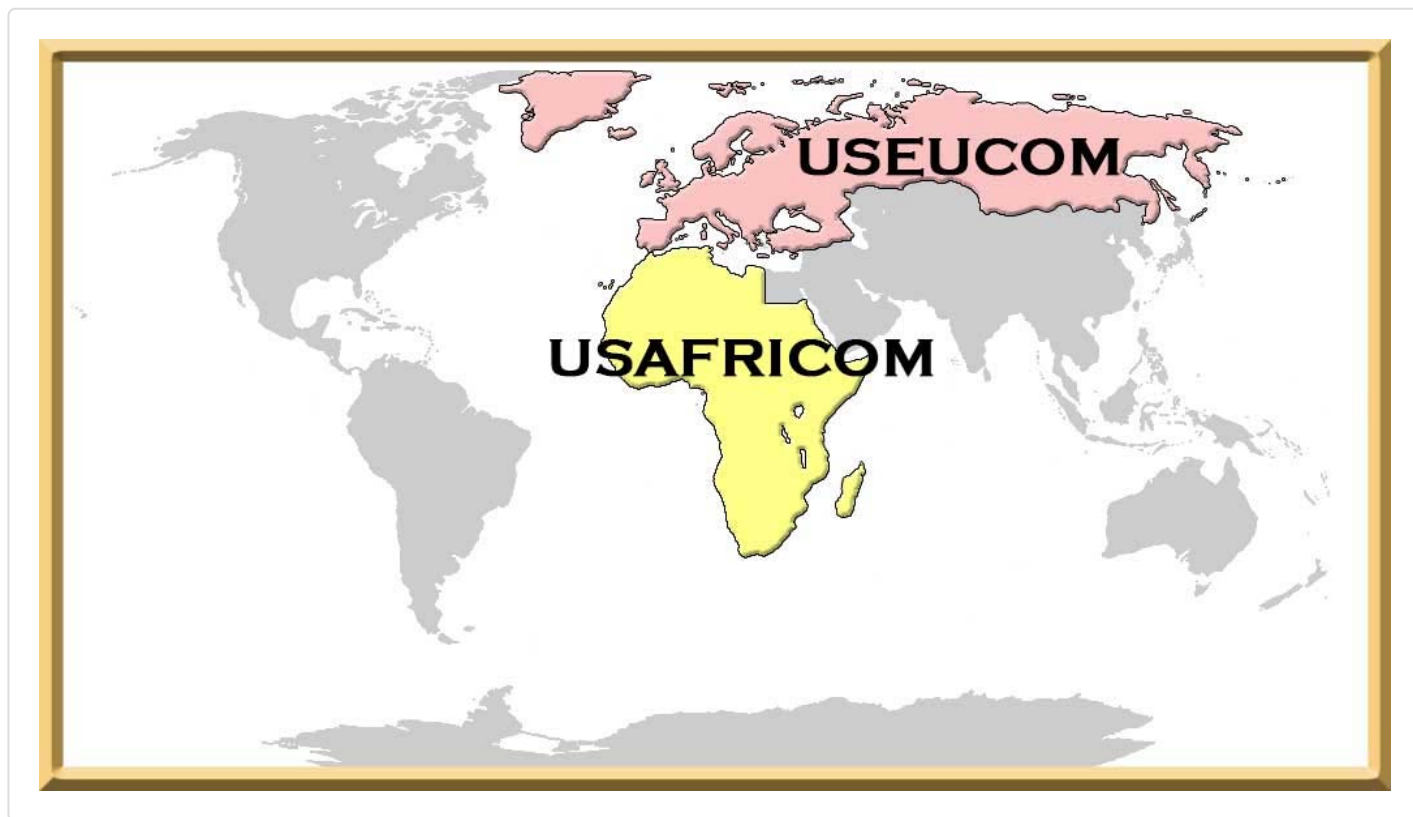


Enlisted Leaders Talk about Shared Goals, Concerns in U.S., Europe, Africa

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester - NCO Journal

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Enlisted leaders from the United States, Europe and Africa gathered in a hotel ballroom in El Paso, Texas, on April 13 to discuss shared goals, concerns and how they could help each other achieve better readiness.

