

STATEMENT OF  
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BEFORE THE  
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE

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**INVESTING IN AMERICA'S SECURITY IN AFRICA:  
A CONTINENT OF GROWING STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Calvert, distinguished subcommittee members, I am once again honored to testify before you on behalf of over 10,000 service members and civilians of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM). As I enter the final months of my command, there has been no greater honor than serving alongside the men and women of AFRICOM who work so hard, even going in harm's way, to defend our nation and way of life. Since I last addressed this subcommittee, AFRICOM underwent its third DoD-directed review in as many years—the “Global Posture Review”—ensuring our campaign plan aligned with the new National Defense Strategy (NDS) and bolstered the nation's deterrence to better safeguard vital U.S. interests. Throughout these reviews, AFRICOM has remained focused on our mission of protecting and advancing U.S. interests—including maintaining a free, open, and stable international order—on the African continent. During my three years at AFRICOM, Africa's geostrategic importance has gained increasing global recognition, driving our strategic rivals to successfully leverage both soft and hard investments into political influence, sometimes malign, and hard military advantage. As my tenure at AFRICOM winds down, I am certain of two things—first, access to a stable and prosperous African continent will be increasingly important to the United States, politically, economically, and militarily and will become even more so in the future; and second, America will increasingly rely on her modest investment in U.S. AFRICOM to protect her interests and advance her objectives in this dynamic and important region of the world.

## **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT**

### ***Potential vs. Obstacles... Opportunities vs. Challenges***

Africa lies at a global crossroads. This enormous continent's environment is complex—ripe with opportunity but burdened with challenges. It holds tremendous geo-strategic significance while being shaped by the competing forces of prosperity and poverty, peace and conflict, plenty and famine, good governance and corruption and democratic backsliding. These tensions are evident throughout Africa—a continent whose socio-economic importance to the future cannot be ignored.

Africa sits astride six strategic chokepoints and sea lines of communication<sup>1</sup>, enables a third of the world's shipping<sup>2</sup>, and holds vast mineral resources. When access through these strategic chokepoints is blocked, global markets suffer. Last March, the grounded container ship *Ever Given* blocked the Suez Canal and froze 12 percent of global shipping for 6 days<sup>3</sup>. This same type of dilemma could limit the flow of U.S. forces as well. Beyond its geostrategic location, Africa possesses vast untapped energy deposits, including one third of the world's mineral reserves and

rare earth metals. These resources are the key supplies that America relies on to produce 21st century technologies<sup>4</sup> and transition to clean energy, including mobile phones, jet engines, electric-hybrid vehicles, and missile guidance systems. The winners and losers of the 21st century global economy may be determined by whether these resources are available in an open and transparent marketplace or are inaccessible due to predatory practices of competitors.

African Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is a global leader averaging 4.9 percent per year since 2000, outpacing global GDP growth by 2 percent over the same period<sup>5</sup>. This growth makes the continent a powerful part of the global economy—for both supply and demand. *The Economist* projects this impact will only increase when a quarter of world population will live in Africa by 2050—a billion of whom will be under 18 and entering the labor force<sup>6</sup>. How those acting on this continent—including Africans, allies, partners and competitors—mitigate or exacerbate the drivers of fragility, like climate change and violent extremism, will determine whether this human potential serves as a catalyst for growth or a contributor to global crises.

### ***Climate Crisis: Exacerbating Fragility, Undermining Resilience***

Climate change serves as a risk accelerant especially when coupled with other persistent fragility factors. Climate change compounds the challenges African nations face, raising new obstacles to overcome with respect to population, migration, and urbanization. Creeping ramifications of climate change include increased water shortages in the Sahel, storm surges in southern Africa, and lower crop yields in the Horn of Africa<sup>7</sup>. All of these issues will have profound negative repercussions on the security environment my successor, and those who follow, will undoubtedly face. Sub-Saharan Africa could see as many as 86 million internal climate migrants by 2050<sup>8</sup>. While the majority of migrants will likely remain within Africa, some 11 million are projected to cross the Mediterranean into Europe<sup>9</sup>.

