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AFRICA DEFENSE FORUM



ELITE OPERATORS

Special Forces Use Speed,
Stealth and Technology
to Defend Their Nations



PLUS

A Conversation with Brig. John Kinyua Njeru,
commander of Kenyan Special Operations Forces Command

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ON THE COVER

The cover shows special operations forces (SOF) operators from Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Tunisia and Cameroon in a variety of training and counterterror scenarios. Skilled SOF units are playing a key role in responding to asymmetric threats on the African continent.

PHOTOS BY REUTERS AND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF WAR

As insurgencies multiply in Africa, militaries are investing in special operations forces (SOF). These highly trained, disciplined operators take on asymmetric threats using speed, stealth and lethality.

But as the importance of SOF grows, it must adapt to meet 21st century challenges. Cross-border terror attacks, weaponized drones, AI-backed cyberattacks — all these threats require new partnerships and training.

Leaders have found that SOF must be interoperable to be effective. Although SOF personnel of African nations speak different languages, use different hardware and follow different procedures, they share the same bond of selfless service to their respective countries. To work together, SOF must establish frameworks for cooperation and build professional networks that let them train together. African SOF leaders also are working to develop common doctrine that reflects the unique geography, cultures and security challenges on the continent.

Today's operators understand the importance of mastering technology. Terror groups are using drones to launch attacks and AI to spread false information and disrupt computer systems. But technology also can be used to defend the public. Young SOF operators are comfortable using high-tech tools, and it is up to SOF leaders to encourage them to be innovative and stay ahead of their adversaries.

SOF leaders also recognize the need to support the people who execute these difficult missions. Developing human capital means making sure SOF recruits meet the highest standards of excellence through stringent selection, challenging training and career-long learning. As threats and doctrine change, SOF personnel must maintain high standards of ethics and professionalism. Investing in human capital also means supporting the health and well-being of the warfighter away from the battlefield.

It is clear that terror groups do not respect borders and place no value on human life. Through asymmetric attacks, they are determined to derail the economic and democratic progress made by African countries. SOF is one of the best defenses against these threats. Now is the time to form a SOF community that spans the continent and works together to secure it.

U.S. Africa Command Staff

A member of the Tanzanian 93rd Special Forces Battalion collects rope after fast-roping from a helicopter in Tanga.

STAFF SGT. AMBER LITTERAL/U.S. AIR FORCE



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Security 'Is a Shared National Duty'



Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama commissioned officer cadets into the Ghana Armed Forces during a January 30, 2026, ceremony at Ranger Baba Parade Square, Whistler Barracks, Teshie, Accra. His remarks have been edited for space and clarity.



Ghanaian Soldiers participate in a show of force exercise in Accra on December 11, 2025. REUTERS



The security environment in our subregion remains complicated and volatile. Violent extremism, terrorism

and transnational crime continue to pose serious threats, particularly along our northern border.

Globally, the rise of nonstate actors and asymmetric warfare has reshaped the nature of security challenges. These realities demand a comprehensive and coordinated national response. Security cannot be seen as a sole responsibility of the armed forces and security agencies. It is a shared national duty. Citizens, communities, traditional authorities, civil society and government must work together to protect the peace and stability we all cherish.

I therefore urge all Ghanaians to remain vigilant and security conscious in safeguarding our nation's peace.

As we celebrate our graduating cadets, we do so against the backdrop of Ghana's proud legacy in international peace support operations since 1960, when Ghana first participated in a United Nations mission in the Republic of the Congo. Our nation has remained steadfast in its commitment to global peace and security.

Today, Ghana is among the leading troop-contributing countries to U.N.

peacekeeping missions. Our men and women serve with distinction in 15 missions worldwide under the U.N., the African Union and ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States].

From Lebanon to South Sudan and from Abyei to Somalia, Ghanaian peacekeepers continue to earn global respect for their professionalism, discipline and respect for human dignity.

I assure you that transparency, fairness and merit will continue to guide the selection of personnel for peace support operations, ensuring that only the most qualified represent our nation abroad.

Exposure to conflict environments has reinforced the Ghana Armed Forces' deep respect for constitutional rule and democratic governance. In a subregion challenged by unconstitutional changes of government, our armed forces remain firm defenders of our democracy, civilian authority and the rule of law.

To our soon-to-be-commissioned officers, your duty extends beyond combat readiness. You are guardians of peace, justice and national unity. Serve with courage, humility and professionalism.

Strengthening the operational readiness of the Ghana Armed Forces remains a No. 1 priority for my administration. We're investing in modern

equipment, advanced training and improved welfare to respond effectively to terrorism, piracy and cross-border crime. Plans are well advanced to acquire new helicopters to enhance air mobility of our Air Force and rapid response capabilities.

Over the next three years, approximately 12,000 new personnel will be recruited nationwide, supported by the establishment of forward operating bases in strategic border areas. These initiatives reflect our unwavering commitment to a professional, resilient and well-equipped armed forces.

Graduating cadets, today marks a defining moment in your lives. In a few moments, you will no longer be officer cadets, but commissioned officers of the Ghana Armed Forces. Leadership is not about rank or privilege. It is about responsibility, service and sacrifice.

I urge you to lead with integrity, uphold courage in adversity, show compassion in command, inspire loyalty among your men, command respect and honor the traditions of the Ghana Armed Forces.

‘Operation Screen’ Secures West African Borders, Nabs Terrorists

Police officers check boats in the Gambia River estuary near the Port of Banjul.

INTERPOL

ADF STAFF

An Interpol-coordinated border security operation in West Africa led to 62 arrests and the seizure of ammunition, explosives, firearms, drugs, counterfeit medicines and stolen vehicles.

Operation Screen West Africa 2025, which ran from July to October 2025, brought together law enforcement agencies from 12 West African countries to strengthen border security, track people with links to terrorism and disrupt transnational organized crime networks.

Officers at land, air and sea borders used Interpol mobile devices and other systems to access global databases to carry out 1.7 million real-time checks.

During the operation, officers arrested nine people suspected of having terrorist connections. Among its most notable successes were the arrests in Burkina Faso of two people wanted by law enforcement authorities who were involved in attacks by the al-Qaida-affiliated

terrorist group Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin. The attacks killed more than 10 security personnel in Côte d’Ivoire in 2020.

Officers in Burkina Faso also arrested a third person with connections to terrorism.

Cyril Gout, Interpol acting executive director of police services, said: “These cases highlight how the operational support we offer member countries and our unique specialist tools can make the links that identify suspected terrorists and disrupt their attempts to create fear and endanger communities. We are determined to counter these threats and constantly work with our member countries to strengthen global security.”

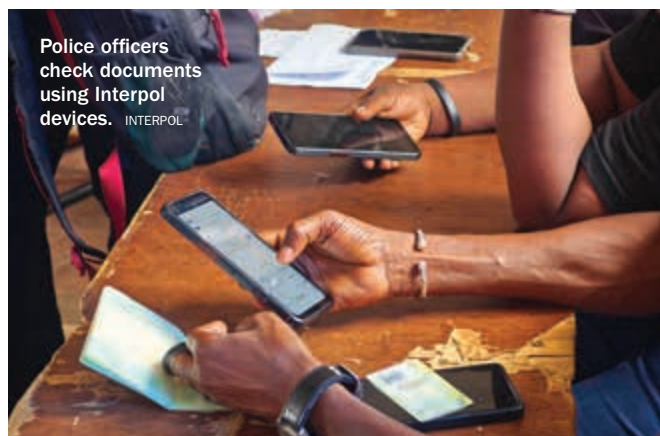
Officers in Ghana also freed 21 victims of human trafficking who had been held in Nigeria.

The operation included checks at harbors and in territorial waters. Interpol alerted participating countries about vessels using deceptive shipping practices, such as identity tampering; so-called dark operations, in which ships deliberately switch off their identification systems; and frequent flag changes, or “flag hopping.”

Authorities seized 17 caches of weapons and ammunition; explosives, including dynamite and detonators; 136 stolen vehicles; 731 kilograms of cannabis; counterfeit medicine, including fake branded opioid pain relief tablets; and counterfeit currency and fraudulent documents.

Proceeds from many of these items can be used to finance terrorism or fund organized crime.

The 12 participating countries were Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.





Nigeria Offers Blueprint for Counterterrorism Online

ADF STAFF

Retired Nigerian Maj. Gen. Abubakar Adamu became the first commander of the Army's Cyber Warfare Command in 2022 and helped his country leverage technology to build its digital intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities.

Now he advocates for expanding digital ISR capacity throughout Africa. "Technology is the driving force for what we are doing, whether in a crisis or in peaceful times," he said during a December 2025 webinar hosted by the Africa Center for Security Studies.

As terrorists continue to innovate, adapt and expand, African security forces must embrace digital ISR tools and expand capacity to protect civilians and secure territory. Open-source intelligence (OSINT),

real-time social media monitoring and other digital tools help governments and militaries stay ahead of terrorists.

Ahmed Labaran of the Nigeria Customs Service wrote about how the combination of geospatial intelligence (GEOINT) and OSINT hold significant promise for law enforcement.

"A new paradigm of knowledge, almost a discipline in itself, GEOINT combines satellite imagery, geographic information systems, remote sensing, positioning data and analytics to provide a visual representation of geographic features, activities and changes over time," he wrote in the October 2025 edition of the World Customs Organization's quarterly magazine.

Experts laud the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) for offering an effective blueprint to other African countries seeking to create institutions that can improve counterterrorism efforts online. The AFN also established the Defence Space Administration in 2016 to develop and provide space and cyberspace capabilities.

Adamu acknowledged that challenges remain. "Most of the products we get, we get them from outside," he said. "We need to do a lot of collaboration both within Africa and outside. So, we need to build our infrastructure and also build a lot of capacity, and also, we must have reliable supply-chain management."

Nonstate actors use these same technologies, so Adamu recommends that nations incorporate modern ISR tools to improve situational awareness, decision-making and operational effectiveness.

"African governments should prioritize the harmonization of policies related to ISR, particularly those in supply chains and data governance," he said. "Individual nations investing in technological solutions that can be used in regional collaboration will be a lot of help."

Land Forces Commanders Preach Self-Reliance

ADF STAFF

Collective security was the focus of the Land Forces Commanders Symposium in Kigali, Rwanda, as African military leaders gathered to build and enhance solutions to a rapidly evolving threat landscape.

Commanders from Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda were among military leaders from 28 African countries who participated October 21-22, 2025.

Brig. Gen. Ronald Rwivanga, spokesperson for the Rwanda Defence Force, said collaboration strengthens capabilities and fosters learning. Interoperability between national armies helps overcome coordination challenges.

"This starts with ensuring peacetime interoperability through harmonized command structures, doctrines, standard operating procedures and communication," he said. "Sometimes you need to have fewer nations working together to respond quickly. After we have brought the peace, then the United Nations can come with its peace support operations and resources. Both approaches can complement each other."

Panel discussions touched on operational challenges for land forces in a new era of drone warfare, ways to



Military leaders from 28 African countries participated in the Land Forces Commanders Symposium in Kigali, Rwanda, in October 2025. RWANDA DEFENCE FORCE

improve interoperability and military diplomacy, and how to promote civil-military cooperation.

"Just like you spend on guns, you must also spend on welfare to win the trust and confidence of the local population," Rwivanga said. "It is useless to operate with only the approach of the military."

Rwanda's Minister of Defence Juvenal Marizamunda urged African leaders to take ownership and strengthen cooperation in addressing complex security challenges that hinder development.

"We operate in an increasingly complex and unpredictable environment, marked by asymmetric conflicts, transnational threats and crises that require decisive action," he said. "In such times, the vital role of land forces cannot be overstated. They are the first responders in times of crisis, the stabilizing force during turmoil and the foundation upon which peace is rebuilt."



The Tanzanian 93rd Special Forces Battalion participates in a close-quarter battle exercise, bolstering Soldiers' operational readiness and skills, during Joint Combined Exchange Training in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. STAFF SGT. AMBER LITTERAL/U.S. AIR FORCE

FAST, LETHAL AND CONNECTED

SOF Leaders Look for Ways to Improve Interoperability at Silent Warrior 25

ADF STAFF

BY necessity, special operations forces are secretive and operate in small, agile units. Their missions are high risk and, if their presence is known, they've probably done something wrong.

But there is a growing recognition that African special operations forces (SOF) needs to get connected. Cross-border threats require that operators share intelligence and coordinate efforts. Operating alone is no longer an option, experts say. SOF needs to form a community.

During Silent Warrior 2025, Africa's premier SOF conference, 400 attendees gathered from 32 African nations and 14 international partners. One repeated motto at the Nairobi conference was: "Your network is your net worth."

For many, building that network of SOF that bridges gaps and breaks down barriers to cooperation was the reason for the event.

"Adversaries are evolving, and our forces must evolve faster," Gen. John Kinyua Njeru, commander of Special Operations Forces Command Kenya, told SOF leaders. "While capabilities matter, trust, interoperability and professional leadership remain the decisive factors in shaping how African SOF respond to these threats."

Attendees did not have to look far to observe the perils of a divided continent. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have left the Economic Community of West African States and formed the Alliance of Sahel States. The result is less intelligence sharing, less coordination and an absence of mechanisms such as the right of pursuit, which lets SOF units follow terrorists across borders.



Attendees from Burkina Faso, the United States and Ghana chat at Silent Warrior 25 in Nairobi. The symposium encouraged special operations forces leaders to meet and exchange information.

STAFF SGT. TRENTON JANCZE/U.S. AIR FORCE

Experts say terrorists thrive in this fractured environment. Sahel countries now account for more than half of terror attacks worldwide.

"We see this lack of coordination is harming the effectiveness of the fight against terror," Dr. Adal Rhoubaid, former security advisor to the president of Niger, told ADF. "Each side becomes a haven for terror groups and, at the military level, because of the political disagreements, you don't see the coordination we used to have. And coordination is the first step before we can even think about interoperability."

**"OUR ADVERSARIES MOVE ACROSS
BORDERS, THEREFORE OUR PARTNERSHIPS
MUST DO THE SAME."**

~ Maj. Gen. Peter Muteti, deputy force commander of the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia

**“AFRICA DOESN’T NEED TO
COPY-PASTE WESTERN SOF MODELS.
WHAT IT NEEDS IS AN AFRICAN
APPROACH TO SPECIAL OPERATIONS —
ROOTED IN LOCAL REALITIES,
BUILT ON TRUST, AND DRIVEN BY
MISSION CLARITY.”**

~ Dr. Alex Cann, military planner, African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia



Members of the Tanzanian 93rd Special Forces Battalion conduct close-quarter battle exercises during Joint Combined Exchange Training in Dar es Salaam. STAFF SGT. AMBER LITTERAL/U.S. AIR FORCE



During Silent Warrior, attendees discussed ways to improve interoperability, including liaison exchanges, joint patrols, mechanisms for intelligence sharing and strengthening regional frameworks.

“Our adversaries move across borders, therefore our partnerships must do the same,” said Maj. Gen. Peter Muteti, deputy force commander of the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia.

