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AFRICA DEFENSE FORUM

IRREGULAR WARFARE

Security Forces Adapt as Threats Emerge

Mercenaries Cast Shadow Across Continent

PLUS

A Conversation with Dr. Albert Antwi-Boasiako, Former Director-General of Ghana's Cyber Security Authority

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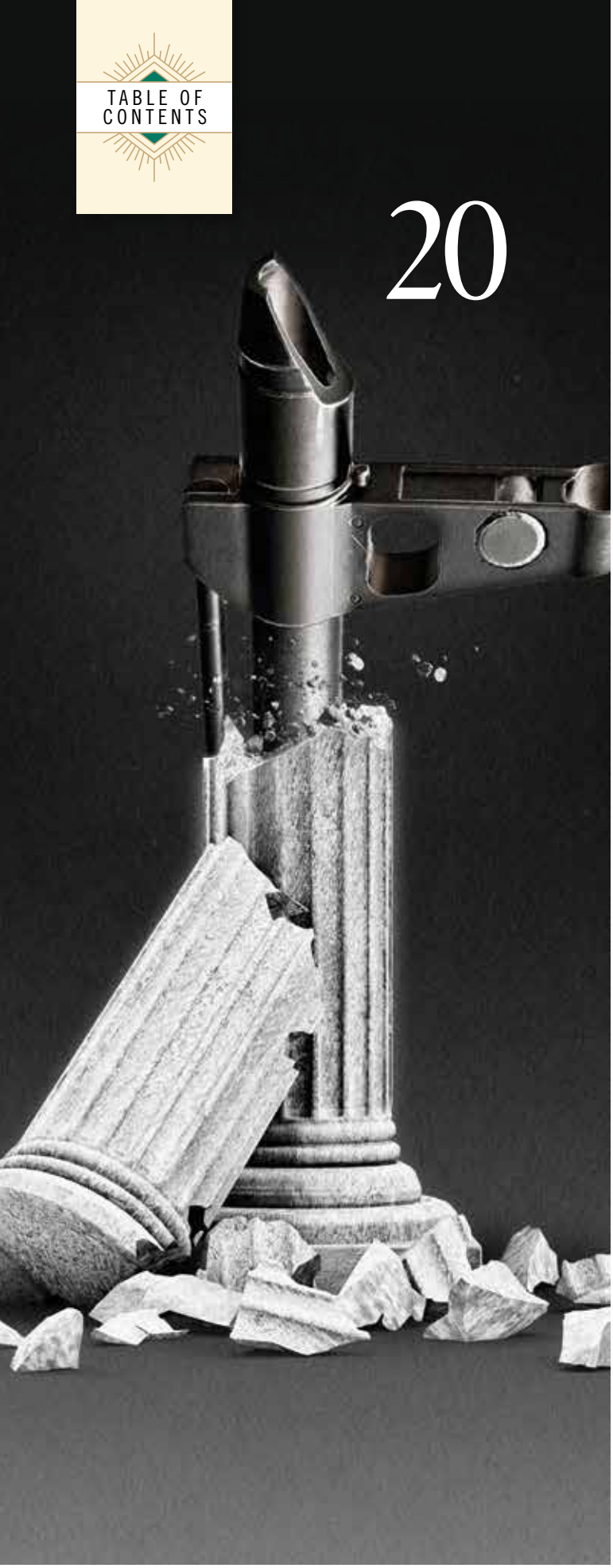

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ON THE COVER
Security forces prepare for a range of emerging threats in the age of irregular warfare.
REUTERS

VIEWPOINT

In the 21st century, the age of conventional war has given way to the age of irregular warfare. Militaries still face off directly in conventional fighting, but it is far less common than irregular warfare, where the attacks are sporadic, asymmetric and hard to detect.

African military forces today are facing threats from state and nonstate groups that employ cutting-edge technology in their attacks. Cyberattacks on state infrastructure are becoming common, and the weaponization of artificial intelligence and other new technologies is on the horizon.

There is no such thing as a standard threat, so there should be no such thing as a static military response. The continent's security forces must adapt in order to survive and win.

One pillar of being prepared for irregular threats is investing in technological readiness. Taking advantage of a young, tech-savvy generation is one way that a nation can jump-start its cybersecurity defenses and leverage existing education and skills to support a technological security sector transformation.

A second pillar is building and sustaining international, continental and regional cooperation. Irregular actors exploit isolated nations and fragmented regions. When security alliances are strong, insurgents have nowhere to hide. When alliances fracture, it becomes easier for state and nonstate actors to launch devastating attacks.

The third pillar of preparing for irregular threats is investing in professional military education. The only way to prepare the Soldiers of today for the unpredictable threats of tomorrow is to provide them with the necessary instruction. Education, including classroom study and a careerlong process that refreshes skills, is key. The best training incorporates modern technology and battlefield lessons to keep the warfighter sharp and ready to respond to new threats.

There is no blueprint for stopping irregular threats, just as there is no way to know what these threats might look like in 10 or 20 years. But some principles stand the test of time. Preparation, partnership and professionalism can help any nation's security sector transform to meet technologically powered irregular threats.

U.S. Africa Command Staff

Soldiers from multiple countries attend the opening ceremony of Justified Accord 2025 at the Counter Insurgency Terrorism and Stability Operations Center in Nanyuki, Kenya. SGT. KYLEJIAN FRANCIA/U.S. ARMY

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U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

CONTACT US:

U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

Attn: J3/Africa Defense Forum
Unit 29951
APO-AE 09751 USA

ADF.Editor@ADF-Magazine.com

HEADQUARTERS U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

Attn: J3/Africa Defense Forum
Geb 3315, Zimmer 53
Plieninger Strasse 289
70567 Stuttgart, Germany

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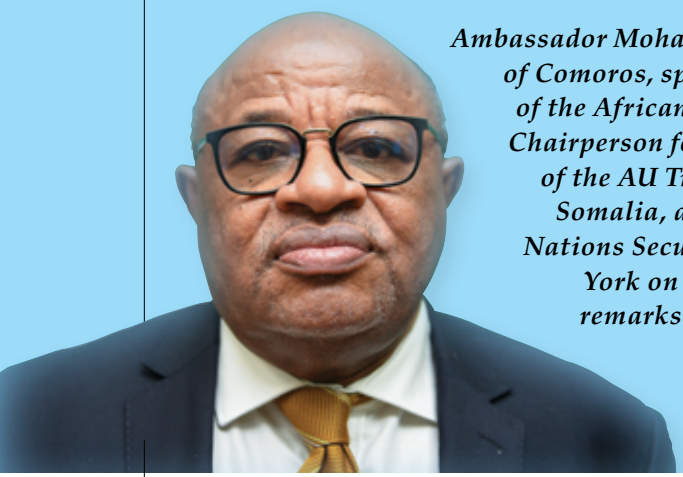
AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Amid Progress, Somalia Needs Sustained Support



Ambassador Mohamed El-Amine Souef of Comoros, special representative of the African Union Commission Chairperson for Somalia and head of the AU Transition Mission in Somalia, addressed the United Nations Security Council in New York on October 3, 2024. His remarks have been edited for space and clarity.

Kenya Defence Forces troops serving with the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia prepare to load their luggage onto a helicopter during the handover of Kuday forward operating base in Jubaland State in 2024. ATMIS

The recent months have witnessed a fluid security landscape in Somalia, characterized by progress and setbacks. The Somali Security Forces (SSF) intensified efforts to degrade al-Shabaab capabilities through improved targeted counterterrorism operations that led to the elimination of insurgent leaders and dismantling of several operational bases.

Nonetheless, al-Shabaab has continued to deploy asymmetric tactics, including complex attacks, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle-borne IEDs and indirect fire. The recent mortar attacks on African Union/United Nations camps in Baidoa, Mogadishu and Kismayo, and other forms of attacks against civilian and military targets in Mogadishu and across the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) sectors, demonstrate al-Shabaab's resilience and underscore the need for robust intelligence-sharing mechanisms.

Moreover, reports of al-Shabaab acquiring missiles and armed UAVs are a further source of concern, increasing drone threats and hostility to federal government of Somalia installations, ATMIS, U.N., and SSF locations and civilian targets.

Similarly, the growing risk of infiltration and collaboration between al-Shabaab and the Houthis is a considerable security challenge, threatening regional stability in the Horn of Africa as well as maritime navigation and shipping routes in the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Mozambique Channel. These concerns underscore the transnational nature of security challenges and the need for comprehensive and coordinated international efforts that prioritize effective and sustainable solutions.

As the government of Somalia advances the implementation of its Security Sector Development Plan to enhance force capabilities, sustained international cooperation and support is crucial to reinforce existing security frameworks, enabling Somalia to effectively address emerging threats.

I am pleased to report remarkable progress in the transition of security responsibilities from ATMIS to the SSF.

In line with this council's decision on the phased approach to the Phase 3 drawdown, ATMIS, with the collaboration and support of the U.N. Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS), completed the transfer of six of the eight forward operating bases (FOBs) designated for handover to the SSF.

With the challenging environmental and infrastructural terrain in some of our areas of operation, we continue to work closely with UNSOS to explore possible solutions, and we are making notable progress, hoping that the last two FOBs will draw down by the end of October 2024.

Transition planning is a complex process integrally tied to the dynamics of national leadership and ownership. In this regard, I commend the federal government of Somalia, under the stewardship of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, for assuming full ownership and responsibility for the planning process by promoting enhanced collaboration and coordination among key stakeholders.

I would like to underscore that despite challenges, there are clear opportunities to consolidate and further progress.

I remain deeply convinced that the determination of President Mohamud to build trust and consensus and foster a culture of shared commitment and responsibility with all stakeholders to address emerging issues will be essential to sustain the fight against al-Shabaab and offer the best possible condition for a smooth transition.

AFRICA TODAY

Piracy Drops, But IMB Warns Against Complacency

DEFENCEWEB

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) recorded 116 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships in 2024, four less than in 2023 and one more than in 2022.

Of concern is an increase in the number of crew members either taken hostage or kidnapped. Pirates took 126 crew members hostage in 2024, compared to 73 in 2023 and 41 in 2022. Twelve crew members were reported kidnapped, compared to 14 in 2023 and two in 2022. A further 12 crew members were threatened, and one was injured in 2024.

The IMB said this is a call to continue prioritizing crew safety. Pirates boarded 94 vessels in 2024, attempted attacks on 13, hijacked six and shot at three.

"While we welcome the reduction of reported incidents, the ongoing threats to crew safety remain a significant concern," Gen. John W.H. Denton, International Chamber of Commerce secretary-general, said in a statement issued by Commercial Crime Services, of which the IMB is part.

"Safeguarding routes and ensuring the security of seafarers, who are essential to maintaining global commerce, is vital. Every effort must be made to protect lives at sea while ensuring the seamless flow of goods through international supply chains. This requires a collaborative effort, with continued regional and international naval presence being crucial to this endeavor."

Africa's west coast, particularly the Gulf of Guinea, reported "relatively lower" piracy in 2024, with 18 incidents. This is four fewer than in 2023 and a big decrease from 2020's 81. The 12 kidnapped crew members in the Gulf of Guinea are a little less than a quarter of the total kidnappings reported to the IMB. Across the continent, in the western Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden, eight incidents were reported.

"Ongoing threats to crew safety highlight the importance of continued caution," said IMB Director Michael Howlett. "Masters and vessel operators are strongly encouraged to strictly adhere to all recommendations in the Best Management Practices while transiting the Gulf of Guinea and waters off East Africa."

Participants in Obangame Express train to combat piracy, illegal fishing, trafficking and other maritime crimes. FRENCH NAVY

Regional Military Logistics Depot Under Construction in Botswana

VOICE OF AMERICA

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) broke ground in December 2024 on a military logistics hub in Botswana to ensure rapid deployment of troops to regional crises, such as the one in northern Mozambique.

Workers are building the SADC Standby Force Regional Logistics Depot on 19 hectares in Rasesa, 40 kilometers north of the capital, Gaborone. The SADC has seen the emergence of trouble spots, notably in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique.

"This groundbreaking ceremony is timely and marks a significant stride in our journey towards promoting and consolidating peace, stability and security in our region," said SADC Chairperson and Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

Mnangagwa said the center will ensure that the region can deploy troops quickly. He called on international partners to contribute to the center's $45 million cost.

Botswana President Duma Boko said the military hub will give the SADC the capacity to intervene and distribute military equipment in strife-torn regions. "[People] are in distress, and they are looking for help, and we in SADC have taken it upon ourselves when these calls of distress are raised to step in, to step up and come to the rescue," Boko said.

Botswana President Duma Boko speaks during the groundbreaking for the Southern African Development Community logistics depot in Rasesa. THE PRESIDENCY, REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

Zimbabwe-based political analyst Effie Dlela Ncube said that although it is critical to have the armory, regional leaders first must address the root cause of conflict.

"We need to go beyond that [deploying troops] and deal with the political, socioeconomic, legal and other structural root causes of conflict in the region," Ncube said.

Operation Targets Cybercriminals in 7 Countries

ADF STAFF

Interpol arrested 306 people and seized 1,842 electronic devices across seven African nations in an international operation that targeted perpetrators of cyberattacks and scams.

The international police organization worked from November 2024 to February 2025 to target banking, investment and messaging app scams. Operation Red Card sought to disrupt and dismantle cross-border criminal networks that harmed more than 5,000 individuals and businesses.

Authorities in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo and Zambia took part in the operation. Interpol worked through its African Joint Operation against Cybercrime.

Authorities seized 685 devices, including laptops and cellphones, in Nigeria. INTERPOL

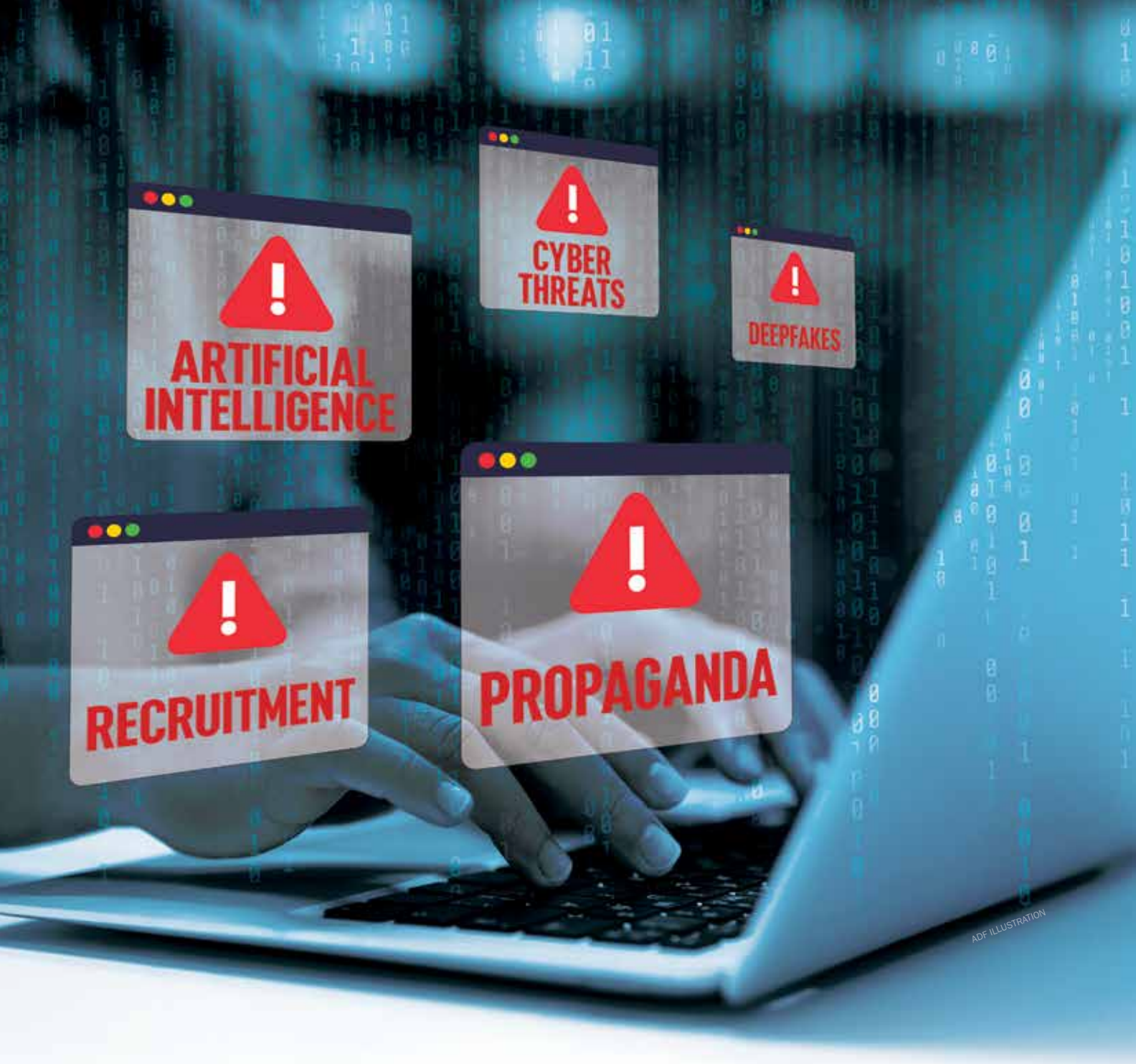
Authorities in Nigeria arrested 130 suspects, including 113 foreigners, who were accused of perpetrating cyber scams such as online casino and investment frauds. Authorities say they converted proceeds to digital assets and were recruited from different countries to run scams in multiple languages. In all, the Nigeria operation seized 26 vehicles, 16 homes, 39 parcels of land and 685 devices.

Rwandan authorities arrested 45 suspected members of a criminal network in social engineering scams that defrauded victims of more than $305,000 in 2024. Authorities say they posed as telecommunications employees and claimed fake "jackpot" wins to extract sensitive information and gain access to mobile banking accounts. Authorities recovered $103,043 and seized 292 devices.

In South Africa, authorities arrested 40 people and seized more than 1,000 SIM cards and 53 desktop computers and towers. The SIM box fraud scheme reroutes international calls as local ones in large-scale SMS message phishing attacks.

In Zambia, officers apprehended 14 suspected members of a criminal syndicate that hacked phones by sending a message containing a malicious link that installed malware when clicked. This gave hackers access to banking apps and the ability to spread the scam.

"The success of Operation Red Card demonstrates the power of international cooperation in combating cybercrime, which knows no borders and can have devastating effects on individuals and communities," Neal Jetton, Interpol's director of the Cybercrime Directorate, said in a news release.



ADF ILLUSTRATION

WAR WAGED IN KEYSTROKES

As Cyber Threats Grow, Security Forces Work to Defend Against Domestic and Foreign Attacks

ADF STAFF

Less than two years after Sudan's civil war began in April 2023, the two warring factions had killed more than 28,700 people, more than a quarter of whom were civilians. Half the population needed humanitarian aid, and nearly a third had fled their homes.

Yet before bombs and bullets spilled blood and felled buildings, a hidden element of warfare already was wreaking havoc in Sudan's cyber realm. Sudan has a history of shutting down internet access dating back to the Omar al-Bashir regime. As citizens protested for his removal in 2019, al-Bashir's government partnered with Russian mercenaries to spread false information, foreign policy nonprofit news website Inkstick reported.

That same year, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) "organized an influence campaign to white-wash the reputation of its leaders," Inkstick reported. As soon as its war against the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) began in 2023, a fake account surfaced on X and falsely claimed that RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as "Hemedti," had died from combat wounds.

In the lead-up to kinetic fighting, the RSF obtained a type of spyware known as Predator. The software lets users mine data and track infected cellphones. Monitors can access messages, media files, locations, browsing histories and call logs. The program works in stealth mode and lets users customize what they collect.

It was clear that tanks, planes, soldiers, bombs and bullets would not be exclusive weapons in the war. Combatants would add keyboards, motherboards, computer programs and hackers to their arsenals.

"There's a habit of not paying attention to the cyberwarfare of conflicts until months after the physical conflict," Nate Allen, cyber operations lead of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), told Inkstick. "And cyber warfare also transcends the hard timing of the actual conflict."