The demands of population displacement and forced migration reaffirm the need for a whole-of-government approach bolstered by the right authorities and timely funding to tackle these challenges. The impact of climate change in Africa can best be addressed by strategic investments in adaptation and resilience, focusing on land and water resources, sustainable and clean power, empowering local leaders to advance community-based approaches to climate adaptation, and other areas where our development partners so expertly lead. Success with climate resilient development and climate mitigation reduces the need for America and our partners to engage in the defense sector.

### ***Geo-Strategic Significance Drives Strategic Competition***

Africa's global impact drives global influence. Africans are increasingly influential in the United Nations (UN) and other international fora. Currently, Africa holds 28 percent of UN General Assembly votes<sup>10</sup> and three of 15 UN Security Council (UNSC) seats<sup>11</sup>. Our African partners face choices to strengthen the U.S. and allied-led open, rules-based international order or succumb to the raw power transactional pressure campaigns of global competitors. How African governments choose partners may determine the future of U.S. values-based influence in international political fora.

Strategic rivals, China and Russia, have long recognized Africa's importance. Both nations leverage opportunities to erode U.S. influence with African nations. Both nations are gaining ground on the continent. Both nations successfully convert soft and hard power investments into new partnerships. Both nations exert political influence at U.S. expense.

China continues to focus on the long game as its dominant position in African markets has allowed it to buttress autocracies and influence global political norms, technological standards, and commercial practices while offering an entry point for their military. China's heavy investment in Africa as its "second continent", and heavy handed pursuit of its "One Belt, One Road" initiative is fueling Chinese economic growth, outpacing the U.S.,<sup>12</sup> and allowing it to exploit opportunities to their benefit. This year, China significantly expanded the capabilities of its Doraleh Naval Base in Djibouti—Beijing's only permanent overseas military base—by adding a large and capable pier while advancing plans to establish a second location along West Africa's Atlantic Coast. By 2030, Chinese military facilities and technical collection sites in Africa will allow Beijing to project power eastward into the Middle East and Indo-Pacific Theaters and west into the Atlantic<sup>13</sup>. A permanent Chinese naval presence in West Africa would almost certainly require the Department to consider shifts to U.S. naval force posture and pose increased risk to freedom of navigation and U.S. ability to act.

Russia continues to undermine rule of law by exploiting insecurity and diplomatic disputes to expand its presence in Africa, primarily through its use of Kremlin-backed Wagner Group. Wagner has malignly inserted itself in several African countries—namely Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, Central African Republic (CAR), Mali—including instances where their mercenaries have been linked to horrific violence against civilians and other human rights abuses<sup>14</sup>. Where Wagner goes, instability follows. For example, Wagner forces in the Central African Republic (CAR) have reportedly massacred dozens of civilians during missions that ostensibly protect the government

while advancing Moscow's economic and political interests<sup>15</sup>. Russia's Wagner uses its designation of as a PMC for Moscow in an attempt to deny, however implausibly, these abuses. Similarly, President Putin insists Wagner is a private company employed by Mali's transitional authorities—the same Malian authorities who claim that only official Russian Ministry of Defense personnel are conducting operations in their country. Further, Moscow remains Africa's largest arms supplier having increased exports by 23 percent over the last four years<sup>16</sup>. The Kremlin's willingness to sell weapons to authoritarian leaders and combatants without end-user agreements fuels militarization and escalates conflict and instability across Africa.

### ***Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO), a Persistent and Growing Threat***

According to the Global Terrorism Index, seven of the ten countries with the largest increase in terrorism in 2020 were in Sub Saharan Africa, with Burkina Faso suffering a 590 percent increase. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaida-aligned VEOs remain a potent and growing threat across much of Africa. In East Africa, al-Qaida's al-Shabaab remains the greatest threat to U.S. persons and interests in the region as well as the homeland, while undermining peace, security, and political progress in Somalia. The largest, wealthiest and most lethal Al Qaeda affiliate in the world today, al Shabbab is now working to re-establish supporting ties with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). It is my judgement that due to a lack of effective governance and counter-terrorism pressure, al Shabaab has only grown stronger and bolder over the past year as seen in recent coordinated, multi-target attacks in Mogadishu.

