

EXAMINING AFRICOM'S MARITIME SECURITY INITIATIVE, PROGRAMMES AND PARTNERSHIPS: A PROJECTION OF ADVANCED MARITIME SECURITY IN THE GULF GUINEA

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Abstract

This paper examined the AFRICOM'S Maritime Security Initiative, Programmes and Partnerships: A Projection of Advanced Maritime Security in the Gulf Guinea. The said insecurity in the sub-region as perpetrated by Violent Extremist Organisations (VEOs) and Transnational Criminal Organisations (TCOs), Gulf of Guinea is a strategic coastal area that contains about 17 countries and it has rich natural endowments with vast reserves of hydrocarbon, oil deposits, mineral (diamond, tin and cobalt), fisheries resources, etc. which

attracted US Government's strategic interest in the maritime region. The study was anchored on the power theory as data collection was based on the qualitative method of data collection. Data collected were analyzed using content analysis and logical data framework. The study found that maritime security challenges in West Africa include piracy, violent extremism, transnational organized crimes, kidnaping, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, transnational crude oil theft, smuggling, armed robbery, and drug trafficking and also that maritime insecurity has remained prevalent in the Gulf of Guinea, despite the establishment of US Africa Command. In conclusion, empirical evidence suggests that AFRICOM has had a positive impact in the Gulf of Guinea by contributing to the decline in piracy incidents, building the capacity of regional security forces, facilitating intelligence sharing and coordination, and engaging in diplomatic efforts. However, on-going challenges in the region require a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving various stakeholders to ensure long-term security and stability. The study, therefore, recommended, among others, that the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) should conduct joint exercises and operations with African partners to enhance interoperability and promote regional cooperation in the sub-region.

Keywords: AFRICOM, Gulf, of Guinea, Maritime, Security, Programmes, Partnership

Introduction

The Gulf of Guinea, a strategic maritime area, located off the coast of West Africa is rich in natural resources and a major transit route for international shipping. It remains the most important oil-producing region in Africa. The region holds about 4.5% of the world's oil reserves, with estimated 25 billion barrels and the daily production of 5 million barrels – compared to 9.4 million for the whole African continent (Onuoha, 2010). These important mineral resources are highly significant to the U.S strategic interests and constitute the key supplies that America relies on to produce 21st century technologies and transition to clean energy, including mobile phones, jet engines, electric hybrid vehicles, and missile guidance systems (UNDP, 2022). The natural endowments of the Guinean Gulf region which have nurtured and shaped its geostrategic importance have nonetheless rendered the region vulnerable and unstable over the years. There are thus serious concerns over the availability of the oil resources in the Gulf of Guinea in an open and transparent market place as well as issues of their inaccessibility due to predatory practices of competitors. The Gulf of Guinea holds a share of more than one-quarter of all worldwide pirate attacks, and experiences the highest number of maritime armed robberies throughout the world.

It has witnessed a significant increase in attacks on vessels, resulting in economic losses, threats to human lives and disruption of maritime trade. Gulf of Guinea has become a hotspot for piracy, armed robbery and

maritime crimes due to various factors such as weak maritime governance, political instability, poverty, and lack of adequate law enforcement capabilities.

Pirate attacks in the Gulf of Guinea involve armed individuals boarding ships, hijacking vessels, and kidnapping crew members for ransom. These criminal activities not only pose a direct threat to the safety and security of seafarers but also impact the region's economy and global trade.

Incidences of abductions of maritime personnel, including the risks posed to foreign maritime staff operating across the Gulf have been on the rise since 2011 as the trend of violent kidnappings for ransom increased by 85% in 2013 when compared to the previous years. The Gulf now exceeds the number of recorded cases in the coastal waters of the Horn of Africa, which were considered to be highly volatile before the decrease in Somali piracy following concerted international security efforts (Max Security, 2014; Ezirim, 2018). Report on the International Maritime Organization (2015) shows that about 50 cases of piracy attacks take place in the Gulf of Guinea each year. The pirates target both oil drilling platforms and ships, with the intention of seizing money, radio equipment and goods from the crew and the passengers (Meyer, 2008). Townsend (2022), also notes that

“despite the tremendous geostrategic significance of the Gulf of Guinea, the region is shaped by the competing forces of prosperity and poverty, peace and conflict, plenty and famine, good governance

and bad governance and democratic backsliding”.....(p.54).

