

# Strengthening Partnerships to Face the Complexities of Africa

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*There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is to fight without them.*

—Winston Churchill

**W**hile Africa may not be the first region that people think about when it comes to the modern security environment that emphasizes near-peer competition and the challenges, complexity, and potential for crises, they do exist more there than in any other region of the world. While some of the challenges in Africa also exist elsewhere, the scale to which the crises may spread is greater in this region due to various characteristics of that expansive, underdeveloped, and often misunderstood continent. The key to overcoming these challenges is an emphasis on strengthening partnerships with our long-standing allies and with our developing partners. The aim should be to turn our partners of today into our allies of tomorrow. To understand how the Army can better prepare for conflict in this region, we must first gain an understanding of the challenges in the region.

## Great Power Competition in Africa

The *U.S. National Security Strategy*, released in December 2017, places emphasis once again on great power competition as the greatest threat to national security.<sup>1</sup> This is a departure from previous security strategies that have largely focused on terrorism and sponsors of terrorist activities. While great power competition will undoubtedly unfold in the South China Sea and in Eastern Europe, it will also take place in Africa, although in more subtle ways.

As the *National Security Strategy* focuses on Russia and China as the nearest competitors, both countries have interests in Africa that will undoubtedly challenge the decades of work by the United States and partner nations to establish democratic institutions on that continent. Although we must prepare for it, direct military confrontation is an unwanted scenario.

**Previous page:** A young Afar boy walks through failed crops 26 January 2016 on farmland in the Magenta area of Afar, Ethiopia. The crops failed and farm animals died during a severe drought that left Ethiopia appealing for international help to feed its people. (Photo by Mulugeta Ayene, Associate Press)

However, the potential for a new Cold War exists, and Africa will be the front line where this competition will take place.

China's interests in Africa are predominantly economic due to the nation's need for natural resources to support industrialization and continued economic growth. A tactic of China is to offer low-interest-rate loans to finance infrastructure and development projects in emerging countries, which are enticing up front but are hard to recover from. A recent example of this is the takeover of the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota by the Chinese government. The former president of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa, signed numerous deals with unfavorable lending conditions for projects deemed unnecessary or unprofitable by analysts.<sup>2</sup> The mounting debt led to insurmountable payments, and the government was more or less forced to hand over the port for ninety-nine years in return for temporary debt relief.<sup>3</sup> This is one example of the numerous attempts by China to invest in infrastructure and commercial networks across the world under the auspices of the Belt and Road Initiative. The harshest accusations about President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative are that the global investment and lending program amounts to a "debt trap" for vulnerable countries around the world, and that it fuels corruption and autocratic behavior in struggling democracies.<sup>4</sup> While the consequences of these debt traps may take years, or even decades, to play out, the Chinese will have patience with their investment due to the payoffs and the potential control of strategic locations.

Militarily, China's presence has steadily increased on the continent. China's Belt and Road Initiative is based on economic opportunities and expansion, yet often these projects support Chinese military access to the region.<sup>5</sup> Current Chinese development efforts will lead to the control of strategic choke points such as the Suez Canal and the Straits of Malacca.<sup>6</sup> China has built or obtained leases for ports in the Horn of Africa (Djibouti), East Africa (Tanzania), and Southern Africa on the Atlantic Ocean (Namibia).<sup>7</sup> Most widely reported was China's establishment of a military logistics base in Djibouti. An increased presence of Chinese troops will undoubtedly increase the likelihood of potential conflict, particularly if located near U.S. forces. Reminiscent of a Soviet tactic used during the Cold War, there have been several incidents involving high-power military laser attacks against U.S. Air Force pilots, resulting in minor eye injuries,



Police disperse the crowd as Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir arrives to give an address 4 April 2016 during a Darfur peace campaign rally at Nyala in South Darfur. (Photo by Mohamed Nureldin Abdallah, Reuters)

which emanated from the Chinese base in Djibouti or a Chinese naval vessel nearby.<sup>8</sup>

Also, Russia appears to be reasserting its influence in the region largely through military equipment sales and donations. Russia may not be the preferred partner, but less stringent Russian regulations and quick delivery timelines for military equipment make it an easy partner to work with. Data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Arms Transfer Database shows that Russia has consistently been the second largest contributor to the global arms trade over the last ten years.<sup>9</sup> During that period, between 15 and 25 percent of Russian arms transfers have been to Africa, with the countries of Algeria, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Angola as the largest recipients.<sup>10</sup> Some of these countries were key partners of the Soviet Union in Africa during the Cold War, and a rekindling of these relationships must be closely watched.