HARMONIZING DOCTRINE

SOF units and capabilities can vary greatly from nation to nation. SOF structures typically emerge from colonial history and are crafted to respond to a nation’s most pressing threats. In Egypt, for example, SOF has expertise in counterterrorism and hostage rescue. In Chad, SOF is known for its speed and ability to conduct desert warfare. Coastal nations such as Nigeria and Ghana have developed maritime units capable of boarding vessels and operating in difficult mangrove swamps.

Some countries have brigade-sized units that can bring to bear significant force against an enemy, but struggle with speed and stealth. Others have smaller specialized units. There are significant differences in language, doctrine and equipment.

“We don’t have similar SOPs [standard operating procedures], we don’t have similar TTPs [tactics, techniques and procedures], therefore, even when we’re engaged in the theater together, we find that the operation is disjointed because the troops don’t



Silent Warrior 25 attendees meet in a breakout session.

STAFF SGT. TRENTON JANCZE/U.S. AIR FORCE

have a common doctrine that they’re sharing,” said Col. Charles Mugo, deputy commander of Special Operations Forces Command Kenya.

Military planner Dr. Alex Cann, who served in the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia, wrote that there are some commonalities despite the variety of African security challenges. Many countries face adversaries such as bandits, terrorists and traffickers who employ asymmetric tactics in challenging geographic zones. These require an African approach to SOF that prioritizes speed and fosters trust from local communities.

“Africa doesn’t need to copy-paste Western SOF models,” Cann wrote. “What it needs is an African

PILLARS OF AN AFRICAN SOF DOCTRINE

Military planner and trainer Dr. Alex Cann believes that Africa needs its own SOF doctrine. He proposes five pillars for consideration:



Selection and training: SOF should have consistently high standards for physical fitness, psychological resolve and ethics.



Interagency integration: SOF should work seamlessly with police, intelligence and border control.



Strategic autonomy: SOF units must have rapid deployment capability and decentralized command structures.



Local legitimacy: To earn civilians' trust, SOF troops must be culturally aware and language capable.



Continental collaboration: African-led training centers, such as SOF academies supported by the African Union or regional economic communities, can foster interoperability.

approach to special operations — rooted in local realities, built on trust, and driven by mission clarity.”

Cann pointed to Mozambique, where a relatively small Rwandan force reclaimed territory from terrorists and outperformed larger forces. In many African countries, he wrote, small and nimble units are most effective.

“Sometimes, it only takes a dozen well-trained warriors to stop a war before it begins,” Cann wrote.

MODELS OF INTEROPERABILITY

Some Silent Warrior attendees identified ways to improve interoperability.

Brig. Gaboratanelwe Tshweneetsile, Botswana’s director of special operations, said that since SOF units might be deployed to terrains and in civilian and military cultures they are unfamiliar with, it would be helpful to have regional centers of excellence where they can learn ahead of time.

“What I advocate for are centers of excellence in different regions so that we can operate together as a common force,” Tshweneetsile told ADF. “If it is desert warfare, you

can go to a country that specializes in desert combat. If it is jungle warfare, you can go to a country that has jungles, so I think that these specialties go across the continent.”

Others pointed to the AU’s African Standby Force, which includes mechanisms for rapid response to crises but does not include a dedicated SOF component. If there was a standing, regional SOF unit, it could be deployed to crises quickly and effectively.

Maj. Gen. Mohamed Ali Barise of the Somali National Army has seen the need for additional SOF capacity in his home country. Somalia’s elite Danab special forces have liberated towns from al-Shabaab, but its relatively small size — 2,000 Soldiers — means it has difficulty holding territory.

A regionally aligned SOF unit within the Standby Force structure could be a major asset in situations like this. It also would support the broader project of SOF interoperability.

“SOF is an enabler,” Barise told ADF. “To use special forces from different countries as an enabler for the fighting elements on the ground, it would be something commendable.”

“TO USE SPECIAL FORCES FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AS AN ENABLER FOR THE FIGHTING ELEMENTS ON THE GROUND, IT WOULD BE SOMETHING COMMENDABLE.”

~ Maj. Gen. Mohamed Ali Barise, Somali National Army



Tanzanian 93rd Special Forces Battalion Soldiers advance during Joint Combined Exchange Training in Dar es Salaam.

STAFF SGT. AMBER LITTERAL/U.S. AIR FORCE



Silent Warrior 2025 panelists offer best practices on leadership development during a session in Nairobi on December 9, 2025.

STAFF SGT. TRENTON JANCZE/U.S. AIR FORCE

One possible model for SOF integration in Africa comes from NATO, where the Allied Special Operations Forces Command (SOFCOM) directs, synchronizes and enables SOF activities across 28 member countries and two partner nations in the alliance. The NATO Special Operations University at Chièvres Air Base in Belgium offers training and education to build SOF capabilities, capacity and interoperability.

The idea is that, when called upon, NATO SOF units can speak the same battlefield language and are ready to work together.

“This effort enhances the development of capable, realistic, geographically oriented SOF relationships and structures to create effects in peacetime, crisis and conflict,” SOFCOM said on its website.

For SOF leaders at Silent Warrior, the annual meeting is a first step toward creating similar continental structures. And, they said, it starts with building relationships.

“The fact that we are coming together as SOF makes a difference,” Tshweneetsile of Botswana said. “We make friendships, we make contacts, and we know what others can do and are capable of. We are going to operate in the future together, so we need to know what the tactics and procedures are across the continent.”

Others said they would return home with newly gained knowledge about the latest SOF technology and what is being done in other parts of the continent. But, they said, the real work starts after the conference concludes when attendees must build on the relationships formed at Silent Warrior.

“We have done the talk; it’s time for the working aspect of it,” Col. BI Amajuoyi, deputy chief of staff for Nigeria’s Special Forces Command, told ADF. “We can take these lectures and these discussions back and practice them.” □



‘ALWAYS BE TWO STEPS
AHEAD
OF THE
THREAT’



Kenyan Soldiers practice tactical maneuvers during U.S.-led Joint Combined Exchange Training in Isiolo.

STAFF SGT. ALYSIA BLAKE/U.S. AIR FORCE

An Interview with Brig. John Kinyua Njeru, Commander of Kenyan Special Operations Forces Command



Njeru gives opening remarks during Silent Warrior 2025 in Nairobi.

STAFF SGT. TRENTON JANCZE/U.S. AIR FORCE

Brig. John Kinyua Njeru has served as commander of Kenyan Special Operations Forces (KENSOF) Command since 2021. He began his career in 1990 and has served in a range of roles in the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), including commander of Army Special Operations Brigade, commander of Ranger Regiment, commander of Special Forces and commanding officer of 30 Special Forces Battalion. He has served in peacekeeping missions in Darfur and Sierra Leone. He holds a master of

arts degree from National Defence College, Tanzania, and has completed a range of training domestically and internationally, including the International Special Forces Course in the United States. He was awarded the Elder of the Order of the Burning Spear, Order of the Grand Warrior and several United Nations medals. ADF interviewed him during the Silent Warrior conference in Nairobi, and he provided written responses to questions. The interview has been edited for space and clarity.

ADF: *Can you share a bit about your career? What made you want to serve your country in the military, and what were one or two key positions you've held during your career?*

Njeru: My journey into the military began with a very simple motivation: a deep desire to serve Kenya in a meaningful and disciplined way. Growing up, I was inspired by the professionalism and sacrifice of our armed forces, and I knew early in life that I wanted to be part of that tradition.

My career has spanned three decades and allowed me to serve in command, staff and operational roles that shaped my strategic outlook. One formative assignment was my time embedded with multinational forces in Sierra Leone and in Darfur. That experience reinforced the value of partnerships and the reality that modern threats do not respect borders.

Another defining moment was leading formations and units in complex operations in Kenya. Operating in this environment taught me the importance of agility,

adaptability and intelligence-led action — principles that continue to guide KENSOF today.

ADF: *Silent Warrior is a unique event with SOF leaders from more than 40 African nations participating. What type of exchanges and partnerships do you expect to take place at an event like this?*

Njeru: Silent Warrior is a convergence point for African experience, innovation and shared purpose. This year's program deliberately brings together regional clusters and thematic discussions to strengthen cooperation and interoperability. At an event of this scale, there are three major forms of exchange:

- **Operational insights:** Nations will compare approaches to insurgency, stabilization and counterterrorism — lessons are drawn from real missions, not theory.
- **Interoperability pathways:** Silent Warrior creates space for identifying where African SOF



Kenyan Special Forces operators take position outside a hotel complex after a terrorist attack in Nairobi's Westlands suburb in 2019. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Njeru speaks during Airborne Day celebrations at Kenyatta Barracks in Gilgil, Kenya, in August 2025.

KENYA DEFENCE FORCES

can synchronize doctrine, communications and capability development.

- **Strategic partnerships:** It offers a diplomatic platform through which relationships between commanders mature into structured cooperation frameworks.

Ultimately, the strength of the symposium is that it recognizes Africa's diversity but focuses on our shared security destiny.

ADF: *How would you characterize SOF partnerships in East Africa? Is there collaboration and intelligence sharing with SOF commanders in the region? Is there room for improvement?*

Njeru: East Africa remains one of the most dynamic and challenging security theaters on the continent, and this reality underscores the importance of stronger SOF partnerships. While individual nations continue to confront shared threats such as al-Shabaab and cross-border criminal networks, there is significant potential for deeper collaboration, particularly in intelligence sharing, coordinated responses and joint training.

Kenya's geographic position — bordering five countries — places us at the heart of regional security. We see great promise in expanding cooperation with counterparts in Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania and other neighbors, building toward a future in which information flows more seamlessly and where operational responses can be mutually reinforcing. The aspiration is to move progressively toward frameworks that support early warning, harmonized planning and more coherent border security postures.



Njeru speaks with attendees at Silent Warrior, an annual, multinational special operations conference.

SENIOR AIRMAN TYLER MCQUISTON/
U.S. AIR FORCE

“Silent Warrior is a convergence point for African experience, innovation and shared purpose.”

There is considerable room for growth. The region would benefit from stronger real-time intelligence fusion mechanisms, interoperable communications systems, and more regular trilateral or quadrilateral SOF engagements. These are areas we are keen to advance through sustained dialogue and confidence-building among our forces. Our adversaries are constantly evolving, and the region must evolve with them.

ADF: *How has SOF training improved and evolved during your career? Kenya’s Special Operations Training School (SOTS) in Gilgil continues to expand. How can Kenya prepare the next generation of operators for the challenges they will face?*

Njeru: Our training model has transformed significantly. When I joined the force, SOF training was intense but narrower in scope, mainly spanning the Para Battalion. Today, SOTS in Gilgil is a modern institution that reflects global best practices. We have expanded our curriculum to include urban warfare, intelligence exploitation and advanced mission planning. This is in line with KDF SOF doctrine. Preparing the next generation requires us to invest in three areas:

- **Human capital:** We must address the welfare of operators and cultivate mentally agile, emotionally disciplined professionals. These operators understand the terrain and the political context of missions.

- **Technology integration:** New operators must train with the tools they will use on operations, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), sensors, digital mapping and AI-enabled systems.
- **Joint and multinational training:** The future operator must be comfortable working seamlessly with other KDF formations and units and with partners from across the globe.

Our young operators are talented. As such, our responsibility is to give them the training edge they need to outthink and outmaneuver adversaries.

ADF: *How is technology being used by Special Forces to gain a tactical advantage over adversaries? Have you seen results from the use of UAVs or other technology?*

Njeru: Technology has become a decisive enabler. In KENSOF, we no longer view technology as an accessory; it is part of the operator’s core kit. UAVs, ground sensors, advanced optics, precision communications and geospatial tools are now embedded into mission planning and execution.

UAVs have provided:

- Persistent military intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, even in terrain that is difficult to access on foot.
- Early warning against hostile movements.
- Improved targeting accuracy, reducing collateral risk.

Njeru speaks during Silent Warrior, an annual special operations conference.

STAFF SGT. SABATINO DIMASCIO/U.S. AIR FORCE



A Kenyan Naval Special Operations Squadron member gives firing commands during a machine-gun drill in Mombasa.

STAFF SGT. SABATINO DIMASCIO/U.S. AIR FORCE

- Support to ground teams during close-quarter engagements.

Beyond UAVs, digital connectivity has enhanced our command and control systems, allowing commanders to make faster, more informed decisions. Technology gives us the ability to see first, understand first and act first, and that is decisive in special operations.

ADF: *The threat along the northern border and the efforts by al-Shabaab to infiltrate and attack targets inside Kenya have been a constant challenge. Can you describe the progress in this fight and what role KENSOF is playing in defeating al-Shabaab?*

Njeru: Al-Shabaab remains an adaptive and persistent adversary. However, Kenya has made significant progress in degrading their networks, denying freedom of movement and protecting local communities.

KENSOF plays a critical role in this effort by:

- Conducting intelligence-driven operations against high-value targets.
- Supporting border security operations in collaboration with other KDF formations, police, intelligence services and international partners.
- Executing precision missions that disrupt planned attacks before they materialize.
- Working closely with communities to strengthen resilience in border counties and to win the hearts and minds of the local population.

Our success is rooted in discipline, consistency and tight integration between SOF, intelligence agencies, local leadership and international partners. Although the threat persists, the capability of Kenyan forces, particularly SOF, continues to outpace the enemy's ability to regenerate. We are determined, patient and unwavering in this mission.



“Our success is rooted in discipline, consistency and tight integration between SOF, intelligence agencies, local leadership and international partners.”

ADF: *Kenya Special Forces emerged within the past three decades. Can you explain how the specialty has grown and developed over that time?*

Njeru: The evolution of Kenya’s SOF capability is one of the most significant military transformations of the past 30 years. We began with small, specialized units responding to emerging asymmetric threats. Today, we have an integrated Special Operations Forces Command with mature doctrine, modern equipment and mission-tested units.

Over time, several developments have shaped our growth, including:

- Professionalization of selection and training to produce elite operators.
- Institutionalization of doctrine to ensure that SOF roles are clearly defined within the national defense architecture.
- Enhanced interoperability with KDF services (the Army, Air Force and the Navy), intelligence agencies, and international partners.
- Operational experience, which has refined our tactics, techniques and procedures.

