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STATEMENT BY

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Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) is guided by the 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS) to protect the homeland, advance U.S. interests, and respond to crises across Africa. We work with our African Partners, our Allies, and our interagency counterparts to enable collective security, which opens the door for investment, and ultimately leads to joint prosperity. This statement outlines USAFRICOM's efforts to address these challenges through military operations by emphasizing three critical levers: defense economics, innovation, and information operations.

Africa's vast resources, strategic geography, and growing population make it critical to U.S. national security. By 2050, Africa will account for 25 percent of the global population, with 12 of the 20 fastest-growing economies in 2025 located on the continent. However, the youth bulge presents risks, as terror groups exploit unemployment and economic instability to recruit vulnerable populations. USAFRICOM works with partners to prevent violent extremist organizations and malign actors from exporting threats to U.S. interests while providing the unique support only the United States can offer.

It's been five years since I commanded Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAF), and in that time, terrorism across the continent has intensified, while our access, basing, and overflight have been dramatically diminished due to successive coups and strained bilateral relationships, limiting our ability to respond to crises and protect at-risk embassies. The threats in Africa are becoming more demanding, with growing challenges from multiple terror organizations and destabilizing activities from disruptive actors like Russia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Iran. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) remain a threat to the homeland today, and if al-Qa'ida groups continue their expansion, they will be positioned to establish a caliphate on the continent. We are already seeing them threaten African capitals.

Given this environment, USAFRICOM must work collaboratively with the interagency to reduce risks to U.S. and Ally national security interests. At the same time, resourcing for certain critical force protection and intelligence-gathering capabilities has not kept pace with the evolving threat environment.

Key Challenge: Terrorism

Terrorism remains the most acute threat in Africa. USAFRICOM's area of responsibility has become the center of gravity for global jihadism, with West Africa accounting for over 51 percent of global terror-related deaths in 2024. ISIS, through affiliates like ISIS-West Africa and ISIS-Sahel, seeks to establish a caliphate by exploiting weak governance and ungoverned spaces in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), an al-Qa'ida affiliate, operates in the Sahel, using violence and local grievances to expand its influence and destabilize governments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Both groups maintain transnational networks that facilitate the flow of fighters, weapons, and funding, posing a direct threat to regional stability and global security. JNIM has perfected tactics to cut off fuel and critical transportation routes, first targeting the cities of Kayes and Nioro du Sahel before nearly taking over Bamako, the capital of Mali. Unlike the ISIS capture of Mosul in 2014, this would be a terrorist organization securing the resources and trappings of a nation state, underscoring the need to monitor and interdict these growing threats. JNIM also has the ambition to threaten the Homeland and conduct attacks on U.S. personnel and facilities.

Additionally, ISIS also seeks to establish a caliphate in Africa, with ISIS-West Africa and ISIS-Sahel becoming increasingly more collaborative. This collaboration among affiliates equates to more funding, more coordination, increased violence regionally, and the hub to direct aspirants across the globe. These organizations have also made calls to conduct kidnappings in the region—just last year, an American missionary pilot was taken hostage in Niger and remains missing today. This contrasts sharply with the 2020 rescue of Philip Walton, where assured access, ISR, and overflight enabled a successful rescue operation within 96 hours—we lack that assured access and ISR now.

Expanding terrorism is not confined to West Africa; in East Africa, terror groups like al-Shabaab continue to exploit similar vulnerabilities and expand their influence. Al-Shabaab remains one of the deadliest terrorist organizations on the planet and continues to attack U.S. personnel and facilities in Somalia. Just last year, Cholo Abdi Abdullah, a highly trained al-Shabaab operative, was sentenced in U.S. courts to life in prison after nearly completing training to be a commercial pilot to conduct a 9/11-style terror attack on the United States. ISIS and al-Qa'ida groups continue to expand and recruit fighters from around the world to position themselves to execute external operations in the future. These groups, if not degraded, could become a much larger problem for U.S. interests, as they have in the past. Continued vigilance in East Africa, particularly Djibouti and Kenya, remains essential to combatting the very real threat of external operations emanating from Somalia that targets the U.S. homeland or our Allies. As evidenced by the foiled attack plots in Detroit and Charlotte late last year, the threat to the homeland is now.