Although, numerous claims have consistently been made by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development over the importance and significant contributions of AFRICOM in limiting Violent Extremist Organisation’s destabilization of the region and preventing further Violent Extremist Organisation’s expansion in the littoral states, VEOs have continued to make critical expansions into the littoral West Africa and occupied under-governed territories, and adding more destabilizing threats to strategically important countries in the Gulf of Guinea. Civilian populations have been targeted with mass casualty attacks, forced taxation, and recruitment thus, driving regional instability. The illicit activities in the Gulf of Guinea including to illegal fishing, smuggling, and trafficking of drugs and arms, further undermines the stability and development of the coastal states in the region. There are now multiple, conflicting, and complex measures, approaches and policy initiatives pursued by major stakeholders in the Gulf of Guinea, including African leaders, international partners, allies and competitors, on how to secure the vulnerable region and mitigate the problems. Against this backdrop, this paper examines AFRICOM’S Maritime Security Initiative, Programmes and Partnerships: A Projection of Advanced Maritime Security in the Gulf Guinea.

Literature Review

Maritime Security Conceptualized

It is within this context that maritime security can be conceptualized as the state provision of security for maritime and coastal areas in a given country or region. Maritime security is therefore, targeted at protecting government assets, business interests, natural resources, cargoes, ships and travellers within the coastal areas against non-state actors and armed groups, including VEOs and TCOs who engage in various forms of transnational criminal activities such as sea piracy, abduction, poaching, illegal mining, human trafficking, drug trafficking, etc.

Maritime security refers to the measures and actions taken to protect and secure the maritime domain, which includes oceans, seas, coasts, and any activities conducted within or related to these areas. It involves safeguarding maritime interests, resources, infrastructure, and activities from various threats, such as piracy, terrorism, illegal fishing, smuggling, human trafficking, and environmental hazards.

Maritime security encompasses a broad range of activities, including the protection of maritime borders, surveillance and monitoring of maritime traffic, enforcement of laws and regulations, search and rescue operations, maritime domain awareness, intelligence gathering, and international cooperation among maritime nations.

Effective maritime security is crucial for ensuring safe and secure trade, promoting economic prosperity,

protecting the environment, preventing crime, and maintaining peace and stability in the maritime domain. It involves the collaboration and coordination of various stakeholders, including navies, coast guards, law enforcement agencies, port authorities, international organizations, and private sector entities involved in maritime activities.

Threats in the Gulf of Guinea

Seventeen countries make up the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea. Gulf of Guinea countries include Africa's largest oil producing countries like Nigeria and Angola; regional powerhouses like Senegal, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria and Angola; booming economies like Senegal, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire and Togo; as well as relatively poor developing countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia (based on GDP per capita). These countries account for nearly 25 percent of Africa's maritime traffic, with approximately 20 commercial seaports such as Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire), Cotonou (Benin), Tema and Takoradi (Ghana) and Lagos (Nigeria) (Nogueira Pinto, 2022).

For decades now, Gulf of Guinea has been threatened with numerous maritime security threats such as piracy, drug trafficking, armed robbery, illegal fishing, smuggling and human trafficking. Piracy has raised maritime insurance costs and adversely affected shipping costs. The region became a major transit point for illegal drugs from South America to Asia and Europe.

Several efforts have been made at the bilateral, multilateral and regional level to tackle these maritime

security threats and the challenges posed by them. On the bilateral front, countries have engaged in information sharing to improve situational awareness and have conducted joint patrols. An example of joint effort at the multilateral level is the partnership forged in June 2022 between the Japanese government, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Nigeria's Martin Luther Agwai International Leadership and Peacekeeping Centre (MLAILPKC) in Abuja to organise an Anti-Piracy training course and conduct research on reducing piracy in order to cut shipping costs.

The maritime route through Gulf of Guinea has high economic importance for regional and international trade and shipping. The regional organisations working on the security issues of Gulf of Guinea include the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). African Union (AU) and GGC have conducted joint patrols, providing training support, have encouraged information sharing and held sessions discussing the maritime security threats facing the Gulf of Guinea and consequentially to its littoral countries. In these discussions, though, terrorism was not the prime focus on the horizon.