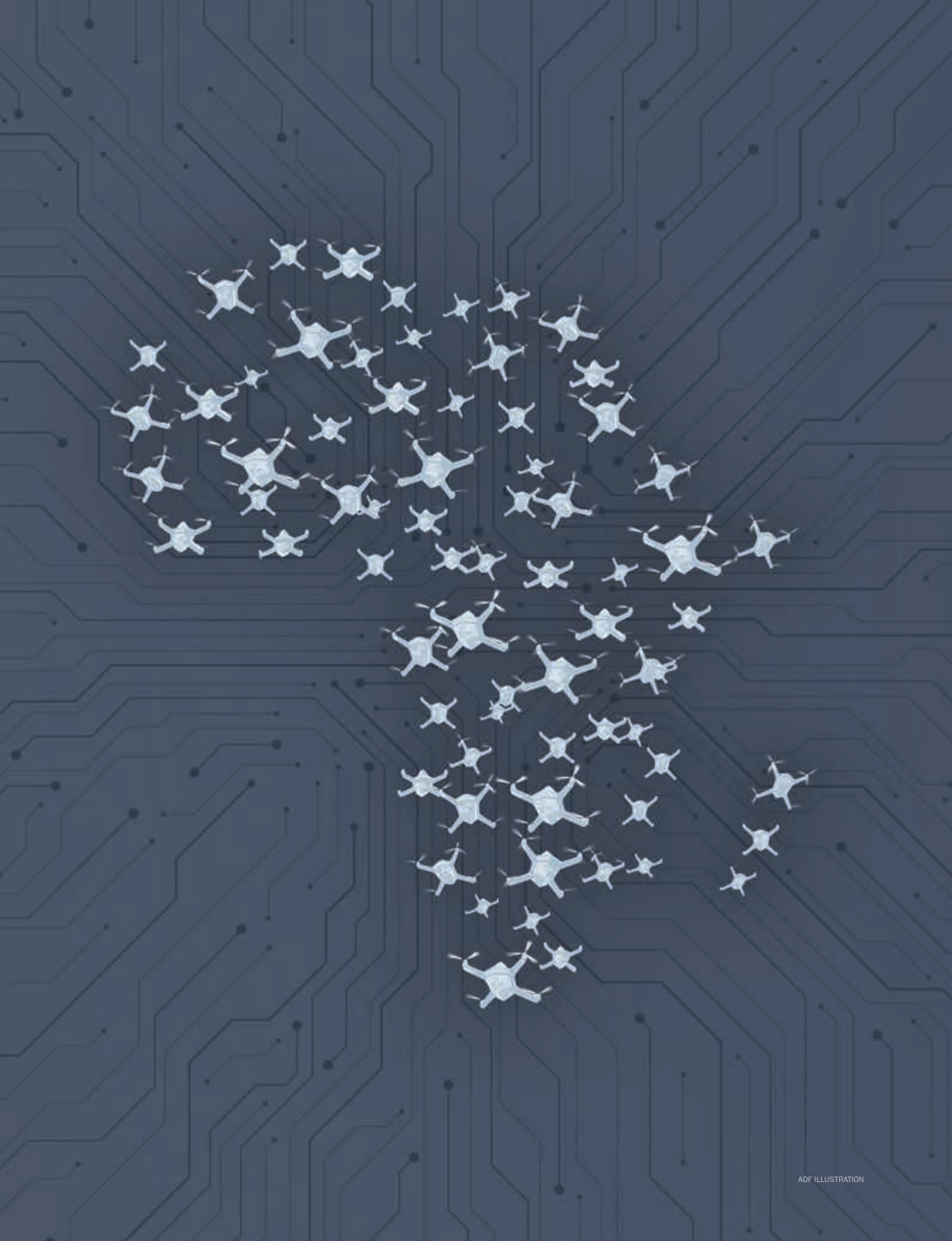
We are still a young force by global standards, but we have grown with purpose and with clear strategic direction.

ADF: *What is the next step in the development of SOF in Kenya? In what ways do you seek to improve?*

Njeru: The next chapter for SOF in Kenya is about deepening jointness, promoting mentorship, accelerating modernization, and preparing for future threats that are more complex, hybrid and technologically enabled.

To accomplish these goals, we want to enhance intelligence fusion to build a seamless SOF intelligence ecosystem that shortens the decision cycle. We need to make advances in adopting technology to integrate AI-enabled systems, autonomous platforms and improved cyber-support capabilities. We must strengthen regional partnerships. Silent Warrior and similar platforms are examples that show Africa’s security future will be cooperative, not isolated. Finally, we should invest in human capital development. This will produce leadership, mental resilience and the special skills needed for emerging domains.

The guiding principle is simple: SOF must always be two steps ahead of the threat. Our development plan ensures that we remain agile, lethal and strategically relevant, both to Kenya and to the wider region. □



ADAPTING TO THE TECH BATTLEFIELD

*Special Operations Forces Strive to Innovate,
Learn and Evolve in a Rapidly Changing Environment*

ADF STAFF

When it comes to communicating on the battlefield, special operations forces often rely on high-frequency radio.

But the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) found that it had a problem with this vital tool. Over the years, Kenya has acquired devices from an array of manufacturers like Motorola, Hytera and Harris. These radios were effective, but they were not interoperable. They use different encryption, operate on different wavelengths and at different frequencies.

Fortunately, the KDF has its own solutions laboratory. The Communication and Information System Maintenance and Innovation Centre (CISMIC), created in 2021, develops and repairs electronic equipment and software for the military. It was tasked with solving the problem.

“The goal here is to make sure our troops in the field are secure,” Col. Stephen Kinyanjui, CISMIC director, told ADF. “So any communication between them is not intercepted by an adversary,

and we do not end up having casualties because we were communicating in an insecure manner.”

The solution they developed is known as “Gate Bridge.” The tool can take a signal from one device, encrypt it and send it on to the next device in a protected and compatible form. KDF technicians conceived and built the tool using locally available parts and their own intellectual property.

Kinyanjui said it was important for the KDF to find a



Members of Tanzania's 93rd Special Forces Battalion train for close-quarter battles.

STAFF SGT. AMBER LITTERAL/U.S. AIR FORCE

homegrown solution so Kenya would not need to rely on external donors and manufacturers.

“When you do it yourself, the support and maintenance becomes integral to you, and you train your own teams and you ensure sustainability of the solution,” he said.

Kenya is following this model as it develops more technology to protect troops on the battlefield. Military technicians are testing counter-IED devices, satellite systems and technology to improve food security. The principle of self-reliance remains central, Kinyanjui said.



A Ghanaian Soldier demonstrates drone takeoff techniques during the military exercise African Lion 2025 in Tamale, Ghana. SGT. WILLIAM CHINA/U.S. ARMY RESERVE

“When you retain the intellectual property, it becomes cheap,” he said. “The knowledge may even be available on open source, so it’s up to you to go and dig it out, work on it, perfect it and then give it out to the troops. That way we are able to sustain the solution.”

Across military branches, and particularly in special operations forces (SOF), technology is offering new possibilities and presenting new challenges. Operators are grappling with how they can best adapt to defend their nations in this rapidly changing landscape. They study how the changes will affect their mission or embolden their enemies.

“There is a technological improvement that we need so we can meet the threat of the terrorists who are already using this technology,”

Col. Jerome Francis Nko’o Ella, commanding officer of Cameroon’s Bataillon d’Intervention Rapide Alpha Operation, told ADF. “We have to catch up, to close the gap.”

THE INNOVATION INCUBATORS

SOF operators often are among the first to adopt new technology. Because they tend to work in small units on high-risk missions and far from central command structures, they need tools that give them an edge.

Forward-deployed SOF units have a history of testing military technology before it is distributed to the wider force, earning them the name “innovation incubators.” One example came in 1990, when GPS technology first was used in combat during Operation Desert Storm. This let operators navigate behind enemy lines and conduct reconnaissance. Today, GPS technology is ubiquitous.

Experts view SOF as the best option for rapid prototyping for the same reasons they are selected for high-risk missions: “their maturity, flexibility, rigorous selection processes, and potential for risk-tolerance,” wrote Leo Blanken, Philip Swintek and Justin Davis for War on the Rocks, an online analysis platform.

Technology is changing the world of SOF operators in a number of ways.

Unmanned aerial

systems (UAS) are used for surveillance and to identify targets, provide early warnings of possible attacks and offer aerial support for ground teams in hostile territory. SOF operators also are on the forefront of testing anti-drone technology, including hand-held jammers to counter attacks.

Artificial intelligence shows promise for a variety of uses. It can help operators predict what adversaries will do. It can be integrated into legacy systems to make them more efficient and aid decision-making. It also can help operators sift through mounds of intelligence. It improves cybersecurity and logistics by

Kenya Defence Forces Military Intelligence Battalion members set up a computer system to control a drone.

STAFF SGT. TIFFANY DENAULT/U.S. AIR FORCE





anticipating failures and weaknesses before a breakdown occurs.

Digital situational awareness tools have SOF operators testing wearable technology that lets them identify friendly Soldiers, map terrain and plot enemy positions. Some devices offer augmented reality, which projects information onto a headset. Additionally, the “sensor-to-Soldier” delivery time is speeding up with data acquired from hardware like UAS and manned aircraft that can be accessed nearly instantaneously.

For Kinyanjui, a culture of innovation and flexibility is key. If forces are not adapting, they’re vulnerable.

“I believe without embracing technology you are going to be left behind,” he said. “If you continue using traditional methods, the individuals themselves will become exposed. When you innovate you are looking for a better way to keep your troops protected.”

DOCTRINE AND TRAINING

As new technology makes its way to the battlefield, experts believe doctrine and training must keep up. SOF operators already train with advanced simulations that create scenarios with inputs from real, complex missions. SOF training incorporates cyber skills; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance techniques; and UAS. Experts say commanders must embrace and empower young tech-savvy operators and prioritize the recruitment of those who have tech skills.

Retired U.S. Vice Adm. Collin Green of DZYNE Technologies said SOF commanders should recognize that young people coming up through the ranks are “digital natives” who use technology “like a fifth limb.”

“Don’t be insecure as a leader; be willing to tap into the well of local talent,” Green said during the Silent Warrior 25 SOF symposium in Nairobi. “Encourage young people to be creative with military solutions.”

An essential part of this is making cybersecurity and awareness a priority. SOF needs to stay ahead of bad actors who seek to infiltrate and disrupt. Terrorist groups, criminal organizations and state-sponsored hackers target military personnel, computer systems and hardware. In South Africa, for example, military and government agencies report an average of 1,450 cyberattacks per week. Command, control and communications systems; supply chains; and even weapons technology are in hackers’ crosshairs.

“Cyber should start with defense first and foremost,” Green said. “Do you know what’s in your fence line, in your supply chains? Do you protect your tactics, techniques and procedures? It’s really hardening yourself first and foremost before you look at what you’re going to do on the offensive end.”

Some of this will require updating doctrine. Kinyanjui advocates written processes that state how emerging technology should be used and protected. This document can be updated as necessary.

“You need to embed it in the doctrine; it needs to be documented and put in your way of operating,” Kinyanjui said. “If you don’t embed it in your procedures and processes, it can be used by one group of special forces, but when you are gone, it’s not there.”

TECH THAT ELEVATES THE WARFIGHTER

As technology plays an increasing role in SOF operations, some operators are referring to a foundational SOF truth published by U.S. Special Operations Command: “Humans are more important than hardware.”

This means that, although technology can help, it is the skill, judgment and courage of the operator that determines a mission’s success.

“SOF operators are the decisive ‘technology’ in any mission,” the think tank website Battelle Insider wrote in an essay series examining warfighter health optimization. “They integrate and operate advanced systems. They interpret chaotic, ambiguous environments. They make rapid, high-stakes decisions under extreme pressure. And they adapt in ways that machines and platforms cannot.”

Likewise, Green said SOF is going through a “renovation period,” adding that it is important to double down on its strengths, like cultural knowledge and on-the-ground expertise, while adapting, evolving and adding new capabilities.

“Control what you can control, remain intellectually curious, have a culture of experimentation,” he said. “Embrace the uncomfortableness.”

As new technology changes the battlefield, SOF’s high standards of performance and professionalism must remain intact, Lt. Gen. John Omenda, vice chief of the KDF, told attendees at the SOF conference in Nairobi.

“Silent warriors operate in areas where complexity is greatest and the margins for error are very small,” Omenda said. “It is in this demanding environment where discipline, integrity, respect for human rights and adherence to international norms must remain uncompromised. Tools may shift, but character remains.” □

LAND, RIVERS, LAKES AND SEA



ELITE NAVAL SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES COMBAT A RANGE OF THREATS

ADF STAFF

Ghana has been a beacon of peace and stability along the West African coast for years, but its security landscape has evolved to encompass a diverse range of threats.

Expanding Sahel-based terrorist groups intent on reaching the coast threaten the nation's north. On the eastern border with Togo, a secessionist movement has stirred anti-government sentiment. At sea, piracy poses an aggressive and unconventional maritime threat that calls for a specialized response.

The Ghana Navy's Special Boat Squadron is addressing all of these threats and more. As the specter of piracy loomed in the Gulf of Guinea from about 2009 to 2015, officials realized that conventional forces would not suffice, said Cmdr. Seth Dzakpasu, squadron leader.

"At the time, the Ghana Navy was very familiar with conventional threats at sea," Dzakpasu told ADF. "And piracy was not one of those conventional threats."

That's when Ghana joined the ranks of African navies with elite special forces squadrons, such as Kenya and Nigeria. These small, highly trained units conduct opposed boarding and vessel searches, countertrafficking operations at sea and on lakes and rivers, and disaster response, among other things.

NEW THREATS, NEW RESPONSES

Several navies have demonstrated a capacity to address maritime threats in some of the most challenging waters on the planet. Nigeria's Navy is recognized as one of the continent's strongest in the 2026 Global Firepower report. It ranks 22nd globally. The ranking is based largely on its 152 total assets, which consist mainly of offshore patrol vessels.

However, its Special Boat Service (SBS) offers a more nimble tool. It addresses an ever-evolving threat matrix that includes traffickers on the high seas and terrorists who navigate Lake Chad and other inland waterways.

Ghana Special Boat Squadron forces prepare to board a vessel off Takoradi, Ghana, in May 2024 as part of Exercise Obangame Express. CHIEF PETTY OFFICER JOHN PEARL/U.S. NAVY

Retired Rear Adm. Dolapo Kolawole, former director of operations at Nigeria's Naval Headquarters and former commander of the SBS, told Arise News in February 2026 that the service helps the Navy address asymmetric threats and complex counterterrorism missions. Formed in 2006, it can perform "surgical strikes" and destroy terrorist camps.

"It is modeled after the United States Navy SEALs," Kolawole said. "Their personnel and sailors are trained for asymmetric warfare ashore and afloat, land and sea. They can function in both environments."



Ghana Special Boat Squadron members prepare to board rubber raiding craft for amphibious special operations training during Exercise Flintlock in Daboya, Ghana, in May 2024.

SPC. KEVIN BROWN/U.S. ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

For example, Nigeria's SBS joined Army and civilian forces in a four-day June 2021 clearance and recovery operation in Baga, a strategic town in Borno State on the shores of Lake Chad.

One of the service's biggest successes came in May 2020. As the Chinese-flagged Hailufeng 11 trawled in Ivoirian waters, 10 pirates stormed the ship, accosted its 18 crewmembers and turned off the automatic identification system. Even so, maritime authorities along the west coast of Africa tracked the vessel until it sailed into Nigerian waters two days later, on May 16, where a Navy patrol boat waited.

The NNS Nguru pulled alongside the hijacked boat about 140 nautical miles south of Lagos. SBS



commandos boarded it while underway at 9 knots after pirates refused orders to stop. No Sailors or crewmembers were injured. The pirates were taken ashore and prosecuted.

Across the continent, members of the Kenya Navy's Special Boat Unit (SBU) serving in the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia responded to a distress call when the dhow MSV Fazlerabbi caught fire off the Kismayo coast on October 29, 2025.

The vessel, on its way to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, was ablaze about 5 nautical miles north-east of the port, according to the Kenya Defence Forces. SBU personnel, working with local boats, rescued all 16 crewmembers.

