

STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE  
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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, distinguished Committee members, United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) is steadfast in protecting America's interests across a vast and dynamic continent. This Combatant Command is committed to our shared values – including civilian control of armed forces, the rule of law, and respect for human rights – while responding to fluid situations in Africa. To accomplish our mission, USAFRICOM weaves together a community of military professionals who work in concert with America's allies and partners.

USAFRICOM's team is synchronized across the Executive Branch to achieve whole-of-government effects alongside the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Intelligence Community, and other U.S. agencies. This Command views itself as one part of a three-part team of diplomacy, development, and defense professionals – what we call the “3D” approach. Using this approach, we operate at the intersection of the interests of the American and African peoples. These common interests provide fertile ground for cultivating multinational collaboration focused on achieving peace and prosperity throughout the continent.

We work together with our sovereign African partners as they implement their own solutions to achieve a just, secure, and prosperous future. Such a future is a common aspiration of the United States, African states, and the international community. We work together because no organization or nation – African or otherwise – has the resources to overcome these challenges alone. America's lead for that collaboration is the Department of State and its diplomats at embassies throughout Africa. USAFRICOM stands in support of our diplomats, just

as we support USAID officers who lead development and humanitarian efforts. Representing the ‘defense’ component of our 3D approach, we manage security cooperation and other missions in Africa in ways that support diplomacy and development activities. Ultimately, sustainable long-term progress relies on governance and development, which enable African nations to lay firm foundations to achieve economic and security self-reliance. The need is most acute in partners like Libya, where – in the wake of tragic flooding last year – USAFRICOM joined the U.S. Special Envoy to Libya and USAID officials on the ground to deliver 13 metric tons of humanitarian aid and engage with senior Libyan leaders. By itself, this event was small. Yet it illustrated how this Command works within the interagency in accordance with the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy.

The adversities facing America on today’s global stage constrain the resources available to USAFRICOM, making us an “economy of force” theater. USAFRICOM carefully stewards modest funds and personnel to maximize effects in close alignment with other Combatant Commands and the U.S. interagency. Our efforts build on each other. Where USAFRICOM helps cultivate security, State and USAID resources can cultivate economic and human development, so African governments have more resources for security independence. To describe how we allocate our limited resources, we begin by setting the stage: a vast continent with a diverse security state of play.

The contrasts across Africa’s operating environment are stark. Some of the continent’s governments are struggling to stave off state failure, while others enjoy the benefits of modern development and reliable governance. While Africa has some of the least developed countries in the world, more than 20 African countries have space programs. Our newest Component

Command, U.S. Space Forces Europe and Africa (SPACEFOREUR-AF), activated in December at Ramstein Airbase, Germany, will drive our defense space collaboration. Challenges on the continent cover a spectrum from natural disasters to corruption to terrorism. This spectrum of challenges requires a spectrum of solutions spearheaded by African peoples and authorities. Given its vast size – three times the landmass of the continental United States – we consider the continent region by region.

The recent military takeovers in West Africa are giving space to Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) and our strategic adversaries. In East Africa, al-Shabaab and ISIS bring violence to peoples already struggling with inter-ethnic clashes and climate-related food and water shortages. Conflict and climate challenges also loom over the vast populations and natural resources of Central Africa, while Southern Africa faces economic and energy shortfalls, combined with an ISIS insurgency in Mozambique. Our support to several partners, most notably those in North Africa, is complicated by differences over the conflict in Gaza, along with Libya's long-running struggle to achieve a united government and military force.

Use of kinetic military force is a last resort that can produce fleeting or counterproductive outcomes. Therefore, USAFRICOM's approach is to help African peoples address underlying conditions. We operationalize the toolkit of security cooperation through the Security Force Assistance Brigade and medical team deployments, institutional capacity building, multinational exercises like AFRICAN LION, intelligence and information sharing, and logistical assistance. The U.S. National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Programs in Africa complements our operations. Last year, the National Guard launched State Partnership Programs that joined North Carolina's National Guard citizen-soldiers with Malawi and Zambia, which look forward to

decades of mutually beneficial training and relationship building. Our naval assets – especially the USS Hershel “Woody” Williams and the USNS Trenton – fly the Stars and Stripes during joint patrols and maritime engagements in strategic ports along Africa’s 19,000 miles of coastline. Partner counterterrorism forces benefit from American equipment and training in combat skills, support to operations, the law of armed conflict and civilian harm mitigation. These programs flow into the USAFRICOM Enlisted Development Strategy, which reinforces Africa’s Non-Commissioned Officer Corps – the backbone of all professional military forces. At the forefront of our campaign, USAFRICOM senior leaders crisscross the continent conducting defense diplomacy to reinforce relationships with governments that are crucial to our ability to defend America’s interests, both today and in the future.

