, and the potential to exert political leverage over African nations. Chinese financial institutions do not adhere to standard international law and financial regulations and

often rely on non-disclosure agreements to prevent African governments from applying a rigorous review to financial contracts.

In a continent where 70% of the protein comes from the sea, access to affordable fish is essential for Africans. China is the world's worst offender of illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing (IUU-F), much of it done in African waters. This activity decreases host nation revenues, increases the price of fish, and creates opportunities to exploit our African partners. China often employs soft and hard power strategies that run counter to U.S. efforts across the continent.

Foreign information manipulation and interference is prevalent as China exploits their relationships in Africa for economic gain and to secure critical minerals and resources. Unfortunately, CCP information manipulation is significantly outpacing our effort to counter their campaigns. CCP investments in digital TV services in Africa and satellite networks allows them to secure restrictive content sharing agreements with local media outlets. Unchecked, China's efforts could reshape the information landscape in Africa, creating biases and gaps that could lead African nations to make decisions to subordinate their economic and security interests to China's own interests.

We work to expose CCP information manipulation and interference, build African resiliency to false information, shape the environment to better support our interests. This growing presence by China complicates the already volatile security landscape and highlights the critical need for sustained U.S. engagement and robust support for regional partners to adequately compete.

The increasing presence of China highlights the growing strategic importance of Africa, emphasizing the need for proactive U.S. engagement on the continent. USAFRICOM plays a

critical role in countering foreign malign influence through military cooperation, capacity-building, and diplomatic initiatives. Our largest facility in Africa, located in Djibouti, is only a few minutes' drive from China's only overseas military base, underscoring its deepening military investments in the Horn of Africa and across the continent. USAFRICOM seeks to counter China in the security cooperation space, where African nations consistently recognize the advantages of partnering with the United States. In comparing the quality of training, equipment, and security assistance, USAFRICOM's offerings outperform China's. While U.S. assistance is often preferred by African militaries, the time-sensitive nature of security challenges means that some partners choose to turn to China when U.S. timelines cannot meet their immediate needs. As we continue to improve the efficiency of U.S. government programs, USAFRICOM remains committed to strengthening these relationships and supporting regional stability.

## **CONCLUSION**

The African continent is a wide and vast space that presents the United States – and our competitors – with challenges and opportunities. We remain fully committed to making effects-based and resource-informed decisions across the continent by matching capabilities to threats, and continue to believe that solutions for lasting security, stability, and prosperity in Africa involve investment across the instruments of national power: *diplomatic, information, military,* and *economic*. The men and women of USAFRICOM work diligently to make informed decisions to address challenges and capitalize on identified opportunities. We seek to maintain access and foster productive relationships with our African Partners and our Allies. In this way, USAFRICOM contributes to stability and helps create conditions that are less conducive to malign actors, while better enabling security and prosperity for the United States.