## Environmental Challenges to Security

Great power competition is not the only security concern in Africa. Perhaps more disconcerting and less

understood than Chinese and Russian actions in Africa are the challenges brought about by climate change, population density, and poor governance. These challenges are often interconnected and tend to exacerbate each other.

In the other regions of the world, the environmental aspects are not often an area of primary concern. However, in Africa, climatic changes continually pressure national governments, international

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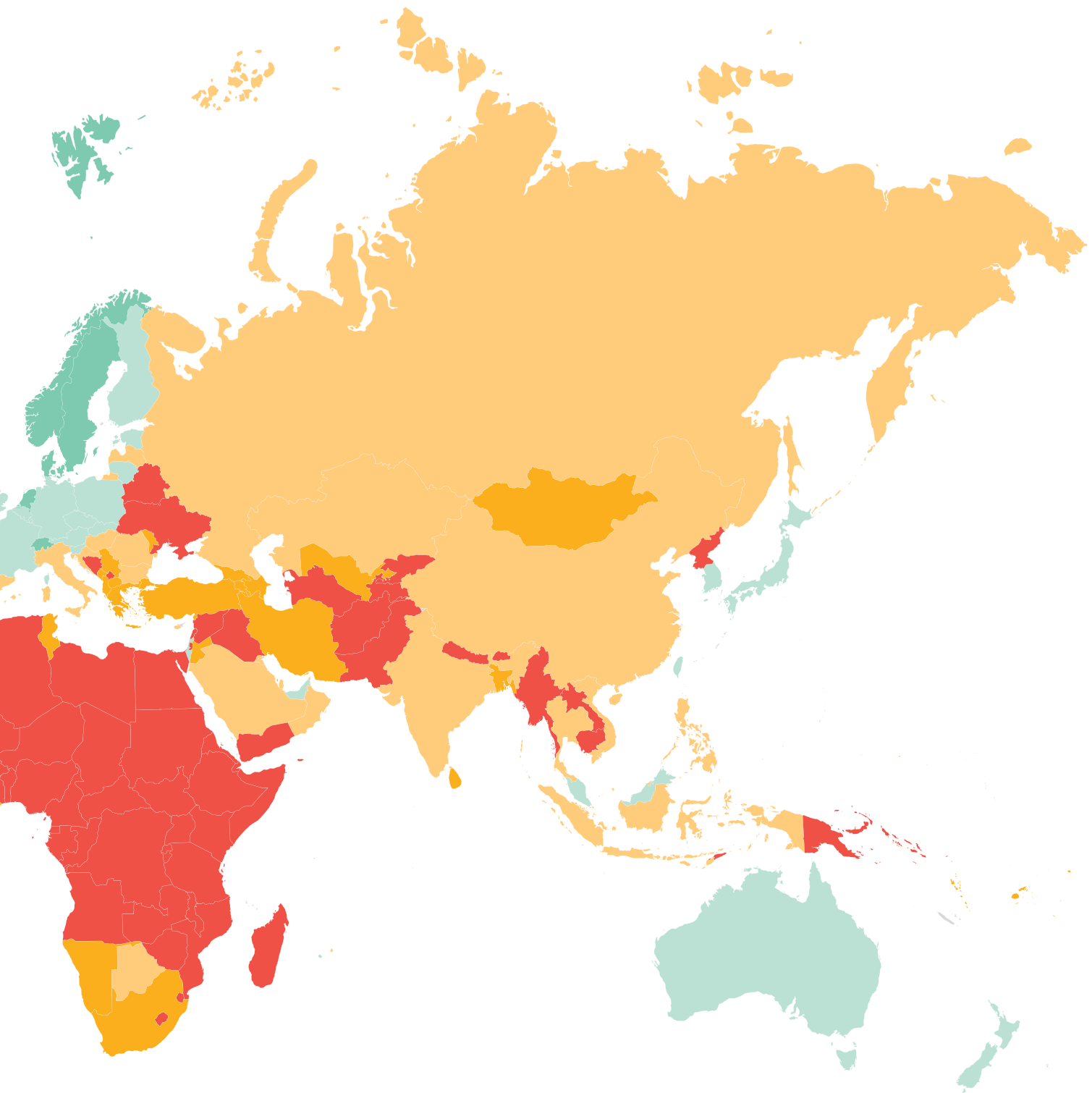


## Political Risk Map 2018

**B**ased on data and insight from BMI Research, Marsh & McLennan Companies' interactive Political Risk Map provides country risk scores for more than two hundred countries and territories. Updated annually, the overall risk scores are based on three categories of risk—political, economic, and operational—and reflect both short- and long-term threats to stability.

