History of U.S. Africa Command

U.S. Africa Command began initial operations Oct. 1, 2007, and became fully operational Oct. 1, 2008.



For the past 13 years, U.S. Africa Command has worked with African partners for a secure, stable, and prosperous Africa. In response to our expanding partnerships and interests on the African continent, the U.S. established AFRICOM in 2007.

The single most important focus then, as it is today, was developing enduring partnerships. The creation of AFRICOM has provided coherence to U.S. military efforts in support of the U.S. Strategy for Africa, enabling our nation to better focus efforts and resources on programs that make the most difference.

Much of what AFRICOM has built is based on partnerships – partnerships with African nations, international allies, interagency departments and non-governmental organizations. AFRICOM is committed to a whole-of-government approach, which is why the command has worked to help African nations enhance their own security through development across many sectors, including defense, governance and economic development.

Establishment of U.S. Africa Command

On Feb. 6, 2007, then-U.S. President George W. Bush directed the creation of U.S. Africa Command. The decision was the culmination of several years of deliberation within the Department of Defense (DoD) acknowledging the growing strategic importance of Africa. The new command would ensure DoD harmonized its efforts in Africa with those of U.S. Department of State as well as other U.S. government agencies.

AFRICOM assumed responsibility for U.S. military activities in areas that had been part of three geographical commands previously, and now included all of Africa except Egypt. AFRICOM was chartered to conduct sustained security engagements to promote a stable and secure political environment in Africa in support of U.S. foreign policy.

Following the decision by Bush to establish a command to oversee all U.S. military activities in Africa, AFRICOM began to organize as a sub-unified command of U.S. European Command. The reduction of U.S. military forces stationed in Europe made space available for a headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. U.S. European, Central, and Pacific Commands (which previously held this responsibility for different parts of the continent) transferred their missions to AFRICOM. Because of the relationship between security, development, and diplomacy, the designers of the new command included management and staff members from the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Treasury, and other U.S. government agencies involved in Africa.

2008

On Oct. 1 AFRICOM became fully operational. Service components aligned under AFRICOM included U.S. Army Africa, U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa, U.S. Air Forces Europe and Africa, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa, and Special Operations Command Africa. Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, established in 2002, also transferred to AFRICOM and continued its mission to strengthen the operational and institutional capabilities of East African partner-nation militaries from a forward operating site in Djibouti.

After the U.S. government announced the creation of AFRICOM, the first leaders of the new command began engaging with African officials. Offices of Security Cooperation increased from 9 to 40. By 2015 the number of Defense Attachés increased to better manage security cooperation programs in Africa.



2009

While Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa began to support international efforts to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia, AFRICOM continued other maritime activities the U.S. had started before the creation of the new command. U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa facilitated exercises and security cooperation programs designed to improve maritime safety and security in Africa, especially in the Gulf of Guinea.

2010

Through the AFRICOM joint exercise program, U.S. forces continued to train with partner nations to increase the capability of African defense institutions to address regional security challenges. The Accord series, for example, focused on countries contributing forces to United Nations and African Union peace support operations, in which African forces increasingly shouldered the burden. The exercise program evolved under AFRICOM. Events become fewer in number and more regional in focus, and host nations welcomed the participation of an ever-larger number of countries and international organizations. All participants benefited. The ongoing series of Medical Readiness Training Exercises allowed U.S. personnel, for example, to work with African medical professionals in remote areas.

2011

U.S. military personnel deployed to central Africa to serve as advisors to forces of the African Union Regional Task Force, which worked to defeat Joseph Kony and other senior Lord's Resistance Army leaders. The operation continued for several years in order to protect local

populations. The U.S. also intervened to protect civilians in Libya. Because it was established primarily to focus on engagement and security assistance, AFRICOM had few assigned forces to conduct operations in Libya. AFRICOM therefore relied heavily on U.S. European Command and other commands for the necessary resources to carry out a non-combatant evacuation and military operations in cooperation with European allies and other partners.