Sustained U.S., African, and allied counter-terrorism pressure has significantly weakened VEOs in North Africa but the problem has shifted southward to Sub-Saharan areas. In the Sahel, what started in the mid-2000s as a small, largely isolated, al-Qaida offshoot in northern Mali, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslmin or JNIM, has metastasized into a powerful, sprawling terrorist network now threatening Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and littoral West Africa. In addition, ISIS's exploitation of ungoverned spaces, including recognition and creation of new branches elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, has increased these groups' ability to destabilize local governments, exploit fragility and instability factors, and drive radicalism. Increased collaboration among ISIS groups in central Africa is a concerning trend that is expanding the terrorist threat to Mozambique, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is my judgement that greater and more coordinated efforts are necessary by our African and international partners, with continued U.S. support, if we are to check the pervasive spread of violent extremism—especially in East and West Africa.

## **U.S. AFRICOM's APPROACH**

AFRICOM actively campaigns towards four enduring objectives<sup>17</sup>. First, maintain America's strategic access and influence on the continent. Failure to achieve this objective means failure everywhere else. Second, counter threats to U.S. persons, facilities, and interests, whether they be from violent extremists or other malign actors. Third, prevent and respond to crises that can range from disaster relief to threats against our embassies. Finally, we do all this with a lean, purpose-built combatant command and a coordinated, Diplomacy-Defense-Development effort that teams with allies and partners to achieve shared security objectives, and advance shared principles. This deliberate, coordinated, low-cost campaign approach requires resources to protect previous and future gains—especially as our strategic competitors increase their investments.

### ***Maintain America's Strategic Access and Influence***

Gaining and maintaining access and influence underpins all U.S. government efforts in Africa and is the cornerstone of our campaign. Without it, we cannot ensure U.S. ability to act, assure allies and partners, deny adversary objectives, respond to crisis, deter major war, or posture to successfully transition from deterrence to conflict. AFRICOM primarily achieves access and influence in priority locations through focused activities such as senior leader engagements; security force assistance and cooperation; and multi-national exercises. We effectively leverage our resources through this range of effective, low-cost opportunities that contest malign influence, impose costs, and exert pressure with minimal escalatory risk.

Activities such as delivery of COVID aid, bilateral security cooperation, and assistance programs focus on African partner nations' priorities, such as existential VEO threats; while exercises such as AFRICAN LION, FLINTLOCK, and CUTLASS EXPRESS expand interoperability that bolsters partner capabilities. AFRICOM's Joint Exercise Program saw cuts from 2020 resulting in the cancellation of three exercises in 2022. The Joint Exercise Program is key to fostering relationships and has the added benefit of enhancing partner effectiveness, deterring malign actor access and influence, and helping prevent exploitation of African nations.

At the end of the day, our engagements, our access, and our influence in Africa matter. Even with our limited physical presence on the continent, we are still considered the "partner of choice" by most African nations. This position of advantage is ours to lose.

### ***Countering Threats to U.S. Persons and Interests***

AFRICOM is the only combatant command with basing that neighbors a Chinese military installation, and one of only two combatant commands with active counter-terrorism operations.

Africa is a center for VEO confrontations. I have fought Al Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria; and in my judgment, VEOs have shifted their weight of effort to Africa. For a variety of reasons, U.S. and partner efforts to disrupt and degrade the most dangerous VEOs have not achieved the success we need. To advance America's security, we are revising and renewing our own efforts. Al-Qaida's al-Shabaab retains the intent and capability to threaten U.S. persons and interests from its safe haven in Somalia, making it a top-tier VEO threat for the U.S. Government and the top counter-VEO priority for AFRICOM<sup>18</sup>. While the metastasis of Al-Qaida and ISIS in West Africa does not pose an immediate threat to the U.S. homeland, they are a clear danger to U.S. persons and interests in West Africa as well as our African and international partners there. Our continued support to multi-national partners in the Sahel, bilateral relationships with affected African partners, and continued support to cooperative efforts remain critical to suppressing the VEO threat. These efforts are essential to early warning to prevent future attacks.