The 2018 map (*shown here*) depicts changes in the political risk landscape during the past twelve months and looks ahead to continuing trade, socioeconomic, and political risks, and other emerging concerns that affect global political stability. The findings highlight geographic regions where festering ethnic strife, social and economic inequities, exploding populations, and diminishing access to resources are continuing to produce social and political instability. The greater portion of vicinities where such adverse conditions exist are currently found on the continent of Africa, as well as in parts of Latin America and Asia. For more information and to view the interactive map, please visit <https://www.marsh.com/us/campaigns/political-risk-map-2018.html>.

(Map courtesy of Marsh & McLennan Companies; risk scores courtesy of BMI Research, A Fitch Group Company)



**Country risk index**



**Stable**

**Unstable**



organizations, and nongovernmental organizations to support vulnerable populations. If a security crisis is not the direct result of an environmental challenge, it will likely be a contributing factor.

The Lake Chad Basin is one of the better-known environmental issues in Africa. Lake Chad, which traverses the countries of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, was once the sixth largest freshwater lake in the world but is now only one-tenth its original size.<sup>11</sup> The size reduction of the lake, which is used by farmers, grazers, and for general livelihood, is estimated to impact fifty million people by 2020, all competing for fewer resources that will require international participation to maintain stability.<sup>12</sup>

Famines are almost synonymous with Africa. More people are affected by famines in Africa than any other region of the world, and they remain a persistent challenge for the international community. Famines are often the result of droughts, but conflicts have also been an exacerbating factor. A famine in Somalia in the early 1990s resulted in the need for humanitarian aid and led to the well-known “Black Hawk Down” incident. Recently, the Islamic militant group Al-Shabaab has prevented the delivery of humanitarian aid to starving populations in Somalia, perhaps as a way to lure the international

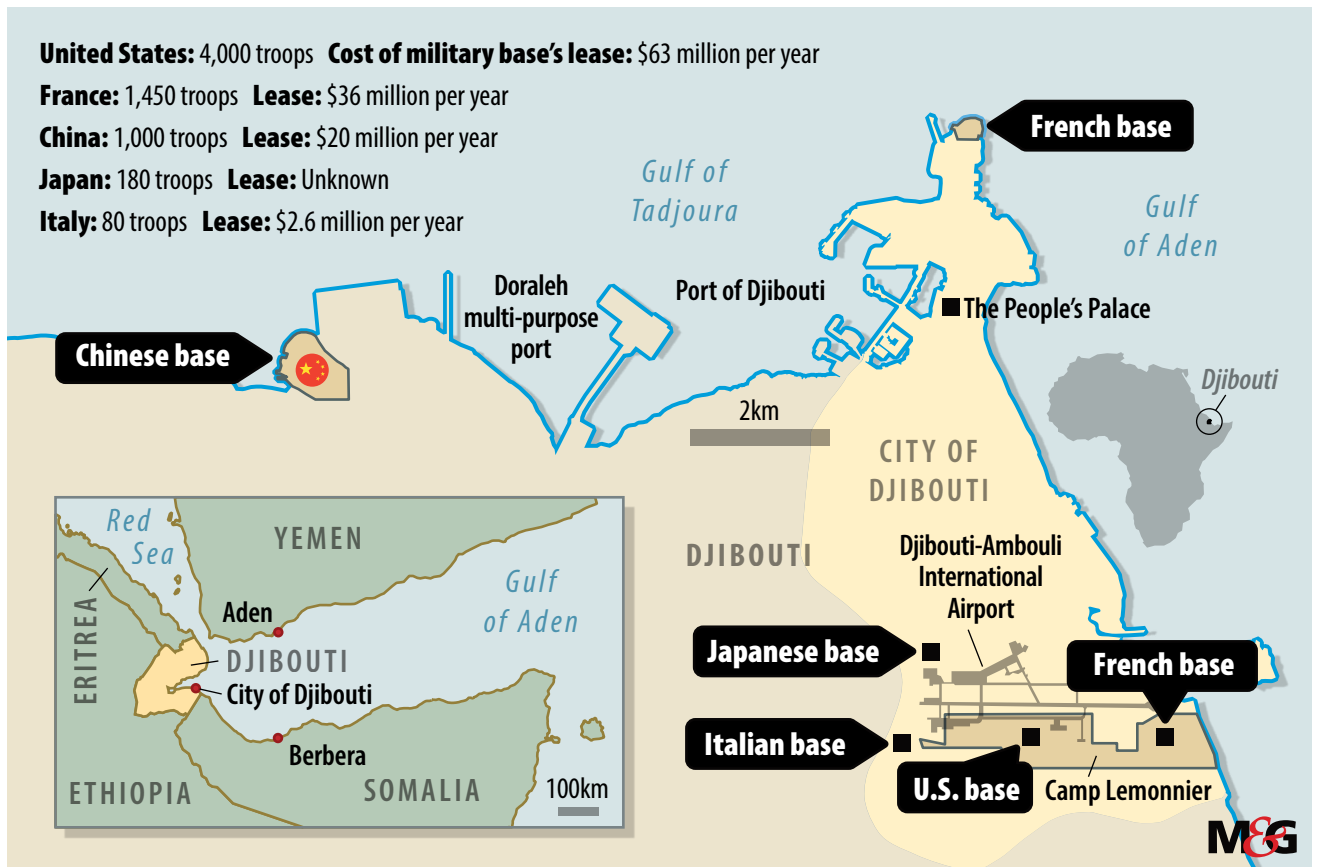
Chinese People’s Liberation Army personnel attend the opening ceremony of China’s new military base 1 August 2017 in Djibouti. China has deployed troops to its first overseas naval base in Djibouti, a major step forward for the country’s expansion of its military presence abroad. (Photo from STR/Agence France-Presse)