2012

Following the 2012 attack on a U.S. diplomatic mission in Libya, AFRICOM positioned additional personnel in Europe and Djibouti to respond to future crises. The East African Response Force and Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force – Crisis Response – Africa rehearsed these operations regularly. In times of crisis, elements of these units deployed to Africa to enhance the security of a U.S. Embassy, or if necessary to assist with the departure of citizens and non-emergency staff.

In 2012 AFRICOM also established a Women, Peace, and Security Working Group, which conducted seminars about the importance of recruitment, retention, and training of military women, as well as protecting civilians during peacekeeping operations.

2013

The U.S recognized the Federal Government of Somalia in January 2013 and resumed military-to-military engagement with Somali security forces. AFRICOM continued to counter the terrorist threat posed by al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab through direct military operations, and by assisting troop-contributing countries in preparing their forces for deployment to the African

Union Mission in Somalia. U.S. military personnel also deployed to support international stabilization missions in Mali.

2014

In the largest contingency operation it has led, AFRICOM assisted USAID in responding to an Ebola outbreak in West Africa. AFRICOM established Joint Force Command – United Assistance to provide logistics and engineering support, as well as to train health care workers. Liberia's military worked effectively with U.S. forces, demonstrating the success of a multi-year program to rebuild the Armed Forces of Liberia. AFRICOM also worked with countries in the region to improve their capacity to respond to future epidemics.

2015

The new programs President Barack Obama announced in 2014, the Counter-Terrorism Partnerships Fund, African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership, and Security Governance Initiative, ensured AFRICOM had resources available to help partner nations combat terrorism within their borders and to improve their ability to deploy forces in support of United Nations peacekeeping and African Union peace support missions. The U.S. also provided defense equipment and services, as well as military education and training, to support the efforts of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria in the fight against Boko Haram through the Lake Chad Basin Commission's Multi-National Joint Task Force. The State Partnership Program also expanded, in which AFRICOM paired U.S. National Guard organizations with African countries in

an enduring relationship designed to improve defense institutions' ability to provide security, respond to disasters, and manage crises.

2016



In cooperation with the Libyan Government of National Accord, AFRICOM conducted nearly 500 precision airstrikes to help Libyan forces drive Islamic State (Daesh) terrorists from Sirte. The U.S. remained committed to working with Libya and other partners to counter the evolving threat of violent extremists in North Africa.

In other engagements, AFRICOM continued to facilitate discussions among the U.S., several African nations and other interested countries, the African Union, the European Union, and the United Nations on improving logistics at the Africa Logistics Forum in Accra, Ghana.

Read more: Year in Review - AFRICOM's top stories in 2016

2017



More than 2,000 military personnel from 24 African and other nations participated in the 10th-annual Flintlock exercise. African special operations forces and Special Operations Command Africa jointly planned and executed the event, which was designed to strengthen security institutions, promote multilateral sharing of information, and develop interoperability among counter-terrorism partners.

Through its programs and exercises the command, in cooperation with its partners, continued its mission to disrupt and neutralize transnational threats, protect U.S. personnel and facilities, prevent and mitigate conflict, and build defense capability in order to promote regional stability and prosperity.

Read more: Year in Review - a look back at AFRICOM's top stories in 2017

2018



In Fiscal year 2018 (Oct. 1, 2017 – Sept. 30, 2018) AFRICOM and its components conducted more than 1,300 theater security cooperation events in more than 45 African nations. Some of these events marked historical firsts while others built off of previous engagements.

Read more: Year in Review: AFRICOM Builds Capacity, Strengthens Partnerships in 2018

2019

During 2019, U.S. Africa Command continued its critical work with African, international, and interagency partners to counter transnational threats and malign actors, strengthen security forces, and respond to crises in order to advance U.S. interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity.

Read more: AFRICOM in 2019: Strengthening partnerships while countering threats, malign actors

2020



In 2020 U.S. Africa Command continued to strengthen its relationships with African partners, strategic allies, U.S. government agencies and departments, and multinational coalitions to prevent, address and mitigate conflict in Africa. Throughout the year, AFRICOM worked to build African-partner defense capabilities.