Like kinetic battlefield tools, cyber weapons are varied and efficient. Malware, spyware, malign social media accounts, viruses and artificial intelligence (AI) deepfakes are just a few tools reshaping conflict and opening a multitude of fronts.

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A July 2021 cyberattack hobbled South Africa's transport and logistics company Transnet.
AFP/GETTY IMAGES

"There's a habit of not paying attention to the cyberwarfare of conflicts until months after the physical conflict. And cyber warfare also transcends the hard timing of the actual conflict."

~ Nate Allen, cyber operations lead of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies

'DIGITAL SWISS ARMY KNIFE'

Social media can be a cheap and potent tool for shaping new realities. Such platforms have been used to influence civilians and hide abuses in junta-led nations. Terrorist groups use the platforms to recruit and sway public opinion.

"Groups like Boko Haram and al-Shabaab frequently disseminate fake news, manipulated videos, or exaggerated claims of victory, graphic content to instill fear," Idayat Hassan of Nigeria, a senior associate with the Center for Strategic & International Studies, told ADF by email. "This tactic aims to sow discord, incite panic and undermines trust in governments."

Al-Shabaab targets young people in Kenya and Tanzania through Swahili-language social media posts, Hassan said. The Islamic State group (IS) recruited Africans from Ghana, Nigeria and beyond to join its fight in Syria.

Extremists also use encrypted messaging apps such as Signal and Telegram to secure their internal communications and plan attacks, she said. "These platforms enable coordination of attacks and dissemination of information to a wider public."

Social media doesn't just give extremists new ways to communicate, "it's fundamentally reshaping the nature of insurgency itself," security expert Brandon Schingh wrote in a July 2024 article for the Irregular Warfare Initiative.

For example, in 2014, IS started its #AllEyesonISIS recruitment campaign. A group that started with 12,000 to 15,000 fighters quickly grew to 40,000 from more than 110 countries. "This surge isn't just a military boost; it's a testament to the raw power of social media in modern conflict," Schingh wrote.

He called the platforms a "digital Swiss Army knife" for their varied potential functions.

In addition to supercharging recruitment, social media lets bad actors adapt with lightning speed, "turning every smartphone into a command center," he wrote. Likewise,

A journalist checks an online newspaper site in Khartoum, Sudan. Access to smartphones and the internet has grown substantially in Africa.
AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A billboard in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, warns citizens about the dangers of false information. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

every user becomes a potential broadcaster for terrorist propaganda.

The challenge of terrorist group propaganda will continue to grow as internet and social media access continues to rapidly expand across the continent. About 300 million Africans have joined social media platforms in seven years, bringing the total to 400 million active users, according to a March 2024 ACSS report. An additional 200 million are using the internet.

REAL OR IMAGINED?

With digital growth comes an increase in internet-connected devices and systems known as "the Internet of Things." Such connections often gather, transmit, and store private or sensitive information vulnerable to hacking. Interconnectivity also increases the risk of large-scale malware infections and denial-of-service attacks. Firewalls, robust authentication procedures and encryption can help address such vulnerabilities.

The latest frontier of cyber threats to nations and their security forces is the use of AI. "The applications of AI in insurgency are as diverse as they are concerning," Schingh wrote, adding that AI-created propaganda can exploit cultural and societal divisions by amplifying grievances and creating confusion. This can sway public opinion and supercharge terrorist recruitment. AI-driven algorithms can do a hacker's job in a fraction of the time, thus enabling huge data harvests and communications disruptions, he wrote.

Perhaps the most frightening aspect of AI is its ability to alter people's perceptions of reality, including through "deepfakes." Deepfakes are manipulated or fabricated video or audio files that seemingly show famous people, politicians or others saying or doing things they did not say or do. Imagine the ramifications of a video that falsely shows an African leader uttering terrorist group propaganda. Likewise, AI could be used to manipulate a known person's voice to extort money or information from targets who presume it to be authentic.

"Groups like Boko Haram and al-Shabaab frequently disseminate fake news, manipulated videos, or exaggerated claims of victory, graphic content to instill fear. This tactic aims to sow discord, incite panic and undermines trust in governments."

~ Idayat Hassan, senior associate with the Center for Strategic & International Studies

"Africa Endeavor is an important platform that accords us an opportunity to learn from one another, share expertise and promote best practices on how to address cyber challenges."

~ Ambrose Lwiji Lufuma, Zambian Minister of Defence

"Everybody is praising how helpful AI will be for African governments. But no one is mentioning the risks, which are not science fiction," Julie Owono, executive director of Internet Without Borders, told Mother Jones magazine. "We've seen what's possible with written content, but we haven't even seen yet what's possible with video content."

There have been previews of the trouble AI-generated content can cause. In early 2019, then-Gabonese President Ali Bongo had spent months out of the country for medical treatment after a stroke, according to Mother Jones. The extended absence led to speculation about his status, including suspicions that he had died. The government released a silent video of Bongo. For some, it was a relief; for others, an indication of deceit. Gabon's military attempted a coup a week later, citing the video as evidence that something was amiss. One Bongo rival called the video a deepfake. Experts were divided on whether that was true, but the damage was done.

Deepfakes aren't the only AI threats. Automated fake social media profiles and bots can emulate human interaction, enabling extremists to radicalize and recruit on an enormous scale, Hassan told ADF. AI-generated imagery and text could help criminals raise money through fraudulent humanitarian appeals, diverting resources from legitimate causes. AI also could enhance hackers' ability to access surveillance and infrastructure systems.

AFRICAN NATIONS RESPOND

As these threats grow, some countries are mounting defenses. Nigeria's National Cybersecurity Coordination Centre (NCCC) leads efforts to establish a network protected from malicious attacks by state and nonstate actors such as terrorist groups.

Participants listen to a presentation at Africa Endeavor 2024 in Livingstone, Zambia. The annual symposium focuses on enhancing cybersecurity policies and strategies. PHILIP REGINA/U.S. ARMY

Cybersecurity is more important than ever as millions of people conduct banking and business online. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The NCCC also is "strengthening the Nigerian Computer Emergency Response Team to enhance its capabilities in detecting, responding to, and mitigating online threats," Hassan said. "These efforts include countering malign actors and defending against cyberattacks targeting critical national information infrastructure."

Nations also are sharing their experiences. From July 29 to August 2, 2024, military and cybersecurity experts from across the continent participated in Africa Endeavor in Livingstone, Zambia, to discuss strategies and build cooperation. The symposium's goal is to improve cybersecurity capabilities in militaries. The 2024 iteration focused on developing cybersecurity policies and strategies.

"Africa Endeavor is an important platform that accords us an opportunity to learn from one another, share expertise and promote best practices on how to address cyber challenges," said Zambian Minister of Defence Ambrose Lwiji Lufuma.

Kenya's Ministry of Defence co-hosted a workshop on the military's responsible use of AI in June 2024. The two-day event in Nairobi brought together personnel from more than a dozen nations to learn about opportunities and risks associated with AI, according to defenceWeb.

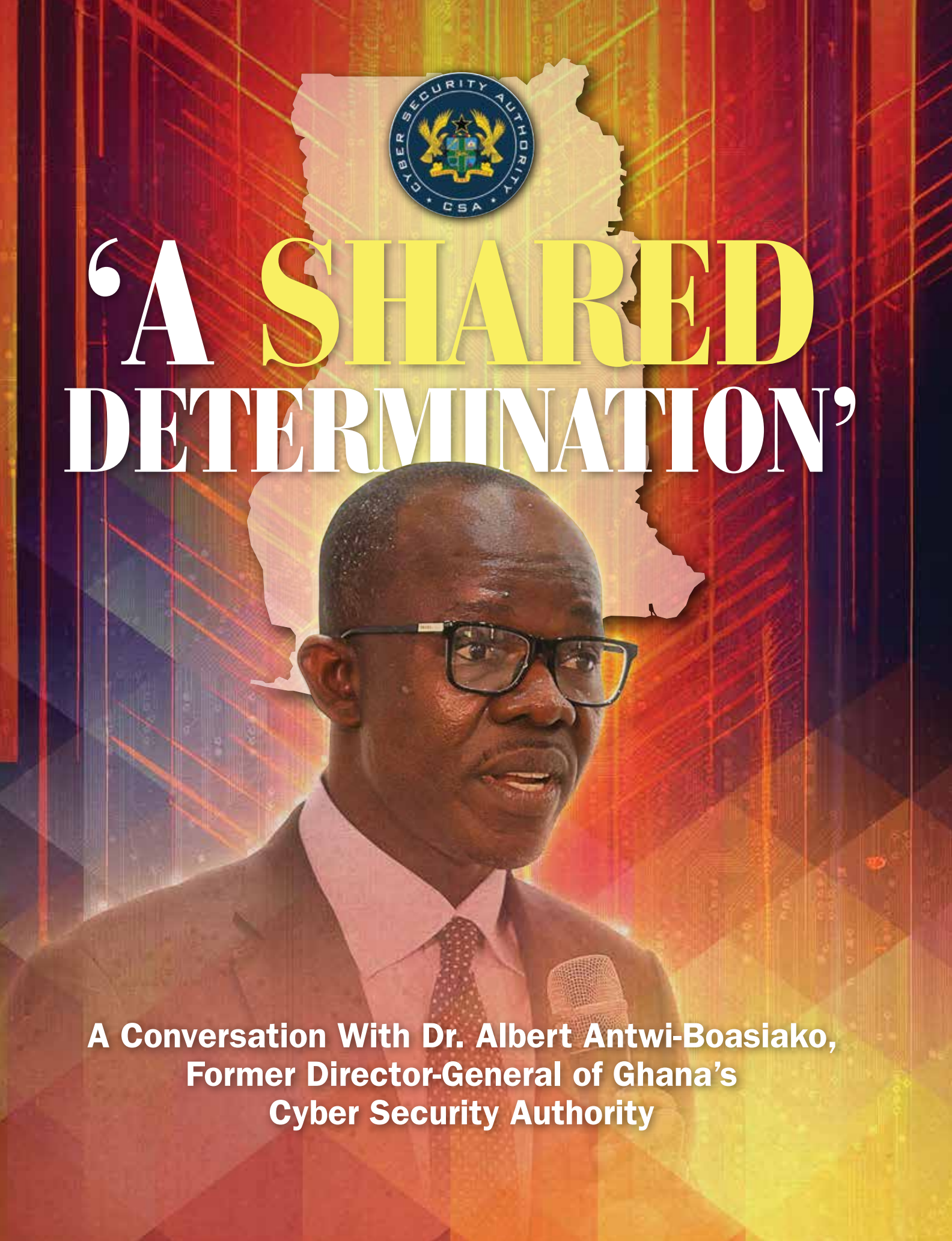
Gen. Charles Kahariri, Kenya's chief of the Defence Forces, said comprehensive regulations are essential to govern the use of AI in military operations.

"Building local capabilities to develop, deploy and regulate AI is crucial," Kahariri said. "These frameworks should address issues such as data privacy, security and ethical use. Policymakers must work closely with technologies, ethicists and military experts to create policies that balance innovation with responsibility." ❑

"Building local capabilities to develop, deploy and regulate AI is crucial. These frameworks should address issues such as data privacy, security and ethical use."

~ Gen. Charles Kahariri, Kenya's chief of the Defence Forces

‘A SHARED DETERMINATION’



A Conversation With Dr. Albert Antwi-Boasiako, Former Director-General of Ghana’s Cyber Security Authority

Albert Antwi-Boasiako of Ghana, right, signs a memorandum of understanding with Rwanda, committing the two nations to share knowledge and experience on cybersecurity and conduct joint training. CYBER SECURITY AUTHORITY OF GHANA

Dr. Antwi-Boasiako is a cybersecurity expert who has worked in the public and private sectors for more than a decade. In 2011, he founded eCrime Bureau, West Africa's first digital forensics firm. He served as a cybersecurity expert with the Interpol Global Cybercrime Expert Group and with the Council of Europe's Global Action on Cybercrime Extended Project. In 2017, he was named Ghana's National Cybersecurity Advisor and head of the National Cyber Security Centre. In this position, he helped craft Ghana's Cybersecurity Act, which was passed in 2020. In 2021, he was named director-general of Ghana's Cyber Security Authority, a post he held until 2025. He spoke to ADF from his office in Accra. His remarks have been edited for length and clarity.

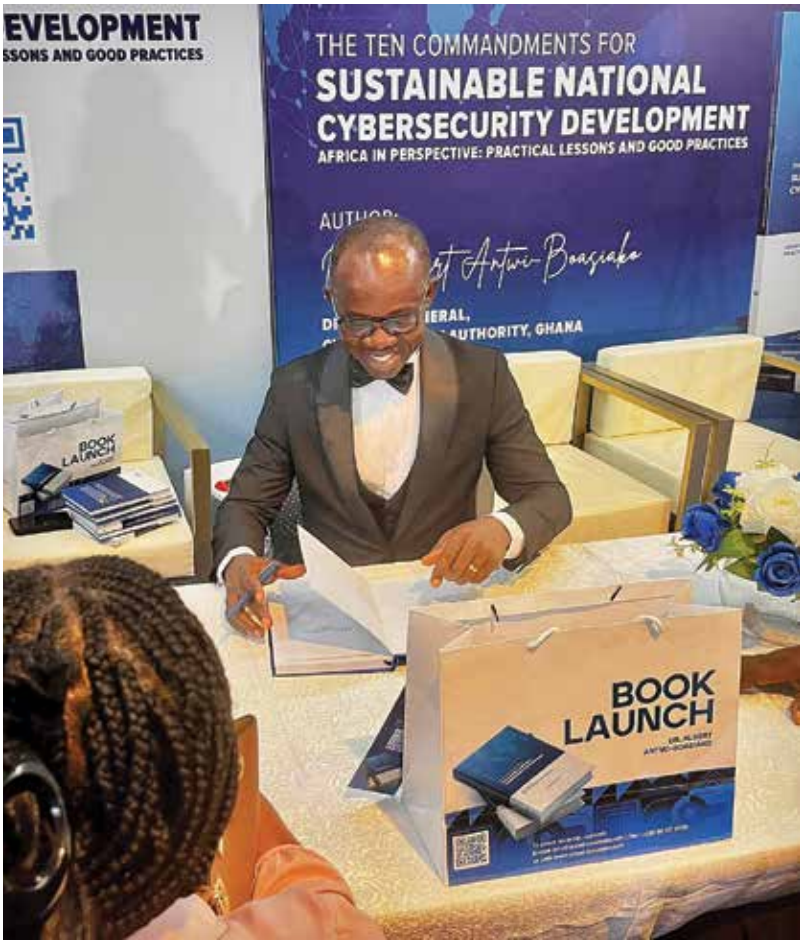
ADF: *Looking at the cyber landscape in West Africa today, how would you describe the threats from state actors and nonstate actors? How vulnerable are governmental institutions and critical infrastructure?*

Antwi-Boasiako: When I look back 10 years, the cyber threats that were facing the region were social-engineering attacks. These are the usual type of scams like romantic fraud and others. Those attacks were more outward in nature. They were emanating from the continent and targeting Europeans and Americans. That is when the 419 ["Nigerian prince"] scams and the Sakawa [spiritualism] scams were prevalent. But today the trend has changed.

During Antwi-Boasiako's time as head of Ghana's Cyber Security Authority, the country was rated the second-highest in Africa for cybersecurity. UNICEF

I'm happy you mentioned the risks faced by critical information infrastructure: government databases, critical systems. There is a great deal of digital transformation going on within the continent, and Ghana is one of the countries adopting a number of digital transformation initiatives: digital ID systems, paperless ports systems, criminal justice administrations using digital platforms.

Within the last few years, we've seen a surge in ransomware attacks. Our analysis shows that they are emanating from criminal actors, and the primary motivation is financial gain. Around 80% of attacks that we've seen are financially motivated. Money is the main driver for this. But I think we also worry about the role of state actors, either directly by states or by their proxies. Even though Ghana's geopolitical position has always been nonaligned, as was construed by the first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, increasingly we are anticipating threats



In 2024, Antwi-Boasiako published a book titled "Ten Commandments for Sustainable National Cybersecurity Development." ALBERT ANTWI-BOASIAKO/X

that will come from state actors. As a nation, we are in serious preparedness by way of awareness creation, by way of legislation, but also by way of our cyber defenses, to be able to stem the attacks.

***ADF:** In the early 2000s, Ghana had major challenges relating to cybercrime, most notably fraud, blackmail and identity theft. Can you describe how this affected the country and why you and others chose to make combating cybercrime a national priority?*

Antwi-Boasiako: The cybercrimes that were being perpetrated were directed outward, but it had an impact here. In that period, we discovered that if you lived in Ghana and you saw something on Amazon or eBay, you couldn't use your credit card to make a purchase. It had a serious effect on e-commerce adoption. Even as of now, there are limitations on IP addresses coming from regions that are associated with fraud. It is a serious issue, and it affects investment in the country.

I want to share a story. In 2012, 2013, something changed. At the time I was in the private sector, and the worst email business compromise attack occurred, and my firm, the eCrime Bureau, was contracted to investigate. The fraud led to more than 2 million euros that were for infrastructure projects in Ghana being diverted to third-party countries. Government and leaders within the country started realizing that the 419, the Sakawa, the Yahoo Yahoo fraud, the identity theft, those crimes are not just directed at Europeans or Americans, but it's something that is having an impact on us. And I think that is where some of our response started.

***ADF:** What was the response?*

Antwi-Boasiako: I remember that one of the first conversations we had was for Ghana to accede to the Budapest Convention [an international treaty designed to harmonize global response to cybercrime]. In the case I investigated, money had moved into two different countries, and IP addresses were located on four different continents. The question was, "How do you investigate cross-border crime of this nature?" You need international cooperation, and you need the tools available to be able to engage with different countries. Ghana moved quickly to ratify the Budapest Convention and started creating legislation to enhance the cyber resilience of the country and worked on the protection of children on the internet. It was the proliferation of these crimes and attacks that led to serious government action. I must say it started, to some extent, through what we call awareness creation. Once the attacks were directed inward, then policymakers and political actors began to understand that the issue of cybercrime was not just some young, poor boys who have the skills to defraud and make some money; it has serious consequences.

***ADF:** You have said that, in Africa, the approach to cybersecurity needs to be more systematic and less ad hoc. What do you mean by that?*

Antwi-Boasiako: I think the scale of the problem has necessitated a shift. We need to systematize the process. Certain imperatives need to be addressed: policy, strategy, establishing institutional framework, and that is why the Cyber Security Authority in Ghana was established. A few African countries are doing the same. Ghana leads the African Network of Cybersecurity Authorities, and currently we have about 20 countries that have dedicated agencies responsible for cybersecurity issues.

***ADF:** Ghana also has established a Computer Incident Response Team, or CIRT. Can you describe what this team does and how it helps defend the country against cyberattacks?*

Antwi-Boasiako: Despite the efforts we've put in place, one day an attack will happen. It's a matter of when, not if.

Therefore, having an efficient CIRT system is imperative. Ghana has adopted what we call a decentralized CIRT system in which we have a national CIRT and other sectoral CIRTs. The banking sector, financial techs, insurance, all the financial-related entities are grouped under a sectoral CIRT. The Bank of Ghana is our lead in that particular area. What it means is incidents are coordinated within the sector, then they work closely with the national CIRT.

We have another CIRT for government databases, another one with the telecommunications, another one for national security. That is how our setup is in terms of the CIRT ecosystem as a country. There are different models, depending on how the internal government structure works, but we had to adopt this because there are quite a number of strong regulatory bodies that we believe, if we work through them, we can better achieve compliance.

***ADF:** You have said only about 35% to 40% of Ghanaians have basic cyber awareness. Why is this dangerous and how can it be improved?*

Antwi-Boasiako: I think if you ask me now, I may even revise that number because [35% to 40%] may be ambitious. Awareness creation of cyber risks is the biggest issue. The gap between the citizens' use of digital devices and their awareness of cyber risks keeps on widening. Especially now when you have AI-enabled tricks being used. You've got videos and images being manipulated using AI systems, and the citizens are actually helpless. Even sometimes to a dedicated eye, it has become quite difficult to distinguish between what is authentic and what is not. There is this growing fear that as technology evolves, the awareness level of our citizens becomes quite low. That is having a huge impact.