The convergence of terrorism and narco-trafficking further exacerbates these threats. African-based terror groups are financed to an increasing degree by drug cartels, expanding those terror group's reach and lethality. This convergence not only destabilizes the region but also poses a direct threat to U.S. national security interests. Since 2024, we have seen an increased flow of drugs emanating from the Americas through Africa into Europe, with a nearly sixfold increase of cocaine flowing across the Atlantic Ocean. Additionally, Mexican, Venezuelan, and Caribbean cartels seek to franchise industrial-scale drug production on the continent by exporting lab expertise to Africa and using Africa as a transshipment point to generate revenue. Both the Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generacion (CJNG) and the Sinaloa Cartel have established methamphetamine production labs in Africa to exploit an expanding market in permissive regions. Mexican cartel members were arrested during raids in several African countries at some of the largest labs ever discovered. This convergence turns a fragile security landscape into a pressure cooker, demanding interagency focus and coordination to prevent a rupture.

Layered into all those challenges is a growing national security threat for our African leaders. Africa's rapidly growing youth population presents a significant challenge for global and regional security. By 2050, Africa will hold one-third of the global working-age population. African leaders consistently identify youth unemployment as one of their top national security issues, noting the potential of leaving millions vulnerable to exploitation by violent extremist organizations like JNIM and ISIS. Addressing youth unemployment is therefore not just a development imperative but a critical component of counterterrorism and global security strategies.

Key Challenge: Disruptive Actors

The PRC sees Africa as their second continent and critical to their economic and military future. Beijing's aggressive investments in Africa's mining, infrastructure, and transportation sectors are designed to secure control over critical minerals and strategic infrastructure. For example, Beijing dominates 90 percent of battery-grade graphite processing, a resource critical for electric vehicles, consumer electronics, and advanced military technologies like 5th and 6th generation fighter jets. This near-monopoly creates a structural vulnerability for the U.S. Defense Industrial Base, forcing a potential future trade-off between achieving military readiness or maintaining private-sector technology growth in a protracted conflict.

Beyond minerals, China's influence extends to infrastructure and the maritime domain. Dual-use deep-water ports provide Beijing with a persistent security presence under the guise of economic development. The ability for the PRC military to operate from a dual-use base on the West coast of Africa would significantly complicate our security posture and be a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. Additionally, China's exploitation of Africa's maritime resources, including illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, deprives coastal nations of critical economic resources, further entrenching Beijing's influence over local economies. China's strategy fuses economic influence with security leverage, using investments in critical minerals, infrastructure, and maritime assets to reshape Africa's geopolitical landscape and challenge U.S. interests.

Russia exploits instability to advance its objectives. Africa has become "Putin's Purse," with gold extraction from the Sahel and Central African Republic generating over $2.5 billion since 2022 to evade sanctions and sustain Moscow's strained economy. Under the guise of counter-terrorism operations, Russia deploys paramilitary forces, such as the Africa Corps, to the Sahel and North Africa to secure access to critical resources. This strategy enables Russia to insulate and protect regimes that support its activities while simultaneously undermining U.S. influence and limiting NATO's reach on its southern flank. Adding to this, Russia actively recruits thousands of vulnerable youths through clandestine human trafficking networks, sending them to fight on the front lines in Ukraine. Complementing these efforts, Russia employs a robust dis-information network to foster instability and obstruct U.S. engagement. In essence, Russia's strategy is clear: insulate, extract, and exploit.