community back into Somalia.<sup>13</sup> The world cannot neglect the fact that the frequency and severity of droughts and famines in East Africa has steadily increased and is forecasted to continue along this trend.<sup>14</sup>

These are only a few specific examples of climatic challenges that affect stability; it is not an all-inclusive list. While some may disagree with the concept of climate change or global warming, no one can refute that severe conditions persist in Africa today or that these challenges contribute to fragility and insecurity.

## Demographics and Urban Density

For those that live in the rural parts of Africa, there are often limited options for employment. One must usually choose from being a fisherman, a farmer, or a herdsman. All are respectable professions but often provide only for subsistence living. As a result, many youths choose to migrate to one of the larger cities within their



(Figure by John McCann, *Mail & Guardian*, South Africa. Source: Global Security, Ombai)

## Playground of the Superpowers: The Foreign Bases in Djibouti

countries with the prospect of increased opportunities for employment and education. The infrastructure of these cities, often established in the mid-twentieth century, cannot meet the demands of the increased population. Roads, electricity, water, and sewage remain persistent issues for African nations whose financial resources are strained or are reliant on foreign partners.

In recent years, the term “megacity” has gained traction within the military profession as a potential future operational environment. The United Nations defines a megacity as an urban area that has more than ten million people.<sup>15</sup> Currently, there are three megacities in Africa—Cairo; Lagos, Nigeria; and Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo—but it is expected to double to six megacities by the year 2030, with the addition of Johannesburg; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; and Luanda, Angola.<sup>16</sup> Megacities in Africa are unique because they spread over a larger area than found elsewhere in the world. The chief of staff of the Army’s Strategic Studies Group conducted an assessment and identified that

megacities are an unavoidable aspect of future conflict, and the Army is currently unprepared to deal with the complexities of the megacity.<sup>17</sup>

Pundits and novices alike are familiar with the term “fragile state.” The Fund for Peace annually publishes the Fragile States Index that assesses country fragility based on cohesion (security), economic, political, and social indicators. According to the most recent report, Africa is host to more fragile states than any other region in the world.<sup>18</sup> The endemic fragility of nations increases the likelihood that a security situation can quickly escalate in scale and magnitude due to government inability to properly address the problem.