Less than a month later, 15 Marine SBU commandos were part of a multiagency force that intercepted a ship about 340 nautical miles off the coast of Mombasa, Kenya. The Marines launched in small boats from Navy patrol ship KNS Shupavu and boarded and seized the flagless motor vessel Mashallah.

The outlaw boat, which had been under watch by international drug enforcement agencies, was escorted to port. Once there, authorities unloaded 769 packets of methamphetamine weighing 1,024 kilograms and valued at \$63 million. The effort was dubbed Operation Bahari Safi, which means "clean

Kenya's Special Boat Unit practices evacuating villagers to a boat during a mass casualty drill. U.S. NAVY

seas" in Swahili. It was the second-largest narcotics seizure in Kenya's history.

These small, specialized teams allow militaries to deploy forces that can adapt to their nation's unique threats. Despite being components of naval forces, their purview is not limited to maritime threats. Ghana's squadron, for example, has been used to address a number of land-related incidents. One is the illegal, small-scale mining known domestically as "galamsey," which is taken from a slang term that means "gather and sell." The practice strips revenue and damages the environment.

Formerly known as the Gold Coast, Ghana still produces the most gold of any nation on the continent, according to a November 2024 Wilson Center report. Galamsey costs the country more than \$2.3 billion yearly in lost revenue. Legal mining is heavily regulated, but illegal small-scale miners often use cyanide and mercury, which pollute freshwater sources.

Dzakpasu said the Ghanaian military has worked to combat galamsey. "The Special Boat Squadron has been in the thick of that operation,



Ghana Navy Special Boat Squadron Sailors board the GNS Chemle in the Gulf of Guinea off Tema, Ghana, during Obangame Express in March 2021.

PETTY OFFICER 3RD CLASS HANNAH FRY/U.S. NAVY

particularly due to how complex that illegality is. It typically happens on riverways in places which are cut off, where there is no direct road access. So, the squadron employed its skills in rivers or in water and in the air, deployed by air means, and has been effective in countering that from about 2017 to 2021.”

Ghana’s squadron also responded to the Western Togoland secessionist movement in 2020, Dzakupasu said. Separatists want to create a new nation from the boundaries of the old Trust Territory of Togoland, which existed under British administration. An incident near an eastern military base had secessionists “taking up arms, blocking up bridges and the rest,” Dzakupasu said. “The squadron was quick and effective in restoring common order by getting into that confrontation with members of this movement.”

Likewise, squadron members have conducted preventive counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in northern Ghana to deter terrorists who operate in Burkina Faso and the larger Sahel region.

SPECIALIZED TRAINING

Ghana’s squadron, established in 2016 with support from Denmark, Nigeria and the United States, in 2022 graduated its first group of domestically trained operators. The eight new members were the only ones out of 25 who completed the rigorous six-month training.

From 2016 to 2020, Ghana sent five groups to Nigeria for training. Once they returned, the Sailors worked in various teams but without a formal unit or command and control structure. In 2021, the chief of naval staff officially formed the squadron, and Dzakupasu was appointed its commander in March 2022.

The ability to train domestically was a key part of a five-year development plan formed in partnership with the U.S. and Denmark’s Special Warfare Group, known as the Frogman Corps. The plan runs through 2026.

One tool that helps train the squadron is a \$1.2 million “ship in a box,” which was commissioned in August 2024 with help from the Danish government and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The metal simulator, which resembles a ship, lets squadron members and others practice visit, board, search and seizure drills. It is at Naval Training Command at Nutekpor in eastern Ghana.

“Instead of sailing out a ship every time you wanted to conduct boarding operations, we have a ship on land that we can just enter, clear out, set up different scenarios and retrain on,” Dzakupasu said.

Then-Minister of Defence Dominic Nitiwul said the simulated ship symbolized a commitment

to excellence, dedication to protecting the Gulf of Guinea and a realistic training environment for different mission types, according to an August 2024 Ghana Peace Journal report.

“The threats we face today, from piracy, drug trafficking, smuggling, illegal fishing and maritime terrorism among others, demand that we equip our personnel with the best possible training, preparing them for every conceivable scenario they might encounter at sea,” Nitiwul said at the commissioning ceremony.

He added that the facility will benefit allies and partner nations by fostering cooperation and helping maritime forces work together seamlessly. Nigeria also has a ship-in-a-box simulator at the Joint Maritime Security Training Centre in Lagos.

Nigeria created its own Special Operations Command on the Benue River in 2025. It incorporates the SBS and the Deep Blue Project’s Maritime Security Unit.

Right: Nigeria’s Special Boat Service has been instrumental in training Ghanaian personnel.

SPC. MARIO HERNANDEZ LOPEZ/U.S. ARMY

Below: Nigeria’s Special Boat Service demonstrates capabilities during a presidential fleet review at the Lagos Naval Dockyard in May 2023. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

SBS training is notoriously difficult and includes endurance tests, physical deprivation and long-range swimming. Specialized courses focus on underwater demolition, combat diving, parachuting, survival training, close-quarter combat, weapons handling, and intelligence gathering and analysis. The training culminates with “hell week,” in which candidates are pushed to their physical and mental limits.

In August 2025, Nigeria’s SBS inducted 33 graduates, less than half of those who began the program’s 36-week Basic Operator Capability Course. Capt. Andrew Zidon, SBS commander, said the trainees “expended thousands of rounds





“THEY HAVE DEMONSTRATED THE PHYSICAL FITNESS, MENTAL TENACITY, PSYCHOLOGICAL READINESS AND EMOTIONAL TOUGHNESS REQUIRED TO CARRY OUT DUTIES THAT WILL BE ASSIGNED TO THEM BY THE NIGERIAN NAVY.”

— Capt. Andrew Zidon, commander of Nigeria’s Special Boat Service

of ammunition and pyrotechnics, burnt thousands of liters of petroleum, oil and lubricant, swam kilometers at sea, and performed countless hours of high-intensity workouts.”

The training is intended to help the service win before ever setting foot on the battlefield. “They have demonstrated the physical fitness, mental tenacity, psychological readiness and emotional toughness required to carry out duties that will be assigned to them by the Nigerian Navy,” Zidon told the Nigerian newspaper *This Day*.

Dzakpasu said he foresees Ghana’s squadron sharing its expertise with African neighbors and partner nations more, in much the same way that Denmark, Nigeria and the U.S. helped train them.

“We’ve already started on that pathway,” he said. “With Nigeria, plans are far advanced to do more bilateral exchange training programs with

This aerial view shows Lake Chad. Terrorists have proliferated in the area and established bases on lake islands. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Senegal, with Côte d’Ivoire and other nations. We shared our expertise during a training event under the auspices of the U.S. Special Operations Command Africa, Exercise Flintlock. During Exercise Flintlock, we meet and we train across; we get to know ourselves better.”

Through its partnership with Denmark and the U.S., Ghana has for the past three years invited mid-level leaders from Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya and Senegal to take part in a special operations orientation and operations planners course, Dzakpasu said. “We’ve started that partnership, and I believe that it will grow with more participation in the coming years.” □



A Sierra Leonean Soldier from the Joint Presidential Guard Force applies a field dressing for a simulated eye wound.

Sierra Leone

Partners With U.S. in Training

ADF STAFF | PHOTOS BY STAFF SGT. AMBER LITTERAL/U.S. AIR FORCE

Soldiers with the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) took part in four weeks of Joint Combined Exchange Training with the United States Army's 91st Civil Affairs Battalion in September 2025. U.S. forces and members of the RSLAF's Forces Reconnaissance Unit and State Protection Service covered civil affairs operations, including reconnaissance and engagement, governance, area studies, mission planning

and reporting, professional development, and force management in Freetown. Training also included tactical combat casualty care, during which all participants earned "Stop the Bleed" certification from the American College of Surgeons. A three-day field exercise tested participants in a dynamic environment. The joint training fosters knowledge exchanges and makes it easier for the two countries to work together long term.



THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF BORDER MANAGEMENT

**Securing Borders Will Require
Coordination and Cooperation Across
Agencies and Between Nations**

ADF ILLUSTRATION



Tunisian Soldiers search for gunmen in the Dernaya Mountains in the Kasserine region, near the Algerian border, after an attacker killed a police officer in 2012.

COL.-MAJ. (RETIRED) SALAH SAKLI,
FORMER CENTRAL DIRECTOR OF THE TUNISIAN BORDER GUARDS
PHOTOS BY AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Africa's nations are partitioned by 83,500 kilometers of political land borders, but only a third of those are effectively demarcated. Many border regions also are sparsely populated, largely unsecured, and far from national capitals and government control centers.

Border regions traditionally have been perceived as marginal, porous, insufficiently defined and poorly managed, leading to significant security challenges such as terrorism, criminal trafficking and illicit migration.

These areas have become potential hot spots of socioeconomic and political tensions, intra- and inter-state armed conflicts, and breeding grounds for various nonstate armed groups. The regions also face enormous migratory movements and are the scene of terrorism; organized crime; and the illegal trafficking of people, goods, natural resources, drugs and firearms.

Criminal and terrorist groups are growing and diversifying along African borders. Recent developments have shown that these groups increased transnational connections and have a growing capacity to challenge the authority of states and regional institutions.

Consequently, deteriorating border conditions in various regions undermine global initiatives to combat terrorism and all forms of transnational crime. These

challenges and threats do not have the same significance for all African countries, but they remain a persistent source of instability across the continent. No nation can address them alone.

Diverse Terrain

Tunisia's borders are naturally permeable and diverse. They are forested and mountainous in the north, rocky in the center, and vast and desertlike in the south. The country covers 163,000 square kilometers and shares a 1,033-kilometer land border with Algeria to the west and a 473-kilometer boundary with Libya to the southeast. Its Mediterranean coastline stretches for 1,288 kilometers to the north and east.

The country has nine international airports, 12 land border crossings and 21 ports, forming a network of 42 official crossing points jointly administered by customs and police services. Police handle travelers and their documents, while customs agents focus on transported goods intended for international trade.

Outside of these regulated crossing points, land and maritime border surveillance primarily is the responsibility of the Directorate General of Border Guards, a structure attached to the National Guard under the Ministry of the Interior. This institution includes

Border regions traditionally have been perceived as marginal, porous, insufficiently defined and poorly managed, leading to significant security challenges such as terrorism, criminal trafficking and illicit migration.



land-based and maritime branches tasked with ensuring security in border areas, combating illegal migration and cross-border crime, and performing functions similar to those of customs police.

Addressing Border Security

Nations have expended enormous efforts to confront border issues at national, regional and continental levels. Nevertheless, many are inadequate given the scale of the challenges.

These efforts generally are reactive and mitigate only effects associated with insecurity. The lack of long-term prevention strategies aimed at anticipating imminent risks and eradicating the root causes of border problems is regrettable. Furthermore, various national, regional and continental plans struggle to be implemented due to insufficient political will and an uneven response from different stakeholders to collectively address common challenges.

These problems can arise from strained relations due to territorial disputes; rivalry, mistrust and suspicion; a desire to forge bilateral alliances with foreign powers at the expense of continental integration; prioritizing national interests over regional and continental integration; institutional compartmentalization

A Tunisian Soldier stands in front of a trench along the Libyan border. Authorities built the barrier, which includes berms and trenches, from Ras Jedir on the Mediterranean coast to Dhiba after terrorists killed 22 people at the national museum in Tunis in 2015.





Refugees who fled violence in Libya line up for breakfast at the Choucha refugee camp near the Tunisian border in March 2011.

that stifles collaboration; regional conditions that favor isolationism; and the persistence of crises and instability in some countries.

Tunisia's Challenges

Since its independence, Tunisia has faced a multitude of border management challenges. These difficulties stem from geographical, political, economic and social factors. Among the main concerns are the presence of terrorist groups along its borders, the intensification of irregular migration, and the increase in smuggling and illicit trafficking, particularly of fuel, narcotics and firearms. This trafficking funds and supports criminal and terrorist organizations. The ongoing Libyan crisis significantly amplifies the scale and nature of the threats Tunisia faces.

Furthermore, armed groups continue to operate along Algerian borders, and major terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State group and al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, originating primarily in the Sahel, seek

to consolidate and expand their North African presence.

Several internal issues compound Tunisian border challenges. The national economy, weakened by successive crises, significantly limits the government's capacity to effectively manage borders, which often are characterized by rugged terrain conducive to the illegal movement of goods and people.

The current border management system relies on a disparate patchwork of laws and regulations that assign responsibilities to various agencies. Procedures are rigid and centralized, and the political discourse remains largely focused on security, to the detriment of communities' socioeconomic concerns and the unique historical and geographical characteristics of border regions.

Tunisia is emerging as a transit country for migrants from other parts of Africa. This transformation has disrupted already fragile balances and further complicated the regulation of cross-border migration flows.

The outbreak of the first Libyan civil war in February 2011 forced hundreds of thousands of foreign workers to flee to Tunisia between March and October 2011. The majority of them were repatriated to their countries of origin within a few weeks, although a small number settled temporarily in Tunisia.

Tunisia also receives immigration primarily from Sub-Saharan Africa, including students, economic migrants, and refugees and irregular migrants fleeing conflict zones. According to the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, the number of irregular Sub-Saharan migrants is constantly increasing.



Tunisian border police check passports at the northwestern Tabarka post near Algeria.

A Libyan ambulance passes through the Ras Jedir border crossing between Libya and Tunisia on July 1, 2024. Libya reopened the crossing, the key transit point between the countries, in a ceremony that day, three months after it was shut down due to smuggler-related armed clashes.



Tunisia Takes Actions on Borders

Tunisian authorities have opted for a holistic and balanced approach based on security and development. This approach encompasses political, social, economic, cultural, religious, legislative and security dimensions. It also upholds close cooperation at local and global levels.

In this context, Tunisia has adopted two complementary strategies: a national border security strategy and a national migration strategy. Both are structured around a multidimensional approach that prioritizes prevention and includes a comprehensive and coordinated control and response mechanism.

Through the border strategy, the government has reorganized and strengthened security on the ground. Advanced units have been repositioned to enhance synergy between security and military forces and to prevent risks.

A buffer zone along southern borders includes several joint checkpoints between the national army and

border guard units. Construction of a 2-meter earthen barrier along the southeastern border prevents vehicle crossings and smuggling. An electronic surveillance system strengthens border control with Libya.

Authorities also have acquired modern equipment to optimize airport and border controls and strengthened coordination between national border management stakeholders. A joint command has been established to supervise and coordinate ground operations. New initiatives train, equip, and support officers and agents who operate in remote border areas.

The national border security strategy seeks to improve operational and technical skills of border personnel, optimize use of available equipment and infrastructure, and harmonize practices at border crossings to guarantee security and facilitate the legitimate movement of people, services and goods. This approach includes rigorous measures against corruption and smuggling, thereby preventing cross-border infiltration.

Tunisia also has developed a National Migration Strategy designed through close collaboration with local and international stakeholders, civil society and the Tunisian diaspora. It proposes an inclusive and comprehensive vision based on respect for fundamental rights while promoting sustainable development, democratic governance and strengthened social cohesion.

The strategy is based on the following values: good governance in migration at the national and regional levels, respect for the human rights and dignity of migrants and their families, recognition and appreciation of the role of Tunisians residing abroad in the socioeconomic and cultural development of the country, and promoting enhanced coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders. The strategy establishes a permanent, inclusive and participatory dialogue with Tunisian civil society organizations and associations representing Tunisian migrants abroad, combating human trafficking and exploitation, and integrating migration issues into all sectoral policies.