Iran's network continues destabilizing activities in Africa to challenge U.S. interests. Tehran's unmanned aerial systems and advanced conventional weapons smuggled through intermediaries extend the Iranian Threat Network and Houthis into Africa, posing a growing threat to U.S. forces and African partners. Al-Shabaab receives advanced Iranian weapons and training along with weaponized drones that they've employed against African Union Forces. Additionally, this relationship has expanded Houthi smuggling routes, allowing them to conduct over 100 attacks on commercial vessels and nearly 50 piracy-related events in the Gulf of Aden since 2023—a marked increase from the previous several years.

Key Challenge: Eroding Access and Basing

USAFRICOM's crisis response hinges on assured access to the continent. However, as our access diminishes, we find ourselves increasingly unable to respond effectively to the growing number of crises. Since the tragic events in Benghazi, Libya, we have been given clear guidance to ensure timely responses to protect U.S. personnel and facilities. This includes security augmentation and, when necessary, military-assisted departures. USAFRICOM is tasked

with safeguarding 17 High-Risk/High-Threat diplomatic posts across Africa, while the rest of the world manages the other 15 posts combined.

Main Effort: Operations, Activities, and Investment & Supporting Levers

My main effort is to leverage USAFRICOM's unique advantage: the ability to convene and connect partners, provide targeted but critical U.S. military assistance (such as ISR, intelligence sharing, limited strikes, operational planning, and specialized training), and integrate interagency tools, allies, and the private sector. Military operations, with a weight of effort on innovation and experimentation and information operations, integrated with defense economics, enable USAFRICOM to address these challenges in flexible and effective ways. USAFRICOM's priorities, informed by the NDS, are clear: defend the U.S. homeland, promote American interests, and ensure effective crisis response.

Dismantling Terrorist Networks and Leadership

USAFRICOM is committed to fulfilling the directives of the 2026 NDS. To address the rising terrorist threat to the Homeland from across Africa, we must adapt, innovate, and seek additional support. Somalia remains the focal point of our counterterrorism efforts, where we have made significant progress over the last year in disrupting ISIS-Somalia by working closely with local partners. In Puntland, U.S. fire support and ISR, has kept ISIS leaders underground in caves, disrupting their command and control, demonstrating how small investments from the Joint Force can empower local partners to achieve outsized results. This sustained pressure has severely limited ISIS's effectiveness and ability to communicate globally.

In southern Somalia, our efforts against al-Shabaab have been bolstered by partnerships with Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda, enabling steady progress in degrading the group. By prioritizing partners with the capability, political will, and commitment to mitigating regional threats, we have applied select Title 10 and 22 resources judiciously, ensuring our partners take on a greater share of the burden. Disrupting ISIS leadership and repelling al-Shabaab from Mogadishu remain critical priorities. The gains of the last year show that our deliberate strike campaign, coupled with partner support, is delivering tangible effects against terrorists who seek to harm us. These efforts are further supported by a coalition of international partners who have been instrumental in sustaining progress.

While Somalia remains a focal point of AFRICOM's counterterrorism efforts, the challenges in West Africa are equally pressing. Our "monitor and respond" approach is increasingly constrained by the Black Hole. Recent events in West Africa have opened the door to expanded information-sharing relationships with Nigeria, the Multi-National Joint Task Force and other regional partners. However, these efforts alone are insufficient to close the gaps. We propose developing innovative security ecosystems that combine limited airborne ISR, sensors, and space-based ISR, all connected through a commercial satellite uplink and integrated AI-driven processing exploitation, and dissemination to illuminate terrorist activity in the Sahel. AFRICOM requires a flexible combination of intelligence assets, specialized personnel, and unique supporting capabilities to assist our partners

We are also assisting law enforcement and allies to address the growing trend of African-based terrorist groups funding their operations through partnerships with Mexican drug cartels,

trading safe passage for financial support. Just last year, the French Navy, with support from U.S. intelligence, conducted three of the largest cocaine seizures emanating from South America ever recorded in the Atlantic Ocean. I am reorganizing my staff to maximize the support we provide with existing resources and leveraging key partners in the interagency, our Allies, and multi-national organizations to streamline our support to these efforts.