Read more: AFRICOM in 2020: Engaging partners, strengthening cooperation in a COVID-19 environment

Engagement

Military and diplomatic engagements continue to be essential to the U.S. military strategy in Africa. Although the U.S. military had worked with African nations through American embassies and the U.S. European, Central, and Pacific Commands prior to 2008, the creation of a new command for Africa was controversial. The first AFRICOM Commander, General William E. “Kip” Ward, traveled widely in Africa to explain the purpose of the new organization and allay concerns. Subsequent commanders and senior AFRICOM officials continued to meet with senior African political and military leaders to discuss U.S. military activities. The number of Defense Attachés and Offices of Security Cooperation working at United States embassies in Africa increased in order to better align security assistance with U.S. diplomatic and African goals.

AFRICOM worked closely with U.S. diplomats and development officials to ensure military, diplomatic, and development programs worked in harmony toward U.S. national goals. It is also important to note that the response forces assigned to U.S. Africa Command to protect U.S. personnel and facilities allowed the U.S. to maintain a diplomatic presence in countries experiencing violence and instability.

AFRICOM routinely engages with partners in Africa through diplomatic engagement, conferences, military-to-military engagement, Non-Commissioned Officer development, military intelligence, chaplain engagement, and Women, Peace, and Security initiatives.

Security Cooperation Programs

The core mission of U.S. Africa Command remained to help African nations and regional organizations build capable and professional militaries that respect human rights, adhere to the rule of law, and contribute more effectively to stability in Africa. The primary tools for

implementing this strategy were military-to-military engagements, security cooperation programs, exercises, and operations. Most of these programs required both military and diplomatic approval. As such, AFRICOM works closely with U.S. Embassies through defense attachés and offices of security cooperation.

- Support to Peacekeeping Operations
- Africa Partnership Station
- African Union Mission in Somalia
- African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership (AMLEP)
- Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP)
- Operation Observant Compass (ended 2017)
- Countering Violent Extremist Organizations
- Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA)
- Africa Deployment Assistance Partnership Team (ADAPT)
- Counter-IED Training
- Foreign Military Sales
- International Military Education and Training
- Counter Narcotics
- Counter-Illicit Trafficking
- Medical Engagement
- National Guard State Partnership Program
- Pandemic Response Program
- Partnership for Integrated Logistics Operations and Tactics (PILOT)
- Pandemic Response Program
- West Africa Disaster Preparedness Initiative
- Veterinary Civil Action Program

Joint Exercise Program

Through U.S. Africa Command-sponsored exercises, U.S. military forces improve interoperability with African and European partner forces. The exercises are divided into series. The Accord series, for example, prepared forces for peacekeeping operations. By 2016 participants included 41 African nations, 22 non-African nations, and 8 international and regional organizations. Exercises increasingly tested decision-making at the operational level rather than simply tactical proficiency.

- African Lion
- United Accord (formerly Southern and Eastern Accord)
- Unified Focus (formerly Central Accord)
- Cutlass Express
- Obangame Express (combination of exercises Obangame and Saharan Express)
- Phoenix Express
- Flintlock
- Silent Warrior (last held in 2015)
- Africa Endeavor
- Justified Accord
- Shared Accord

Contingency Operations

A fundamental part of the mission of U.S. Africa Command was to respond to crises. In the first decade of the command's history, it conducted contingency operations in Africa to protect civilians and defeat terrorist threats in Libya, support African Union operations in Somalia, Central Africa, and the Lake Chad Basin, and responded to the largest Ebola outbreak in

recorded history. An enduring task was to protect United States embassies and citizens in the region.

- Operation Odyssey Dawn (2011)
- Operation Juniper Micron (2013)
- Protection of U.S. Personnel and Facilities (2012-present)
- Operation United Assistance (2014-2015)
- Operation Odyssey Lightning (2016)