Security Challenges in the Gulf of Guinea

The problem in maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea is the high prevalence of piracy, armed robbery at sea, and other maritime crimes. This region, located off the coast of West Africa, has witnessed a significant increase in attacks on vessels, resulting in economic

losses, threats to human lives, and disruption of maritime trade. The Gulf of Guinea is a strategic maritime area, rich in natural resources and a major transit route for international shipping.

However, it has become a hotspot for piracy and maritime crimes due to various factors such as weak maritime governance, political instability, poverty, and lack of adequate law enforcement capabilities. Pirate attacks in the Gulf of Guinea involve armed individuals boarding ships, hijacking vessels, and kidnapping crew members for ransom. These criminal activities not only pose a direct threat to the safety and security of seafarers but also impact the region's economy and global trade.

Furthermore, the illicit activities in the Gulf of Guinea contribute to illegal fishing, smuggling, and trafficking of drugs and arms. This further undermines the stability and development of the coastal states in the region.

AFRICOM and US National Interest in the Gulf of Guinea

The U.S. military maintained that AFRICOM is essentially positioned as a mission to protect and advance U.S. interests in Africa which includes the maintenance of a free, open, and stable environment. According to Townsend (2022), Africa's geostrategic importance has attracted growing attention at the world stage which accounts for the drive by U.S. strategic rivals to seek ways to also leverage both soft and hard investments into political influence, but sometimes they use malign, and hard military advantage to achieve their ambitions. However, U.S. AFRICOM has been stationed

as a ground force on the African continent to subdue the rival interests, particularly by promising and providing access to a stable and prosperous African continent, and supporting African governments politically, economically, and militarily. AFRICOM therefore secures U.S. investments, protect her interests and advance her objectives in a dynamic and important region of the world.

It is further noted that Africa's geo-strategic relevance has continued to drive the ongoing competition and pursuit of influence in the region. Africa's influence has also increased significantly in the global stage because of this strategic importance. For example, Africa now controls about 28 percent of UN General Assembly votes and three of 15 UN Security Council (UNSC) seats (de Carvalho and Forti, 2020). The U.S. sees African partners as having a choice to make either to cooperate with the U.S. AFRICOM and their European allies to promote open, rules-based international order or get into the hands of the raw power transactional pressure campaigns of global competitors. It is believed that the choice of African governments over who they partner with can determine the future of U.S. values-based influence in international political fora. As noted by Townsend (2018), other strategic rivals such as China and Russia, also know about Africa's strategic importance and have always wanted to explore them fully. These nations therefore seek means to deny the U.S. a place of influence in the region so as to control African resources. This they do by asserting political influence, and converting soft and hard power

investments into new partnerships, to the detriment of U.S. interests.

Particularly, China continues to engage in the exercise of a dominant position across African markets, which has allowed it to strengthen autocratic regimes and influence global political norms, technological standards, and commercial practices while offering an entry point for their military. China has made enormous investment in Africa as its “second continent”, and has pursued the initiative of infrastructural development in Africa which has boosted Chinese economic growth, outpaced the U.S. and allowed it to exploit opportunities to their benefit (Cordesman, 2021). In 2018, China recorded great milestone in the expansion of the capabilities of its Doraleh Naval Base in Djibouti where China has the only permanent military base abroad, as they added a big and capable pier; and again, advanced some measures to create a second location in West Africa’s Atlantic Coast. China’s military outfit and technical build-up in Africa gives the country adequate leeway to enhance power eastward into the Middle East and Indo-Pacific Theatres and west into the Atlantic. There is also apprehension by U.S. think tanks over a long-term Chinese naval presence in West Africa which would demand that the U.S. Department considers a shift to U.S. naval force posture and such could also pose increased risk to freedom of navigation and U.S. ability to act (Nakamura et al., 2021).

