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U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM)

Congress has continued to examine the evolving role and posture of the U.S. military in Africa since AFRICOM became fully operational as the newest U.S. geographic combatant command in 2008. The command is responsible for Department of Defense (DOD) operations, exercises, and security cooperation on the African continent, its island nations, and its surrounding waters.

AFRICOM's stated mission is to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity in Africa, in concert with interagency and international partners, by building defense capabilities, responding to crises, and deterring and defeating transnational threats. AFRICOM Commander General David Rodriguez has stated that the command's most important responsibility is to "detect, deter and prevent attacks against the United States, its territories, possessions, and bases and to employ appropriate force to defend the nation should deterrence fail."

Before AFRICOM became a stand-alone command in October 2008, responsibility for U.S. military involvement in Africa was divided among European, Central, and Pacific Commands. Its area of responsibility (AOR) does not include Egypt, which remains in Central Command's AOR. Its FY2015 budget request (headquarters, operations, exercises and related programs) is $245 million.

Responding to Threats and Challenges

AFRICOM's establishment and its evolution reflect a change in policymakers' perceptions of U.S. strategic interests and security challenges in Africa. For some, the justification for a U.S. military command focused on the continent has never been more pronounced. The Obama Administration's 2012 U.S. Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa argues that "Africa is more important than ever to the security and prosperity of the international community, and to the United States in particular." While the military prepares a strategic "rebalance" to the Asia-Pacific region, in the near term, African conflicts and extremist threats increasingly occupy military planners' efforts. Despite positive political and economic trends in some countries, armed conflict still plagues parts of the continent and poses threats to regional stability and other U.S. interests.

Terrorist threats appear to be increasing in North Africa; in such West African countries as Nigeria and Mali; and throughout East Africa, including in Somalia and Kenya. Violent extremist groups like Al Shabaab, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Boko Haram, Ansar al Sharia and other like-minded groups continue to attract recruits, and are reportedly increasingly sharing training, tactics, and weapons, including those from former Libyan stockpiles.

> For the foreseeable future, the most direct threat to America at home and abroad remains terrorism.... from decentralized al Qaeda affiliates and extremists, many with agendas focused in countries where they operate. And this lessens the possibility of large-scale 9/11-style attacks against the homeland, but it heightens the danger of U.S. personnel overseas being attacked, as we saw in Benghazi. It heightens the danger to less defensible targets, as we saw in a shopping mall in Nairobi. So we have to develop a strategy that matches this diffuse threat—one that expands our reach without sending forces that stretch our military too thin, or stir up local resentments. We need partners to fight terrorists alongside us. *President Barack Obama at the U.S. Military Academy-West Point, May 28, 2014*

In Africa, the United States has taken a lower profile approach to countering terrorism that it has in Afghanistan, where the U.S. military deployed in large numbers to pursue Al Qaeda, or in Pakistan or Yemen, where air strikes against terrorist targets have been more frequent. AFRICOM works primarily indirectly, by training, equipping, and sustaining partner forces such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to degrade extremist capabilities. Direct U.S. military action has been limited; examples include Special Operations Forces missions in Somalia and Libya in October 2013 to capture suspected terrorists; the January 2012 rescue of a U.S. hostage in Somalia; and, in a limited number of cases, targeted strikes against members of Al Qaeda in Somalia.

AFRICOM's largest military operation to date is Operation Odyssey Dawn, in which it had operational and tactical command of U.S. forces supporting the multilateral effort to enforce a no-fly zone and protect civilians in Libya in 2011.

The Indirect Approach

The Obama Administration's 2010 National Security Strategy stresses the need to "embrace effective partnerships" in Africa, highlighting U.S. strategic priorities such as "access to open markets, conflict prevention, global peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and the protection of vital carbon sinks." The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review asserts that "our ability to project forces to combat terrorism in places as far away as Yemen, Afghanistan, and Mali—and to build capacity to help partners counter terrorism...reduces the likelihood that these threats could find their way to U.S. shores." It outlines DOD's intent to rebalance its counterterrorism efforts "toward greater emphasis on building partnership capacity, especially in

fragile states, while retaining robust capability for direct action, including intelligence, persistent surveillance, precision strike, and Special Operations Forces."

With partner capacity-building now a key component of U.S. military strategy in Africa, AFRICOM has sought to focus greater effort on professionalizing African militaries. This work has been episodic in some countries and has been largely reliant on the level and continuity of State Department-administered security assistance that DOD implements (some State Department security assistance programs are conducted by contractors). Congress has authorized increasing DOD funding for capacity-building programs and DOD spending in Africa has increased, but these programs are largely focused on counterterrorism.