Collaboration is Crucial

Technical, human and financial resources, and robust international cooperation based on solidarity and mutual trust are essential to support these strategies. To this end, African countries must combine their efforts and pool their resources to maximize their potential and prospects. Each nation must make its resources available to its community and neighboring countries.

Tunisia has prioritized an approach based on strategic cooperation with various nations and international institutions. This collaboration has fostered fruitful alliances, contributing to the development of an innovative border management policy. The main objective is to improve institutional mechanisms by drawing on the most successful experiences at the regional and global levels, while also rationalizing the use of resources allocated by international partners. As a result, Tunisian border services now operate in synergy with their counterparts in neighboring countries. This strategy is based on mutual trust, transparency, equitable partnership, respect for national sovereignty and the inviolability of recognized borders.

Thus, Tunisia has concluded several agreements with neighboring countries. These agreements initially focused on demining and the demarcation of common borders. Subsequently, various bilateral and multilateral conventions were signed to promote cross-border development projects in key areas such as health, transportation, trade, the environment, civil protection and

disaster management. These agreements also include reciprocal commitments aimed at facilitating access, free movement, and the right of residence, work and establishment for nationals of each country. Some conventions even provide for specific arrangements, such as grazing access during droughts or obtaining permits for livestock to move between territories.

Tunisia has established joint commissions with its two immediate neighbors to address border security. Interactions between Tunisian and Algerian authorities are regular and productive thanks to a permanent organization and a stable structure. Negotiations with Libyan representatives are more challenging due to the difficulties associated with the absence of a single, legitimate central authority.



Tunisians working and living in Libya pass a road sign outside the Tunisian city of Ben Guerdane that marks the distance to the Ras Jedir border post in 2011.

It is crucial that African nations identify their own challenges, determine their specific needs and take ownership of financing their initiatives so that their partners can contribute without bearing the entire burden and associated consequences. Doing this enhances efficiency, generates substantial savings, and positions Africa as a continent where cross-border travel and commerce can occur efficiently and safely. Border issues can no longer be viewed as peripheral. They are now central to national security and economic development in Africa. By prioritizing collaborative border security, African countries can make major economic strides and help make the continent better integrated. □

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Retired Col.-Maj. Sakli is the former central director of the Tunisian border guards and currently works as an independent border security expert and trainer. He is motivated by a desire to improve border security and cooperation on the African continent.



ROADS ON FIRE

A truck drives along National Road 15 from Sévaré, Mali, toward Burkina Faso. Al-Qaida-linked terrorists operate in the area, making RN15 one of the most dangerous roads in Mali.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

HOW TRANSPORT NETWORKS ARE SHAPING WEST AFRICA'S CONFLICTS

STEVEN M. RADIL, OLIVIER WALTHER AND ALEXANDER THURSTON



Burkinabe soldiers patrol the road from Dori to the Goudebo refugee camp in February 2020. Control of roads ultimately leads to control of territory. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

West Africa's roads are more than trade routes. They have become the front lines of the region's expanding wars.

In Burkina Faso, a 2022 terrorist ambush on a 200-vehicle convoy near Djibo killed dozens and triggered political turmoil that culminated in a military coup. Farther east, in Nigeria's Borno State, terrorists have used land mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to cripple the Maiduguri-Monguno highway, cutting off markets and forcing civilians into "super camps" for protection.

Across Mali's Mopti region, terrorists have destroyed bridges to isolate entire towns. In October 2025, terrorists in the Sikasso region destroyed a convoy of about 50 fuel tankers that had crossed into the country from Côte d'Ivoire.



These incidents reveal a growing truth: West Africa's transport infrastructure has become a target and a weapon. New research by the authors analyzed more than 58,000 violent events recorded by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project (ACLED) across 17 countries and shows that nearly two-thirds of all attacks occur within a kilometer of a road. The analysis underscores the degree to which controlling roads now defines controlling territory.

WEST AFRICA'S BLEEDING ROADS

Roads are the arteries of the state. They carry goods, troops and influence. But in much of the Sahel and its coastal periphery, poor road conditions and sparse networks have turned mobility into a dangerous gamble.

Violence is most intense along major corridors that link fragile capitals to remote frontiers. In Mali, the 640-kilometer highway connecting Mopti and Gao is the Sahel's deadliest route, scarred by more than 400 violent incidents since 2012. In Cameroon's anglophone Northwest, the road around Bamenda has seen more than 700 attacks since 2018, fueled by separatist violence.

These hot spots illustrate a broader pattern. Our research found that violence decreases sharply with distance from the road network: 65% of violent incidents take place within 1 kilometer of a road, but only 4% occur farther than 10 kilometers away. The trend is nearly

Civilians and military personnel in Mali and across the Sahel must use the same roads, which makes both vulnerable to terrorists, who often strike near infrastructure. REUTERS

identical regardless of whether violence involves ambushes, IEDs or attacks on civilians.

Part of the reason is logistical. Security forces and civilians must use the same narrow transport corridors to move people and supplies. Terrorists exploit this predictability, launching ambushes or planting explosives on the few paved routes available. Meanwhile, states rely on these same corridors to reassert control, creating a deadly feedback loop that makes mobility itself a source of insecurity.

URBAN CENTERS TO REMOTE HINTERLANDS

The geography of violence also is changing. During earlier stages of the region's insurgencies, attacks clustered around cities and main highways. But as terrorist groups expanded, they began to strike deeper into rural areas.

In 2011, when urban violence reached its peak in West Africa, nearly 90% of all attacks were within 1 kilometer of a road. By 2024, that figure had fallen by about a third. This shift reflects what we call the ruralization of conflict: a process in which terrorist and rebel groups seek refuge and support in remote communities far from the reach of central governments.



Children cross a street in Damasak, Borno State, Nigeria.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Even as the front lines move outward, however, transport routes remain crucial. Rural ambushes, land mines and convoy attacks still depend on road access. Armed groups use control over transport to tax traders, impose blockades and restrict civilian movement.

The siege of Djibo in northern Burkina Faso is one of the clearest examples. From 2020 to 2024, terrorists surrounded the town, cutting all major road access and preventing food or medical supplies from arriving except by air. Hundreds of civilians died, and the town's isolation fueled political unrest that destabilized the country's leadership. Since then, militants have used blockades as a key tactic in central, southern and western Mali, affecting Kayes, Mopti, Nioro, Ségou, Sikasso and the capital, Bamako.

THE NEW GEOGRAPHY OF DANGER

Across West Africa, several corridors stand out as especially dangerous.

- **Mali:** The RN16 between Mopti and Gao and the RN17 leading toward the Niger border are frequent targets of ambushes and IED attacks. Increasing numbers of attacks occurred between Bamako and the southern border with

Côte d'Ivoire on the RN7 corridor, along which most oil consumed in the country is transported.

- **Burkina Faso:** The N3 road connecting Djibo and Dori near the Mali border remains among the most perilous, reflecting years of terrorist efforts to blockade key towns.
- **Nigeria:** The A3 and A4 highways radiating from Maiduguri, including routes to Bama and Damaturu, have been attacked hundreds of times, with militants using roadside bombs and mobile ambushes.

According to our research, these zones correspond closely with areas where state control is weakest and where transport accessibility is poorest. Sparse infrastructure magnifies insecurity. With only a few viable roads linking major towns, a single blockade or destroyed bridge can isolate entire regions.

Malian soldiers operate a checkpoint in Konna, 50 kilometers north of Mopti. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



AMBUSHES AND IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVES

The increase in ambushes has been one of the most striking evolutions in the Sahel's many conflicts. Between 2000 and 2011, fewer than 60 ambushes were recorded in the entire region. By 2023, that number had surged to more than 260 a year.

Terrorist groups use ambushes not only to kill soldiers and seize weapons but also to sow fear and disrupt military logistics. Attacks often occur in sparsely populated zones where convoys are slow and visibility is low. In Mali, a 2024 ambush by Tuareg rebels killed more than 100 Malian soldiers and Wagner Group mercenaries near Tin Zaouatine, close to the Algerian border.

IEDs are another growing threat. Because they are commonly placed near roads, IEDs are an indicator of how closely violence tracks transport corridors. Since 2021, Burkina Faso and Mali each have sustained more than 100 IED incidents annually, many targeting military or humanitarian convoys. The impact goes beyond immediate casualties. Mines and explosives deter farmers from tending their fields and traders from using regional highways, deepening economic isolation.

WHEN ROADS BECOME WEAPONS

For terrorists, roads are more than targets. They also are tools of control. In much of the Sahel, armed groups erect checkpoints to tax traders and monitor population movements. A single roadblock can become a miniature customs post, a propaganda site or an ambush point.

In the Lake Chad region, such tactics compelled Nigerian forces in 2019 to consolidate troops into fortified super camps, ceding vast rural territory to insurgents. Similar dynamics are visible across Chad and Niger, where militants exploit the limited road network to dominate key corridors.

At times, terrorist groups deliberately destroy bridges and culverts to isolate communities or punish populations viewed as cooperating with the government. In central Mali, two bridges destroyed in mid-2021 cut off entire villages in Mopti and Bandiagara for more than a year, forcing the United Nations to fund emergency reconstruction. The new bridges were not completed until December 2022.

These acts of destruction underscore the symbolic and strategic power of transport infrastructure. Control over who can



move, where and at what cost has become a central element of political authority in the region's wars.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE-SECURITY PARADOX

The research points to a paradox. The same roads that enable state power also expose it. Across the region, government forces and civilians depend on limited infrastructure, while terrorists exploit that dependency to inflict damage at a low cost. This allows terrorists to continually weaken the capabilities of government forces and erode public confidence in ruling regimes while also bypassing the need to mount direct assaults on major cities.

Improving security in West Africa therefore will require investing not only in troops but also in transport. Expanding and maintaining road networks could reduce isolation, facilitate trade, and allow faster military and humanitarian responses. As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Sahel and West Africa Club notes, the lack of accessible transport remains one of the biggest obstacles to security and development.

Sixty years after independence, vast areas of the region still lack paved roads connecting them to national capitals. This absence leaves populations feeling abandoned and provides fertile ground for rebellion. As long as isolation persists, insurgents will continue to exploit the geography of neglect.

THE BATTLE FOR MOBILITY

Control over roads is reshaping the geography of power in West Africa. The region's conflicts are not fought only for territory but also for the ability to move through it.

From Mali's deserts to Nigeria's forests, each attack on a convoy or bridge represents more than a tactical strike. It is an assault on the fragile connective tissue that binds not just states but also the entire region.

Until mobility itself is secured, the region's roads will be lifelines and battlefields. ▣

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FLINTLOCK

BRIDGES SECURITY GAPS



A Senegalese Special Forces Sailor leaps from a helicopter during Exercise Flintlock 2025 in Senegal. CHIEF PETTY OFFICER JOHN PEARL/U.S. NAVY

THE ANNUAL COUNTERTERROR EXERCISE EXPANDS SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIT SKILLS TO COMBAT GROWING THREATS

PEARL MATIBE, SECURITY ANALYST

IN 2005, terrorism was just beginning to take root in the Sahel and threatening other parts of the continent. As terrorist groups expanded their operations, the United States and its West African partners launched a military exercise specifically designed to combat them. The exercise has endured ever since.

Libya and Côte d'Ivoire co-hosted the 2026 iteration in April. The arrangement bridged a gap in continental security by connecting North African security forces to West Africa's coastal nations. It marked 21 years of African countries building Flintlock into an institutionalized special operations platform against terrorist groups.

"It helps us build and reinforce the capability of our (special operations forces) unit in order for them to be able to fight effectively against terrorist groups," Lt. Col. Kitcha Sekongo of Côte d'Ivoire said at a Flintlock planning session in 2024. "Being an international exercise, it also helps us build the right coalition and build partnerships in order to stand united against this threat."

Exercise Flintlock has become U.S. Africa Command's premier annual special operations exercise. It brings together more than 30 African, Western and other nations to strengthen security, counter terrorist organizations and improve interoperability. It focuses on improving operational independence, human rights, and regional stability in the Sahel and surrounding regions. It gets its name from an early type of firearm and has come to symbolize the "lock, stock and barrel" of fundamental training.

Each Exercise Flintlock reflects the recent history of the continent. Flintlock launched in 2005 with five African countries as Sahelian threats from al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and other terrorist groups emerged. The 2015 exercise took place while Boko Haram threats unfolded, marking Flintlock's shift to real-world scenarios.

Flintlock was the only U.S.-led annual exercise on the continent conducted in 2020 during COVID-19. The exercise was hosted in Mauritania with an outstation in Senegal. Morocco and Senegal acted as counterterrorism and regional cooperation trainers, a first since Flintlock's inception.



Senegalese Special Forces Sailors conduct a rapid force extraction drill during Exercise Flintlock 2025 in Dakar, Senegal.

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER JOHN PEARL/U.S. NAVY

Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana have hosted the exercise multiple times. Over the years, host countries also have included Algeria, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

Flintlock 2026 came amid unprecedented terrorism threats across Africa. Sahel violence from Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and other groups spills toward coastal ports. The Lake Chad basin has become a haven for extremist activity. Libya remains contested by terrorists and malign actors.

As a collective, Flintlock's African participant countries confront an increasingly dangerous environment in which shared threats demand shared solutions. Flintlock goals focus on three capacities: interoperability across doctrinal divides, intelligence-driven operations against cross-border networks and civil-military resilience that protects communities. African countries also drive continuity, choosing partnership through crises.

The exercises are about continental and global threats.

"You can see the whole spectrum, and it's not just West Africa," a Ghanaian military officer told Joy News, a TV news station and website in Ghana, during Exercise Flintlock 2023. "It's a global thing. I mean, there's a time not to just think about yourself, because if it attacks you, it attacks everybody."

African security forces face stark communication challenges. Languages spoken at Flintlock include English, French, Portuguese, Arabic and a multitude of African native languages such as Hausa and Swahili. The different languages present problems with communication and command terms. Incompatible radios and communications systems can present more problems. A Chadian intelligence tip might reach Ghanaian operators through three languages and mismatched formats.

Flintlock bridges these gaps. Mixed planning cells embed interpreters. Standardized map symbols and situation templates overcome technical differences. Drills prioritize "low-tech, high-trust" tools — high-frequency radios, human couriers, paper maps — realistic for West African outposts without satellite links.

"We must be able to fight with what we have, but think together with what we share," a West African special operations forces commander emphasized.

Participants say the annual event facilitates intelligence sharing on the continent.

"Something that's fundamental in the fight against terrorism is this information-sharing — it's essential," Chadian Brig. Gen. Zakaria Ngobongue told ADF during Flintlock 2015. "If we don't share information, we're never going to get to our final stage. Flintlock is exactly what we needed, the right time and place, together. We share information and put into practice this sharing of information."

Live scenarios push trust beyond words. Soldiers from different countries witness each other's competence under pressure.

"We don't always have the opportunity to blow up a vehicle, so it's a sizable learning experience to see the life-size explosion," said Maj. Issa Diack of the Senegalese National Police during Flintlock 2016.