As VEOs remain the number one concern for many African countries, U.S. counterterrorism support is also a key avenue by which we compete strategically on the continent. In Africa, helping partners tackle shared security goals to address VEO challenges is an effective way America wins influence over strategic competitors.

### ***Preventing and Responding to Crises to Protect U.S. Interests***

Always ready, regardless the threat, AFRICOM safeguards U.S. personnel, facilities, and other critical interests in Africa's uncertain and volatile operating environment. In 2021 AFRICOM maintained a ready-response posture. In one brief period, we simultaneously tracked violence in Chad, prepared for concurrent Non-combatant Evacuation Operations in Ethiopia and Sudan, shepherded diplomatic engagements in Libya, monitored multiple irregular transitions of power, and conducted periodic engagements in Somalia. With crisis frequency in Africa managed in hours and days, not weeks and months, AFRICOM selected capabilities to provide the crisis response the American people expect.

Africa contains 16 of the 31 diplomatic posts designated by the Department of State (DoS) as High Threat or High Risk worldwide<sup>19</sup>. U.S. diplomats and service members operate across the continent at the extreme fringes of our operational reach. AFRICOM shares its crisis response forces, located in four widely dispersed locations, with three other combatant commands. These shared resources maximize the savings and readiness for the Department of Defense. Personnel Recovery/MEDEVAC, ISR and vertical lift are the most important capabilities our troops need to accomplish their missions in harm's way with acceptable risk.

### ***Teaming with Allies & Partners to Achieve Shared Security Objectives***

AFRICOM pursues our campaign objectives in close cooperation with allies and partners. Our relationships enable us to coordinate actions, enhance interoperability and share costs and risk to achieve mutual security goals. These relationships not only lead to stronger access and influence, but also showcase democratic principles, strengthen compliance with the rule of law, and highlight nefarious intentions of our competitors.

Strong bilateral relationships with allies and partners are also fostered through AFRICOM's active participation in multi-national efforts. This participation reinforces our message that the U.S. will stand side-by-side with our partners to work toward a more stable and prosperous Africa. Furthermore, our presence, engagement, and security cooperation efforts with partners not only improve their capability to address internal security concerns, but also degrades our competitors' ability to exploit relationship gaps. The National Defense Strategy places great importance on partnering. However, DoD distribution of security cooperation funding steadily declined for AFRICOM in previous years. This is an area of concern to me, as I assess it opens the door for China or Russia to usurp the U.S. as the partner of choice. Security cooperation, multi-national exercises, and the National Guard's State Partnership Program (SPP) provide AFRICOM with relatively low-cost tools to strengthen relationships, sustain our long-term strategic alliances, and address future challenges.

### **REGIONAL ASSESSMENTS & OBJECTIVES:**

#### ***East Africa***

Somalia's slow but continued steps towards stability stalled over the past year. Al-Shabaab exploited political infighting and decreased security pressure from Somalia, African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the U.S., to expand its territorial control, revitalize attacks in Mogadishu, and plan terrorist attacks that threaten American persons and interests. The persistent threat al-Shabaab poses to U.S. persons and interests, coupled with the pressing need to disrupt ISIS-Somalia's funds distribution, as well as stay postured for crisis operations in Ethiopia and Sudan, reinforces the importance of retaining our small force footprint in the Horn of Africa.

Both Djibouti and Kenya remain strong partners in this increasingly vital but volatile region. I believe the U.S. must continue our efforts to support these partners, lead Somali and AMISOM partners to pursue our common fight against al-Shabaab and degrade their ability to threaten the homeland. As al-Qaida's largest and wealthiest global affiliate<sup>20</sup>, if left unchecked al-Shabaab will soon expand beyond Somalia's borders and become an even greater threat to regional stability and



American interests. ISIS-Somalia's ability to connect, direct and fund ISIS elements elsewhere in Africa makes them a group of unique concern.