On the other hand, Townsend (2022) alarms that Russia has been undermining rule of law and has explored the

on-going insecurity and diplomatic disputes to promote the expansion of its presence in Africa, by using Kremlin-backed Wagner Group. Wagner now has presence in many countries in Africa including Libya, Sudan, Mozambique, Central African Republic (CAR), and Mali. In some cases, the mercenaries get involved in acts of violence against civilians and other human rights violations. Wagner is thus accused of fostering instability in some African countries such as the Central African Republic (CAR) where there have been reported cases of killings of scores of civilians during operations purported to support the government, even though the underlying aim had been to foster the political and business interest of Russia. Although these accusations have been deliberately denied by Russia's Wagner, and President Putin had maintained that Wagner is a private company contracted by Mali's transitional authorities. However, the Malian government already stated that only official Russian Ministry of Defence personnel are conducting operations in their country. Nevertheless, Russia has been the largest exporter of weapons to African countries, with over 23 percent rise in exports to Africa between 2018 and 2022. It is argued that Russian arms sale to authoritarian leaders and combatants in Africa without end-user agreements contribute to militarization, and escalate conflict and instability on the continent (Parachini and Bauer, 2021).

Importantly, Townsend (2022) has reflected on the complexity of U.S. interests in the Sahel, littoral West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. According to him, the rapid spread of Sahel-based VEOs outside of Mali and

Burkina Faso pushed the need for U.S. involvement in the region in order to protect her interests. Townsend (2022) recalls that in 2021, the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslmin (JNIM) recorded advancements into littoral West Africa, which gave them the audacity to issue a new destabilizing threat to strategically important countries on the Atlantic. In addition to the crisis and escalating security situation, JNIM's regional rival group, ISIS in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), started a campaign that targeted civilian populations with mass casualty attacks, taxation, and recruitment which further destabilized the already volatile region.

Theoretical Orientation

This paper was anchored on the power theory. Power theory is propounded and popularized by the following scholars, namely: Hans Morgenthau (1964), Robert Dahl (1957), Frankel (1974), Richard K. Ashley (1983), Edward H. Carr (2001), Joseph Nye (1990), Nye (2004), Steven Lukes (1974), John Mearsheimer (2001), Robert Keohane & Joseph Nye (2001) among others. The power theory emphasizes the pursuit of national interest through the use of power by state actors in the international system.

According to Hans Morgenthau (1964), power is an instrument for expressing and promoting state interest, and it provides both the aim of a state's foreign policy as well as the means of achieving foreign policy objectives. The practice of power focuses on the ways statesmen engage power to achieve desired interests with the least perils. For Morgenthau (1964) states all over the world are driven by their national interest, and this is defined in

terms of power such states could project in its dealings in the international system. Thus, power is used by states to achieve their interests in the international system. While power which is borne out of political realism constitutes the sphere of politics, it is not alone within it. Morgenthau linked this intrinsic presence of morals back to the “nature of man as both a political and a moral animal”. Even though human beings are moral agents, the lust for power as a means to protect perceived interest has become an ubiquitous empirical fact; and the pursuit of power does not conform to universal ethical norms. “There can be no renunciation of the ethical denial without renouncing the human nature of man” (Morgenthau, 1946).

Robert Dahl’s (1957) believes that power is utilized by state actors to compel obedience from other parties in the international system. Hence, power is A having the ability to make B to do what A wants. This means that A’s power determines the behaviour of B, and the reason of the behaviour for B is A’s power. Explaining the overriding influence of power, Carr (2001) noted that, "power" reflects an actor's ability to exercise influence over other actors within the international environment. This influence can be coercive, attractive, cooperative, or competitive. Mechanisms of influence can include the threat or use of force, economic interaction or pressure, diplomacy, and cultural exchange. According to Marcella (2004):

Power is the capacity to direct the decisions and actions of others. Strategy marshals’ capabilities

and brings them to bear with precision. Statecraft seeks through strategy to magnify the mass, relevance, impact, and irresistibility of power. It guides the ways the state deploys and applies its power abroad. These ways embrace the arts of war, espionage, and diplomacy. The practitioners of these three arts are the paladins of statecraft (Marcella, 2004,p. 2).

Power therefore reflects the fulcrum of international relations and shows the integral of power politics between and among state actors in international relations (Guzzini, 2020). Power seeks to achieve a goal and serves as ‘control mechanism’ to achieve expected outcomes and consequences in international relations. Joseph Nye (1990: 178) emphasizes the idea of “power conversion” as a process of power configuration. Power conversion is a process of aggregation of elements of potential power. This involves the capacity of actors and institutions to direct their actions and exchange demands. Institutional structures bargaining ability and options thus become basic political issues (Keohane & Nye, 2001: 46). Power can be equated predominantly in terms of political goals, implying that power is a behavioural factor, namely aggregation of certain elements directed to affect other actors’ behaviour and in return achieve an expected consequence and outcome.