## **WEST AFRICA**

During the past three years, national defense forces turned their guns against their own elected governments in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger. These juntas avoid accountability to the peoples they claim to serve. An understanding of West Africa’s spike in coups – and potential remedies – requires an appreciation for the underlying conditions that laid the groundwork for coups in the first place.

The drivers for coups in Africa include endemic corruption, lagging development, weak democratic institutions, and a shortage in strategic patience. Criminal groups and terrorists aligned with al-Qaeda and ISIS exploited underdeveloped, under-governed areas to prey on vulnerable populations. Popular grievances grew against historical colonial powers. Centralized national governments lacked the ability to defeat extremists, purge corruption, provide basic

services, and mediate inter-ethnic conflicts over limited resources like access to land and fisheries. Coup leaders overthrew elected governments claiming they will fix these problems.

Having overthrown legitimate governments, however, these coup leaders find themselves distanced from security partners like USAFRICOM, European allies and United Nations peacekeeping missions. Instead of making progress, the junta leaders and their constituents see their security problems only get worse. African mechanisms for multinational collaboration – like the G5 Sahel – dissolve. Violence against civilians increases. As security worsens, coup states need international partners more than ever, and they turn to partners who lack restrictions in dealing with coup governments: our strategic competitors – particularly Russia.

We work with all African partners to improve security training and assistance to help safeguard sovereign nations that share our values of constitutional, civilian-led government. We do not give orders to – or otherwise control – our partners, including graduates of U.S. military training programs. Yet, USAFRICOM activities have helped to prevent coups by educating military leaders about the negative consequences for security partnerships with competitors. If America ceased providing training to African militaries in reaction to a handful of trainees becoming involved in coup attempts – usually years after their training – the risk of more military takeovers would only grow. Our whole-of-government approach, including persistent engagement with problematic partners, is the best way America can help mitigate the risk of future coups and encourage military juntas to rejoin the rules-based international order. When Africa's military officers understand the painful security, diplomatic and development penalties levied against coup states, and they participate in defense education that strengthens their already

ingrained aversion to coups, they are less likely to view a military takeover as a viable path to solving disagreements with democratically elected civilian leadership.

USAFRICOM needs to stay in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea to limit the spread of terrorism across the region and beyond. Amid withdrawals of European and United Nations missions – often directed by the host nation, we have remained because West African leaders ask for our continued assistance and presence. They value our security cooperation because it is both effective and politically neutral. Recent history shows that Moscow and Beijing jump to fill the void when American engagement wanes or disappears, and we cannot afford to do that in West Africa.

Even where our engagement is restricted, we continue key tasks, such as surveilling VEOs and supporting USAID’s unfaltering humanitarian assistance. The 2019 Global Fragility Act enables collective U.S. effort to assist coastal West African states, which are facing growing threats from Sahel-based VEOs and illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing that saps a priceless national resource for food and employment. USAFRICOM support is key to stemming the rise of Russian disinformation, human rights abuses, and private military company expansion that exploits sovereign resources and fosters violent extremism.

## **EAST AFRICA**

USAFRICOM’s main effort in the Horn of Africa is supporting the Somali government’s fight against al-Qaeda’s largest franchise – al-Shabaab – as well as ISIS-Somalia. We returned to a persistent deployed presence in Somalia in 2022. We are providing training, logistical support, medical evacuation, and intelligence to vetted units in the Somali National Army (SNA) – the

Danab commandos – and collaborating with the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). Last year, we conducted 18 air strikes requested by SNA commanders and removed a global ISIS facilitator and leader in Somalia, Bilal al-Sudani. None of these operations caused a single civilian casualty.

With the SNA at the helm, we have seen progress in Somalia, but we also see mounting challenges. ATMIS is expected to be phased out by 2025 and the SNA is not currently prepared to defeat al-Shabaab, even though their training, firepower, and ability to muster resources outmatches al-Shabaab. Where the SNA most needs help is in reinforcing battlefield gains and providing resilient security for development of sustainable local governance that can root out lingering al-Shabaab influences. Al-Shabaab dominates swaths of Somali territory and regularly launches attacks into Mogadishu and other cities. Al-Shabaab is poised to exploit any reduction in counter-terrorism pressure by rejuvenating their ability to attack the U.S. homeland and our facilities in East Africa.