Across 20 years, Flintlock has trained multilingual officers who operate joint staffs post-exercise, turning barriers into an advantage of multilingual units that can outmaneuver terrorist organizations. Officers who sustain joint operations after the exercise are crucial.

Picture Ghanaian drones tracking a terrorist arms convoy from one West African country while Benin's border patrol relays positions by radio. Togo's quick reaction force might cut off escape routes. French-speaking Beninese might write English summaries; interpreters could relay live raid commands. That is interoperability. In Sirte, Libya, eastern and western units might combine

Senegalese Navy special operations forces prepare for a beach landing in Saint-Louis, Senegal, during Exercise Flintlock 2016.

SPC. DAVID SHEFCHUK/U.S. ARMY



Tunisian and Italian forces participate in Exercise Flintlock 2024 in Daboya, Ghana.

PFC. HANNAH BECKER/U.S. ARMY



local terrain knowledge with Moroccan signals intelligence to defend oil infrastructure, practicing civilian evacuations around live pipelines. That is intelligence fusion.

In Côte d'Ivoire's north, Guinean, Ivoirian and Senegalese security forces might clear villages, fuse local tips with satellite imagery, secure schools and coordinate programs for young people that mirror Abidjan's border youth initiative. That is civil-military resilience.

Each scenario forces African countries to solve problems they have faced, such as language gaps, intelligence mismatches and civilian complexities. Officers leave with procedures that work year after year.

In 2023, Ghanaian Col. Richard Mensah shared lessons learned in Flintlock. "We cannot throw our hands in the air saying that, because terrorism is happening and we're not achieving much, we should go to sleep," he said, as reported by the website Joy News. "Special Operations are not created in emergencies. We must continue to train. Training is everything, and everything is training. We have to get our guys ready to be able to deal with the terrorists. These insights help us to build partnership exchanges, intelligence, and ideas and experience to be able to surmount some of the challenges."

Many African countries have maintained partnerships through genuine hardships: coups in the region, unrest and economic challenges.

Flintlock exercises have crossed linguistic and governance barriers amid terrorist threats. Democracies have



Chadian Soldiers work with Senegalese trainers to practice combat casualty care in Mauritania during Exercise Flintlock 2020.

SGT. 1ST CLASS CALEB BARRIEAU/U.S. ARMY

deepened preventively; combatants have built sustainably. Post-2022 Flintlock has had stable country participation despite some Sahel withdrawals. In most cases, national interests have prevailed over politics.

This year's Exercise Flintlock helped African militaries face terrorist groups with coastal ambitions, emboldened by Sahel safe havens. Flintlock endures because African security forces made it theirs. ▣

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MEN, NOT MACHINES

**Training, Holistic Support and
Mentorship Build SOF's Human Capital**

ADF STAFF

As technology plays a larger and larger role in special operations forces (SOF) missions, leaders still believe that it is humans, not hardware, that make the difference.

Highly trained operators use their courage, ethics and adaptability to make split-second decisions on the battlefield. Amid upheaval brought on by tools like artificial intelligence (AI), African security professionals stress the importance of keeping “human capital” at the center of SOF planning.

“The determining factor in SOF is the personnel, the human being,” said Maj. Gen. Mohamed Ali Barise of the Somali National Army during the 2025 Silent Warrior conference in Nairobi. “The way you train, the way you indoctrinate, shape and instruct will determine the success of the mission.”

But what’s the best way to develop these operators? Experts believe it is a combination of stringent selection, adaptive training, mentorship and career-long support.

Superior Selection Process

SOF training is notoriously grueling. New recruits are pushed to their physical and psychological limits to prepare them for combat. SOF units are known for having the highest attrition rates in the military. Some elite groups graduate only about 10% of candidates.

Soldiers from Côte d'Ivoire's special forces march in Grand Bassam during a parade to commemorate the country's Independence Day. REUTERS

South Africa's famed Recces, for example, must endure a test known as the ultimate challenge, which involves desert treks while carrying blocks or sandbags, along with wilderness survival and sleep deprivation. Experts believe SOF should not shy away from this toughness. In fact, it should be a badge of honor that is used to attract young people willing to test themselves.

"Take operatives to a point, almost to a breaking point, so when he gets to the field and hits this same point he will not give up," said Col. Charles Mugo, deputy commander of Kenyan Special Operations Forces Command.

At Silent Warrior 25, an annual special forces conference, one commander recalled a situation in which a unit on patrol in Somalia was ambushed and several Soldiers were separated from the group. They spent weeks having to survive in the wilderness, relying on their training to keep them alive. Training must prepare SOF operators for such hardship, the commander told attendees.

SOF should not only seek candidates who are physically fit but those who also are mentally tough, creative problem-solvers and leaders.

"Look at the recruitment process," Mugo said. "Recruit volunteers who understand the nature of the work they're going to face."

Progressive Training

Col. Jérôme Francis Nko'o Ella, commanding officer of Cameroon's elite Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide (BIR) Alpha Operation, knows well the importance of highly trained SOF units. His nation faces terrorism and banditry in its extreme north, separatists in the west, and piracy along the coast, meaning BIR operators must be prepared to handle diverse terrain and problem sets. To refresh skills and maintain sharpness, BIR operators return every two years for additional training to add new capabilities and take on new responsibilities.

Nko'o Ella said this emphasis on training is important. "In other parts of the world, they are emphasizing technology and equipment; in Africa, we don't have the



Left: A member of the Tunisian Special Forces calls for evacuation of a simulated casualty during exercise African Lion in Bizerte.

TUNISIAN ARMED FORCES

Below: New members of Somalia's elite Danab Brigade demonstrate field tactics during a graduation ceremony at Baledogle Military Airfield, Somalia. STAFF SGT. ENRIQUE BARCELO/U.S. AIR FORCE





Above: A sniper with Cameroon's Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide keeps watch while his squad patrols during Exercise Flintlock 2025 in Daboya, Ghana. STAFF SGT. JAKE CARTER/U.S. AIR FORCE

Right: An Ivoirian Special Forces Soldier takes part in Exercise Flintlock 2025. STAFF SGT. ZACHARY WRIGHT/U.S. AIR FORCE



same money, so we need to emphasize training Soldiers instead of equipment," he told ADF during Silent Warrior. He added that there is a need to work with outside partners, so the training they provide is progressive. This means that each time a foreign partner comes to provide training, it builds on what was learned before. Ultimately, this results in a "train-the-trainer" model that builds Cameroon's domestic capacity.

"We, the receivers of the training, should feel that we are really improving our abilities. With time, we are better organized," he said. "The outside trainers need to know also that every time they come, they're getting more in terms of increased capabilities."

The best training modules have a rapid feedback cycle that uses combat experience to update instruction. Sometimes called adaptive training or fail forward, it keeps SOF tactics, techniques and procedures up to date with what adversaries are doing.

SOF leaders believe the best way to accomplish this is by adding homegrown, self-sustaining training capacity in African countries. One example is Côte d'Ivoire's International Academy for the Fight Against Terrorism,

inaugurated in 2021. It offers 19 special forces training programs based on real-world challenges faced by West African SOF.

"In order to have training for the African security context, we need to look at the African realities," Mugo said. "Let our training be based on the realities that we are facing in the African security context, and let us all tailor our training depending on what we are experiencing in the countries. The threat analysis should guide us."

Mugo believes the best training stems from well-crafted doctrine that lets special forces units from the Navy, Air Force, Army as well as police personnel work together. This doctrine, according to best practices, should be updated at least every five years.

"All these challenges that are faced in training SOF originate mostly from the doctrine," Mugo said. "If you have got a good doctrine, a common doctrine for special operators, then you will be able to have good leaders."

A Model for Supporting the Warfighter

As leaders look to support SOF's human capital, one model used by militaries and large organizations globally can be helpful. This framework for identifying solutions to complex organizational problems is known by an acronym — DOTMLPFI — that can be helpful in focusing efforts. It stands for:

1. **Doctrine:** These fundamental, officially sanctioned principles guide how military forces organize, train and use capabilities to achieve national security objectives. The doctrine is a shared framework for action that constantly evolves. When the doctrine is not aligned with the realities of the mission, operators struggle to succeed.
2. **Organization:** This is how forces fight in units within a command structure. Supporting human capital development means offering operators clear career paths and merit-based promotion within their organization.
3. **Training:** At its best, SOF training incorporates lessons learned and adapts to realities on the ground. It also should be forward-looking to anticipate enemy tactics. The best training is progressive, instead of repetitive. It is also self-sustaining, led by domestic trainers and institutions.
4. **Materiel:** SOF operators are quickly adopting new weapons and high-tech tools to face shadowy, asymmetric adversaries. However, say SOF veterans,

the best equipment is not necessarily the most advanced but what can be consistently maintained in the field and repaired when needed.

5. **Leadership:** SOF leadership demands moral courage, discipline, and the ability to make quick decisions in the fog of war and accept responsibility for them. As SOF units look to develop leaders, they increasingly foster intergenerational mentoring relationships.
6. **People:** Developing human capital means supporting warriors away from the battlefield. This requires supporting their families, career aspirations, and physical and mental health.
7. **Facilities:** Effective operators are forged at bases, barracks, training ranges and higher learning institutions. To support its human capital, SOF must have adequate facilities.
8. **Interoperability:** As threats cross borders, it is increasingly important that SOF be interoperable with a wide range of security partners. This includes forces from other countries, the branches of its own military and other domestic security agencies.

Nigerian Special Forces personnel fast-rope from a helicopter during the African Land Forces Summit military demonstration at General Ao Azazi barracks in Gwagwalada, Nigeria. AFP/GETTY IMAGES





The Sierra Leone Forces Reconnaissance Unit and Joint Presidential Guard Force take part in Joint Combined Exchange Training in Freetown. STAFF SGT. AMBER LITTERAL/U.S. AIR FORCE



An Ivorian Special Forces Soldier prepares for a hostage rescue drill in Abidjan. REUTERS

Mentorship

Militaries recognize that the best training might not happen in the classroom or on the shooting range. Some of the most effective fighting forces now consider mentorship a strategic pillar in officer cadre development.

“Whether in barracks, war colleges, or peacekeeping deployments, seasoned commanders are increasingly guiding junior officers not only in tactics but in ethics, diplomacy, and the evolving nature of leadership in modern African conflict zones,” wrote King Richard Igimoh for the website African Defence & Security.

As young SOF operators are thrust into complex, rapidly changing environments, mentorship can be a steadying force. It promotes intergenerational knowledge transfer, reinforces ethics and builds esprit de corps.

More than 12 African countries have formal mentorship programs with 62% of junior officers citing mentorship as key to promotion, African Defence & Security reported.

Among the countries that have successfully established mentorship programs are:

- The Rwanda Defence Force, which assigns senior commanders to cadets at graduation, who work with them for five years.
- The Ghana Armed Forces, which designates a mentorship officer in each battalion responsible for pairing mentors with new lieutenants and captains.
- In Kenya, mentorship is part of the Military Ethics and Leadership School, with a particular emphasis on making sure officers in peacekeeping deployments are paired with mentors. The Kenya Defence Forces runs forums after deployments to capture lessons learned and offers support to returning officers.

Another key component is the development of noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who are responsible for training and sustaining a mission-ready force and executing strategies that originate in the officer corps. In most

militaries, a new recruit will depend on an NCO for basic training, drill and ceremony instruction, and to maintain order and discipline.

A Ghanaian colonel captured the importance of the practice when he told African Defence & Security: “Ranks fade, medals rust, but the lessons passed from one soldier to another — that’s the legacy that endures.”

SOF for the Future

As SOF leaders prepare for the future, they are looking at ways to support the health and well-being of the warfighter. Improving retention rates can be done through programs that ensure merit-based promotion and incentives for operators to continue their education and acquire critical skills. Effective SOF units also are focused on supporting family life and the mental health of operators.

But as SOF training adapts to new threats and new technology, experts believe operators should stay focused on what makes them unique: their knowledge, their values and their adaptability.

“Warfare is a human endeavor,” retired U.S. Vice Adm. Collin Green of DZYNE Technologies said during Silent Warrior, noting that, at its best, SOF is the “connective tissue” of the military with regional expertise, cultural understanding and language skills. These come from being on the ground in contested areas, and “that’s not going to go away,” Green said.

As a path is charted for the future, leaders urge SOF to double down on its core values.

“The SOF operator must be well trained and prepared as a fighting machine, but the value is more than that,” Somalia’s Barise said. “It’s the ideology, the doctrine, the reason why they are wearing the uniform. It’s the way they are conducting the operation, the ethos they believe, the integrity, professionalism, the courage. These are the determinant factors for a Soldier to be a Soldier.” □



An artist's rendering of
the PV43-M NVL EGYPT

Egyptian Subsidiary Produces Patrol Vessels

ADF STAFF

An Egyptian subsidiary has begun production of 10 high-tech patrol vessels for the Egyptian Navy to be used for surveillance and defense.

NVL Egypt, a subsidiary of German company Naval Vessels Lürssen, is building 10 PV43-M patrol vessels for the Navy. NVL Egypt was founded in 2022. The company said production began in late 2025, after it was selected as the main contractor two years earlier.

The PV43 is a 43-meter-long offshore patrol vessel designed for maritime surveillance, emergency response and asset protection. It can be configured with large guns and anti-ship missiles, according to defenceWeb.

"This program represents a strategic milestone in strengthening Egypt's naval forces, as 10 state-of-the-art naval vessels will be built entirely in Egypt, in cooperation with Alexandria Shipyard and with technical support from the German parent company NVL," the company said in a news release.

"At the same time, the program will significantly contribute to the development of Egypt's national naval industry, through the transfer of technology and the localization of expertise."

The company said it also is developing maintenance services, spare parts, training and technical support. The goal is to ensure long-term readiness and sustainability.

Egypt has one of Africa's largest navies. Its fleet of about 140 vessels includes eight submarines and 42 offshore patrol boats, according to a 2024 report by Business Insider Africa. It has an estimated 32,500 personnel.

The PV43-M is based on a Croatian OOB-31, which typically is armed with a 30 mm cannon, two manually controlled 12.7 mm machine guns and surface-to-air missiles. The ship can hold 16 crewmembers and stay at sea for 10 days. Its top speed is about 28 knots, with an optimal cruising speed of 15 knots.

Lürssen has supplied Egypt with multiple vessels, including nine 40-meter patrol ships and a single 60-meter coastal defense ship five years ago. Egypt has collaborated with NVL on several projects, including the CC-60, a 60-meter ship fitted with 3D radar, electronic warfare measures and a broad suite of weaponry, defenceWeb reported. The CC-60 also has anti-submarine warfare capabilities and can accommodate drones and light helicopters.

ANGOLA Adds Surveillance Aircraft

ADF STAFF

The Angolan Air Force has taken delivery of three C295 maritime surveillance aircraft from Airbus to be used for search and rescue, maritime traffic control, and other duties.

Angolan officials say the planes also will be equipped and used to gather intelligence and monitor illegal fishing.

The Air Force ordered the three planes in 2018 at a cost of \$188 million, according to defenceWeb. One reportedly was built in a transport configuration, and the other two were configured for maritime surveillance. The surveillance aircraft have tactical avionics systems that include search radar, electro-optical sensors and anomaly detectors. Weapons can include torpedoes, missiles, mines and depth charges.