Other demographic challenges such as high fertility rates and youth population bulges, along with the language and cultural diversity make Africa more distinct than other regions of the world. In Africa, population growth outpaces the rest of the world, and it is estimated that over half of the population is currently less than twenty years old.<sup>19</sup> This youth bulge places another



# A RUSSIAN PORT IN EAST AFRICA



(Map courtesy of CIA World Factbook)

“ Russia is engaged in a frantic new scramble for influence in Africa, which is being spearheaded by a rash of military cooperation and arms deals signed across the continent in 2018. The most recent—an agreement for a planned Russian logistics base in Eritrea, which would give it access to the Red Sea—was announced in early September after nine months that have seen Kremlin officials crisscross from the Horn to the Great Lakes and southern Africa. The pace of Russia’s renewed intervention has raised fears over the human rights and security implications of selling arms to regimes that are weak or in conflict, particularly as the US has signalled its own plans to withdraw troops and close missions. ... The moves, say observers, have accelerated markedly in 2018 as senior Russian officials have shuttled between capitals offering arms and military services deals—often with few conditions attached—in exchange for diplomatic support and potentially lucrative mineral extraction contracts.”

Source: “Russia’s Scramble for Influence in Africa Catches Western Officials Off-Guard,” *The Guardian* (website), 11 September 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/sep/11/russia-scramble-for-influence-in-africa-catches-western-officials-off-guard>.

stress on governments who must factor in higher costs of education and health care associated with a larger population. If governments cannot provide the basic services that most people expect, then a large youth demographic disenfranchised with the capacity of their government could be fertile ground for recruitment by extremist groups.

## Violent Extremism

One cannot discuss the security challenges of Africa without mentioning the rise of Islamic extremism. Porous borders and underresourced security institutions enable such groups to exist. A recent study shows that violent attacks by extremist groups in Africa have drastically increased over 300 percent since 2010.<sup>20</sup> Groups such as al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and numerous other groups in central Africa and across the Sahel have posed challenges to governments and U.S. forces as well. Although not common, the United States has suffered casualties from these groups, such as the well-known attack on U.S. forces in Niger in October 2017 that resulted in the tragic loss of four soldiers.

Though the challenges and complexities are evident and clearly daunting, they are not insurmountable. No country can do it alone; therefore, an emphasis on cooperation and partnerships is necessary to effectively face these challenges.

## How to Prepare for the Complexities of Africa

U.S. resources dedicated to Africa are not likely to increase in the coming years. Not only are resources more constrained, but irregular budget cycles resulting in continuing resolutions have also led to delayed or missed opportunities. Furthermore, the security situation in Africa is not often on the top of the priority list when strategies and resource allocations are determined, as evidenced by the recent *National Security Strategy* that emphasizes near-peer competition. Africa remains unique in the fact that the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) was



established knowing that military activities would “directly support U.S. diplomatic and development efforts,” as stated by its commander, Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser, during his 2018 Posture Statement to Congress.<sup>21</sup>

Due to AFRICOM’s unique mission and the fact that resources are unlikely to be diverted to the region, we must consider redefining how the Army views the region and the potential opportunities that exist for the Army. Without a doubt, the Army must be prepared to deploy, fight, and win a war anywhere at any time. In order to ensure the Army is ready to answer this call, the secretary of the Army and the chief of staff of the Army recently released an updated Army Vision, which states that the Army of 2028 will be ready to “deploy, fight and win decisively against any adversary, anytime and anywhere, in a joint, multi-domain, high-intensity conflict, while simultaneously deterring others and maintaining its ability to conduct irregular warfare.”<sup>22</sup> Often overlooked, all those characteristics are found in Africa. The Army Vision also emphasizes the need to strengthen alliances and build partnerships to offset future challenges. It is in Africa where the U.S. Army can work

on strengthening these relationships with the largest payoff to contribute to international security. Brig. Gen. Kayanja Muhanga, Ugandan contingent commander of the African Union Mission in Somalia’s (AMISOM), visits the site of a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attack 15 October 2017 that was conducted by the militant group Al-Shabaab in the Somali capital of Mogadishu. (Photo by Tobin Jones, AMISOM)

on strengthening these relationships with the largest payoff to contribute to international security.

The Army must focus on increased cooperation with long-standing allies who have more experience in the region such as British and French forces who have a history of being heavily engaged in the region. The interests of long-standing allies often align with the United States, and coordinated efforts could save those allied countries valuable resources and reduce duplicative efforts that have the same intent. Partner nations already have liaison officers at the geographic combatant commands, but more coordination needs to take place on the ground between the embassies.