Our largest facility in Africa is in Djibouti, a few minutes' drive from the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) only overseas military base. Beijing is deeply invested in the Horn of Africa, as it is across the African continent. USAFRICOM does not offer African partners "U.S. vs PRC" ultimatums, because our partners rely heavily on China's economic and infrastructure investments. We seek to out-compete the PRC in the security cooperation arena – and African militaries see the difference. In comparing the quality of training and equipment, USAFRICOM's partnership offers stark advantages over PRC partnership. African partners consistently prefer U.S. defense assistance, but they often have to turn toward Beijing when U.S. timelines do not meet their urgent needs.



Being a trusted partner in East Africa allows USAFRICOM to respond to crises. For example, a civil war unexpectedly broke out in Sudan last April – and USAFRICOM was ready when the State Department called. Within hours, we were coordinating with the U.S. interagency, both parties in the civil war, and our allies and partners. Within days we were joining forces with those allies and partners to rescue Americans and others in need who were caught in the crossfire. Within weeks, Embassy staff and Americans in need of evacuation had safely crossed the Red Sea. While the evacuation last year was a success, the Sudanese people still face protracted fighting, displacement, ethnic cleansing, and potential famine.

The world is watching conflicts across East Africa. Inter-ethnic clashes involving Ethiopia and Eritrea have defined the ever-shifting landscape of opportunistic alliances that leave civilians in jeopardy. Eritrea's alignment with Russia risks establishing a Russian base on the Red Sea, endangering global commerce and freedom of movement in this critical maritime highway. Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea demonstrate that threats to African partners don't have to originate in Africa to have an effect in Africa. Even though the Red Sea marks a geographic boundary between U.S. Combatant Commands, USAFRICOM and USCENTCOM seamlessly coordinate to help inform and protect our African partners from these threats. This relationship demonstrates the interoperability USAFRICOM has with all Geographic and Functional Combatant Commands in support of the Department's globally integrated construct.

We can't overlook the progress in East Africa. Kenya is a leading force behind regional security efforts, including the African Union's ATMIS mission in Somalia. Last year, the Tanzanians hosted our annual pan-Africa communications and cyber symposium AFRICA

ENDEAVOR, and this year they will host our annual African Directors of Military Intelligence Conference. Tanzania is charting a non-aligned course between us and the PRC to maximize development and economic opportunities to support their emergence as a hub for continent-wide defense collaboration. With continued USAFRICOM support, East Africa as a region can also progress toward security self-reliance and full participation in global defense of the rules-based order.

## **NORTH AFRICA**

Our partnership with North Africa dates to just after the American Revolution – America’s longest treaty relationship is with Morocco. USAFRICOM is proud to build on that legacy. Morocco and Tunisia are significant contributors to regional security along NATO’s southern flank. Algeria is a highly capable partner often aligned with U.S. objectives. Our continual engagement with these predominantly Muslim countries has created resilient bonds. One engagement in particular, USAFRICOM’s flagship annual exercise AFRICAN LION, relies primarily on our North African partners as they make game-changing contributions in training their African neighbors. Morocco and Tunisia also joined USAFRICOM at last year’s Exercise PHOENIX EXPRESS, which trained Africa’s maritime forces to combat IUU fishing and criminal smuggling. Empowering female sailors was a cornerstone of that exercise, driven by 2017’s Women, Peace and Security Act.

Libya is struggling to realize the vast potential of its people and natural wealth. Competition between rival political stakeholders poisons Libyan prospects for development and internal security. The solution lies with the Libyan people, but USAFRICOM’s role is to contribute within our whole-of-government 3D approach alongside allies and partners.

USAFRICOM is on the U.S. State Department's team to facilitate trust between Libya's factions and close the fissures in their security leadership. USAFRICOM is on USAID's team to provide life-saving humanitarian aid and development assistance. Our goal is to facilitate the establishment of legitimate, unified governance that answers to its people while protecting Libyan sovereignty and resources from VEOs and Russian encroachment. The emergence of a strong Libya will be a victory for the stability of North Africa and the national security of the United States.

### **CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA**

As in Libya, the solutions to Central and Southern Africa's security challenges are not military, but are diplomatic and developmental. The tragic conflict between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda has long threatened to descend into a full-scale war, and America is joining with African partners to provide mechanisms that build trust and de-escalate tensions.

Our Central and Southern African partners have little trust in our strategic adversaries, but these partners need what Chinese and Russian companies offer: infrastructure, inexpensive equipment, and quick financial incentives. These countries are in a dilemma: they must balance their development needs against risks to national sovereignty. Chinese and Russian companies have used predatory tactics to entangle African states in debt and extractive contracts that leave local populations in the lurch. America offers an alternative. U.S. diplomatic, development, and defense support does not hold their peoples and natural resources hostage, so we do not impose a moral balancing act on our partners. Instead of demanding financial and political concessions,

we demand accountability on the fundamentals: respect for human rights and the rule of law. These are interests we share with peoples throughout Central and Southern Africa.