One of the things we do every year is National Cyber Awareness Month, through which we engage the citizens as much as possible. We also use social media platforms to issue security alerts when we see a common trend, because the low-level crimes are also organized crime. You have scammers sometimes who put themselves in one apartment and their job is just to be scamming and making money. The funds are little, but the aggregate volume is quite huge. The cumulative effects as far as losses by citizens are significant.

We try to share information and create awareness and educate the public, but I must say there are still some gaps that we need to cover. We need to reach out to our citizens who may not be able to read English. In Ghana, financial inclusion has a high penetration. In remote villages, they are all using mobile money transactions. They are all potential targets. Even my old mom in the village is a potential target for fraudsters.

Lt. Gen. Thomas Oppong-Peprah speaks during Cyber Awareness Month at Burma Camp in Accra. Ghana has worked to raise cyber awareness throughout the ranks of the military and strengthen defenses against cyberattacks.

GHANA ARMED FORCES

ADF: *Each year, during National Cyber Security Awareness Month, the Ghana Armed Forces holds events for its personnel. What role do you think the military can and should play in supporting cybersecurity?*

Antwi-Boasiako: The military's role in terms of incident response is very much consistent with the mandate of a typical military. What is the military's role? To deal with the territorial integrity and national defense of the country. Certainly the military's role is to protect their internal systems because that is a potential target for an enemy. Cyber defense, in my view, is both defensive and offensive. That is one area that is a work in progress. I think the road map is, as you modernize your military and you introduce more network-centric systems to make your military efficient and technology compliant, then your internal defense also needs to be strengthened.

ADF: *Today, the continent has an estimated 20,000 trained cybersecurity professionals, which is about one-fifth of the total needed, according to the cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike. What needs to be done to expand training and employment opportunities for young cybersecurity professionals?*

Antwi-Boasiako: That's a big issue, the issue of skill sets. Government needs cybersecurity professionals to protect the country, the private sector needs them, criminal justice needs them. The education system

GHANA'S INTERNET PENETRATION RATE HAS RISEN FROM JUST OVER 50% IN 2020 TO 70% IN 2024.

People use computers at an internet cafe in Accra. GETTY IMAGES

needs lecturers to impart knowledge and skills to the new generation of professionals being produced at our universities. The needs are there. What Ghana has started is we introduced what we call the accreditation system, which is basically registering cybersecurity professionals at three levels and at a general category as well. On one hand, we have certain professionals who studied and worked abroad and have returned home. These guys are quite good; they have exposure, they have experience, but they're quite expensive. The strategy has been to get one or two or three of them and then you can get younger ones who are quite talented coming from our universities, and they can understudy.

The registration is helping us to identify those at the bottom so that you'll be able to possibly have a policy to have the senior ones, the most qualified ones, be able to support them by work training. That is one area that we have started to deal with: workforce development. I think broadly the plan is to have research to determine which skill sets we have and how many are needed. That is one area we are also looking at to ensure that we develop the necessary skill sets. We need to have the numbers and know how many we have in the system. Without that, it is very difficult to determine how many more you want to add.

A customer buys goods using a mobile phone in Accra. The country's adoption of electronic payment systems and mobile banking has required increased vigilance against cybercrime. REUTERS

__ADF:__ In 2024, Ghana was rated as a Tier 1 nation for cybersecurity on the Global Cybersecurity Index, the highest tier. It was the second-highest rated African nation, with a cumulative score of 99%. What are your goals for the future, and where would you like to see Ghana improve?

Antwi-Boasiako: I think you made it a personal question so I'll answer personally. I'm proud to see a developing country start this journey from nowhere. In 2017, when I was appointed, the [International Telecommunication Union's Global Cybersecurity Index] level was about 32%. And by 2024, the percentage jump was quite impressive [to 99%]. I must say the political commitment is the denominator. We've been lucky to have that political commitment to drive us. We've also been lucky to have a team of technical people and educated staff who have helped us achieve this milestone.

I think it's impressive to tell the story that you may be a developing country — and Ghana is not a rich country — but I think that shared determination and focus has really put us in a serious position. I'm proud to say that a few things that we have introduced here, other countries are now learning from that: license and accreditation. We have other Western countries talking to us to learn how we did that, protection of critical information infrastructure, protection of children on the internet. When I say I'm proud, it's because we are a net contributor to cybersecurity development by way of best practices. It was a proud achievement.

The next coming years I do expect the same political commitment to continue, I do expect the same spirit of focus and drive. Look, the country is digitalizing. We don't have options; we don't have excuses. We must develop our cyber competency and cybersecurity systems to be able to defend the investments we are making.

__ADF:__ You recently published a book titled "Ten Commandments for Sustainable National Cybersecurity Development." Why did you think it was important to write this book, and what do you hope readers take away from it?

Antwi-Boasiako: The book was written for the general audience. It's not technical; it's an easy read. That's the feedback I'm getting. A nation's cybersecurity development is a multidimensional undertaking. It is wrong if we just think of it as a technical undertaking. You need all the facets of society to be involved. You need civil society, you need criminal justice, you need national defense, you need the business community, industry, you need international partners. In communicating, you need to have a language that is common to all. The motivation was driven by my own experience. I've seen that African countries are making strides; there are some initiatives. But the problem was that they are not integrated; they were not programmed in a manner that can have a collective impact. Coordination was absent and, in some cases, there was duplication. We need a guiding principle, so that's why I used the phrase "Ten Commandments." These are 10 areas that anyone who picks up the book, no matter their position, they can play a role. And I use the word "commandment" because each of these are an imperative; they are a must do. ❑

SHADOW GOVERNMENTS

ADF ILLUSTRATION

Using Extortion Disguised as Taxes, Terrorist Groups Try to Hold Power in Areas They Control

ADF STAFF | PHOTOS BY REUTERS

Somalia, which has been engulfed in conflict since 2009, now has two systems struggling to exert control — the established federal, regional and local governments, and the extremist group al-Shabaab.

Although fragmented by years of military defeats and infighting among its leaders, the al-Qaida-aligned group remains a major presence in Somalia, where it continues to try to impose its strict system of fundamentalist law. The group generates a tremendous amount of revenue, estimated at $100 million annually, compared to the $300 million collected by the national government.

Al-Shabaab's revenues support a well-armed network of 5,000 to 10,000 fighters. The money lets the group fund regional supply channels while maintaining what researcher Wendy Williams calls a "phantom presence" of alternative government throughout the nation.

"Al-Shabaab extorts revenue from various aspects of everyday Somali life — from toll roads to property taxes — building on its cultivated reputation of omnipresence and intimidation," Williams wrote in a 2023 study for the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS). "Al-Shabaab has also compromised various government agencies including, for example, acquiring freight manifests from port employees enabling it to extort shipping companies upon arrival."

The group's "taxes" actually are nothing more than extortion.

"Its taxation produces some services for those who live under the group as well as some services available to those who use the group's courts or roads," Tricia Bacon wrote for the George Washington University Program on Extremism. "But the demands of the extortion system outstrip the services provided and mainly provide protection from the group. It threatens, kidnaps, and even kills those who do not pay its taxes. The group has become so effective at extortion that it runs an annual surplus, and some argue that it is more of a mafia than an ideological organization at this point."

The terrorist group has used its money to undermine many of the government's traditional services, including its courts system. Government officials say there are people who go to al-Shabaab "courts" to get justice because government court decisions aren't enforced.

"For those using them voluntarily, pull factors include a reputation for lowered levels of corruption, less discrimination based on clan and high enforcement capacity compared to the government judicial system," Omar Mahmood of the International Crisis Group told Voice of America. "The courts themselves are not always that sophisticated and the threat of brutal forces underpins them, but at the end of the day they have shown to be more effective in addressing the needs of some populations."

A Somali police explosive ordnance disposal officer prepares to detonate recovered mines and shells on the outskirts of Mogadishu.

The terrorist group exploits gaps in national governance by offering partnerships and bolstering local leaders of clan militias in Hirshabelle and Galmudug states.

ACROSS THE CONTINENT

Other terrorist groups in Africa increasingly exploit government service gaps to establish shadow governments, which offer alternative power structures that

People draw water from a well near a camp in Tinzaouaten, northern Mali. Terrorism has displaced more than 330,000 people in the country.

sometimes provide social services, enforce laws and collect taxes. In addition to Somalia, parts of Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Nigeria have come under the control of terrorists and renegade groups.

In Mali, the al-Qaida affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) has become a controlling force and is spreading its influence across other parts of the Sahel. In addition to imposing a harsh interpretation of Shariah, it is acting as a security force and a protection racket.

The terrorist group is responsible for thousands of deaths in recent years. Along with its direct violence, JNIM controls access to basic services, capital and transport, "allowing it to exert pressure on the fundamental aspects of everyday life that can lead to the slow demise of livelihood felt by all civilians there," according to researcher Tammy Palacios, writing for New Lines Institute in 2024. "This explains JNIM's success in expanding its control." She noted that the group has disrupted civilian movement and access to food, water, cellular communications, electricity and other services.

"JNIM conducts checkpoints on roads within areas of its control," Palacios wrote. "JNIM fighters stop passenger vehicles, commercial trucks, pickups transporting goods and livestock, and transport buses. 'Taxes' on such goods are common, as is outright looting. JNIM sells livestock it has stolen elsewhere. It has its tentacles in almost every aspect of society in areas it controls."

In Nigeria and other parts of the Sahel, Boko Haram and al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have established forms of shadow governance while taking different approaches with various levels of success. At its peak in 2014 and 2015, Boko Haram controlled a large portion of northeastern Nigeria, declaring it a caliphate. During that time, it imposed its strict interpretation of Shariah, collected taxes and provided some basic services in some remote areas in exchange for support.

Researchers say Boko Haram's governance has been more brutal than that of other terrorist groups, relying heavily on fear and violence. In a 2025 report, Modern Diplomacy said Boko Haram's ideology is that "terrorism is often justified using religious rhetoric, although the

Women wait to receive food during Ramadan at the Mugunga camp for internally displaced people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The rebel group M23 is responsible for their displacement.

group misinterprets key Islamic texts."

"Factors such as low education, poverty, political influence, and misguided beliefs drive their violent actions," the report said. "Boko Haram's attacks on mosques and churches, where many have been killed while praying, show that their motivations extend beyond religion to self-interest."

Boko Haram's shadow government consists almost entirely of suppression, with little in the way of social services offered. The group has destroyed hundreds of health clinics during its reign of terror and will forever be associated with the 2014 kidnapping of 276 girls and young women from Nigeria's Chibok area.

AQIM has kept a low profile in recent years, refraining from conducting terrorist attacks, according to Critical Threats. The Council on Foreign Relations says that AQIM's ideology "blends global Salafi-jihadist dogma with regionally resonant elements, including references to the early Islamic conquest of the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula." Analysts said it has focused on building alliances with local communities and exploiting criminal networks. Its tactics have included providing protection along illicit trade routes, working with smuggling networks and offering financial incentives to communities.

Children sit at the Muja displaced persons camp near Goma, North Kivu province, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In the DRC, the rebel group M23 has established local administrations, collected taxes from businesses and individuals, and provided some basic services. In a 2024 report, researchers concluded that M23 was looking for long-term local political power in the eastern DRC using historical land disputes, political marginalization, and illicit taxation to expand and solidify its authority.

"M23's disruptive strategy aims to replace Congolese authorities and overhaul local governance in areas

Al-Shabaab's SPY NETWORK

ADF STAFF

Within the al-Shabaab terrorist group, a secret service known as Amniyat is particularly feared as a disciplinary force and spy agency.

Al-Shabaab includes three independent security bodies: the Hesbat, the Jabhat and the Amniyat. The Hesbat, with the help of its religious police, implements a harsh version of Sharia in territories under al-Shabaab control. The Jabhat specializes in communication, explosives, logistics, medicine and the media. It is responsible for operations involving military units, researchers say. The Amniyat is the de facto intelligence unit, a network of spies.

Hussein Sheikh-Ali, a former security advisor to the Somali president, said, "The Amniyat is the veins of the organization. It is all-powerful. If the Amniyat was destroyed, there would be no al-Shabaab."

The secret agents are everywhere. Researchers say the Amniyat recruits local and government officials as informers who provide intelligence for attacks in Mogadishu and other parts of the country.

"It is the most dreaded, integral, and organized branch of al-Shabaab," wrote researchers Gábor Sinkó and János Besenyő in a 2023 study for Connections: The Quarterly Journal. "It seems Amniyat uses intel and counter-intelligence to provide critical analysis of their opponents' vulnerabilities. The secret service recruits its members from the rank of the group's fighters; however, the most important recruitment pool is the locals, who are approached based on recommendations from reliable and paid informants. While an increasing number of women find safe shelters, relay messages, and provide food, most of their operatives are educated young men."

The intelligence wing has about 500 to 1,000 members, researchers say. In addition to intelligence, it operates clandestine activities and plans attacks.

"Like many terrorist organisations, Al-Shabaab commits high resources to the group's survival," wrote researcher Bobby Payne in a 2024 report for the London-based intelligence company Grey Dynamics. "This is where the Amniyat's operations are vital. It tasked Amniyat operatives with drilling fear into Al-Shabaab's members by any means necessary. They are an omniscient organisation that is to limit dissent within the group and prevents penetrations by state intelligence organisations, especially Somalia's [National Intelligence and Security Agency]."

Its methods, Payne wrote, include imprisonment, assassination, and execution of potential moles and those who they believe are not fully loyal to the group's cause.

The Amniyat also handles al-Shabaab finances, Payne reported.

"They gain most of the finance through the taxation of local businesses," he wrote. "Especially vehicles that transport goods through Al-Shabaab-controlled territory. The people of the largely Al-Shabaab-controlled south of Somalia, pay three taxes: Al-Shabaab's tax, Islamic State tax and the regular Government tax. As a result, Al-Shabaab brings in $15 million per month in illegal taxes."

it controls in eastern DR Congo," researchers Ken Matthysen and Peer Schouten wrote in The Conversation Africa magazine. "Many Congolese we spoke to perceive M23's main aim to be control of power at the local level — undermining the existing authorities."

A key aspect of M23's shadow governance is its control and exploitation of the country's abundant natural resources, such as iron ore, gem-quality diamonds, gold and coal. M23 uses the resources to generate revenue, create economic incentives for local support and establish international connections through illegal trade networks.

REGIONAL THREAT

Shadow governance by terrorist and rebel groups in Africa threatens not just individual countries but also entire regions. Such governance imperils the legitimacy of the state and can give an opening to coup leaders who promise to reassert control.

The governance provided by terror groups generally means extortion without actual benefits other than some protection — a racket often called a mafia. It is characterized by violence, strict ideological control and exploitation of local resources. The long-term sustainability of these shadow governance structures is doubtful, as

Internally displaced people walk to Virunga National Park to cut trees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

they face challenges from state forces and competing nonstate actors.

Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond military solutions. Strengthening state institutions, addressing underlying grievances and providing viable economic alternatives are crucial steps in undermining the appeal and effectiveness of shadow governance by irregular forces. In Somalia, researcher Williams says, the government must stop al-Shabaab's revenue flows by prioritizing the professionalism of agencies responsible for financial, intelligence and judicial functions. The case of Mali's reconciliation efforts with Tuareg rebels offers a potential model for addressing these challenges through political means rather than solely relying on military force.

As Africa continues to grapple with governance challenges and violent extremism, understanding and addressing shadow governance by nonstate actors will be crucial for promoting stability and development. As countries struggle to coordinate military responses to prevent extremist insurgencies, they must act quickly to tackle the structural fault lines and vulnerabilities that let violent extremist groups establish themselves, including the difficult issues of land rights and allocation of natural resources.

"Whether in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, or Togo,

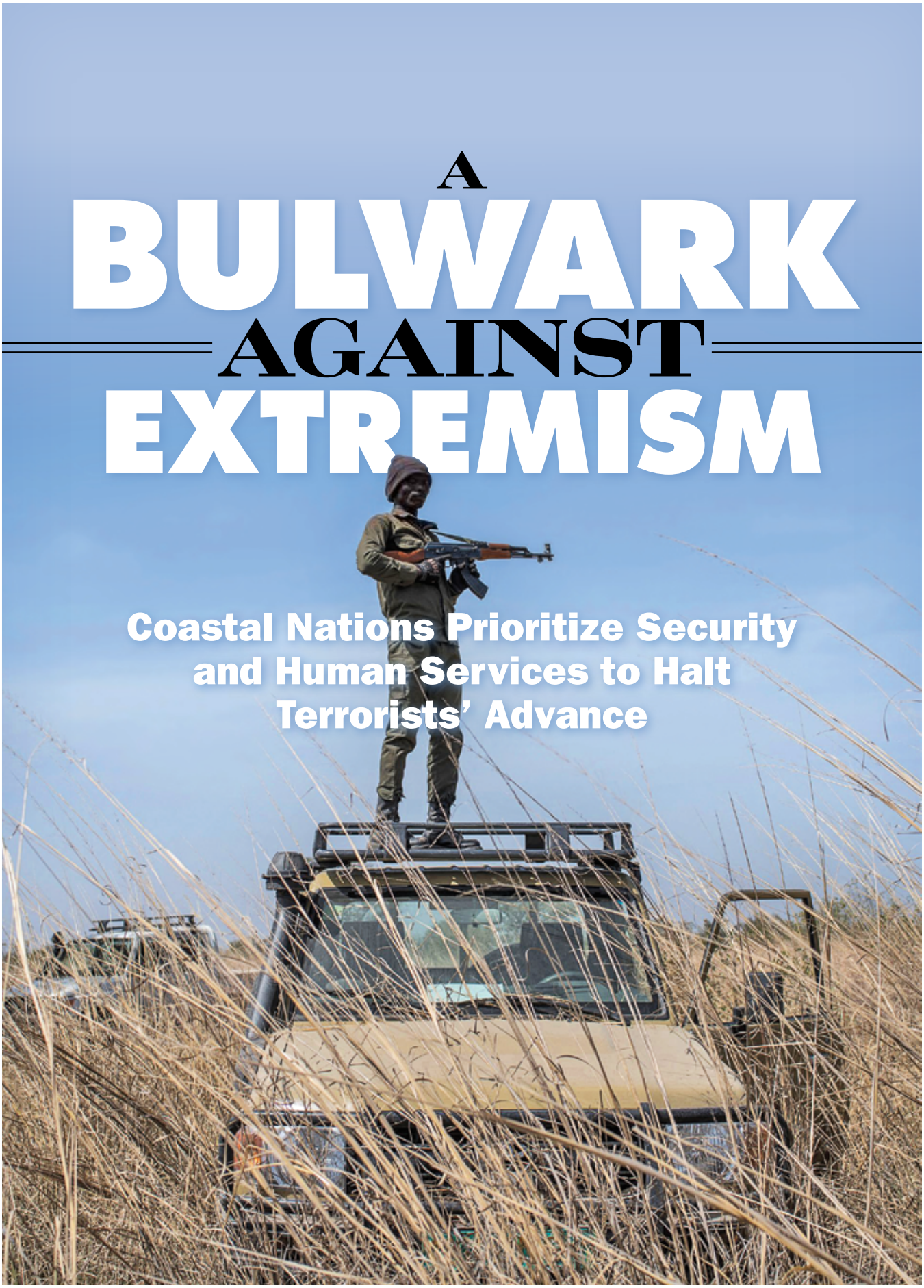
Congolese Soldiers keep guard during a visit by Ministry of Defence officials in February 2025.

relations within and between rural communities are fragile, as are citizens' relations with local authorities, security forces, and self-defense groups," wrote Anouar Boukhars of the ACSS in 2023. "It is therefore critical that states redouble their efforts to manage community-level disputes, bolster local conflict resolution mechanisms, and supervise local self-defense groups."

By showing that they can reliably provide services, security and justice, African nations can make it harder for terrorist and rebel groups to subvert legitimate governments. ❑

A BULWARK AGAINST EXTREMISM

Coastal Nations Prioritize Security and Human Services to Halt Terrorists' Advance



ADF STAFF

Terror came to Benin in 2019. Sahel-based extremists emerged from Pendjari National Park and kidnapped two French tourists and their guide. Since then, a flood of incursions has bedeviled the country, increasing with each passing year.