Addressing the complex system of threats requires a different approach. Leveraging innovation and experimentation is a critical node to address terrorism and narco-trafficking on the continent. Exercise FLINTLOCK serves as a 'battle lab' for refining counterterrorism approaches, bringing together African partners and U.S. special operations forces to rehearse operations annually. It also allows us to experiment with low-cost technologies, such as commercial ISR and ground-based sensors coupled with artificial intelligence that builds an ecosystem that empowers our partners to monitor and disrupt terrorist movements. By integrating these tools into FLINTLOCK, we ensure they are effective and scalable, enabling our partners to take on a greater share of the fight without requiring a large U.S. footprint.

Advancing U.S. Interests and Countering Disruptive Actors

USAFRICOM is leveraging its unique authorities to integrate key levers such as defense economics, experimentation, and information operations to incentivize burden-shifting, secure access to critical materials, and bolster our defense supply chains. These efforts advance U.S. interests by demonstrating to our African partners how to build their own defense capacity beyond traditional security assistance.

Exercises like AFRICAN LION and the EXPRESS maritime exercise series serve as platforms for both strengthening relationships and driving innovation. Morocco is a key partner having hosted Exercise AFRICAN LION for the past 21 years and is investing in centers of excellence where they are bringing in African partners for training. Additionally, the recognition of Western Sahara has opened the door for increased partnership as Morocco has said they want to deepen the relationship with the United States. These exercises allow the United States and its Allies to operate in key strategic terrain, while also testing advanced capabilities in permissive environments and enabling the operational independence of our African partners.

Africa's vast distances, austere conditions, and contested information spaces make it an ideal location for experimentation. In East Africa, we have successfully experimented with innovative and cost-effective methods to counter unmanned aerial systems. These successful tests have allowed us to rapidly field new defensive capabilities, enhancing the security of our forces and partners. By treating innovation and experimentation as a warfighting function, USAFRICOM works to test and validate solutions for large-scale combat operations using live data. These innovations not only strengthen African security but also provide valuable insights for global application, building readiness and ensuring the United States remains ahead of its adversaries.

Through key leader engagements and conferences, USAFRICOM amplifies its convening power to foster collaboration and build trust. The Yaoundé Accord, a West African regional maritime security framework, exemplifies the type of win-win agreements that USAFRICOM facilitates by helping African nations share maritime domain awareness and information to combat piracy, illegal fishing, and trafficking, countering China's illicit maritime activities and illuminating ghost fleets transiting the Gulf of Guinea. These engagements not only strengthen

partnerships but also align efforts to address shared challenges, ensuring that African nations are empowered to take the lead in securing their regions. To address this concern and capitalize on our convening power, we are standing up a Defense Economics Engagement Cell within our headquarters designed to integrate economic development into our overall strategy and engagements.

Operations in the Information Environment are critical to USAFRICOM's mission, as adversaries like Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), the PRC, and Russia use disinformation to erode U.S. credibility, destabilize partner nations, and exploit vulnerable populations that puts regional allies and partners efforts to degrade and destroy terrorist organizations at risk. USAFRICOM counters these narratives by exposing the harmful impacts of malign activities, such as the Chinese factory chemical spill in Zambia, which released nearly 1.5 million tons of toxic mining debris into the country's largest river—a vital drinking source—devastating nearly 300,000 households.

Similarly, Russia's exploitation of miners in the Central African Republic highlights the destructive consequences of adversarial actions. By promoting truthful narratives and empowering African partners to safeguard their national interests, USAFRICOM strengthens resilience against terrorism and external manipulation, laying the foundation for long-term stability across the continent.