In this region, the stakes are high. Its wealth of critical minerals contrasts sharply with its vulnerability to natural disasters. USAFRICOM's approach is to enable information sharing and to support our State Department and USAID colleagues to cultivate climate resilience in governments and security forces. Geospatial data sharing is a low-cost, high-impact way to equip our partners' forces to deal with the criminal and terrorist elements that prey upon our partners' safety and sovereign natural resources. Those resources include staple local food sources – notably fish – and minerals designated by the U.S. Department of the Interior as critical for our national security. Chromium, cobalt, manganese, tantalum – the list is long. If we don't support host nations in securing these resources, the implications for America's defense edge will be grim. These are critical minerals for our adversaries too.

When we look at partners in southern Africa, we see a bright and secure future for the peoples of southern Africa. Angola is moving away from its historical partnership with Moscow to embrace U.S. military cooperation. This puts them on the fast track for becoming a regional security exporter in its own right. South Africa is the leading contributor to the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) military force that is overcoming ISIS-Mozambique's insurgency in Cabo Delgado. And – in a historical 'first' for USAFRICOM – this year's iteration of our flagship annual Chiefs of Defense Conference will be on the African continent, co-hosted by the Botswana Defense Force. USAFRICOM looks forward to this and numerous other senior leader conferences in Africa during coming years, because these events culminate in the multinational defense collaboration that paves the way toward our common security objectives.

## CONCLUSION

The outcome for which we all strive in Africa – the outcome most important to America’s national security – is a continent of free, safe, prosperous, and resilient nations that hold their peoples’ interests at heart. We seek to foster nations that are self-reliant for domestic defense and are able to provide defense assistance to their neighbors through bilateral, multinational, and international security collaboration frameworks. The nations of Africa are on the road to achieving this goal, and some have arrived. For those that have not, they need USAFRICOM support more than ever.

It is sobering to see our international allies downsizing in Africa. France’s considerable counterterrorism presence is at a low point. The UN peacekeeping mission in Mali has departed, and the mission in DRC is drawing down. International funding for African Union peacekeepers in Somalia beyond this year is unresolved. Because of this trend, USAFRICOM will continue to reinforce security cooperation programs that reenergize partnerships with African militaries. Those forces are the world’s first line of defense against technologically savvy VEOs, and they need to build capacity to keep pace in this 21<sup>st</sup> century contest.

The second-order value proposition of USAFRICOM’s capacity- and relationship-building effort is competition with America’s strategic adversaries. While our allies are moving out, our adversaries are moving in. Last year, the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) completed its first circumnavigation of the continent since 2018. In the last few years, Russian military forces – both public and private – have made in-roads in West Africa’s coup states, the Central African Republic, and Libya. Russian fighters claim to fight terrorists, but they do so at a grave human and financial cost to their host nations. Moscow’s disinformation machine is adept

at obfuscating their atrocities, and the Kremlin's agents are keen to spread disinformation and meddle in their African clients' domestic political affairs while claiming to provide "security."

Information sharing is a key component of USAFRICOM's campaign on the continent. It goes to the core of our value proposition to Africa's defense forces. Maritime domain awareness and geospatial intelligence enable our partners to take the fight to terrorists, smugglers, pirates, and IUU fishing operations. We shed light on Russian disinformation and the risks of partnership with unregulated Chinese industries. The information we provide trainees on human rights, civil-military relations, law of armed conflict, and civilian casualty avoidance is our best means of deterring our military partners from the pitfalls of operating on a continent as diverse and dynamic as Africa.

Africa is big, and so are its challenges. There is high potential for strategic-level national security threats to grow this year. Africa's critical minerals and maritime shipping lanes become more important to America's technological and energy independence every day. Coups in West Africa have distracted local security forces from fighting VEOs, giving branches of al-Qaeda and ISIS room to expand, modernize, and reconstitute capabilities to threaten the U.S. homeland. America's fastest-growing partners for trade, space exploration, and scientific exchange are in Africa, and its young and fast-growing populations are the key to safeguarding the global rules-based order. USAFRICOM is shoulder-to-shoulder with our State Department and USAID colleagues to do America's part in helping Africa address its challenges. If we fail in Africa, our strategic competitors will move in. If we succeed, so do the peoples of Africa.