Benin deployed 3,000 troops to the north under Operation Mirador to prevent militant attacks on civilians, security forces and park rangers in the W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) Complex, which includes territory in Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger. Sahel-based militants have ramped up attacks on Benin and Togo and crept closer to Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal.

"The annual number of violent events linked to militant Islamist groups in and within 50 km of the borders of the Sahel's coastal West African neighbors has increased by more than 250 percent over the past 2 years, surpassing 450 incidents," according to researchers Daniel Eizenga and Amandine Gnanguênon in a July 2024 report for the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS).

That deadly trend continued on January 8, 2025, when militants attacked Operation Mirador forces, killing 28 Soldiers in the nation's Alibori Department, which borders Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria.

"We've been dealt a very hard blow," Beninese Col. Faizou Gomina, the national guard's chief of staff, told the BBC. Gomina said the attacked position was "one of the strongest and most militarized" and called on commanders to bolster operations to prevent more attacks. The al-Qaida-linked extremist association known as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) claimed responsibility. A military source told Agence France-Presse that Soldiers killed 40 militants in response.

"Wake up, officers and section chiefs, we have battles to win," Gomina said.

A GROWING THREAT

Terrorist leaders met in Central Mali in February 2020 to discuss expanding toward the Gulf of Guinea, primarily through Benin and Côte d'Ivoire, and attacking military bases there.

A ranger stands guard at Pendjari National Park in Benin. The park complex has since become a haven for violent extremists spreading to Benin from Sahel nations.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Côte d'Ivoire's International Academy for the Fight Against Terrorism in Jacqueville trains counterterror forces from the region.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Ivoirian special forces take part in Exercise Flintlock in March 2023.
AFP/GETTY IMAGES

French security officials said the meeting included leaders from al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Ansar al-Dine, JNIM and the Macina Liberation Front.

Since that meeting, the Sahel's security has deteriorated significantly. A series of Sahel state coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger; the dismissal of Western security forces; and the overreliance on brutal Russian mercenary tactics all have led to worsened security. Attacks and deaths have steadily increased. Coastal nations have seen their border security fray, despite efforts to bolster it.

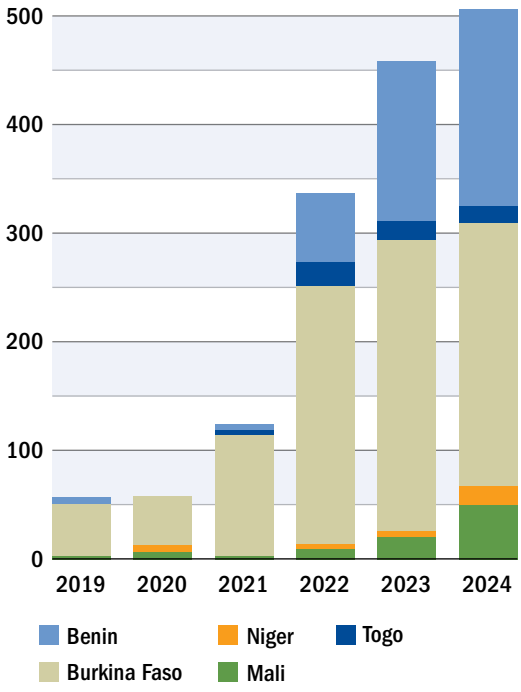
"The rapid westward and southward expansion of militant Islamist violence in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger in recent years has dramatically increased the number of violent events pushing up to and spilling over the borders of coastal West African countries from Mauritania to Nigeria," Eizenga and Gnanguênon wrote for ACSS. "While most attention has been focused on Benin and Togo, there have been two dozen violent extremist incidents in Mali within 50 km of the borders of Mauritania, Senegal, and Guinea — in regions where, until recently, there was little to no activity."

AREAS OF CONCERN

One of two hot spots is where Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali meet. Burkina Faso and Mali depend on Abidjan's port for a significant percentage of national imports. Burkina Faso sends more than half of its exports through Abidjan, according to the ACSS.

The route also is laced with artisanal gold mines. The mines, trade routes and trafficking networks present attractive targets for extremists.

Militant Islamist Violent Events In and Within 50 km of Coastal Countries



Data source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data project

Note: Côte d'Ivoire has had 18 total violent events, and Mauritania has had four since 2019.

The 26,361-square-kilometer transnational WAP Complex presents a second source of peril to coastal nations, primarily Benin and Togo. JNIM-affiliated militants have infested the complex since 2018, according to the ACSS. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara has infiltrated the park from the Nigerien side.

ADF ILLUSTRATION ADAPTED FROM A MAP BY GREGOR ROM

Extremists have aligned with regional smugglers who move cigarettes, counterfeit medicines and goods, fuel, gold, and guns through the parks, the ACSS reports.

Several major economic corridors pass through the WAP Complex, including Ouagadougou-Lomé, Niamey-Lomé, Niamey-Cotonou, Ouagadougou-Accra and Niamey-Ouagadougou. About two-thirds of Burkina Faso's imports enter Benin through these corridors. The Niamey-Cotonou corridor handles more than half of Niger's trade, according to the ACSS. Militants threaten all of these routes.

NATIONAL EFFORTS

Amid these threats, coastal nations have taken actions to protect their sovereignty and keep vulnerable citizens from succumbing to extremism's siren call.

Villagers in Kwatcha fish in the Niger River near Gaya at Niger's border with Benin.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

An Ivoirian Soldier provides security in Tougbo, where the government launched an aid plan for young people.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Here are some of those efforts:

Benin has faced some of the most persistent threats, as underscored by the January 2025 attack. The creation of the Beninese Agency for Integrated Management of Border Areas has combined security and development in vulnerable areas.

Beninese authorities also reached an agreement with Niger in mid-2022 to fight extremism along their common border. However, a year later, a junta overthrew Niger's democratically elected government and ended the agreement. Talks on a unified security and management plan for the WAP Complex also halted.

Between 2021 and 2023, Benin invested $130 million in its security forces, including an intelligence outpost in Pendjari National Park and eight military bases strategically placed across the parks, according to New Lines Magazine.

One such base in Kourou-Koalou sits where Benin, Burkina Faso and Togo meet and is equipped with heavy artillery and tanks, New Lines reported. Mirador's 3,000-Soldier contingent is supported by an additional 4,000 who rotate through seasonally, the ACSS reported. Another 1,000 local forces help supply intelligence. All work with South Africa-based African Parks, a conservation group that manages Benin's side of Pendjari Park and reserves.

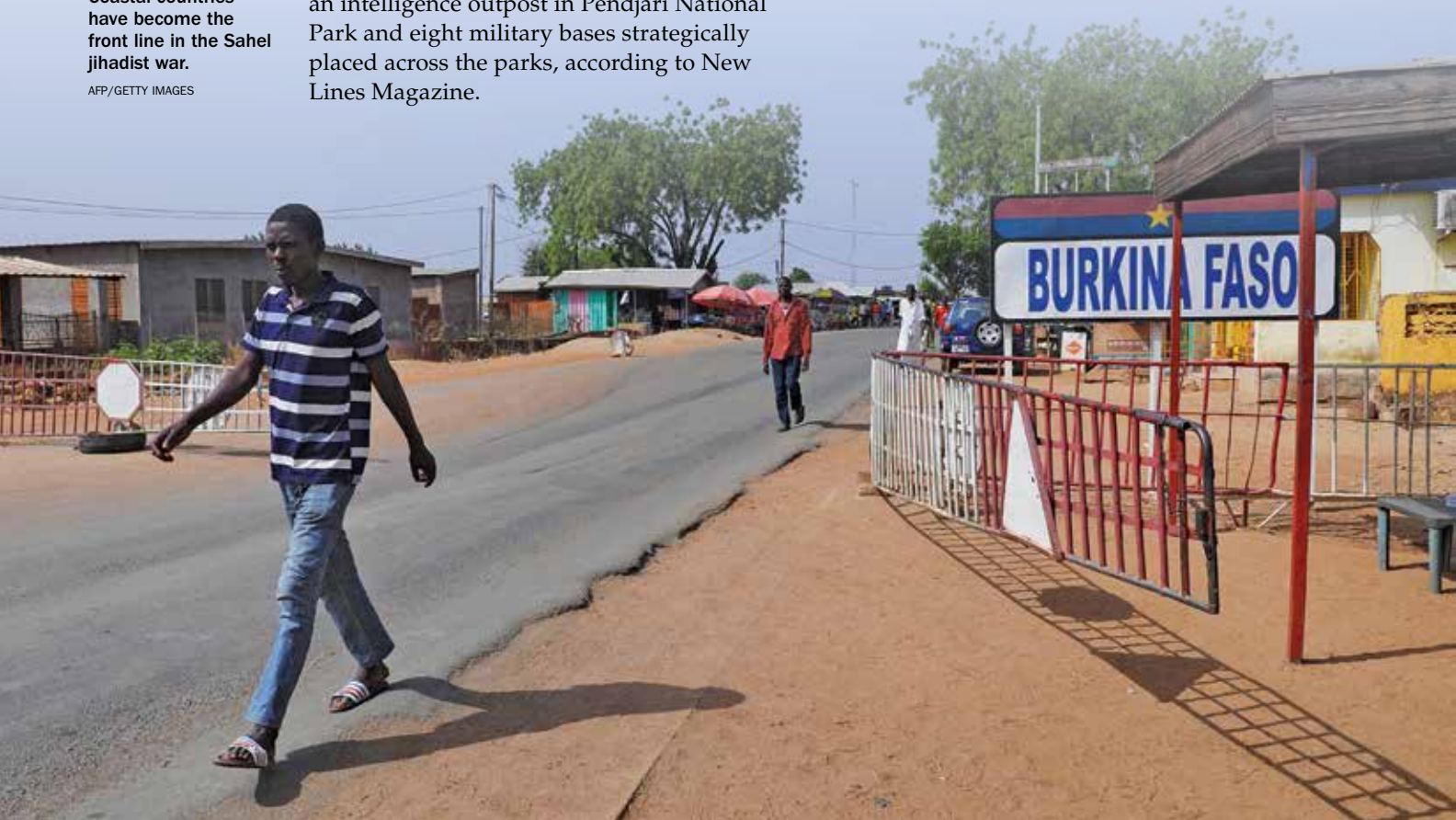
Côte d'Ivoire has responded to the threat of cross-border attacks by fortifying its regional security presence and investing in socioeconomic programs. In 2022, the government launched the Program to Combat Fragility in the Border Areas of the North. It blends a heightened military presence with infrastructure investments and social programs aimed at young people.

The goal is to give young people in six northern regions tools to resist extremist appeals. For example, the program paid Samuel Yeo, a pig farmer in Ouaragnéné, 1 million CFA francs, which helped him more than triple his number of animals to 70. At one point, he was selling 10 heads for 150,000 to 200,000 CFA francs each month and growing two small eateries where he sold cooked pork.

Less than a year after its inception, the program had supported 23,892 people, according to a government report. The effort helped more than 30,000 beneficiaries in 2023. The program focuses on labor-intensive work,

A man walks from Burkina Faso into northern Ghana. Coastal countries have become the front line in the Sahel jihadist war.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES



training, income generation, micro and small enterprises, subsidies to informal sector workers, volunteerism, and village savings and credit associations.

Côte d'Ivoire's program is considered a success, and cooperative military operations between Ivoirian and Burkinabe forces in 2020 and 2021 provided "enhanced security, communication, and coordination across the border," Eizenga and Gnanguênon wrote. But cooperation withered after Burkina Faso's coups.

Togo initiated the Emergency Program for the Savanes Region to build resilience in its north. Between 2021 and 2023, authorities built a 25-megawatt solar power plant in Dapaong that brought electricity to 15,000 additional households, a regional increase from 29% to 42%, the Togo First website reported in January 2025. About 80,000 people gained drinking water access, an increase from 64% to 73.5%.

More than 1,000 hectares were developed, and an influx of modern equipment has made local farmers more productive and competitive.

An 18-month program to strengthen resilience against violent extremism in the Savanes region began in January 2024 with 5 million euros in European Union funding. The first of two projects will cover seven prefectures and help 10 local organizations start microprojects to boost employment, Togo First reported.

The second project targets two Central region prefectures. It will distribute health and school equipment to 10,000 people, financially support 4,000 women, and strengthen conflict prevention skills for 2,000 people, including local authorities. It will supply grants to 100 young entrepreneurs.

BETTER TOGETHER

Although individual nations have worked to combat the extremist threat, Eizenga and Gnanguênon say enhanced regional coordination is necessary. They list several recommendations to help coastal nations:

Have security forces build rapport with civilians: Soldiers, police officers and customs personnel can't merely be present in border regions. They must earn the trust of local people and respect their property. Security personnel will have to train in how to mitigate harm and work with communities. Heavy-handed tactics can destroy hard-won trust. Ghana's Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre and Côte d'Ivoire's International Academy for the Fight Against Terrorism can help.

Ramp up development in vulnerable areas: This is occurring already, and its success validates that efforts must go beyond military approaches. Countries successful in these efforts could help set up regional "development exchanges."

Form a regional strategy on WAP Park Complex risks: Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and Togo should coordinate governing policies for borderlands and protected spaces. Countries must weigh security operations against efforts to preserve and protect communities' livelihoods.

Myriam Dossou-d'Almeida, vice president of Togo's National Assembly, presents tool kits, sewing machines and other items to 160 young artisans as part of the Emergency Program for the Savanes Region in 2023.
MYRIAM DOSSOU-D'ALMEIDA

Streamline intelligence sharing: Nations should maintain open channels so security forces can swap information as extremists move. Assessments could be combined with information in the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) Early Warning Network.

Adopt a multitiered stabilization strategy: The first layer could include boosting community resilience against extremist influences. Second, governments should support socioeconomic interests in vulnerable regions. Coordination and support from the Accra Initiative, a West African cooperative effort to blunt the spread of Sahelian terrorism, and help from ECOWAS in policy and financial matters round out the recommendations.

The rise of Sahel juntas has encouraged coastal nations to strengthen cooperation to meet the extremist challenge, Eizenga and Gnanguênon wrote. "Enhancing the cohesion, coordination, and scale of these coastal West African efforts to mitigate the threats may avoid a much larger and more costly regional impact." ❑

As Floodwaters Rise, MILITARIES STEP UP

ADF STAFF | PHOTO BY AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A Multinational Joint Task Force boat carries people to safety after floods devastated Maiduguri, Nigeria, in September 2024. Nigeria was not the only country where the military responded to destructive floods in 2024. The Kenya Defence Forces deployed in April to rescue those affected by heavy rains. About 300 Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Soldiers helped search for and evacuate people in the Bulambuli district after a landslide killed at least 28 people in November. Record amounts of rain fell in 27 African countries during the year, killing 2,500 people, displacing 4 million, inundating cropland and killing hundreds of thousands of livestock, according to an Africa Center for Strategic Studies report. Ten million children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger and Nigeria could not attend schools that flooded or were used for temporary housing. Flooding can lead to profound security concerns as critical infrastructure is damaged or destroyed, water- and vector-borne diseases such as cholera and malaria increase, and displaced people disrupt other communities. The flooding underscores the need for disaster response capabilities in African militaries.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES LOOK TO THE FUTURE

COMMANDER SETH ANTHONY DZAKPASU, GHANA ARMED FORCES | PHOTOS BY REUTERS

After 20 Years of Flintlock, Special Forces in Africa Should Standardize Doctrine to Meet Shared Threats

As the threat of violent extremism was growing in the Sahel and West Africa in 2005, U.S. Africa Command sponsored a new exercise. It was designed to tackle the threat head-on by bringing together special operations forces (SOF) from across the region and pairing them with allies from Europe and North America.

From its first iteration, which included seven African nations and more than 700 Soldiers, Flintlock has focused on special operations task units and operator level training for SOF. These operators are some of the best of the best in their respective countries. They are typically the first sent in to conduct delicate missions such as hostage rescue or to neutralize high-value terror targets.

SOF units in Africa have much in common, but before Flintlock they rarely trained together. Barriers of language, doctrine, equipment and national policies led to SOF silos in which operators didn't coordinate their efforts and leaders seldom shared intelligence or best practices. Extremist groups often capitalized on these divisions, seeking out weak, ungoverned areas to establish bases, recruit and operate with impunity across borders.

The aim of Flintlock was simple: help participating nations counter violent extremist organizations, collaborate across borders, and provide security for their people, while respecting human rights and building trust with civilian populations.

Left: Special operations forces conduct a simulated raid on a militant camp during Exercise Flintlock.

Right: Ghanaian military personnel train during Flintlock, an annual counterterrorism training exercise.

Ghanaian military personnel complete drills during Exercise Flintlock in Sogakope, Ghana.

On its 20th anniversary, it's worth assessing the record to see where Flintlock can go from here.

Growth and Opportunity to Fill Gaps

Flintlock, in its present form, is the largest deployment of SOF partners in Africa, and arguably, the world. Annually, more than 1,300 personnel representing 30 African and international partners deploy to enhance cooperation and interoperability, and forge enduring partnerships that pay dividends in lives saved. In its 20 years, it has grown in scale and scope while identifying several critical gaps in training, disparities in SOF capability, and opportunities to improve cooperation and interoperability between African and international partners.

The most glaring, time-sensitive challenge relating to SOF also might be the most impactful opportunity. This is the development of standardized concepts and doctrine. To be effective and universally accepted, this doctrine must be developed by, with and through African SOF. As the principal medium of collaboration in counterterrorism in West and North Africa, Flintlock is best positioned to support the development of an African SOF doctrine.

As a participant and planner for the exercise, I would like to lend my voice to those calling for development of a doctrine and concept of SOF in Africa. The time is right. As terror groups seek to expand and regional alliances in the Sahel splinter or are under threat, I believe SOF cooperation today is more important than ever.

Smaller Can Be Better in SOF

In Flintlock, the concept and doctrine of SOF centers on the seminal work of retired U.S. Navy Adm. William McRaven, who propounded the "relative superiority" theory. In his book "Spec Ops," he drew lessons from conflicts dating to World War II to outline foundational SOF ideas. In conventional warfare, a force defending a position is inherently stronger than one on the offensive. This leads to the conventional need to have an attacking force that is triple the size of the defensive force. But in SOF, this conventional wisdom is flipped on its head. Small SOF units can have unconventional and extraordinary capabilities. By examining operations ranging from a British commando raid in St. Nazaire, France, in 1942 to the Israeli rescue of hostages at the Entebbe, Uganda, airport in 1976, McRaven demonstrates the power of these small, elite units. McRaven writes that SOF gain the upper hand when they have a "simple plan, carefully concealed, realistically rehearsed and executed with surprise, speed and purpose." This concept indicates that SOF should

have smaller executing elements or task units when compared to conventional units.

Variations in SOF Concepts and Doctrine in Africa

African militaries often include indigenous structures that predate the modern era and colonial structural legacies. Elite military units in West and North Africa come in the form of commando, ranger, diver and paramilitary organizations. However, these types of military organizations are inherently different from doctrinal SOF units conducting SOF missions. In one country, an elite unit might be conducting counterinsurgency operations or combating banditry. In another, it might be tasked with protecting critical national infrastructure or natural resources.

Often during Flintlock there is evidence of some African nations crisscrossing conventional and elite concepts with that of SOF. African nations present dissimilar sizes of task units. Some are as large as conventional units, which makes it difficult to achieve the needed speed, security and surprise vital to SOF missions. There are challenges with interoperability and tactics when nations with small SOF units work with nations with conventional-sized units. Some nations at Flintlock might use larger units due to unique challenges with operation in their national context and terrain. A review of the operational context of African SOF, grounded in an understanding of established concepts and doctrine to harmonize sizes of task units, could overcome these challenges.

Harnessing SOF Power

SOF can be employed as an instrument of national power, sometimes termed SOF power. SOF power typifies the capability of a small military force punching above its weight in politically and militarily sensitive environments, but at a low cost to the state. We have seen this on display in places such as Mali, where Chadian SOF took back terrain from extremists, and in Nigeria, where SOF units have rescued hostages held by Boko Haram. Even in the Gulf of Guinea, small commando units have liberated seafarers from the clutches of pirates and helped secure the waters for commerce.