A common challenge when working with international partners is determining who covers the logistical costs. A potential work around, which would require

a Department of Defense-wide effort, would be to create a new authorization in future National Defense Authorization Acts that would enable the U.S. government to cover some of the costs required to incorporate partner nations. If the authority exists, then the appropriations would likely follow. Of course, the intent of this effort would not be to cover all the costs of partners and allies to train with U.S. forces, but there would need to be some middle ground. Many partners want to do more in the realm of security cooperation but are often hamstrung financially. This authority would largely focus on developed allies such as NATO partners through multilateral engagements, because authorities already exist to train partner nations bilaterally in the developing world, like in Africa.

As well as increased cooperation with our enduring allies, the Army should focus on bringing more partners from Africa to train with U.S. forces during combat training center (CTC) rotations. This would be mutually beneficial to U.S. and partner forces to build relations, increase influence, and ensure U.S. forces meet readiness requirements. The focus of this effort should be on partners that will likely volunteer for future peacekeeping operations or have the potential for future combined joint operations. There has been a great success in Europe with bringing partners to the Joint Multinational Training Command in Germany, and this should be replicated with our African partners. The United States has the premier training centers in the world, and the opportunity to train at CTCs alongside U.S. troops would be a point of pride for these nations. There is already a long list of potential partners that all have unique combat experiences that the United States can learn from. The *National Security Strategy* emphasizes increased military cooperation, and this is achievable by partnering units with international partners at each CTC rotation.

In addition to focusing on strengthening partnerships, the Army should increase emphasis on security cooperation activities. Currently, security cooperation activities (sometimes referred to as security force assistance or building partnership capacity) are commonly viewed as a detriment to unit readiness. However, if done properly, security cooperation activities can sustain or even enhance unit readiness. There have been recent calls by members of Congress to create a security force assistance brigade (SFAB) and dedicate it to Africa.<sup>23</sup> The SFAB is a great concept, but all are currently aligned to the U.S.

Central Command area of operations. An Africa-focused SFAB would assist the Army in providing forces for the numerous building-partner-capacity missions that exist yet remain unfilled by the Army. The demand signal is out there, but the U.S. Army has fallen out of favor as the service of preference because of the inability to allocate or assign forces to the region, the unresponsiveness of the process for requesting forces, and the constraints on available units and personnel due to the “readiness” argument.

Furthermore, to face the challenges of Africa, the Army must be responsive. And to be responsive, the Army must be able to gain access and entry into the region. The Army has done this by establishing cooperative security locations (CSLs) across the region. A CSL functions as a bare-bones launching pad for quick-reaction troops called into the region to secure U.S. diplomatic facilities and personnel.<sup>24</sup> These locations are essential in a region characterized by poor infrastructure and vast distances, and they enable entry to the region to prepare for onward movement to a crisis. Investments in new technologies such as 3-D printing will increase the effectiveness of these CSLs and reduce the need for long logistics trains if items and equipment can be produced on site. This capability would not be required in each country, but only at the few CSLs within the component command’s area of responsibility. Having this forward-deployed capability at a CSL would be the perfect alignment of posture, responsiveness, and sustainment.

A program that is often overlooked or unknown to the active-duty force is the National Guard Bureau’s State Partnership Program. This program, established following the end of the Cold War, partners a U.S. National Guard state with an ally to bolster and support their military. If the Army is unwilling to allocate or assign forces to U.S. Army Africa, then an increase in support to the State Partnership Program would be extremely beneficial to our partners, helping to develop long-lasting relationships, capabilities, and institutions, as well as adding to the experience of our National Guard soldiers.

In addition to increasing U.S. Army participation in security cooperation activities, there are various other opportunities to improve the Army’s preparedness to operate in Africa should the need arise. Not just specific to Africa, but all soldiers in the Army should be assigned a region of study to be tracked like an additional skill identifier. This would build a bench of knowledge of the various regions of the world across

the entire force. If each soldier is assigned a region, their regional knowledge can be developed through specific research focused on that region throughout their professional military education courses. This will ensure that both personal and professional education will continue and increase over a soldier's career.

Although the U.S. Army is touted as the most lethal and capable ground force in history, the complexities of the African continent could prove to be the greatest

challenge to date. With extremist groups benefiting from fragile governments with urban and demographic challenges exacerbated by climatic changes over vast distances, the Army must reenergize efforts to strengthening our partnerships to mitigate the complexities of future conflict. The opportunity for gain is too great to ignore. The Army must prioritize engagement and multilateral training opportunities to build and strengthen our current partners into our allies of tomorrow. ■

## Notes

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