AFRICOM has sought more persistent engagement with partner militaries, in line with the 2011 National Military Strategy, which states that "military-to-military relationships must be reliable to be effective, and persevere through political upheavals or even disruption." Debate continues within the U.S. government as to whether military relationships should be sustained in situations such as the 2012 military coup in Mali, when a combination of legal and policy restrictions led to a cessation of military training and contacts despite an ongoing conflict involving transnational terrorist groups. Some observers express concern that growing DOD engagement risks feeding the perception of an increasingly militarized American foreign policy toward the region.

DOD officials stress training programs aim in part to encourage respect for civilian authority and human rights, key shortcomings for some African forces. Provisions in DOD appropriations measures prohibit DOD assistance to foreign security force units implicated in gross human rights abuses, a restriction that S. 2410, the draft National Defense Authorization Act for FY2015, seeks to codify.

AFRICOM's proactive approach of seeking to strengthen partner capacities to shape the regional security environment for the longer term reflects an evolution in DOD strategy, but it remains a difficult effort to operationalize. Congress and the executive branch continue to deliberate on the appropriate balance between DOD and the State Department in addressing stabilization priorities. Debates about funding and authorities are ongoing, with Administration officials arguing for greater flexibility and resources to respond to emerging threats and opportunities.

A Light Footprint

DOD engagement in Africa has grown since AFRICOM's establishment. That growth may be attributed to a range of factors—policymakers' changing perceptions of U.S. national security interests in Africa; Congress's enactment of increasing authorities and appropriations for DOD programs there (and for DOD partner capacity building efforts globally); and, more recently, an increase in U.S. military units aligned with or assigned to AFRICOM from which the command can draw for engagements. (In its early years AFRICOM had no assigned forces and had to use the Global Force Management and Request for Forces system.)

After ruling out an initial plan to locate AFRICOM's headquarters in Africa, and countering proposals for a move to a U.S. location, DOD announced in early 2013 that the command would remain based in Stuttgart, Germany, for the foreseeable future. As noted in a 2013 Government Accountability Office report (GAO-13-646), AFRICOM's commander had determined the command to be more operationally effective in its current location, given shared resources with European Command and the proximity to its AOR, while acknowledging that Germany was a more expensive option than moving to the United States. GAO questioned DOD's analysis of the operational and cost benefits in making the location decision.

DOD has repeatedly stressed that there are no plans to have a "significant" troop presence in Africa. Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti hosts the U.S. military's only enduring infrastructure in Africa. The facility also provides support for U.S. military operations in the Gulf of Aden area and supports DOD objectives in Yemen. AFRICOM has access to several foreign air and naval bases and ports in Africa, including several sites from which to conduct aerial surveillance for counterterrorism and counterpiracy efforts, and to support missions such as the regional effort to address the threat posed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a small, vicious armed group in Central Africa.

AFRICOM's troop footprint on the continent varies from month to month, based on training, exercises, and other operational requirements, but is estimated at 5,000-6,500 at any given time. Approximately 100 U.S. military personnel serve as advisors to the counter-LRA effort. U.S. military personnel have also been deployed to support counter-terrorism efforts in East Africa and North-West Africa, and, more recently, Nigeria. AFRICOM also draws support from a Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force (SP-MAGTF) for engagements and crisis response capability. Since 2013, AFRICOM has served as a test case for the Army's new Regionally Aligned Force (RAF) concept. Troops from a Kansas-based brigade of the 1st Infantry Division have deployed for a range of partner capacity building missions in Africa that have been traditionally performed by Special Operations Forces.

The New Normal: Protecting U.S. Personnel and Facilities

In early 2014, 15 U.S. diplomatic missions in Africa were classified as high threat, high risk posts, and the continent's size and limited infrastructure pose serious challenges for crisis response. Planning for the rapid deployment of response forces, particularly in the aftermath of the 2012 attacks on U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya, has become an increasing focus for AFRICOM. Several crisis response units have been assigned to AFRICOM since October 2012, including a Commander's In-Extremis Force; a Fleet Anti-Terrorism Support Team; an SP-MAGTF Crisis Response unit; and the Army's East Africa Response Force (EARF), which operates from Djibouti; along with other Special Operations Forces units. Efforts to secure the U.S. embassy and evacuate U.S. citizens from South Sudan in December 2013, amidst an unfolding civil war, was an early test for AFRICOM's new crisis response capabilities.

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