

USAFRICOM's Approach to International Stability

The United States Africa Command, created in 2007, is responsible for military relations in 53 African countries. Having assumed responsibilities formerly housed in three other combatant commands, USAFRICOM is now tasked with a broad range of humanitarian, military and policy objectives on the continent, including conducting mine action and remediating the dangers posed by explosive remnants of war. This article explores the massive tasks facing USAFRICOM as it stands up, and the ways in which the command is already making a much-needed difference.

by Eric Wuestewald [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]

Formed in 2007, USAFRICOM sought to secure the sustainability and growth in 53 African countries by building schools, delivering medical supplies and providing education on HIV/AIDS. In addition, USAFRICOM works to create awareness about unexploded-ordnance and explosive-remnants-of-war clearance, and performs ERW-clearance operations and explosive-ordnance disposal.

Despite Africa's growing involvement in international affairs, many nations on the continent still struggle with the looming threat of political instability. HIV/AIDS, extreme poverty, widespread hunger and repeated violent conflicts have left many countries with longstanding problems and a reliance on assistance from international organizations. Of course, subsisting primarily on foreign aid creates even more complications. Without enough money to begin investment, these countries have little to no chance of economic development; thus, the recovery process becomes cyclical and ineffective.

Certainly, the threat of landmines and other ERW does not help these situations. According to the United Nations' 2009 *Portfolio of Mine Action Projects*, there are 973 suspected mined areas and 1,010 UXO-contaminated areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo alone. Similarly, the *Portfolio* reports that landmines and UXO affect more than 1.9 million people

in 1,492 communities in Ethiopia. It also notes a presence of at least 1,561 landmines and pieces of UXO in Burundi and approximately 12.16 square kilometers (4.7 square miles) of mined areas in Mozambique.¹ As has been the case in addressing economic hardship across the African continent, complete reliance on foreign assistance is not likely to stimulate the national investment needed to effectively provide self-sufficiency and stability. With seemingly countless numbers of affected areas, including those just mentioned, the challenges Africa and the international community face are clear.

Background

After 10 years of discussions about how best to reverse the unfortunate dichotomy between international influence and regional instability, and how to achieve and promote the long-term sustainability and security of African nations, the U.S. Department of Defense announced the creation of an African Geographic Combatant Command on 6 February 2007.² USAFRICOM is the youngest of the U.S. Department of Defense's six geographic commands. USAFRICOM consolidates the responsibilities previously allocated to U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. Central Command and U.S. European Command into a single African security-related organization.³

Humanitarian Approach

Whereas traditional commands have focused their attention on direct warfare, USAFRICOM instead works toward diplomacy and sus-

tainability through military operations to promote "a stable and secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy."² The command employs more than 1,000 individuals from both military and nonmilitary organizations, working closely with the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the African Union, and other regional, international and nongovernmental organizations to ensure coordination of political stability, economic growth and international humanitarian efforts in Africa.^{3,4}

In October 2008, USAFRICOM officially transitioned to independent Unified Command status, and since then it has actively worked toward merging and managing the U.S. military activities for Africa organized by U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. Central Command and U.S. European Command.⁴ Despite the Command's relatively short existence, USAFRICOM has already taken significant steps to ensure the long-term security of African countries by constructing schools and clinics, delivering medical supplies and services, and providing HIV/AIDS-awareness programs.

Mine Action

Mine-action activities are just a small part of USAFRICOM's mission. To help combat the human-

itarian threat of mines and ERW, USAFRICOM conducts its own series of programs to supplement pre-existing services conducted by international and nongovernmental organizations and trained host-nation personnel.

USAFRICOM carries out ERW train-the-trainer programs in multiple countries, utilizing U.S. Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force Component Commands to assist in its UXO- and ERW-clearance training.³ By conducting these train-the-trainer missions, in addition to working with each individual country and its specific needs on a case-by-case basis, the Department of Defense plans to incorporate capacity building and sustainability into the program.

With a US \$310 million budget,⁴ USAFRICOM is conducting six active mine-action engagements in Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia. In each of these countries, USAFRICOM performs ERW operations, EOD Level I (location, exposure and destruction of single landmines and other ERW) and Level II (moving, transportation and proper disposal of mines and other ERW) training, mine-detector maintenance/repair, medical first-responder, and MRE courses.

In fiscal year 2010, these programs will also be conducted in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo and Sudan.³

Conclusion

USAFRICOM has been operational for only two years. Despite its nascent state, this Combatant Command has already assumed many responsibilities from three other geographic commands. In addition, USAFRICOM has also established a program that initiated mine-action work in six African countries. Though there are no clear results yet on how these particular programs will affect the host nations, with an increased budget, more focus on training and diplomacy, greater military personnel and expanded military operations, USAFRICOM expects a long-term beneficial impact. ♦

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