The discussion was part of the first International Training and Leader Development Symposium, a three-day event in El Paso that brought together enlisted leaders from all over the world to foster international partnerships and professional NCO development.

Command Sgt. Maj. Darrin Bohn, command senior enlisted leader of United States Africa Command, started the discussion. He said a main concern for African NCOs is the often unbalanced level of education given to officers versus NCOs.

“Some of the countries that I deal with, and thankfully they are not in the room, but they default always to the officers,” Bohn said. “They send someone to the war college. Well, we can send somebody on a Mobile Training Team over there to train 60 noncommissioned officers at the same time for less money.”

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Master Warrant Officer Dickson Owusu, the sergeant major of the Ghana, Africa, army, said one of the roadblocks to getting more NCO training in African countries is that NCO development and empowerment can be seen as a threat.

“That’s why I like to use the terms ‘roles and responsibilities’ instead of empowerment,” Bohn said in response to Owusu. “We need to convince the officers that our roles and responsibilities give them more time to plan the big things. We’ll get our soldiers there in the right uniform, with water and ammunition, ready to execute the mission.”

The senior enlisted leaders of four African countries – Ghana, Malawi, Kenya and Liberia – took part in the symposium. The four shared their struggles in getting their officers to accept NCO involvement in decisions. Bohn encouraged them to continue to fight for NCO empowerment and let them know it’s not ever going to be easy.

“To be honest with you guys, even I struggle with my headquarters to get NCO involvement,” Bohn said. “Every day is a fight for me, as well. Every day is a fight to make sure the noncommissioned officer’s voice is being heard. I don’t always get my way, but at least I get my say. So it’s a fight all the time for me, too. I know what you guys are going through. Don’t think the struggle is just on the African continent. The struggle is still on the American continent, as well. So how do we make ourselves relevant? How do we interject in some of these things to get what’s best for our NCOs and soldiers?”



Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Sweezer, command sergeant major of the Joint Multinational Training Command in Grafenwoehr, Germany, gives a brief on the command to a group of senior enlisted leaders from Africa and Europe on April 13 in El Paso,

Command Sgt. Maj. Sheryl Lyon, the command sergeant major of U.S. Army Europe, said that joint training in Europe also includes talk about NCOs' roles and responsibilities, but with the additional need to incorporate NATO doctrine.

"For U.S. Army Europe, we're a little bit different because our partnerships have been going on for 70-plus years," Lyon said. "State partnerships, at least some of them, have been going on for 25 years. They're very well established. So there is a difference in the way we see things and the way AFRICOM sees things. Being well established helps us in that we can focus on other things."

The State Partnership Program has established 70 partnerships in 76 countries, pairing state National Guard units with other nations' armed forces. SPP partnerships with European countries started as early as 1993.

Both Lyon and Bohn stressed the importance of using Mobile Training Teams in the effort to educate and train noncommissioned officers in Europe and Africa.

"I advocate for MTTs," Lyon said. "It works much better for a country. For one, it's cheaper. You don't have to pay for 40 students to come to an NCO Academy somewhere in the states or in Germany. It comes to you. It works much better to get them certified, able to instruct their own courses."

After the discussion, Lyon said that the talks showed that NCOs around the world share common goals.

"One of the things I took away from the breakout sessions was that we face many of the same challenges in our NCO corps regardless of where we are from or how long we've had an NCO corps," Lyon said. "Readiness is our number one priority, making training essential to success."

Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Gilpin, command sergeant major of U.S. Army Africa, noted that only four senior enlisted leaders, out of 54 countries in Africa, were represented at the symposium. He said the discussions were fruitful, but more participation will be a goal in the future.

"We were able to better communicate expectations, capabilities and understanding of how we can strengthen our partnership and be more efficient," Gilpin said. "That directly leads to readiness as we optimize personnel and resources."