The level of development and context of African nations affect the employment of SOF power in national strategy. The economic power of a state affects the military assets and equipment available to SOF. The technological advancement and growth of military industries influence the development of niche equipment and weapons and their maintenance. The concepts and doctrine on SOF and SOF employment must reflect that

African nations don't have the same level of resources as many Western countries. SOF in Africa will not have the same focus on technology and support assets. However, although gaps might exist in technological capabilities, the experience of African operators and their ability to navigate uniquely difficult climate, terrain and threat matrices give them an advantage over forces that rely heavily on technology. As is often stated by experienced SOF operators: "Humans are more important than hardware." An African SOF doctrine should reflect this reality.

Broadening Objectives

Flintlock has provided tremendous benefits in creating awareness of the importance of SOF in counterterrorism operations and in the wider context of crisis response. The effects reach political, economic and social aspects of nations through engagements with senior leaders, interagency integration, local civic-military action programs, humanitarian assistance, developmental projects, public messaging and information operations. Each Flintlock iteration includes events such as medical assistance programs or veterinary programs that reach thousands of people. This has developed over the years, as has the recognition that there is no such thing as a military-only solution to violent extremism. The problem must be addressed holistically by responding to the root causes of the scourge and by winning the hearts and minds of those closest to the violence.

The exercise has broadened its objectives by not simply defeating terrorist and violent extremist

Chadian Soldiers prepare for a training session during Exercise Flintlock.

organization networks, but by helping SOF gain the trust of local people through demonstrated adherence to the rule of law and applicable legal frameworks that support civil authorities. When communities see SOF personnel up close, they tend to be reassured that they are professionals who can be trusted. Many countries have complicated legacies to overcome, and the goal is for civilians to understand that, in the event of an emergency, they can run toward their armed forces instead of away from them.

Mapping a Strategy

The approach to developing concepts and doctrine for SOF in Africa needs to be inclusive and comprehensive. This is not an easy undertaking. Developing a common language of concept and doctrine for SOF in Africa will be challenging, but the challenges pale in comparison to the real-world challenges that North and West Africa face from violent extremism. In 2024, there were 10,400 deaths connected to militant Islamic violence in the Sahel, making it the most terror-affected region in the world. There is no time to waste in addressing this threat.

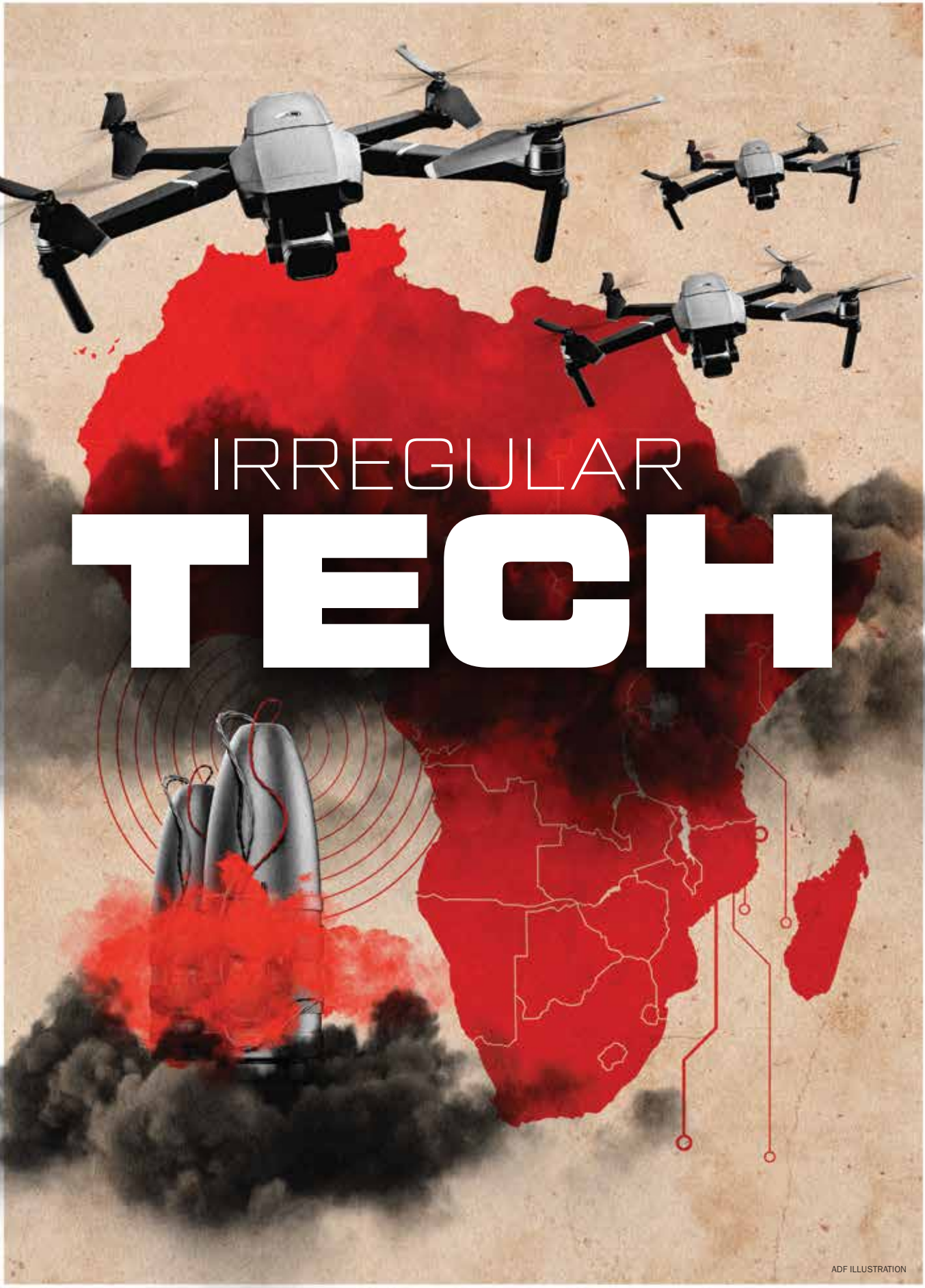
Developing a joint framework for SOF in Africa is vital to address current threats as decades of experience have shown us that malign actors do not respect or adhere to geographic boundaries. As U.S. Special Operations Command Africa commander Rear Adm. Ronald Foy stated: "No one country can address and solve these challenges alone." This expression not only lends credence to the importance of common concepts and doctrine for SOF in Africa but also shows that we must address the threats of today and be prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.

Flintlock has undergone huge changes in objectives and delivery over the past 20 years. What initially was designed as a joint-combined exchange model of hierarchical, multilateral training, with international forces serving as mentors and African SOF as trainees, continues to morph into a more mutually beneficial and collaborative culminating training event. It is vital that all parties continue to understand the structure of the receiving SOF units by gathering information of internal workings. More discussions with leadership in African SOF are needed to make advances toward fighting a common threat. A useful methodology would be a systems approach, which would require extensive engagements with SOF and other subregional agencies and Western partners. When done correctly, a systems approach embeds training as part of the overall system rather than an annual standalone activity.

The Way Forward

Overarching concepts and doctrine for SOF in Africa, developed by African SOF, offer great opportunities for a more robust and enduring counterterrorism effort. Although the auspices of Flintlock provide an opportunity to use NATO SOF doctrine to truly build interoperability, the concepts used and doctrine employed must be developed and codified by, with and through African SOF. This approach of developing African-centric concepts and doctrine for SOF might seem laborious and tedious, but it offers an effective way to face the complex threats in the region. These threats are a holistic problem set that will require a holistic solution. The first step in addressing this problem might just be the development, formulation and employment of concepts and doctrine, led by SOF in Africa, and indoctrinated by SOF in Africa. This is the challenge facing the SOF community and Flintlock, building on 20 years of success, to offer the tools, working relationships and infrastructure required. ❑

About the author: Commander Dzakpasu is the commanding officer of Ghana's Special Boat Squadron. His previous roles include serving as commanding operations officer at Riverine Command, commanding officer at Ghana Navy Headquarters Burma Camp, and commanding officer of the Ghana Navy Ships Blika and Garinga. He holds master's degrees in maritime affairs from the World Maritime University in Sweden and in defense and international politics from the Ghana Armed Forces Command and Staff College.



ADF ILLUSTRATION

NATIONS LOAD UP ON TECHNOLOGY TO DEFEAT INSURGENTS, BUT ADVERSARIES ADAPT QUICKLY

ADF STAFF

The Islamic State group's attack on Puntland Defense Forces early in 2025 represented a key change in tactics and technology from those used previously. Where earlier attacks had been carried out with improvised explosive devices, the twin January assaults employed aerial drones.

It was Islamic State (IS) in Somalia's first successful use of drones against the government forces trying to drive the group out of the Cal Miskat mountains. The drone attacks on January 20 and 23 targeted the Puntland Dervish Force and Puntland Maritime Police Force at their base in Buuraha Cali Miskat. At least two Soldiers died, and others were injured.

The attack on Puntland forces happened about a week after the government killed 26 terrorists and shot down nine drones during Operation Lightning. Some of the drones were used for surveillance. Others carried explosives.

Pictures posted on social media by the Somali Ministry of Defense show that the downed IS drones were varieties of the inexpensive, commercially available quadcopters that have allowed terrorist groups across the continent to have air power.

From the mountains of northern Somalia to the arid plains of Mali to the forests of northern Mozambique, terrorist groups such as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), and al-Shabaab in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province have added drones to their arsenals.

At first, terrorists used drones primarily for surveillance and intelligence gathering. Some groups used them to film battles, with resulting footage added to online propaganda videos. More recently, terrorists have taken to arming drones with simple explosives and using them against government forces.

Combined with social media, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and other irregular warfare techniques, drones have become a crucial force multiplier for terrorists against better armed and equipped government forces.

For African countries confronting terrorist groups, experts say that terrorists' rapid and widespread adoption of drones offers a valuable lesson in irregular warfare. Technology may create a short-term advantage for the military, but insurgents catch up by adopting their own irregular tactics.

"We tend to believe that the new toy is going to solve all the problems," irregular warfare expert and national security analyst Salvador Artiaga told ADF. "What we're seeing in different places is that it's not always the one with the biggest weapons or with the latest technology that are the ones that are winning."

ADVERSARIES ADAPT

Using drones and other technology may give militaries a brief advantage, but insurgents will adapt quickly.

"It's not always about who's getting ahead," Artiaga said. "It's always about who adapts better."

Sahelian insurgents told French newspaper Le Monde that drone attacks caught them by surprise at first, but they quickly learned to identify their buzzing sound, hide from them and avoid forming groups. The Sahel's insurgents are stocking up on their own drones and modifying them for irregular warfare.

Extremists in the Sahel have countered their governments' use of expensive drone technology by turning to inexpensive, off-the-shelf quadcopters that can be adapted as weapons. GETTY IMAGES

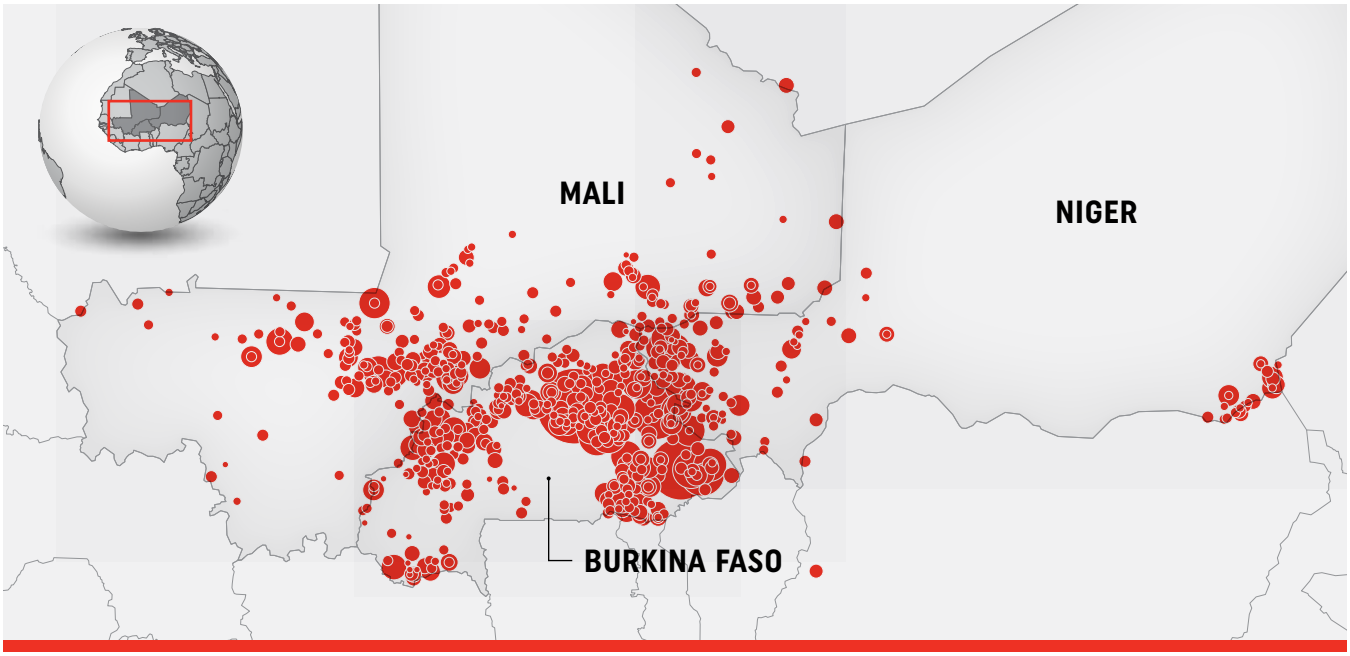
According to analyst Francis Okpaleke, several factors contribute to the use and spread of drones among Sahel extremists, such as commercial accessibility, low cost, porous borders, technical utility and propaganda.

"The proliferation of drones among VNSAs [violent nonstate actors] introduces a new dimension to counterterrorism efforts, potentially shifting the balance of power in favor of these groups," Okpaleke wrote in a 2024 analysis for the Global Network on Extremism & Technology.

Although a previous generation of insurgents used mobile phones to detonate IEDs, today's insurgents can attach an explosive to an off-the-shelf quadcopter to create a flying bomb that can be directed against military targets.

"Insurgents can do whatever they want, and there's nothing that they really have to worry about," said

JIHADI VIOLENCE IN THE SAHEL: 2024



Source: Reuters

The Liptako-Gourma region near the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger has become the world's hot spot for irregular warfare.

Artiaga, who writes for the Irregular Warfare Institute. "In irregular warfare, the most effective force isn't necessarily the one with the best technology but the one that uses technology in the smartest way. For $20,000 [in modified drones] I can create chaos."

In Mali, for example, the Tuareg Permanent Strategic Framework used drones against Russian mercenary bases in Goundam and Léré. In each attack, commercially available quadcopter drones dropped small explosives on their targets, then retreated. The coalition claimed its attacks killed at least nine mercenaries. Similarly equipped drones were part of the ambush of Malian forces and Russian fighters near Tin Zouaten in July 2024. That attack killed 84 mercenaries and 47 Malian soldiers.

Insurgents' drone attacks force Sahelian governments and their Russian allies to react, keeping them on the back foot, Artiaga said.

"The underlying message is that the insurgents now have air strike capabilities, just like their enemies," Le Monde reporters Benjamin Roger and Emmanuel Grynszpan wrote in October 2024.

> "UTILIZING RUDIMENTARY COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES AND INTEGRATING WITH LOCAL POPULATIONS OFTEN ALLOW THESE LOW-TECH FORCES TO EVADE DETECTION."
>
> ~ **Salvador Artiaga**, irregular warfare expert

THE BATTLE GOES DIGITAL

Insurgents are adopting another pervasive technology, social media, by using X and other platforms to broadcast battlefield footage and propaganda videos. To that end, insurgents, many of whom are "digital natives" born into the internet age, might be far ahead of the people running their governments, Artiaga said. Insurgents use their ties to the sophisticated media operations of IS or al-Qaida to produce videos that promote their victories to online audiences.

"Propaganda videos disseminated through drones serve not only as a tool for recruitment but also to demonstrate technological prowess, enhancing the groups' perceived legitimacy and power," Okpaleke wrote. "They also serve symbolic purposes, projecting airpower, status and technological progress, potentially aiding fundraising efforts."

Cyberspace gives insurgents everything they need to know about building bombs, modifying drones or running public relations campaigns, he added. Artificial intelligence systems can even do some of the work for them. The result is a technological advantage that feeds insurgencies regardless of what governments throw at them, Artiaga said.

People shop in the market of Fada N'Gourma, eastern Burkina Faso, an area that is the world's hot spot for terrorist attacks. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

"You have forces in the government that are waiting for this new technology to do everything for them," Artiaga told ADF. "While the government is relying on this new technology, their adversaries are adapting within the environment."

TECHNOLOGY VERSUS HUMAN DYNAMICS

Artiaga noted that even as they load up on drones and other technology to fight insurgents, African nations appear to be missing the lessons other countries have learned when dealing with long-running irregular warfare: The side with the better technology does not always win.

"It's fascinating to watch the interaction between forces with advanced technology and those who are less dependent on it," Artiaga wrote in an analysis for the website Irregular Warfare. "Utilizing rudimentary communication techniques and integrating with local populations often allow these low-tech forces to evade detection."

Technology offers powerful tools to enhance irregular warfare strategies, but it also comes with vulnerabilities when dealing with insurgents skilled in guerrilla tactics, according to Artiaga. Beyond that, insurgents who have the support of the local population, whether through their own actions or in response to government attacks, can be nearly impossible to defeat.

Sahel junta regimes in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have invested heavily in drone technology, particularly Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2s and Akincis. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

An overreliance on technology by either side engaged in irregular warfare can be a vulnerability, Artiaga added.

"In the realm of irregular warfare, the essence of victory remains rooted in understanding human dynamics, grasping local geopolitical currents, and mastering the timeless art of adaptability," he wrote. "As the timeless strategist Sun Tzu articulated, the pinnacle of warfare artistry lies in subduing the enemy without direct confrontation." ❑

‘PREYING ON INSTABILITY’

PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES CAST A SHADOW ACROSS THE CONTINENT

ADF STAFF

Private military companies, private security companies, paramilitary forces and mercenaries have operated in Africa for decades, but their use by African nations has spiked in recent years, causing concern among the continent’s security experts.

The numbers are staggering. At the height of the conflict in Libya, there were an estimated 20,000 foreign fighters supporting both warring factions. Russia’s Wagner Group alone deployed an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 mercenary forces to countries including the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali and Sudan with plans to grow its force size on the continent to 20,000.

“We are witnessing the ever-increasing presence of mercenaries and mercenary-related actors in contemporary armed conflicts and the ever-mounting risk of grave human rights abuses and war crimes,” said Sorcha MacLeod, chair of the United Nations working group on the use of mercenaries.

When discussing these fighters, definitions are important. Private military companies (PMCs), sometimes called private military security companies (PMSCs), are legal entities. Their use is controversial and often raises questions about accountability and actual or potential abuses. Private security companies (PSCs) provide armed or unarmed security services. Paramilitary groups often are politically motivated, might not be focused on profit and sometimes act as national military auxiliaries. Mercenaries are individuals who sell their services to fighting forces or causes as freelancers.

Russian mercenaries patrol in northern Mali. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ADF ILLUSTRATION

TRANSACTIONAL SECURITY, AT A PRICE

The modern face of the foreign mercenary operating in Africa is that of Russia's notorious Wagner Group, rebranded Africa Corps after the 2023 death of its founder, Yevgeny Prigozhin. Now an official Russian government entity, the Wagner Group trades security services for precious metals and gem deals in some of Africa's most dangerous countries. As a result of their operations over the past five years, the Wagner Group now maintains an opaque, complex network of operations on the continent that critics say plunders diamonds, gold and other natural resources. They also exercise outsized influence over the government and security forces in areas where they operate, according to The Sentry, an investigative policy organization. Due to the attrition of its own security forces in Ukraine, Russia has resorted to hiring Syrian mercenaries to fill security contracts in the CAR, Libya and other countries.