This year's 250th Years of Freedom provides a unique opportunity to highlight the positive contributions of U.S. engagement in Africa. However, resource constraints limit our ability to fully amplify these efforts, underscoring the need for additional investments in cutting-edge technologies like Artificial Intelligence to maintain situational awareness and shape positive perceptions across Africa.

Rebuilding Access: Partnerships, Agility, and Influence in Africa

Regaining access and enhancing crisis response in Africa requires the right assets, trust, influence, and sustained goodwill. USAFRICOM's ability to respond to crises depends on establishing flexible, temporary posture locations that enable rapid deployment and withdrawal. When indications and warnings signal a threat to U.S. interests, USAFRICOM will use internal assets to respond, or we will request external assets to execute precise, time-bound operations that neutralize threats quickly and effectively.

USAFRICOM uses our ability to convene the interagency and U.S. companies to bring targeted investments to align economic and security interests, creating mutually beneficial relationships. The Manda Bay, Kenya runway project exemplifies this approach. This project will not only enhance counterterrorism operations by enabling U.S. and Kenyan forces to project power more effectively against al-Shabaab but also sits on an economic corridor at the intersection of security and economic development. The upgraded runway will support heavy cargo planes, fighter jets, and unmanned aircraft, improving logistics and operational reach. Kenya also contributed nearly $60 million to this effort-highlighting their commitment. By aligning economic development with security objectives, USAFRICOM is able to foster deeper relations with East African nations to take on a greater burden against terrorists in the region and provide a counter to PRC investments.

USAFRICOM employs a range of security cooperation programs to build trust, enable partner operational independence, and align African nations with U.S. strategic objectives. The International Military Education and Training (IMET) program and the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program (SPP) are key to cultivating enduring relationships and professionalizing African militaries. IMET has trained more than 125 Chiefs of Defense and Service Chiefs across Africa, including 11 current Chiefs of Defense and 21 Service Chiefs, instilling values such as transparency, civilian control of the military, and operational expertise. Supporting these efforts, programs like Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Excess Defense Articles (EDA) equip African partners with tailored capabilities that enhance their effectiveness and foster economic ties. Together, these programs strengthen partnerships, promote stability, and advance U.S. strategic interests.

The SPP is one of the greatest strategic initiatives developed by the Department since the Cold War. This program produces significant benefits as it strengthens ties with African partners through consistent engagement in training, exchanges, and joint exercises, delivering disproportionate benefits from minimal resources. By fostering unique civil-military bonds and long-term relationships, the SPP showcases the United States as a reliable and enduring partner across 25 nations—an area where U.S. influence remains unmatched. The State Partnership Program creates valuable networks that, in some cases, bring together partners from different regions to share lessons learned and innovative solutions for common security challenges. To maximize its impact, we are expanding the SPP's integration into our operations, highlighting its successes, challenging adversarial narratives and showcasing the tangible benefits of U.S. engagement.

Resource Requirements

To effectively address the challenges in Africa, USAFRICOM requires capabilities and forces for flexible employment to meet crisis response timelines, stable funding for critical U.S. support, and dedicated ISR assets to locate and neutralize terrorist threats. Additionally, sustained support for experimentation and innovation is needed to enhance U.S. and partner readiness, along with funding for the SPP, to strengthen operations and activities across the continent.

Conclusion

Africa stands at a crossroads where terrorism, malign influence, and economic competition demand dedicated engagement. USAFRICOM addresses these challenges by leveraging U.S. strengths to protect the homeland, advance U.S. interests, and respond to crises. Through traditional military operations and a focus on innovation, defense economics, and information operations, we amplify our impact and meet strategic objectives. However, resource constraints and competing priorities pose challenges. Africa requires alignment between directed outcomes and a small set of enabling capabilities. The men and women of USAFRICOM remain resolute in advancing U.S. interests while empowering African nations to secure their futures. Through partnerships, investments, and a commitment to stability, they create conditions that reduce violent extremism and malign influence, ensuring Africa's potential benefits both the continent and the United States.