### ***The Sahel, Littoral West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea***

The rapid expansion of Sahel-based VEOs outside of Mali and Burkina Faso calls for stronger international action. During the past year, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslmin (JNIM) made inroads into littoral West Africa, adding a new destabilizing threat to strategically important countries on the Atlantic. Compounding the escalating security situation, JNIM's regional rival, ISIS in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), has embarked on a campaign targeting civilian populations with mass casualty attacks, taxation, and recruitment thus driving regional instability.

AFRICOM's approach in West Africa aims to *limit* VEO destabilization of the Sahel and *prevent* further VEO expansion in Niger and the littoral states. Our three-pronged approach is strengthening U.S. assistance to international partners, bolstering partner effectiveness to deal with VEO advances, and increasing the effectiveness of existing multi-lateral security constructs in the region. We enable the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development to capitalize on these lines of effort, addressing drivers of instability and contributing to sustainable solutions. Otherwise, competitors will affiliate and partner where the U.S. government does not—Mali's outreach to Russia's Wagner Group is a prime example<sup>21</sup>.

Nigeria is the largest purchaser of U.S. military equipment in West Africa and is an important security partner on the front lines against ISIS's largest global affiliate, ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA). ISIS-WA has consolidated control over the Lake Chad Basin and increased cross-border attacks into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Abuja's domestic security concerns, and those it shares with its littoral West African neighbors, have strategic implications beyond national borders. Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is a devastating economic and food-scarcity challenge for the region. Chinese fishing fleets are the primary IUU offender, even as Beijing offers West African countries maritime security cooperation as pretext to expand a security or military basing foothold it could use to threaten the United States. There is no clear delineation between military, economic, and diplomatic investments by China, therefore the line between pro-Africa and anti-U.S. activity can be difficult to discern.

U.S. maritime engagement, especially in West Africa, is critical. A single unique asset, our new expeditionary staging base vessel, USS Hershel "Woody" Williams (HWW), provides enormous return on investment. Assigned to AFRICOM in August 2020, the HWW conducted more Sub-Saharan maritime engagements in less than two years than this command was able to conduct in the

previous five years. In four locations, she was America's first port call in over a decade. Regular presence of a vessel like HWW demonstrates U.S. commitment and improves interoperability with our African partners in ways that had been absent for years<sup>22</sup>. Our Ambassadors praise the powerful impact of our maritime engagement to advance an array of U.S. security objectives in Africa.

### ***North Africa***

Countering the encroachment of Russia and China along NATO's southern flank remains a top focus for AFRICOM, followed by monitoring and disrupting signs of VEO resurgence in Libya and Tunisia, and supporting State Department efforts to consider reestablishment of a permanent U.S. diplomatic presence in Tripoli. Senior DoS and AFRICOM engagements this past year helped Libya defuse its long-standing civil war, advanced progress to a unified government, and disrupted longstanding Russian aspirations to establish a permanent security foothold in the country. Conversely, Tunisia's economic and democratic uncertainty made it increasingly vulnerable to Chinese influence, threatening Tunisia's strategic importance as a major non-NATO U.S. ally, as Tunis signed new financial and technical agreements with Beijing. Future Chinese overtures could further expand Beijing's leverage in Tunisia, including potential port development<sup>23</sup>.

Maintaining strong partnerships remains critical to U.S. access, influence and interests in the region. Last summer 31 partner nations joined AFRICOM for exercise AFRICAN LION, our premier annual exercise combining air, ground, and maritime components to enhance readiness of U.S. forces and strengthen African security capabilities. AFRICOM's ability to exercise with Major Non-NATO Allies, like long-standing co-host Morocco, is key to bolstering U.S. credibility on the continent and supporting a lead security partner.