An overwhelming number of well-publicized atrocities follow Wagner Group deployments, highlighting the dangers of employing foreign forces with little to no training or experience with insurgency warfare. Several reports document Russian mercenary forces ordering government forces to kill women and children, torture people, and conduct ethnic cleansing campaigns against communities. Fighters involved in these activities told The Sentry that the mercenaries' intention is to create terror and instill fear. This shock and awe approach is anathema to prevailing counterinsurgency doctrine, which emphasizes winning the hearts and minds of the population.

"Preying on instability and weak states, the Wagner Group has instrumentalized violence in an unchecked pursuit of economic resources and political power, with horrific consequences for civilian populations," Charles Cater, director of investigations at The Sentry, said in a news release. "Nowhere has this threat been more evident than in the Central African Republic, whose increasingly compromised sovereignty should serve as a stark warning to other governments in Africa and elsewhere."

Russian mercenaries also are being used to provide regime protection for military juntas that seized power in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Although these junta leaders invited the Russian mercenaries under counterterrorism pretenses, terrorist group violence has continued to expand, with the number of Sahelian deaths nearly tripling to more than 11,600 since 2020. This indicates that either the counterterrorism auspices of the Wagner Group deployment were a ruse, or its personnel are ineffective as a counterterrorism force.

"We have seen it across the Sahel and beyond, resulting in bloody [coups], attempted removal of leadership, illegal mining extraction as well as severe and explicit human rights abuses, including sexual violence against women and girls," analyst Jonathon James wrote in the Nigerian newspaper This Day Live. "Russia's very presence on the continent is an overt threat to peace, security, democracy and sovereignty."

One incident highlighted the failure of undertrained mercenary forces. In July 2024, 47 Malian Soldiers and 84 Russian mercenaries were killed at Tinzaouaten by Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and allied Tuareg rebel fighters. This was the biggest loss of mercenary forces on the continent, and the biggest military disaster in Mali's long-standing fight against Tuareg separatists and Islamist militants in the Sahel.

Russia's mercenary model in Africa is a cautionary tale of trading a country's sovereignty, precious resources and future economic viability for short-term security gains that can't be sustained with an untrained and inexperienced foreign force.

The mercenaries' failures and abuses of civilians have left some more fearful of foreign soldiers hired by their government than of terror groups.

"They have shifted the balance of fear: Civilian populations are now more scared of being arrested or killed by Wagner than jihadist and other armed groups," Héni Nsaibia, a senior analyst with the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data project, told The New York Times. "But they haven't affected the jihadists groups' capacity to operate."

FOCUSED ON PROTECTING CHINESE BRI INVESTMENTS

Chinese PSCs also have rapidly grown in Africa in recent years, but in contrast to the Wagner Group model, Chinese PSCs focus on protecting the country's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investment projects. With a predominant presence in Sub-Saharan Africa, Chinese PSCs are employed to protect state-owned Chinese company projects and personnel that produce more than $50 billion in revenue each year, according to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS).

Through the BRI, Beijing has placed tens of thousands of Chinese national workers in Africa to build Chinese-financed infrastructure projects. A few years ago, China turned to PSCs to protect assets such as mines, natural gas projects, railways and shipping routes.

"We have seen a massive deployment of workers, Chinese workers, more specifically," Jasmine Opperman, an independent security consultant based in South Africa, told Voice of America (VOA). "Now these investments, like in Sudan, South Sudan, are really in volatile areas, so we have seen a proliferation of Chinese [PSCs] on the African continent, with a task to protect employees and the infrastructure projects."

In July 2024, militia fighters killed nine Chinese nationals at a Chinese-linked mining site in the northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) Ituri province. Analysts say incidents like this — and a 2023 attack that killed nine Chinese nationals at a gold mining site in the CAR — resulted in the deployment of more Chinese security companies.

"It's about the protection and expansion of Chinese influence, and because of the volatile security

EXPERTS WORK TO REGULATE A GROWING THREAT

ADF STAFF

More than 150 experts and stakeholders from across Africa met in September 2023 to discuss the ramifications of the growing number of foreign fighters on the continent. There was a consensus that the African Union must reassess its stance on mercenaries and take action to guard civilians.

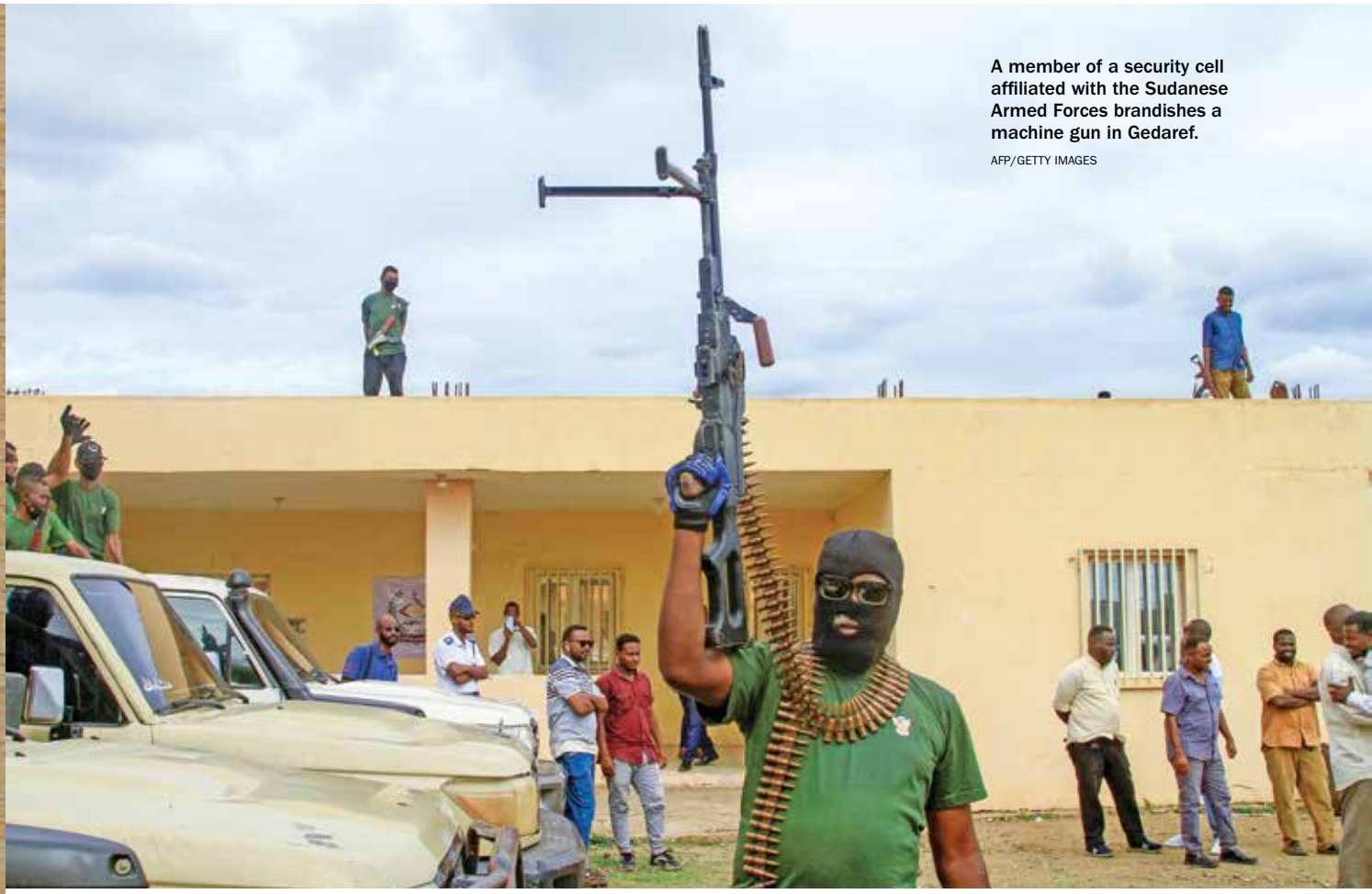
The two-day symposium was hosted by the Secretariat of the AU's Economic, Social and Cultural Council in Zambia; the University of Johannesburg's Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC); the Institute for Peace and Security Studies at Addis Ababa University; and the Pan-Africana Strategic and Policy Research Group in Nigeria.

During the meeting, speakers urged African states to prioritize security sector reform and ensure that foreign fighters who commit atrocities are subjected to the rule of law. The experts and stakeholders agreed that mechanisms for targeted sanctions on governments or organizations using foreign fighters and mercenaries must be implemented.

Adeoye Akinola, head of research and teaching at IPATC, and Ratidzo Makombe, a researcher there, documented several AU policy recommendations that emerged from the two-day symposium, including:

- **Review** legal frameworks such as the 1977 Convention on Mercenaries, strengthen partnerships between the AU and regional economic communities, and improve political and security institutions through bilateral and multilateral platforms, real-time data exchange and interconnected databases.
- **Facilitate** the formulation and implementation of inclusive socioeconomic development programs to empower citizens and stem the proliferation of insurgency groups and military coups.
- **Design** a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program to disengage local and foreign fighters from conflict and integrate them back into the society.

A private Russian security guard, center, works at a Central African Republic polling station during a presidential visit. A 2023 symposium urged African nations to hold foreign fighters accountable to the rule of law. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



A member of a security cell affiliated with the Sudanese Armed Forces brandishes a machine gun in Gedaref.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

situations, we are seeing these [PSCs] now growing in numbers," Opperman said.

Beijing's PSCs operate differently than Moscow's mercenaries. Most Chinese security contractors are strictly controlled and don't carry weapons, except for those involved in counterpiracy maritime escort missions.

"Wagner is engaged in combat operations," Paul Nantulya, a China expert at the ACSS, told VOA. "It's engaged in wars; it supplies a national security adviser in, for instance, the Central African Republic. They become part of the governing architecture. They fight wars on behalf of governments."

Chinese contractors typically conduct military trainings with host nations and supply equipment, intelligence and surveillance. Opperman said the Chinese security contractors still could have a destabilizing effect.

"Though PMCs from China are not allowed to carry weapons, what they are doing is collaborating through private or local security companies or even local militia groups in terms of providing security," she said. "By means of collaborating with local militias, you're basically taking sides."

UAE A 'HUB FOR MERCENARY ACTIVITY'

Since the 2010s, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), known to be a central logistics and financing hub for Russian mercenaries, has strengthened military ties with many African countries, particularly in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. Abu Dhabi seeks to gain influence, access mineral resources, and protect trade routes in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Mercenaries hired by the UAE work to combat terrorism, insurgency and piracy; provide weapons and equipment; promote defense cooperation; and offer military support to nonstate armed actors in Ethiopia, Libya and Sudan. In Sudan, the UAE is accused of arming the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) during its war with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).

Since 2016, the UAE has signed military agreements with Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Somalia's autonomous Puntland State, Senegal and Somalia. Abu Dhabi since the 2010s also has established military outposts in Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Libya, Puntland, semiautonomous Somaliland and Somalia.

The UAE also hires foreign fighters to protect its interests on the continent. Abu Dhabi hires Colombian mercenaries, for example, to support the RSF in Sudan. About 160 Colombian fighters were part of a caravan traveling from Libya into Sudan in mid-November 2024 when they were attacked by a group aligned with the SAF. Three mercenaries were killed.

Reports emerged in 2024 about a job advertisement

circulated by Abu Dhabi-based Manar Military Co. seeking a "Foreign Legion operator." The ad sought a person under 50, highly disciplined, physically fit with more than five years of military experience and able to handle "high stress conditions." Pay started at about $2,000 monthly but would increase once the person was deployed to Somalia or Yemen.

"Certainly when you hear 'mercenaries' nowadays, I usually think UAE much more than Russia," Andreas Krieg, a senior lecturer at the School of Security Studies at King's College in London, told German news service Deutsche Welle. "The Emirates have become something of a hub for mercenary activity in the global South."

TURKISH FIGHTERS IN THE SAHEL, WEST AFRICA

Turkish PMCs also have entered the African market, and they are known to employ Syrians to fight alongside their PMCs in the Sahel and West Africa. In 2024, Ankara's Sadat International Defense Consultancy, a PMC closely allied with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, sent 1,100 fighters recruited from Syrian refugee camps to Niger.

"In Niger, Syrian mercenaries are supposed to guard mines, oil installations or military bases," Rami Abdel-Rahman, director of the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told French newspaper Le Monde. "But they then find themselves involved in fighting against jihadist groups."

Turkish contractors also have been reported in Togo, where they have flown attack helicopters. Two reportedly were killed in combat with JNIM.

"Turkey also has opportunities to increase economic and military cooperation with Burkina Faso and Mali, but Russia's larger presence in both countries will pose a greater obstacle," analyst Liam Karr wrote for the Institute for the Study of War.

Turkish PMCs are involved in more traditional roles of providing economic infrastructure security and force training services. Although Turkish PMCs have competed for many of the same contracts as Russian and UAE companies and employ similar recruiting tactics, they're generally viewed as a more palatable and disciplined option with minimal risk of operational brutality and human rights abuses.

MERCENARY FORCES DO NOT ENSURE LONG-TERM STABILITY

Proponents of hiring mercenaries cite their value in maintaining peacekeeping efforts and offering humanitarian assistance, often in conflict zones and areas where government forces are unwilling or unable to act.

However, analysts fear mercenaries are not held accountable for atrocities committed against civilians in conflict zones and that there is a risk of confusion and unintended consequences when other military forces are active in the same theater. Some observers also find troubling the use of natural resource concessions to pay for mercenary and other security services, as in the CAR and Mali.

"In effect, these governments are mortgaging their country's economic future to foreign groups that, ironically, thrive on instability as a source of demand for their services," Alan Doss, former under-secretary general of the U.N., wrote in African Arguments.

Mercenaries also might not be invested in ensuring the long-term stability of the nations that hire them. In January 2025, nearly 300 Romanian mercenaries recruited to help the DRC's Army battle M23 rebels withdrew to Rwanda and eventually went home.

In a BBC report, one of the Romanian mercenaries said M23, which claims to fight to protect the rights of ethnic Tutsis, was supported by state-of-the-art military equipment and that the DRC's Army gave up. "Missions were disorganized, working conditions poor," said another. "Romanians should stop going there because it's dangerous."

Syrian fighters, some of whom Turkey recruited to guard mines and bases in Niger, have found themselves battling insurgent groups.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Some analysts say training indigenous military forces to battle homegrown insurgencies is more effective than hiring foreign fighters. In Somalia's Puntland region, security forces in January 2025 destroyed several operating bases for the Islamic State group (IS) in the Cal Miskaad Mountains. The attacks were part of a broader strategy by Puntland authorities to enlist the region's ethnic clans in the fight against IS.

"The fight cannot be won by security forces alone," Puntland's First Deputy Speaker Mohamed Bari Shire said. "We need the courage and cooperation of the people to secure our communities."

In viewing the security landscape in Africa, most of the continent's security experts agree that the use of mercenaries or PSCs does not lead to long-term peace.

"African and other governments should recognize that mercenaries are not the answer to state weaknesses," Doss wrote for African Arguments. "Quite the opposite: they are antithetical to state building because they do not contribute in a sustainable manner to enhancing state capacity. Governments that rely on mercenaries or PMSCs … to shore up their national security are likely to remain vulnerable to instability." ❑

SUDAN'S PROXY WAR

Nations Beyond Africa Choose Sides for Profit and Influence

ADF STAFF

As two generals in Sudan wreak havoc on their nation in their own quests for wealth and power, other countries have pitched in, looking for a piece of the action.

The war, which began in 2023, has devastated the country. Some estimates place the death toll as high as 150,000. More than 14.6 million people have lost their homes, making it the world's worst displacement crisis. It also has brought the country to the brink of famine, with 30.4 million people — more than half the country's population — needing humanitarian support.

The warring factions in Sudan's "Generals' war" are the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) under Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the opposing paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) under the former Janjaweed leader known as Hemedti. Neither side has articulated a clear political vision, indicating that competing claims to the nation's wealth, not ideology, are driving the conflict. That wealth includes the country's gold, copper and iron ore mines; oil; and agricultural production.

Foreign nations, particularly in the Gulf region, are opportunistically backing sides in the conflict as they seek access to Sudan's natural resources; its 850-kilometer shoreline on the Red Sea; and its strategic position as a gateway to the Sahara, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa.

"The Sudan conflict has evolved into one with multiple sides as well as different historical and geo-political dynamics," wrote Theophilus Dirisu for Quays News. "Sudan has become a microcosm of a larger powerplay in which the rising powers of the Middle East seek to project their power and gain an advantage over their rivals."

The countries with stakes in the war extend beyond Africa and the

A protester holds a Sudanese flag during a rally against military rule in Khartoum in 2022. REUTERS

Middle East. China, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have openly taken sides, and in some cases have provided weapons and materiel that continue to fuel the conflict. In addition to expanding their influence and developing future Sudanese revenue streams, some nations supplying weapons through arms sales actually stand to gain financially the longer the war goes on.

"Sudan seems to be an easy win that you can get on the cheap," Sudanese academic Magdi el-Gizouli said in a Bloomberg report. "You can get the Red Sea coast, you can get political influence in Khartoum, you can get mineral resources at a very cheap price. You can make a hell of a profit out of a country like Sudan."

IRAN TRADES ARMS FOR INFLUENCE

Since the beginning of 2024, Iran has been flying cargo planes to the SAF-controlled Port of Sudan. The BBC and other news sources have reported evidence of Iran supplying the SAF with armed drones.

"Reports suggested that these deliveries included drones that were later used to bomb a path through Omdurman, breaking a siege," Quays News reported. "Iran wants to expand its influence in Africa, particularly on the Red Sea."

Sudan had a history of military cooperation with Iran before relations ended in 2016 due to a conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, when Sudan sided with Saudi Arabia. Since the start of the current conflict, the Sudanese government has restored relations with Tehran.

"Iran is looking for a foothold in the region," Suliman Baldo, director

People gather at a school turned into a shelter in Port Sudan in August 2024. Millions are homeless as a result of the country's civil war. REUTERS

of the Sudan Transparency and Policy Observatory, told the BBC. "If they find geostrategic concessions, they will certainly provide more advanced and numerous drones."

In March 2024, Iran petitioned Sudan to establish a naval base at the Port of Sudan on the Red Sea. The SAF rejected Iran's request. Despite the rejection, Iran reportedly has supplied the SAF with Mohajer-6 drones, according to the Atlantic Council.

In February 2025, Iran and Sudan disclosed a new alliance, with then-Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Youssef meeting in Tehran with his Iranian counterpart, Abbas Araqchi, and Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf. Al Jazeera and Iranian news agencies said the two countries were working toward "a clear plan to promote mutual interests." They reportedly agreed to mutual exemptions from entry visas for diplomatic, special and official passport holders. Reports indicate that Iran still is negotiating with Sudan for an Iranian naval base on the Red Sea.

RUSSIA WANTS NAVAL BASE

In the past, Russia's mercenary Wagner Group has supported Hemedti and the RSF, motivated by Hemedti's control over Sudan's gold mines. The RSF has helped smuggle vast quantities of bullion to the Middle East, where it is sold on the world market. The gold shipping has enriched Hemedti and provided crucial financial support to the RSF. It also has helped fund Russia's war with Ukraine, researchers say.

Russia's involvement in Sudan also has been driven by its strategic interest in securing access to the Red Sea.

In exchange for access to gold mines, Wagner has supplied the RSF with surface-to-air missiles, enabling them to target and shoot down SAF fighter jets, according to reports.

Sudan shares a 382-kilometer border with Libya in its far northwest, which has proved to be an advantage for the Wagner Group, now known as the Africa Corps. The Russian mercenaries are aligned with Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, eastern Libya's strongman ruler. Reports show that the mercenaries have been engaged in extensive fuel smuggling across the border for the benefit of the RSF. Between April and October 2024, Russia supplied 2.8 million barrels of diesel and gasoline to Sudan, accounting for nearly half of the country's fuel imports, Bloomberg reported.