The Airbus C295 is a medium-range twin-engine turboprop tactical transport aircraft designed and initially



An Angolan Air Force
C295 maritime
surveillance aircraft

AIRBUS

manufactured by the Spanish aerospace company CASA. Airbus says it has sold 230 units worldwide. The aircraft is 25 meters long with a 26-meter wingspan. It has a top-mounted wing for maximum visibility, is designed for rugged conditions, and can take off and land on short airstrips.

Angola's Air Force consists mostly of transport and cargo planes, used for moving supplies, equipment and personnel within the country. "The active fleet's main role has often been transport and logistics, vital for connecting the vast country," GlobalMilitary.net reports.

Airbus says other African countries that operate or have ordered the C295 aircraft are Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Mali and Senegal.

Nigeria Makes Landmark Fighter Jet Acquisition

ADF STAFF

Nigeria is working to acquire 24 M-346FA fighter jets and 10 AW-109 helicopters from Italy, a landmark deal that signals a major upgrade of its airpower.

The \$1.4 billion deal with defense company Leonardo includes training, spare parts and support services to maintain the fleet. At the beginning of 2026, six of the M-346FAs were in advanced stages of production, with three still under flight tests, Business Insider Africa reported.

Italian sources said that once completed, Nigeria's deal will be the largest military procurement investment by a West African nation, The Defense Post website reported.

Nigeria decided to adopt Italian systems as part of its tactical airborne modernization effort in 2021 as some of its aircraft were aging out. In October 2024, Nigerian representatives inspected the first six jets in the aircraft package in Italy and verified manufacturing status, a delivery plan and the opening of a maintenance center in Nigeria to provide service support for the incoming fleet.

The jets will help strengthen Nigeria's air presence, especially in its ongoing fight against terrorist groups. The country faces a yearslong insurgency in the Northeast, along with bandits in the Northwest and unrest in the country's Middle Belt.

The M-346 twin-engine jets are used as advanced trainers and light combat aircraft. The compact aircraft are 11.5 meters long with a 9.7-meter wingspan. They have a range of about 1,900 kilometers.

The helicopters will be used in part to improve logistics support.



A Leonardo M-346 trainer jet GETTY IMAGES



South Africa Buying Locally Made Drones

DEFENCEWEB

The South African Army is preparing to take delivery of new fixed-wing and rotary drones for duties that include border protection.

The Army will get the drones in part from Cape Town-based AutonoSky, founded in 2020 to produce aerial systems for rescue, fire and security organizations. The defense company develops complete aircraft, electronics and AI-driven software in-house. It supplies drones and other equipment across defense, logistics and industrial sectors.

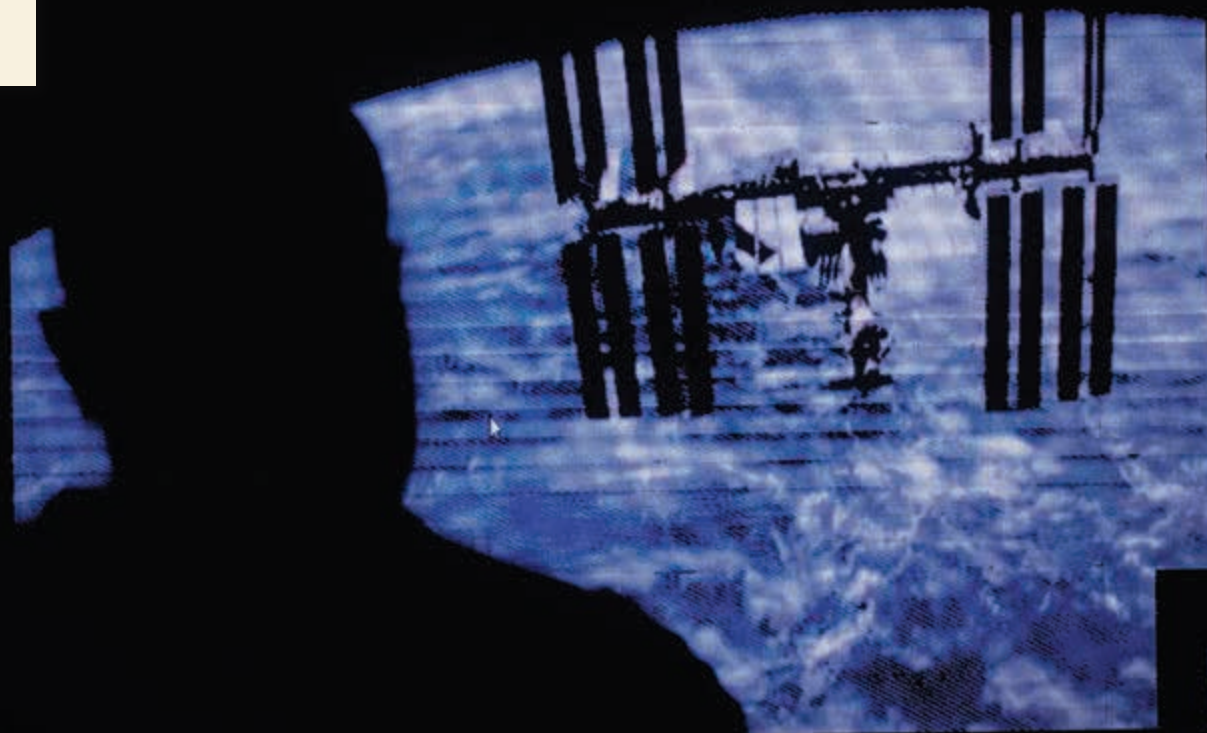
AutonoSky manufactures the Autono1 heavy-lift multirotor drone, which has a maximum payload of 30 kilograms and a flight time of up to an hour. The drone has been integrated with multiple special payloads, including fire detection sensors and advanced electro-optical systems.

AutonoSky also is expanding its portfolio to include a new class of vertical takeoff and landing fixed-wing platforms based on South African-owned intellectual property. These will feature special sensors and modular payload architecture, enabling communications relays. The company said the new platform will give "South Africa a homegrown option in a category traditionally dominated by foreign suppliers."

AutonoSky has introduced the A22 Manqoba, a tactical, foldable multirotor drone built for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; border security; and rapid response missions. The A22 has a tactical payload capacity of 6 to 8 kilograms.

The Army is acquiring multirotor drones and fixed-wing aircraft with a wingspan of 3 meters. Procurement includes training, support and maintenance. The Army is analyzing specific requirements of each of its land borders before deploying the aircraft for border security.

South African officials said drones are needed for disaster response, border security and event security. Organized crime networks along the borders, particularly in Mozambique and Zimbabwe, have drones of their own, Army officials said.



U.S. Initiative Supports AFRICAN SPACE PROGRAMS

ADF STAFF

The United States has announced a new initiative to work with African countries to strengthen space capabilities, improve access to technology and promote development.

The first U.S.-Africa Technical and Regulatory Space Training Meeting took place in December 2025. Several additional meetings took place in the run-up to the NewSpace Africa Conference in April 2026 in Libreville, Gabon.

Ambassador Jonathan Pratt, then with the U.S. State Department's Bureau of African Affairs, said the program aims to support African nations in creating and funding independent domestic programs that connect with other space programs around the world. It will help nations navigate the complex legal and commercial dimensions of space activity, the State Department said.

"The United States aims to empower African nations to create locally owned, financially sound, and internationally-aligned space programs — not dependent, opaque, or controlled by outside actors," the U.S. State Department said.

The 2025 meeting represented the first step in strengthening U.S. space diplomacy in Africa, whose

countries now have about 70 satellites on orbit.

Representatives from Angola, Botswana, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal participated in the inaugural meeting.

Another development in U.S.-Africa space relations occurred in July 2025, when Senegal became the fourth African country and the 56th country overall to sign the Artemis Accords. This set of nonbinding principles asks countries to pledge to pursue peaceful, transparent and sustainable civil space exploration and use. Senegal joins Angola, Nigeria and Rwanda as signatories.

"Senegal's adherence to the Artemis Accords reflects our commitment to a multilateral, responsible, and transparent approach to space," said Maram Kairé, director-general of the Senegalese Space Agency, during a signing ceremony at NASA headquarters. "This signature marks a meaningful step in our space diplomacy and in our ambition to contribute to the peaceful exploration of outer space."

Kenya's first nanosatellite (CubeSat) was launched from the International Space Station in 2018. African nations now have about 70 satellites on orbit. AFF/GETTY IMAGES



SOUTH AFRICAN BORDER AUTHORITY Partners With Tech, Defense Sector

ADF STAFF

The South African Border Management Authority (BMA) has partnered with high-tech defense companies to boost security at two of the country's busiest border crossings.

The companies deployed an integrated suite of surveillance, mobility and protective technologies at the Beitbridge, Zimbabwe, and Lebombo, Mozambique, border crossings during the holiday travel season that began in December 2025. The public-private partnership was a pilot project to demonstrate what is possible when the government works with the defense and technology sectors.

"This collaboration represents a growing model of South African-global technology partnership," the companies said, as reported by defenceWeb. "These capabilities will strengthen real-time situational reporting, improve incident documentation and enable higher levels of operational transparency across the border environment."

Among the private sector partners, DCD Protected Mobility provided two Springbuck personnel carriers for patrol and one all-terrain vehicle for driving on rugged land. Unipro Protective Wear supplied body camera systems able to perform analytical functions, including facial recognition and number-plate recognition. Snode Technologies provided cybersecurity technology, and A2D Geoscan and Battlecopter supplied unmanned aerial vehicles.

The effort was deemed a success. From December 10, 2025, to January 15, 2026, officials processed more than 4.9 million travelers and intercepted 26,852 people trying to enter the country illegally. Officials also arrested 81 people for serious offenses that included possession of stolen vehicles, illegal firearms, drugs and explosives. Authority Commissioner Dr. Michael Masiapato said the operations were aimed at dismantling criminal networks while also facilitating legitimate trade and travel.

"The message is clear: South Africa's borders are no longer soft targets," Masiapato said. "Through innovation, strong partnerships and decisive enforcement, the BMA will continue to protect the sovereignty of the Republic, the integrity of its borders and the safety of its people."

Pedestrians and vehicles move through the Lebombo border crossing that separates Mozambique from South Africa.

SOUTH AFRICAN BORDER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

RESILIO AFRICA to Help Communities Defend Themselves From Cyberattacks

ADF STAFF

As cybercriminals target African businesses and government institutions, the CyberSafe Foundation is set to launch Resilio Africa, a three-year project designed to reduce the risk of cyberattacks in communities.

The project, supported by Google, aims to make communities and local institutions stronger and safer in the digital space.

Resilio Africa will help 200 critical community institutions (CCIs) by giving them free technical tools, cybersecurity assessments, threat intelligence and incident-response support. The program is expected to protect more than 2 million people and secure more than 15 million public records in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. It is one of the biggest community-focused cybersecurity projects on the continent.

"Africa's digital transformation cannot succeed if our communities remain vulnerable," said Confidence Staveley, founder and executive director of the Lagos, Nigeria-based CyberSafe Foundation. "With Google.org's support, we are scaling a proven model that will help critical institutions become resilient, safeguard the people they serve, and preserve trust in digital public systems."

Resilio Africa will provide CCIs with technical tools and cybersecurity assessments, custom playbooks, and incident response frameworks. Instructors will offer more than 10,000 hours of free cybersecurity consulting. They will provide tiered cybersecurity training for executives, IT teams and general staff, and training for more than 4,500 employees across the four countries.

Cybersecurity experts warn that institutions across Africa are vulnerable. Ransomware attacks against government offices, health care institutions and businesses are rising. Kenyan national security agencies identified more than 114 cyberattacks targeting community institutions in the first eight months of 2024, followed by a 201% increase in attacks in the first quarter of 2025.

CyberSafe Foundation says that, without support, cyber incidents could disrupt essential public services, expose sensitive data, and create digital and physical harm for millions of people. Since 2019, the foundation has reached more than 30 million people, trained more than 70,000 people and helped more than 4,000 small businesses strengthen their cybersecurity.

"We believe that access to secure digital systems is a cornerstone of inclusive growth," said Haviva Kohl, senior program manager at Google.org.

A new program, Resilio Africa, will help defend 200 critical community institutions in four African countries from cyberattacks.





Nigerian Army Overhauls Training as Threats Evolve

ADF STAFF

The Nigerian Army is launching an ambitious plan to overhaul its training and its operational and administrative frameworks. The plan was announced by Lt. Gen. W. Shaibu, chief of Army staff, during his annual conference in Lagos in December 2025. It is meant to improve professionalism, combat readiness and adaptability.

Shaibu said training must be mission-oriented and produce operational effectiveness and battle-field success. The reforms will include a comprehensive review of curricula across all Nigerian Army training institutions.

“You play a critical role in shaping the competence, mindset and resilience of our officers and Soldiers,” Shaibu told attendees at Division Training Officers Training Week in Jos. “Leadership on the battlefield is directly linked to the quality of training you design, supervise and enforce.”

Shaibu said the Army will acquire new hardware and software to modernize training. He also committed to improve troop welfare and pledged to build new Army housing nationwide.

Shaibu said training Special Forces and Army Aviation personnel will be emphasized. The Nation newspaper reported that the

Nigerian Soldiers serving in the Multinational Joint Task Force sing during training at Sector 3 Headquarters in Borno State.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

moves are to keep up with a security environment that is becoming more complex and requires “enhanced capabilities in intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, reconnaissance, and cyber operations.”

Threats facing Nigeria include terrorism, banditry and intercommunal violence. In December 2025, Nigerian President Bola Tinubu unveiled a new counterterrorism doctrine that classifies all armed groups operating outside of state authority as terrorists, including bandits, militias, armed gangs, and their political or community enablers.

The overhaul is expected to be led by Army Headquarters through the Department of Training. Shaibu called robust training the nation’s “first line of defense.”

“Training must foster inquisitive and adaptable mindsets,” Shaibu said. “Our officers and Soldiers must be prepared to learn, unlearn and relearn in line with changing tactical and operational demands.”



KENYAN RESCUE TEAMS RESPOND TO LANDSLIDES

ADF STAFF

WHEN FLASH FLOODS AND LANDSLIDES struck western Kenya, Kenya Defence Forces personnel were part of a multiagency team conducting search and rescue operations. The November 2025 operation in Chesongoch focused on rescuing survivors, recovering the bodies of victims and offering emergency medical assistance.

Rain on November 1 left the region inaccessible by road. Mudslides destroyed an estimated 1,000 homes and killed more than 30 people. First responders included the Kenya Air Force's Rapid Response Unit teams, the Kenya Red Cross, Eldoret Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital staff, the National Police Service, and local volunteers.

During the first two days of the operation, officials airlifted 29 injured people for treatment and recovered 22 bodies.

"This tragedy really reminds us that we must be careful during this rainy season, especially along the valley all the way from Samburu to West Pokot," said Kipchumba Murkomen, Cabinet secretary for the Interior. "I want to request our people to be on the lookout; we want to request them to go to higher ground and avoid areas that are prone to landslides."