### ***Central and Southern Africa***

Thwarting the rise of ISIS in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda is a key regional objective in Central and Southern Africa, where we are witnessing accelerated trends of VEO mergers, cohesion, and expansion. This year, security forces from eight countries of the Southern African Development Community joined Rwandan troops in northern Mozambique to stabilize Cabo Delgado and push ISIS back into the bush. AFRICOM training and partnership enables this regional solution to regional instability. Despite this underappreciated success of regional cooperation, other central and southern African countries—unaffected by VEO violence three years ago—remain threatened by ISIS expansion today. AFRICOM maintains small, unmanned contingency locations in Africa to provide platforms for crisis response. We have these on-call "lily pads" across the continent with the exception of southern Africa, a region larger than the continental U.S.

## **CONCLUSION**

A more stable and prosperous Africa will enhance America's security. AFRICOM is committed to our work to improve security and stability, to doing our part in whole of U.S. government efforts to lessen the sources of extremist recruitment, to create stable political environments, to improve governance and to promote democracy and the rule of law.

With our partners, the men and women of USAFRICOM work hard every day to maintain U.S. access and influence in Africa, to counter threats that might emanate from Africa, and to rapidly and effectively respond to crises that threaten U.S. interests or are humanitarian in nature. To be effective in these tasks, our troops require critical capabilities—PR/MEDEVAC; contracted airborne ISR platforms, both manned and unmanned; security cooperation programs like the International Security Cooperation Program; and exercise programs that help our partner nations in countering VEO activities while also enhancing their own security. These capabilities allow our troops as well as partners and allies to succeed in not only defeating our enemies, but also allowing our partners to continue to build their own capabilities and capacity.

Despite AFRICOM's forward leaning stance, we know one of our main roles it to enable diplomacy and development—our tools of *first* resort. For that reason, AFRICOM requests Congress consider measures to ensure we have confirmed Ambassadors to lead our diplomatic missions in Africa. Currently five nominees are pending confirmation, including Chad, Kenya, South Africa, South Sudan, and Sudan. At the same time, I believe the USAID would greatly benefit from increased flexibility to address emerging requirements. Due to earmark constraints in annual appropriations, the USAID Administrator has limited discretion to direct resources within Africa.

I believe it is imperative that America sustain a predictable, though modest, investment in AFRICOM to protect U.S. interests and advance U.S. objectives in this dynamic and important region of the world. A sustained and coordinated U.S. government approach, bolstered by strategic vision and appropriate resourcing, can serve to strengthen relationships with partners in Africa, preserve U.S. interests, and further our objective for increased security, stability and prosperity.

Thank you for your diligence and commitment to invest in AFRICOM—its joint force and its future. Together with your support, AFRICOM will continue to implement smart investments and partner with this region of growing strategic importance to advance America's interests.

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- <sup>1</sup> (U.S. Africa Command Strategy, Engagement and Plans Directorate, 2021)
- <sup>2</sup> (World Shipping Council, 2021)
- <sup>3</sup> (Russon, 2021)
- <sup>4</sup> (United Nations Environment Program, 2022)
- <sup>5</sup> (International Monetary Fund, 2022; Trade, 2021)
- <sup>6</sup> (The Economist, 2020)
- <sup>7</sup> (Serdeczny, et al., 2016)
- <sup>8</sup> (Voegelé, 2021)
- <sup>9</sup> (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2021)
- <sup>10</sup> (de Carvalho & Forti, 2020)
- <sup>11</sup> (Charbonneau & Nantulya, 2021)
- <sup>12</sup> (Runde, 2021)
- <sup>13</sup> (Nakamura, Moriyasu, & Hadano, 2021)
- <sup>14</sup> (Harding & Burke, 2021)
- <sup>15</sup> (GlobalSecurity.org, 2022)
- <sup>16</sup> (Parachini & Bauer, 2021)
- <sup>17</sup> (Townsend, 2021)
- <sup>18</sup> (Williams, 2021)
- <sup>19</sup> (U.S. Department of State, 2021)
- <sup>20</sup> (USAFRICOM Intelligence Directorate and U.S. Intelligence Community, 2021)
- <sup>21</sup> (News Wires, 2022)
- <sup>22</sup> (U.S. Navy Europe-Africa, 2021)
- <sup>23</sup> (The World Bank, 2022)