Russia's involvement in Sudan also has been driven by its strategic

Sudanese Armed Forces soldiers celebrate the army's liberation of an oil refinery in North Bahri in January 2025. REUTERS

interest in securing access to the Red Sea. After allying with the RSF since the beginning of the war, Russia shifted its alliance to the SAF in 2024. The switch was sparked by a stalled 2017 agreement that had promised Moscow a naval base at Port Sudan. After diplomatic meetings in mid-February 2025, Sudan agreed to allow a Russian naval base in the country.

A Russian naval base in Sudan would support Russia's strategic objectives in Africa and the Mediterranean, "while decreasing Russian reliance on bases in Syria after the collapse of the Bashar al Assad regime," the Institute for the Study of War reported. The institute also noted that Russia could allow Iran to operate from the proposed base in Port Sudan.

CHINA WANTS RESOURCES, ACCESS

China has a long-standing history with Sudan that dates to mutual diplomatic recognition in 1959. At one stage, China was Sudan's largest arms provider. Beijing's stake in Sudan has decreased significantly since South Sudan took most of the oil reserves when it became independent in 2011. Still, Sudan remains one of China's important partners, with an export market worth $1.3 billion.

China is interested in Sudan's gold deposits and a Port Sudan location on the Red Sea as a regional trade center, an analyst told Voice of America. The Chinese government has not officially taken a position on Sudan. Amnesty International says that China has armed both sides in the conflict, providing Chinese-made armed drones, advanced drone jammers, mortars and anti-materiel rifles. Reports say that China is negotiating to sell advanced jet aircraft to the SAF. Unconfirmed reports say the SAF already has some of the jets.

China has built a $140 million harbor in Port Sudan to ship camels and is in talks with the SAF to invest in a new oil refinery and rebuild the country's largest slaughterhouse, according to a December 2024 Bloomberg report.

UAE 'SINGLE BIGGEST PLAYER'

Researchers and reporters say that the UAE has taken an active part in the Sudan war. The Sudan Conflict Observatory says it began tracking UAE movements in 2023 and reported 32 flights between June 2023 and May 2024, concluding with "near certainty" that they were weapons transfers from the UAE to the RSF. The Sudan Tribune reported in late 2024 that the UAE had agreed to stop supplying weapons to the RSF.

> "Amid this web of external interference, Sudanese military elites have continued to gamble their nation's future for the fleeting promise of dominance, leaving devastation in their wake."
>
> — Emadeddin Badi, Atlantic Council

Analysts say that the UAE is the foreign player most invested in the war. It regards resource-rich, strategically located Sudan as an opportunity to expand its influence and control in the Middle East and East Africa, according to news site The Conversation.

"Since 2018, the UAE has invested over U.S. $6 billion in the country," wrote researcher May Darwich for The Conversation. "This includes foreign reserves in the Sudanese central bank, agriculture projects and a Red Sea port. The UAE has also recruited and paid fighters from Sudan, drawn mostly from the Rapid Support Forces, to join its conflict in Yemen."

Others have said that the UAE has a significant influence over the warring parties and could use it to promote peace.

"The UAE is the single biggest player in Sudan's war," wrote Sudanese journalist Nesrine Malik in a January 2025 column for The Guardian. "The Gulf state has a pattern of playing kingmaker in Africa's wars, taking a punt in order that, if its chosen partner prevails, the UAE will be granted access to vast resources and geopolitical power."

SAUDI ARABIA FORMS ALLIANCE

Like the UAE, Saudi Arabia has heavily invested in Sudan's economy, focusing on infrastructure, mining, agriculture and port access to the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia is trying to secure sea lanes and protect its long-term investments. It has openly supported the SAF under al-Burhan.

Sudanese troops also have reportedly served as hired soldiers in Saudi-orchestrated campaigns, strengthening the ties between the two governments.

The alliance with the SAF serves Saudi Arabia's regional ambitions, including supporting Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's leadership and advancing his long-range Vision 2030 economic, social and cultural goals. The plan dates to 2016.

The Saudi government's cooperation with the SAF is rooted in

Sudanese women from community kitchens distribute meals in July 2024 for people in Omdurman affected by war and hunger. REUTERS

Families flee Rapid Support Forces in Sudan's El Gezira State in June 2024. REUTERS

military cooperation, economic investment and strategic regional interests, including efforts to counter Iranian influence. However, because of the region's political complexities and the devastation of Sudan's war, Saudi Arabia also has tried to organize peace talks. The result has been a complicated and sometimes fragile alliance between the two countries.

PROLONGING THE WAR

Each year, the International Rescue Committee's Emergency Watchlist analyzes which countries are most likely to experience a new or worsening humanitarian crisis. For the second consecutive year, Sudan topped the list in 2025 as the country's collapse accelerates amid the brutal war.

The committee says that rather than advancing diplomacy, outside powers are fueling the conflict by funneling weapons to their allies. "SAF and RSF leaders appear to believe that continued fighting best serves their interests, leaving Sudan on a trajectory toward catastrophic humanitarian collapse," the committee noted.

Emadeddin Badi, a senior fellow with the Middle East Programs at the Atlantic Council, contends that extensive foreign interference in Sudan is only prolonging the war.

"Amid this web of external interference, Sudanese military elites have continued to gamble their nation's future for the fleeting promise of dominance, leaving devastation in their wake," Badi wrote. ❑

MOROCCO

Requests Stingers from U.S. in $825 Million Deal

DEFENCEWEB

Morocco is working to acquire FIM-92K Stinger Block I missiles from the United States in a deal that could be worth $825 million. Morocco asked for up to 600 of the missiles, as well as contractor engineering, logistics and technical support services.

U.S. officials said the missiles will help modernize Morocco's armed forces and expand its army short-range air defense options. "This will contribute to the Moroccan Army's goals of updating capability and further enhancing interoperability with the U.S. and other allies," U.S. officials said.

The FIM-92K Stinger Block I is an advanced variant of the Stinger family of surface-to-air missiles, primarily designed for short-range air defense. Unlike earlier Stinger models, which could be operated by a single Soldier, the FIM-92K typically is integrated into self-propelled ground-based air defense systems.

The missile is designed for all-aspect targeting, allowing it to engage threats from any direction, increasing its lethality against fast-moving aerial targets. A defining feature of the FIM-92K is its datalink capability, which enables it to lock on targets after launch. This allows the missile to be fired before acquiring a target, extending its effective engagement envelope, especially against low-signature or evasive targets such as small drones.

The FIM-92K uses an ignition device that significantly improves its effectiveness against small, agile or unmanned aerial targets by detonating the warhead when near the target, rather than requiring a direct hit.

FIM-92 Stinger missiles can be fired from the shoulder or from land, air or water craft. SGT. SCOTT JENKINS/U.S. MARINES

ZAMBIA
Plans to Expand Air Fleet

ADF STAFF

Zambia plans to buy used Bell 412 transport helicopters and associated support from the United States with an estimated value of $100 million.

Depending on the model year and condition of the Bell 412EP helicopters, ranging from $2.6 million for a 1994 model to $9.6 million for a 2016 model, Zambia could acquire between 10 and 38 units.

The Zambia Air Force operates a fleet of utility helicopters, including 12 American Bell 205s, two Bell 206s and two Bell 212s. The helicopters serve various roles, including transport, medical evacuation and support for other government operations. Zambia has ordered two U.S.-made Enstrom 480s for training.

The Air Force also participates in the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique, deploying a C-27J Spartan transport aircraft and a protection regiment to support stabilization efforts in Cabo Delgado.

Produced since 1979, the Bell 412, part of the Huey family, is a twin-turbine utility helicopter developed by the U.S. company Bell Helicopter as an upgraded version of the Bell 212. It features a four-blade composite main rotor, replacing the 212's two-blade system.

The 412 has a dual digital automatic flight control system and Pratt & Whitney PT6T-3D engines. The 412 is capable of civilian and military missions such as search and rescue, medical evacuation and offshore transport.

The helicopters would improve Zambia's capability to conduct peacekeeping and regional security, disaster response, and humanitarian aid missions over long distances and in difficult weather.

Zambia could acquire as many as 38 Bell 412 helicopters. U.S. ARMY

Egypt to Upgrade FAST MISSILE CRAFT

DEFENCEWEB

The Egyptian Navy's Ambassador III-class missile craft Soliman Ezzat sails in the Arabian Sea. U.S. MARINE CORPS

Egypt plans to modernize four of its fast missile craft to combat maritime crime and protect its shipping lanes. The U.S. government has approved the deal, which is worth an estimated $625 million.

The U.S. said the Egyptian government requested new or system upgrades for combat management, air and surface surveillance radars, decoys, electro-optical/infrared sensors, electronic warfare, navigation data distribution, communications intelligence, and fire control radar. Egypt also asked for 76 mm gun upgrades.

Egypt's $1.1 billion fast missile craft project began in 2005 when the U.S. agreed to help produce a new naval vessel. A company then called VT Halter Marine in Pascagoula, Mississippi, received a contract to build four 63-meter Ambassador IV-class vessels for the Egyptian government.

The first vessel, ENS Soliman Ezzat, was transferred to the Egyptian Navy in 2013, and the second, ENS F Zerky, was handed over a month later. The remaining two ships, ENS M Fahmy and ENS A Gad, arrived in 2015.

Each vessel carries a 76 mm super rapid gun, eight Harpoon block II missiles, Mk 49 Rolling Airframe Missiles, Block 1B Close-In Weapon Systems and two M60 machine guns.

The fast missile craft have a top speed of 41 knots. A crew of 38 can operate at sea for up to eight days on board the craft. An aluminum superstructure reduces overall weight, maintenance and radar signature, and hulls are made of steel.

Egypt's fast missile craft defend against armed surface and shipping threats in the coastal waterways of the Mediterranean Sea, Suez Canal and Red Sea.

The BOTSAT-1 ground station

BOTSWANA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (BIUST)

BOTSWANA'S FIRST SATELLITE LAUNCH A MODEL FOR AFRICAN COUNTRIES

ADF STAFF

Botswana has launched its first satellite, BOTSAT-1, in an effort led by 80 volunteers from the Botswana International University of Science and Technology. The launch, despite the fact that Botswana does not have a space agency or national space policy, offers a model for developing countries looking to gain a presence in space, reported Space in Africa.

Developed over four years, BOTSAT-1 was launched into orbit by Space X's Falcon 9 rocket in March 2025 and is circling Earth at an altitude of about 500 kilometers. It scans Botswana with a sweep observation area of about 32 kilometers, offering valuable data for environmental conservation, food security and urban planning.

"Rather than purchasing satellite data from external providers, the Botswana team took the initiative to develop their own satellite," Space in Africa reported. "This decision would not only provide the needed Earth observation capabilities but also advance the country's Human Capacity Development goals."

Dr. Dimane Mpoeleng, the project lead for the BOTSAT-1 mission, said the satellite effort is part of a national push to begin a space program.

"The government has now prioritised the establishment of a space agency, which will be key in implementing subsequent BOTSAT missions," Mpoeleng told Space in Africa.

The team already is working on BOTSAT-2 and is partnering with schools to inspire children to study space science. The first message from BOTSAT-1 was the country's national anthem in Setswana, Botswana's national language.

"The successful launch of BOTSAT-1 is the first step in Botswana's broader space strategy, which aims to expand the nation's satellite capabilities for scientific research, environmental sustainability, and digital transformation," reported Dragonfly Aerospace. "It also sets a precedent for future African-led satellite missions, demonstrating the power of strategic partnerships in driving innovation."

The BOTSAT-1 engineering team works on the satellite. BIUST

Simulator Prepares Ghanaian Sailors for *SEA HAZARDS*

ADF STAFF

The Ghana Navy has opened a state-of-the-art full mission bridge simulator to improve Sailors' navigation, safety and decision-making. The simulator was built with support from Denmark and is at Naval Training Command in Nutekpor in Ghana's Volta Region.

Sailors test the full mission bridge simulator at Naval Training Command in Nutekpor, Ghana. GHANA PEACE JOURNAL

The system includes a 270-degree full mission bridge simulator, three 120-degree part-task simulators, two instructor stations, a briefing room, a server room and instructor offices. Its design replicates the challenges and dangers Sailors could face in the Gulf of Guinea.

The simulator has been named the Lill-May Didriksen Simulation Centre, in honor of a pioneering Royal Danish Navy officer.

Authorities believe interactive digital instruction is essential to prepare Sailors for the worst scenarios without risking their lives or taking ships out of use for training.

"In our digitized era, simulation training has emerged as an indispensable tool for developing the skills needed to navigate modern maritime challenges," Legal Counsel to the President of Ghana Marietta Agyeiwaa Brew said. "Facilities like the Lill-May Didriksen Simulation Centre exemplify the future of practical training, offering advanced systems that replicate real-world scenarios in a controlled and safe environment."

Ghana provided $322,000 for construction, and Denmark paid to acquire technology worth $370,000 from the Wärtsilä Voyage company. Denmark's Svendborg International Maritime Academy trained instructors.

Ghanaian Commodore Solomon Asiedu-Larbi, the flag officer commanding the Naval Training Command, said the center would offer his Sailors practical skills, confidence and experience to operate calmly and effectively at sea, even during emergencies.

"In our line of work, precision, readiness and professionalism are nonnegotiable," he said. "Naval operations are inherently complex and demand unwavering competence."

Ghana also hopes these training tools will expand its maritime sector and spur young people to work in the sector and boost the nation's economy.

"Around the world, secured maritime spaces have led to thriving fisheries, increased maritime trade and sustainable offshore energy projects," Brew said. "We are therefore determined to replicate this success in Ghana."

KENYA PLAYS LEAD ROLE IN CREATING BLUEPRINT FOR MILITARY AI USE

ADF STAFF

About 60 countries endorsed the blueprint for the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the military, which was voted on at the Responsible AI in the Military Domain conference in South Korea in 2024. Kenya was a co-host of the event and has been a continental leader advocating for the need for rigorous risk assessments and human oversight of AI operations.

"We are committed to continue engaging in the process of developing the UN resolution on Responsible AI in the Military Domain [REAIM] which underscores the need to ensure that the development, deployment and use of AI promotes peace, security, and human dignity," Kenyan Defence Minister Soipan Tuya said in a post on X. "Kenya is equally steadfast in her commitment to implementing the REAIM Blueprint for Action, which advocates for transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in AI development."

The document emphasizes preventing AI from being used to proliferate weapons of mass destruction by malign actors, including terrorist groups. It underscores the need for human control and involvement, particularly in the deployment of nuclear weapons. Neither China nor Russia endorsed the document.

Netherlands Defence Minister Ruben Brekelmans told Reuters that the latest document is more "action-oriented" than previous ones. It outlines what risk assessments should be conducted before AI is used, the need to establish conditions such as maintaining human control, and the importance of developing confidence-building measures to manage risks.

"We are making further concrete steps," Brekelmans said. "Last year ... was more about creating shared understanding; now we are getting more towards action."

In June 2024, Kenya hosted the inaugural African Regional Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence in Military workshop in Nairobi. During the event, Kenya's Chief of Defence Forces Gen. Charles Kahariri spoke about the power of AI to improve the decision-making process of security professionals and enhance national security efforts.

"Developing a comprehensive regulatory framework that governs the use of AI in military operations is essential," Kahariri said, according to Kenyan Foreign Policy. "Building local capabilities to develop, deploy and regulate AI is crucial."

Kenyan Defence Minister Soipan Tuya, right, speaks during the Responsible AI in the Military Domain conference in Seoul, South Korea. KENYA MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Kenyan Soldiers Fight Blaze,

RESTORE HOPE TO TROUBLED REGION

ADF STAFF

When a major wildfire broke out in Kenya's Turkana South National Reserve, Soldiers from the Kenya Defence Forces' (KDF) Operation Maliza Uhalifu (OMU) were there to contain the blaze and save valuable land, property and lives.

The multiagency fire response in January 2025 also included the Kenya Wildlife Service, General Service Unit, National Parks Service and the Anti Stock Theft Unit.

The response was just the latest achievement by OMU, which was launched in 2023 to address banditry in the North Rift and Eastern regions. Of particular concern was a rise in clashes among heavily armed pastoralist militias sometimes termed "cattle warlords" who steal livestock and terrorize communities.

During OMU's first year, pastoralist violence dropped by 50%, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project. "The operation has been characterized by dusk-to-dawn curfews, tracking of militias, and the seizure of stolen livestock," ACLED reported in 2024.

The region also recorded a 60% drop in cattle rustling between February 2023 and the end of 2024, the Ministry of Interior reported. In December 2024, a sting operation recovered 172 illegal firearms and more than 10,000 stolen livestock. The operation led to the arrest and prosecution of 250 suspects.

"The security situation in the North Rift has significantly improved, thanks to the efforts of this multi-agency approach," the Ministry of Interior said. "Security officers on the ground have successfully disarmed hundreds of bandits, dismantled their hideouts in the rugged terrain, and restored stability to affected communities."

The KDF also is working to restore civilian life to normal in the region. The government set aside 100 million Kenyan shillings to renovate and reopen schools closed due to the violence. The KDF is leading the effort and 26 schools have reopened, allowing 4,000 children to return to school, The Star in Kenya reported.

"While we celebrate the progress made, 13 schools remain closed and pupils relocated to other schools," the Ministry of Interior said. "We recognize that the journey to lasting peace is ongoing and as we move forward with Operation Maliza Uhalifu, we will continue to build on these gains for a safe North Rift and secure Kenya."

A Kenya Defence Forces Soldier from Operation Maliza Uhalifu fights a fire in Turkana South National Reserve. KDF

Senegal's Air Force School TRAINS TECHNICIANS to Boost Aviation Industry

ADF STAFF

Senegal has graduated its first civilian aeronautical maintenance technicians trained by the Air Force School to boost the country's aviation industry, enhance the defense sector and improve self-sufficiency.

Gen. Birame Diop, chief of defense staff of the Senegalese Armed Forces, presents diplomas to aeronautical maintenance technicians. DIRPA

The first 29 aeronautical maintenance technicians received diplomas in January 2025 during a ceremony in Thiès. The graduation is the result of what is being called a historic public-private partnership designed to increase Senegal's domestic capacity to repair aircraft and build the planes of tomorrow.

"It is the realization of a vision, that of preparing our youth for the challenges of the aeronautical sector and of permanently registering Senegal on the world map of aviation," Col. Ousmane Ngom, commander of the Thiès School Base, said during the graduation ceremony.

The school partnered with Air Senegal and Blaise Diagne International Airport in Dakar. The technicians, along with 11 pilots in the graduating class, will work for Air Senegal.

"This project is an example of cooperation that fits perfectly in the concept of Armée-Nation that is so dear to our country," said Gen. Birame Diop, chief of defense staff of the Senegalese Armed Forces.

Diop said the country aims to become a major global air hub. "By combining the expertise, materiel and finances of the Air Force and its civilian partners, Senegal boosts its capacity to train the youth to be qualified and able to respond to strategic needs like aerospace," he said.

NEW BASE, SHIP SIGNAL GHANA'S INTENT TO BECOME 'MARITIME POWERHOUSE'

ADF STAFF

Ghana is investing in maritime security to support its growing blue economy and protect maritime resources.

In early 2025, Ghana commissioned a forward operating base (FOB) in Ezinlibo, in the western region, and received a Japanese-made ship, the 65-meter GNS Achimota, at the Sekondi Naval Base. The Ezinlibo FOB is now the country's largest naval station and is expected to provide logistical support and personnel accommodation while supporting the Ghana Navy's efforts to combat illegal fishing, piracy and other security threats in the Gulf of Guinea.

The Ezinlibo base joins a network of FOBs across the country, including those at Bui, Kenyase and Sankore. New ones are planned for Ada, Elmina, Keta and Winneba.

The GNS Achimota is the country's largest naval vessel. Then-Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo said these assets will help promote regional peace and stability.

"GNS Achimota stands as a powerful symbol of how far our Navy has come in its 65 years of service," Akufo-Addo said in a Facebook post. "As I said during the ceremony, 'GNS Achimota represents the evolution of our Navy and a marker of resilience, service, and growth.' This … reflects our unwavering dedication to making Ghana a maritime powerhouse in the region."

