

**HEARING ON “US CT OPS IN AFRICA”  
DECEMBER 7<sup>TH</sup>, 10 AM, 2017 RHOB 2172**

Good morning Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and members of the committee. Let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to appear here with Deputy Secretary of State Sullivan. This is my first testimony since assuming my position just a few weeks ago as the Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, but as a former House committee staffer I am keenly aware of the important oversight role Congress plays on national security issues and I appreciate being here today.

Before we begin, I want to express- on behalf of the entire Department of Defense- our deepest sympathy for the loss of Staff Sergeant Bryan Black, Sergeant La David Johnson, Staff Sergeant Dustin Wright, and Staff Sergeant Jeremiah Johnson. We also hope for the continued speedy recovery of both Captain Michael Perozeni and Sergeant First Class Brent Bartels.

We honor the service and sacrifice of these Americans, and we owe it them, their families, and their fellow soldiers to investigate the events of October 4 thoroughly. The death of any service member is something that has a profound effect on us at DoD, and it is with the upmost diligence and seriousness with which we are conducting our investigation.

The investigation is ongoing, and we want it to be complete. We do not want to provide inaccurate or incomplete information, and we must wait for the investigation to be completed by AFRICOM before we can have the full picture of what happened. However, we will inform Congress on the conclusions of the investigation as soon as possible after the families are briefed.

That said, we must remember that it is an important mission we are doing in Africa. Specifically, we are fighting violent extremist organizations and addressing the terrorist threat in Africa. To that end, my remarks today will discuss:

1. The changing threat landscape with respect to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qa’ida in Africa; and

## 2. Efforts by the Department of Defense (DoD) to counter terrorist threats within this changing threat landscape.

### 1. Changing Threat Landscape

- The United States has been involved in counterterrorism efforts in Africa for the past 20 years. Today, we are confronting ISIS and al-Qa'ida affiliates across Africa, specifically in the Sahel, the Maghreb, and the Horn of Africa, most of which either predated ISIS or initially emerged as unaffiliated extremist groups. These threats in Africa have changed in terms of the actors and the scale and scope of their tactics and activities.
- Terrorist groups exploit instability and weak governance in North, West, and East African countries, some of which rank among the most fragile in the world according to the Fragile States Index. Affiliate and adherent groups of ISIS and al-Qa'ida transit porous borders, seek to establish safe haven in under-governed spaces, recruit from vulnerable populations, and leverage conflict to spread their toxic ideology and attack all who do not subscribe to it
- The United States and its allies and partners must remain committed to combating this threat through strong partnerships and a holistic approach to counterterrorism. We must deny ISIS and other terrorist organizations safe havens from which they can plot attacks and further destabilize the region. We must continue to work with credible voices who can effectively counter the narrative of harmful extremist ideologies used to recruit and radicalize at-risk populations.
- To maintain pressure against terrorist groups in Africa, our successes in the field should be complemented by well-resourced stabilization and longer-term development efforts as provided by the Department of State and USAID. These efforts, principally led by non-military organizations, are critical to preventing terrorist organizations from regrouping and obtaining new safe havens.
- We are applying major lessons learned from the fight against terrorism:
  1. Defeating terrorists cannot be achieved through military efforts alone - it requires a whole-of-government approach and will require resources for U.S. interagency stabilization efforts, particularly those supported by the State Department and USAID; our partner nations

must address their own security issues and the underlying causes of conflict;

2. DoD's "by, with, and through" approach with local partners is essential to building the local capacity needed to address security concerns in the long run; and
3. We must continue to leverage regional solutions to regional terrorism issues in Africa.

## 2. DoD Efforts to Counter Terrorist Threats in Africa

- Turning now to DoD's efforts in the counterterrorism realm, we must focus on promoting whole-of-government solutions that involve political, development, economic, military, law enforcement, and other elements.
- With respect to military efforts, DoD maintains the most capable special operations forces in the world, including our forces in Africa. These forces are capable of conducting focused direct action, including precision airstrikes, and other counterterrorism activities as required. I'd be happy to provide additional details, if needed, in a closed session.
- However, DoD's main effort is the "by, with, and through" approach to countering terrorism which emphasizes working with key partners. This means that
  - Military operations against terrorist organizations are conducted **by** our partners or host-nation forces;
  - U.S. forces work **with** our partners to train, equip, advise, enable, and when authorized, accompany them on operations and improve their effectiveness and professionalism;
  - And **through** this cooperative relationship, the United States and our partners achieve our shared strategic objectives.
- This approach allows us to build partner capacity to address their own security issues, which is absolutely essential for the long-term success of these efforts. This also allows us to minimize our own footprint on the continent.
- As we work to build partner capacity, I want to note that we are not simply looking at military effectiveness, but we place a high value on

professionalization of our partners' militaries, and, specifically, to improving their adherence to norms for respecting human rights.

- This foundational approach is being brought to bear in Africa's Lake Chad Basin, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa. Ultimately, filling the security void in these regions will advance our security objectives and protect our national security interests.
- Secretary Mattis has placed a significant emphasis on building and strengthening these partnerships. In addition to strong bilateral relationships with our partners, we also seek to work with regional security organizations, such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the G5 Sahel Joint Task Force. Our NATO Alliance also provides us a ready set of partners for a variety of counterterrorism efforts. We also work through other partnership initiatives, including Presidentially-directed and interagency programs such as Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), Partnership for East African Counterterrorism (PRACT), Security Governance Initiative (SGI) and others.
- All of these challenges require flexible, adaptable tools. We are grateful for Congress's efforts to provide DoD and the Department of State a variety of flexible authorities to support counterterrorism operations and build partner capacity. For instance, efforts to reform U.S. security cooperation authorities in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 have led to a suite of streamlined authorities to fund counterterrorism training, equipment, and other support for counterterrorism partner forces across the globe.
- Regarding legal authorities, the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) remains a cornerstone for ongoing U.S. military operations and continues to provide the domestic legal authority needed to use force against al-Qa'ida, the Taliban, and their associated forces and against ISIS.

### 3. Closing

- Thank you for the opportunity to testify to this Committee on a topic of such critical importance. The Department of Defense appreciates your leadership and oversight in this area.
- I'll be happy to address any additional questions.