Chesongoch has been hit by landslides in the past due to its hilly topography. Dozens of people died in landslides in 2010 and 2012, Al Jazeera reported. Floods swept away a shopping center in 2020.

The government announced plans to help relocate people away from flood zones and build homes in areas that are "geologically stable."

"I want to ask people to continue pulling together and support each other in solidarity even as we reach out to the bereaved and the ones who are still searching for their loved ones," Murkomen said.

Kenya Defence Forces Soldiers transport a victim of landslides in Chesongoch. KDF

Guelwaar Challenge Tests Senegalese Troops

ADF STAFF

In a first-of-its-kind event, the Senegalese Armed Forces held a competition for 20 ground force units in eight physical challenges. The Guelwaar Challenge included competitions in endurance running, an obstacle course, tactical shooting, combat first aid, orienteering, tactics and swimming.

Organizers created the event, whose Wolof name translates to "the noble one," to raise standards of excellence and physical fitness among the rank and file.

"Sport occupies a key place in the armed forces in general and in the Army in particular in the operational preparation of units," Gen. Simon Ndour, chief of Army staff, said during the opening ceremonies on November 17, 2025.

Ndour said competitions like Guelwaar can push troops to improve their performance in military tasks.

"It builds the physical conditioning needed for combat, strengthens unit cohesion and develops the values that make a good Soldier, like discipline, courage, respect and effort," Ndour said.

After four days of grueling competition held in Thies at Tactical Training Center Mbaye Diagne, the Commando battalion won first place, followed by the Parachutists and the Armored battalion.



Winners of the Guelwaar Challenge, a military competition designed to test troops' physical abilities, receive a trophy. DIRPA

"I invite all of you to carry the spirit of this competition with you every day by aiming for excellence, solidarity and fraternity," Ndour said during the closing ceremonies.



U.N. Promotes African Union Peace Initiative

ADF STAFF

The United Nations secretary-general has called for action to prioritize peacekeeping in Africa, including promoting the African Union's "Silencing the Guns" initiative.

Secretary-General António Guterres made the recommendation at U.N. Headquarters in New York after the ninth conference between the global body and the AU.

"Cooperation between our organizations has never been stronger — or more necessary," Guterres said at a news briefing alongside the chairperson of the AU Commission, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf. "Our world is in turmoil, rocked by deadly conflicts, widening inequalities, climate chaos and runaway technologies. The impacts are felt deeply on the African continent."

Guterres said the partners are working closely on peacekeeping programs, including the AU's peace initiative. Silencing the Guns in Africa is a flagship program aiming to end all conflicts, violent acts and gender-based violence, while fostering peace and development across the continent. The program was launched in 2013 with a 2020 goal, but the timeline was extended to 2030. It focuses on addressing root causes of instability through disarmament, political dialogue and socioeconomic development.

The AU has a peace plan called the Lusaka Master Roadmap, adopted in 2016. It provides a framework for addressing the causes of conflict by focusing on five

interlinked areas: political governance, economic development, societal cohesion, environmental sustainability, and peace and security. The research group Amani Africa says the road map "emphasizes strengthening conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, advancing post-conflict reconstruction, addressing governance and economic drivers of conflict, fostering democracy and the rule of law and curbing the proliferation of illicit arms."

Guterres said he supports Africa having permanent seats on the U.N. Security Council, "correcting once and for all an intolerable injustice faced by the African continent." He also stressed the need for financing for development and innovations, saying that the continent's progress "is held back by an outdated and unfair global financial system."

"The world must not turn its back on Africa, home to nearly one-fifth of humanity," the U.N. chief said, warning that "the stakes are too high. And the potential is too great."

African Union peacekeepers work a security cordon during an election day lockdown in Somalia. AFP/GETTY IMAGES





U.N. Trains South Sudanese Police to Investigate Crime Scenes UNMISS

United Nations peacekeepers have trained South Sudanese police officers in investigative techniques and skills. The results have been immediate, officers say.

South Sudanese police officers study investigative techniques with United Nations Mission in South Sudan peacekeepers. UNMISS

“The thin line between justice denied and justice served is determined by investigation,” said South Sudanese Warrant Officer Michael Dhieu Malual after the five-day program.

After completing the training from police officers serving with the peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, he was able to successfully deliver justice for armed robbery victims. An offender broke into a victim’s home in the middle of the night, threatened the residents at gunpoint, and ran off with a bag of clothes and other belongings.

“The residents informed the police about the crime, and we cordoned off the scene before marking, photographing and packaging the evidence,” Dhieu said. “A few days later, we found the perpetrator wearing the same clothes that he had stolen, and we were able to get these identified by the owner. We further investigated and were able to take the case successfully to court.”

Peacekeepers from the U.N. mission trained 31 people from the police force, riverine crime unit, traffic and criminal investigations teams.

“We were able to absorb the importance of a meticulous approach to investigation, including how a single fingerprint, a careful interview, or a well-documented chain of custody can mean the difference between justice served and justice denied,” Dhieu said.

The officers’ investigation studies included securing crime scenes; recording evidence; interviewing victims, witnesses and suspects; and compiling case files for prosecution.

Beyond technical skills, officers also studied the law, the importance of respecting victim and offender rights, and the need to collaborate with prosecutors and other agencies.

They explored all aspects of crime from violence and theft to fraud, cybercrime and environmental offenses. They also studied investigative approaches such as proactive tactics, reactive responses, forensic science and community partnerships.

Algeria Pledges Support in Fight Against Terrorism

ADF STAFF

An Algerian official has pledged her country’s continued commitment to Africa’s fight against terrorism, saying extremists are a threat to the continent’s way of life.

Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Salma Bakhta Mansouri said Algeria is making an active contribution to advance peace, stability and sustainable development in Africa. Mansouri spoke in December 2025 in Algiers at an expert consultative workshop on the draft Strategic Plan of Action on Countering Terrorism.

She said, “terrorism is no longer a temporary phenomenon or confined to specific geographical areas, but has evolved into a cross-border threat, adaptable and fueled by complex interactions that combine transnational organized crime, illicit economies, and illegal trafficking of resources, alongside the increasing exploitation of modern technologies,” according to the Algeria Press Service.

Algeria is not considered a hot spot for terrorism. However, its national forces have been involved in the fight against extremists. Algeria’s People’s National Army reported that it neutralized 67 terrorists and arrested 369 people on related charges in 2025. The Army also said it recovered significant quantities of weapons and ammunition, according to Algeria’s AL 24 News. In combating organized crime, the Army reported that it arrested 2,354 drug traffickers and seized 934 kilograms of cocaine and 40 million psychotropic tablets. It seized more than 2.6 million liters of fuel.

During the workshop, Mansouri said that Africa “now bears the brunt of this threat, with over 70% of global terrorism victims, in a structural crisis that undermines state authority, hinders development pathways, and fuels cycles of instability.” She said Africa needs to strengthen its presence and role as a strategic actor in international anti-terrorism efforts through a “more coherent and integrated continental approach, based on clarity of vision and the consolidation of strategic sovereignty.”



Algerian Soldiers take part in a parade for the country’s celebration of 60 years of independence in 2022. AFF/GETTY IMAGES



South Africa JOINS FLOOD RELIEF OPERATIONS IN MOZAMBIQUE

DEFENCEWEB

The South African Air Force (SAAF) used three helicopters to help neighboring Mozambique rescue 759 people during flooding in early 2026.

The SAAF Search and Rescue team took action after heavy rains fell in January across Mozambique and the northern part of South Africa. The team operated an Atlas Oryx and two A109 helicopters.

"This mission formed a critical component of the broader disaster relief effort undertaken in response to the emergency situation that affected thousands of civilians," Maj. Lebogang Phakathi reported for the SAAF.

After the search and rescue operation, the Mozambican government, the SAAF, humanitarian organizations

and partners provided food, clean water and temporary shelters to affected communities. SAAF aircraft helped ensure that food was delivered safely.

"Although floodwaters are slowly receding, the scale of destruction remains immense," the SAAF said. "Support will be required not only to restore immediate stability but also to fully recover and rebuild what has been ruined by the flood disaster. Severe damage to crops and livestock has left many families without sources of income, and the task of rebuilding livelihoods will demand time, significant resources, and sustained cooperation across institutions and communities."

Two SAAF helicopters also were activated for flood relief in South Africa's Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces. The rescues included people from game lodges trapped by floodwaters.

By the end of January, the flooding had killed more than 100 people in Southern Africa and displaced hundreds of thousands, The Guardian reported. More than 70 people died in Zimbabwe, 30 in South Africa and 13 in southern Mozambique.

South African Air Force personnel provide flood relief and humanitarian assistance in Mozambique in early 2026.

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL DEFENCE FORCE

ESWATINI, KENYA DISCUSS DEFENSE COOPERATION

ADF STAFF

A Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) delegation has met with representatives of the Umbutfo Eswatini Defence Force to discuss military cooperation between the two nations.

The two sides met in late 2025 to discuss capacity development through training partnerships, the Kenya Ministry of Defence reported. They also discussed defense policy and planning, personnel welfare, terms and conditions of military service, and joint career progression courses.

The two teams addressed the Kenya-Eswatini Defence Cooperation Agreement Draft, which proposes further collaboration in peace support operations, research and development, military health services, border security management, cybersecurity, and other aspects of defense. They described the meeting as a “reflection of mutual goodwill” and an opportunity to strengthen relations and share experiences and information.

The Umbutfo Eswatini Defence Force is responsible for territorial defense, internal security and support for civil authorities. It has an estimated 3,000 personnel.

The KDF, with 50,000 personnel, is active in peacekeeping operations, particularly in Somalia as part of the African Union mission.

Kenyan Soldiers prepare to leave the Democratic Republic of the Congo in December 2023. AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Nigeria, Saudi Arabia AGREE TO DEFENSE PACT

ADF STAFF

Nigeria and Saudi Arabia hope a landmark memorandum of understanding will deepen defense and military cooperation between the two countries.

The agreement, signed December 9, 2025, in Abuja, comes as Nigeria confronts multiple security threats and seeks stronger international

support to rebuild its defense capabilities. Nigerian officials called the memorandum “a significant milestone,” noting that it includes cooperation in training, joint exercises, intelligence sharing, technical support, logistics and other mutually agreed upon defense engagements.

The agreement will run for five years, with a renewal option. Either party can terminate it with three months’ notice. The agreement includes capacity building and training, operational effectiveness, and counterterrorism and internal security, according to Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation.

Saudi Arabia will offer “expanded opportunities for professional military education, specialist courses and training exchanges to raise the skill levels of Nigerian personnel,” the ministry said. The agreement will include joint exercises and shared doctrine that will improve operational compatibility and readiness across Nigeria’s armed forces.

The ministry said the two countries will cooperate on counterterrorism, counterinsurgency and intelligence sharing to support efforts against terrorism and organized crime.

Nigeria and Saudi Arabia share long-standing diplomatic, cultural and economic ties, “heavily influenced by religious connections through the annual Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages,” the online newspaper Premium Times noted. Both nations also work within multilateral bodies such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

In the past year, the two nations have begun to develop new partnerships. In January 2026, they signed their first bilateral agreement on the recruitment of general workers, creating a formal labor corridor, Business Insider Africa reported. The agreement will formalize Nigeria’s labor contribution to Saudi Arabia’s economy while ensuring worker protections.

Nigeria's Minister of State for Defence Dr. Bello Mohammed Matawalle and Saudi Arabia's Assistant Minister of Defense for Executive Affairs Dr. Khaled H. Al-Biyari signed a memorandum of understanding.

SAUDI ARABIA MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

A 16th Century Battle Changed West Africa

ADF STAFF

When Moroccan Sultan Ahmad al-Mansur invaded the sprawling Songhai Empire to the south in 1591, his 3,000 to 4,000 troops faced an army 10 times its size.

But the sultan's troops had a technological advantage: gunpowder. The two sides met at the Battle of Tondibi, and the Songhai soldiers' spears and arrows were no match for the Moroccans and their clumsy, but deadly, shoulder-fired guns. The sultan's troops won the battle and the subsequent war that dragged on in the following months. The war is now recognized as the end of the empire, and a major turning point in West African history.

Dating to the 1400s, the Songhai Empire, in what is now Mali and Niger, was the dominant force in West Africa, controlling key commercial trade routes, including those used by Saharan caravans. The empire was centered on the Niger River, West Africa's trade superhighway, and included major cities Gao and Timbuktu. It was a key trade hub for goods moving between Africa and Europe, handling gold, salt, slaves, textiles and kola nuts. But by the late 1500s, it was engulfed in regional rebellions and civil wars and was beginning to unravel around the edges. Disputes within the ruling family threatened to divide the empire. The kingdom was no longer a fortress.

In North Africa, al-Mansur ruled the Saadi dynasty, having come to power after beating Portugal in battle in 1578. But his empire was limited, and his treasury was thin. He needed new sources of wealth to maintain his army and stay in power, but most of his possible areas of expansion already were under the thumb of the Ottoman Empire. He looked instead to the south and the Niger River region, said to be rich with gold. And although Songhai no longer produced gold, it still controlled gold trade routes. It was an obvious choice for the sultan's plans for conquest.

The sultan sent his troops south into what is now Niger. The Moroccan army first had to cross the Sahara, a



journey that took months and claimed the lives of many soldiers and pack animals. When they finally arrived in Songhai territory, the Songhai Askia, or ruler, Ishaq II, mobilized his army, estimated at 30,000 infantrymen and 10,000 cavalrymen.

The Moroccans' primary weapon was the arquebus, an early gun that was a crude precursor to the musket. It was deadlier than bows and arrows and more accurate than the older hand cannons.

The Songhai launched a huge frontal attack, including driving 1,000 cattle into the battle to disrupt the Moroccan forces. But the sound of the Moroccan gunfire terrified the animals, making them turn and stampede the Songhai forces instead. The Battle of Tondibi ended in disaster for the Songhai.



Sultan Ahmad al-Mansur

Over the next months, Moroccan forces advanced as Songhai forces retreated. The sultan captured Gao, Timbuktu and Djenné, the centers of the empire. But it was not a quick death for the Songhai Empire, as its ruling class continued to resist, fragmenting the region. The Moroccan troops, cut off from their capital of Marrakech, began to mutiny and disperse, even putting down roots in their conquered land and marrying locally. They formed a new military class that ruled parts of the Niger River Valley for decades.

The invasion marked the eventual end of the Songhai Empire, but it could not be regarded as a complete success for the sultan. The anticipated gold instead was dispersed to European merchants. The sultan now controlled only fragments of the former empire. The logistics of controlling a vast territory across the Sahara proved to be an impossible task, and Morocco lost control of the Songhai cities in the coming years.

The collapse of Songhai marked the end of a long era of large empires throughout the Sahel, showing the difficulty of controlling any region that includes the vastness of the Sahara. It changed global trade patterns, permanently altering African power structures.

CLUES

- 1** This city, on the southern edge of the Sahara, is known as the gateway to the desert.
- 2** The historic city center, an important crossroads of the caravan trade, is divided into 11 sections with irregular shapes.
- 3** Among the earthen dwellings and religious buildings is a 27-meter mud-brick minaret, the tallest such structure in the world.
- 4** The location dates to the 15th and 16th centuries, when the Sultanate of Aïr established itself there.

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