Kurinoura Shipbuilding built the Achimota in Japan in 1999. It is powered by a single-screw fixed-pitch propeller and diesel engine. It has advanced navigation, communication and surveillance systems, The Defense Post reported. It will serve as a military training platform. Ghana expects delivery of two offshore patrol boats to help protect the country's oil and gas infrastructure, Military Africa reported.

"GNS Achimota is not just a ship, but it is a beacon of hope," Ghana Chief of Naval Staff Rear Adm. Issah Adam Yakubu said during a December 21, 2024, ceremony marking the ship's arrival.

The 65-meter GNS Achimota is the Ghana Navy's largest ship and will help combat piracy and illegal fishing. GHANA NAVY

Uganda Strengthens Capabilities With Vehicle Facility

U.S. EMBASSY IN UGANDA

The Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF) acquired a $1.5 million advanced vehicle maintenance facility to boost its logistical self-sustainment capability.

The Uganda Rapid Deployment Capabilities Center includes maintenance bays, a fueling station and storage, a vehicle inspection pit, administration buildings, and a security fence. The maintenance facility has roofed open bays that allow multiple vehicles to be worked on at the same time.

Vehicles are parked at a new maintenance facility that the U.S. provided to the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces to boost its rapid deployment capabilities.

U.S. EMBASSY IN UGANDA

This handover of the facility, which was funded by the U.S., builds on earlier efforts to improve the UPDF's ability to deploy troops and sustain them while in the field. The UPDF received a second United Nations Level 2 Mobile Field Hospital in October 2024, designed for rapid deployment. It plays a key role in providing medical care in emergency operations while also supporting the health needs of Ugandan citizens.

The U.S. is focused on increasing African nation self-sustainment capacity to fully enable a country's ability to enact "African solutions to African problems." Uganda is one of the top troop-contributing countries to peace support operations on the African continent, including contributing more than 4,000 Soldiers to the African Union mission in Somalia.

Ugandan Soldiers wait for other teams to check in after completing a land navigation course in Kasenyi, Uganda.

U.S. AIR FORCE

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Egypt Joins AU Peacekeeping Force in Somalia

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Egypt has joined an African Union peacekeeping force in Somalia as the two countries draw closer amid tensions with Ethiopia.

Egypt joined the mission ahead of the end of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) to make way for the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), a new force against al-Shabaab insurgents. ATMIS concluded in December 2024.

"We believe that the establishment of AUSSOM provides an opportunity for the international community to refocus its efforts, renew its commitment, and demonstrate its resolve to assist the brotherly people of Somalia in their quest for peace, stability, and development," Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said during a summit hosted by Uganda in April 2025.

Tensions flared in the Horn of Africa after Ethiopia signed a maritime deal in January 2024 with the breakaway region of Somaliland, pushing Mogadishu closer to Egypt, Addis Ababa's regional rival. Ethiopia and Somalia agreed in January 2025 to restore diplomatic representation in their respective capitals, more than a year after Somalia severed ties over a sea access agreement that landlocked Ethiopia signed with Somaliland, The Guardian reported.

Turkey had brokered a deal to end the nearly yearlong bitter dispute between Ethiopia and Somalia. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hailed the breakthrough as "historic."

Somalia earlier had said Ethiopian troops would be excluded from the AU peacekeeping force but welcomed Egypt's participation. In August 2024, Egypt signed a military cooperation deal with Somalia during a visit to Cairo by Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. Months later, a summit brought together Egypt, Eritrea and Somalia in a new regional alliance that was seen as excluding Ethiopia.

Egypt has long been at odds with Addis Ababa, particularly over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile, which it says threatens its vital water supply.

Central African Republic, Chad Open Border Post

UNITED NATIONS

A major step has been taken in the Central African Republic toward better protection of civilians and a return to lasting peace with the inauguration of the first mixed border post in Bembéré, between the northwest part of the country and Chad.

The border post, built and equipped by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), houses several state services under one roof, including the gendarmerie, the police, customs, and officials for water, forests and livestock.

It represents the first concrete achievement of the national policy for the management of the Central African borders and its 10-year action plan supported by MINUSCA. It meets the objectives of extending and gradually restoring the authority of the state throughout the Central African territory, including along its six borders.

The 1,556-kilometer CAR-Chad border stretches from Cameroon to Sudan. For more than 20 years, thousands of CAR refugees have crossed the border, fleeing the conflict in their home country.

In a speech during a handover ceremony, Valentine Rugwabiza, the head of MINUSCA, stressed that the mixed border post "is part of the implementation of the peace agreement, one of the pillars of which is the securing of border areas, which must move from areas of insecurity to areas of trade and prosperity for the benefit of all."

MINUSCA will continue its advocacy in support of the implementation of the National Policy for the Management of Border Areas so that mixed border posts can be established in other areas of the country.

MINUSCA Head of Mission Valentine Rugwabiza, center, commemorates the start of construction of a mixed border post in Bembéré. MINUSCA

JOINING HANDS

Operation Clamps Down on Illegal Mining

DEFENCEWEB

An Interpol-led operation targeting illegal mining in Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Guinea and Senegal has led to the arrest of 200 people and the seizure of chemicals, explosives, drugs and pain relief medication used by illegal miners.

Operation Sanu, which ended in late 2024, brought together experts from Interpol and national law enforcement agencies to combat illegal mining and associated crimes. Hundreds of officers deployed to identify criminal routes and modus operandi in remote and isolated areas of the four countries, Interpol said in a statement.

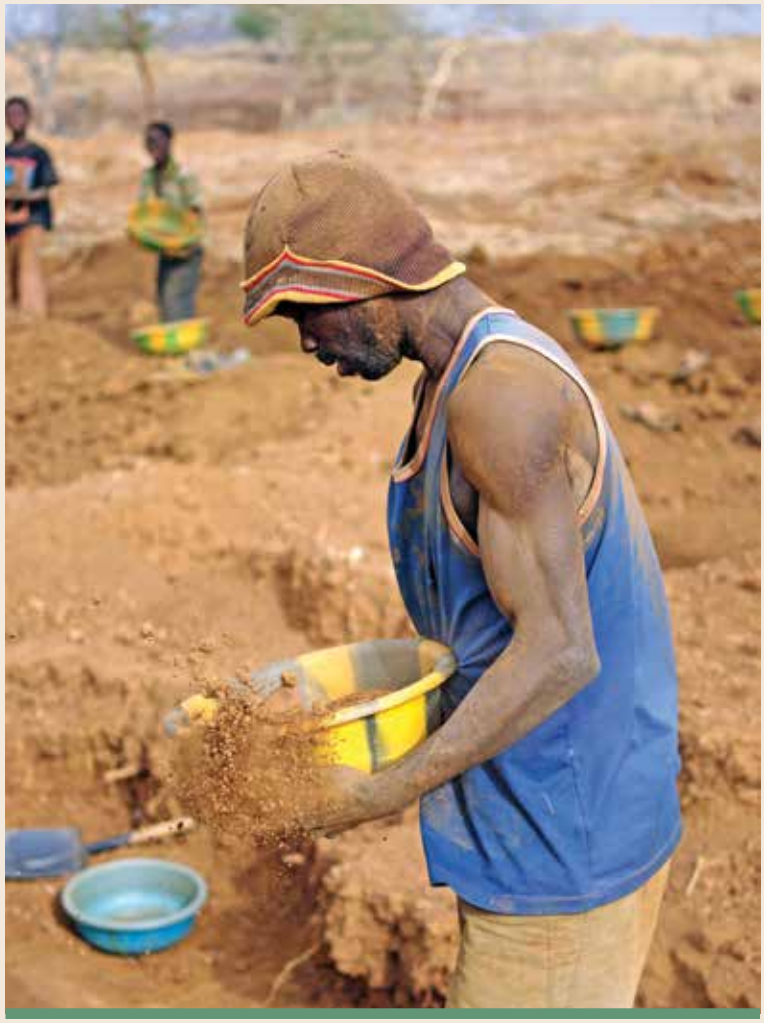
The cross-border collaboration led to the seizure of significant amounts of chemicals and equipment used in illegal mining: 150 kilograms of cyanide, 325 kilograms of active charcoal, 14 cylinders of mercury with an estimated value of more than $100,000, 20 liters of nitric acid, and two 57-liter containers of sulfuric acid. Officials also seized 10 kilograms of cocaine and almost 7,000 explosives.

Authorities also seized large quantities of opioid tablets commonly used by miners to alleviate pain caused by the use of chemicals such as mercury and cyanide in illicit small-scale gold mining. These chemicals can have toxic effects on the nervous system, Interpol cautioned.

"The operation also gave Interpol and the law enforcement officers and prosecutors involved new insights into the wider damage caused by illegal mining in the region — from deforestation to landslides and the deviation of river flows leading to drought or flooding — as well as its impact on economies and communities in the region," Interpol said.

Operation Sanu is part of a pilot project to support law enforcement agencies as they tackle the complex and multifaceted issues arising from illegal mining in Western and Central Africa. It was carried out by Interpol's Environmental Security Programme with funding from the United Kingdom's Home Office.

Interpol's Operation Sanu targeted illegal activities at sand mines in The Gambia. INTERPOL



A man sifts soil in search of gold at a mine in Burkina Faso. REUTERS

Moroccan F-16s 'Intercept' B-52s

DEFENCEWEB

In an impressive display of capabilities, Royal Moroccan Air Force fighter jets "intercepted" United States Air Force B-52H Stratofortress bombers as part of a joint training event.

The bombers from the 20th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron, Barksdale Air Force Base, departed England for Morocco in late November 2024. Upon entering Moroccan airspace, the F-16s "intercepted" them en route to the Aoreora Range south of Agadir. At Aoreora, Moroccan and U.S. Special Operations joint tactical air controllers contacted the bombers to conduct a live munitions drop. The controllers guided the bombers to their target, where they released two 227-kilogram bombs.

"Our ability to conduct these long-range missions across multiple combatant commands in cooperation with our partners on the continent highlights our partnership, continued military-to-military engagements and training when working with continental partners," said Maj. Gen. Claude Tudor, director of operations for U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). "These missions reinforce our commitment to African partners and allies while helping support regional and African security."

The B-52s flew to Morocco as part of a bomber task force mission, reinforcing the United States' ability to project strategic reach and long-range strike capabilities. The mission coincided with a visit to Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya by U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Michael Langley, commander of AFRICOM. In a meeting with Kenyan officials, U.S. officials stressed AFRICOM's "commitment to enabling partner effectiveness and bilateral efforts on counterterrorism operations." The two partner nations shared their concerns about regional security and emphasized the importance of partnerships to promote regional peace and security.

A B-52H Stratofortress takes off as part of a training mission with the Royal Moroccan Air Force. U.S. AIR FORCE

Police in Djibouti use Interpol biometric devices at ports of entry. INTERPOL

Afripol Announces 37 Arrests in East African Terrorism Sweep

ADF STAFF

In a sweeping operation that covered multiple East African countries, Afripol announced the arrest of 37 terrorism suspects and the destruction of weapons, including a missile and antitank armaments.

The operation in November and December 2024 netted members of the Islamic State group (IS) and al-Shabaab, along with other foreign fighters. Working with Interpol, Afripol authorities made arrests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania.

In the DRC, police arrested four alleged members of the Allied Democratic Forces and two associates. They also captured and destroyed a missile and antitank device abandoned by terrorists.

In Kenya, authorities arrested 17 people, including two suspected IS members, several foreign fighters, and more people involved in terrorism financing, radicalization and propaganda.

In Somalia, authorities arrested three people, including a suspected bombmaker for an intelligence unit of al-Shabaab, who had been planting improvised explosive devices to target law enforcement officers and Soldiers. Another suspect was an al-Shabaab operative believed to have attacked several police checkpoints with hand grenades.

In Tanzania, police arrested an alleged member of IS-Mozambique and a Ugandan national who tried to join a terrorist group in Mozambique.

Afripol also worked with law enforcement authorities in Djibouti, Mozambique, South Africa and Uganda to capture the terrorism suspects. The arrests were part of a five-day border security operation that used Interpol databases to search for people suspected of major crimes, including fraud, money laundering and robbery.

The East African counterterrorism operation came after a separate joint Afripol-Interpol investigation in September and October 2024 that resulted in the arrests of more than 1,000 people suspected of cybercrimes across 19 Sub-Saharan countries. Operation Serengeti broke up more than 134,000 scam operations that had stolen more than $193 million from victims worldwide.

An Oyo king in a 1910 photo

NATIONAL ARCHIVES, UNITED KINGDOM

The Horsemen of Oyo

ADF STAFF

There have been fierce, powerful armies throughout the history of Africa, but few were ever so spectacular as the Horsemen of Oyo.

The Kingdom of Oyo had its start in about 1300 A.D., in what are today southern Benin and western Nigeria. Oyo quickly became a trans-Saharan trade center. The Yoruba people traded in salt, leather, kola nuts, ivory, cloth and slaves. Oyo's climate in the savannah region north of the tropical forests made it relatively free from tsetse fly infestation, which in turn made it easier to raise healthy animals. The excellence of Oyo's horses made them their most famous commodity.

All this trade made the Oyo Empire rich. The wealth came from taxes, called tribute, paid by surrounding kingdoms.

With such wealth, the kingdom chose to invest in its military, especially in forming a skilled cavalry. These cavalrymen were the backbone of the Oyo military, known for their equestrian skill, bravery in battle and striking appearance. They had no peers among the surrounding kingdoms in terms of their mobility and speed. At its peak, the cavalry had 100,000 horsemen.

The Oyo military leaders came to realize that other armies were intimidated by their horsemen and played upon that fear. The Horsemen of Oyo wore elaborate, dramatic battle attire with brightly colored robes and headdresses and were armed with lances, swords and shields. Their horses were trimmed in feathers, elaborate decorations and heavy armor. The sight of the Horsemen of Oyo charging into battle was said to have been terrifying and awe-inspiring.

A wooden sculpture depicts a Yoruba horseman with braided hair and decorated saddle bags on a stylized horse.

INVALUABLE AUCTION

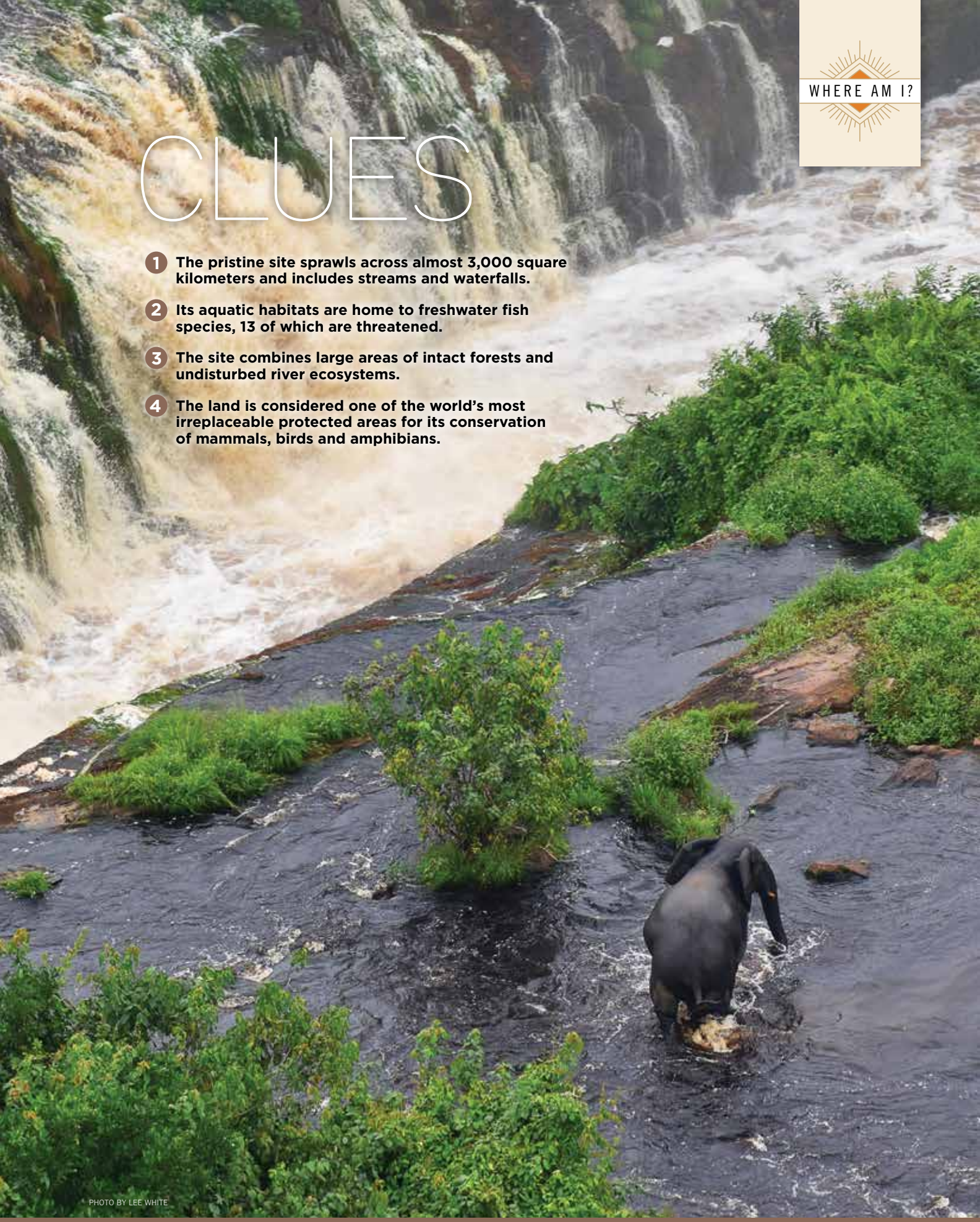
The empire's military success was not solely due to the cavalry, however. The Oyo army was a well-rounded fighting force, with archers and infantry.

Despite their formidable reputation, the Horsemen of Oyo were not invincible. The Dahomey Wars, which began in 1728 against a neighboring kingdom, exposed some of the cavalry's weaknesses. The Dahomey warriors, armed with firearms, found that the sound of gunshots frightened the Oyo horses, disrupting their charges. Additionally, the Dahomey built fortifications and trenches that neutralized the cavalry's effectiveness. The Oyo were forced to adapt their tactics and rely more on infantry in certain situations. It took 11 invasions, but the Oyo, largely on the strength of its cavalry, defeated the Dahomey warriors in 1748.

In its time, it was the largest Yoruba-speaking empire and one of the most important kingdoms in all of Western Africa. By the late 18th century, the empire held considerable influence over not just most of the other Yoruba-speaking kingdoms, but also most of the nearby African states.

The Kingdom of Oyo endured, in various degrees of power and influence, for more than 500 years. The end of the kingdom came from within, as palace political infighting eroded the power of the king to the point that he could no longer command the allegiance of his chiefs. With the reduced power within the capital, the kingdom eventually crumbled into smaller parts.

Today, it is best remembered for its time of great wealth and influence. And it is remembered for its horsemen, who had a lasting impact on the history of the continent.



WHERE AM I?

CLUES

1. The pristine site sprawls across almost 3,000 square kilometers and includes streams and waterfalls.
2. Its aquatic habitats are home to freshwater fish species, 13 of which are threatened.
3. The site combines large areas of intact forests and undisturbed river ecosystems.
4. The land is considered one of the world's most irreplaceable protected areas for its conservation of mammals, birds and amphibians.

PHOTO BY LEE WHITE

ANSWER Ivindo National Park, Gabon

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The magazine is published quarterly by U.S. Africa Command and covers topics such as counterterrorism strategies, security and defense operations, transnational crime, and issues affecting peace, stability, good governance and prosperity.

The forum allows for an in-depth discussion and exchange of ideas. We want to hear from people in our African partner nations who understand the interests and challenges on the continent. Submit an article for publication in ADF, and let your voice be heard.

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Headquarters, U.S. Africa Command
ATTN: J3/Africa Defense Forum Staff
Unit 29951
APO AE 09751 USA

Headquarters, U.S. Africa Command
ATTN: J3/Africa Defense Forum Staff
Kelley Kaserne
Geb 3315, Zimmer 53
Plieninger Strasse 289
70567 Stuttgart, Germany

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