John Mearsheimer (2001) maintained that the essence of the use of power by state actors is to balance capabilities and achieve desired interests in the international system. This use of power can be in two different ways; either in

the form of “hard power” or “soft power”. Hard power is a coercive means of actualization of one’s interests. It deals with coercive tactics: the threat or use of armed forces or military invasion, economic pressure or sanctions, assassination and subterfuge, as well as other forms of intimidation. Hard power is predominantly deployed by most powerful nations, and they have often utilized power to change the domestic affairs of other nations through military threats. However, instruments of soft power include debates on cultural values, dialogues on ideology, the attempt to influence through good example, and the appeal to commonly accepted human values. Means of exercising soft power include diplomacy, dissemination of information, analysis, propaganda, and cultural programming to achieve political ends (Nye, 2004).

Nye (2004) examines transnational power relations in the explanation of ‘soft power’. He also adopted the concept of “smart power” to show the relationship between hard power and soft power. Nye defined "smart power" as "the ability to combine hard and soft power into a successful strategy. The art of statecraft therefore involves a combination of both soft and hard power to achieve political interests.

Again, political interests have two major aspects, material and non-material interests. The specific type of interest desired determines the condition for power being used, whether hard or soft power or both. However, it is difficult to determine the objectivity of interests. A state may have an objective assessment of what it considers to

be national interest, but the use of power does not always guarantee an objective assessment of the means of achieving the interest (Keohane & Nye, 2001).

The power theory in this study is used to emphasize the influence and capabilities of the U.S. as a key actor in the international system, and how the U.S. has been able to deploy its power capabilities to pursue its core interests in the Gulf of Guinea region. Hence, the establishment of U.S. Africa Command, being U.S. military paraphernalia in Africa, is designed essentially for the achievement of United States core interests and foreign policy objectives on the African continent, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea region. This is to ensure that the U.S. remains a purveyor of power in the region. Keohane and Nye (2001) maintained that in the use of state power, institutional structures, bargaining ability and options are basic political issues. This approach implies that power is a behavioural factor, namely aggregation of certain elements directed to affect other actors' behaviour and in return achieve an expected consequence and outcome. This underscores the negotiating skills, use of propaganda, diplomatic tools and mediatory styles adopted by the U.S. in the deployment of AFRICOM and its operational bases in Africa. This can be seen in the manner in which the U.S. Department of State has cleverly convinced African governments that the purpose of AFRICOM is to help them build strong military partnership and train African militaries to be able to address maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. According to the Commander of the U.S. Africa Command, General Stephen Townsend

(2022); AFRICOM is committed to improve security and stability, to combat sources of extremist recruitment, to create stable political environments, to improve governance and to promote democracy and the rule of law.

Methodology

This paper is based on the ex-post facto research method. The ex-post facto design helps to interrogate possible cause-effect relationships by observing an existing condition and searching back in time for plausible causal factors (Cooper & Schindler, 2001). The ex-post facto design adopts a series of pre-measurement and post-measurement or before and after observation required for establishing causal relationship or cause-effect relationship (Leege & Francis, 1974).

This paper equally adopted the qualitative method of data collection. This was used to describe and interpret existing conditions as well as prevailing phenomena to understand the relational dimension of variables. *The study obtained from secondary sources. The secondary data comprises of* information generated from already existing materials that may have gone through some level or measures of refinement (Asika, 2001). The secondary data helped to locate this study within the existing literature and to make deductive and general inferences. *These include: textbooks, journal articles, magazines, newspapers, conference proceedings, and official reports and publications from relevant institutions such as U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Navy Europe-Africa, the U.S. Agency for International*

Development (USAID), United Nations Security Council (UNSC), U.S. Embassy in Nigeria, Benin, and Ghana, U.S. Political-Military Affairs Unit in Benin, African Union, ECOWAS, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Europe District, U.S. Navy Europe-Africa, International Maritime Bureau, etc.

This paper adopted the descriptive method of analysis. This is used in the study to systematically analyze written materials, which involves examination of documents to investigate specific topics or themes such as evidence of bias or prejudice, prevailing practices, etc (Ofordile, 2002). The descriptive method is preferred in this study since it is adjudged to be most suitable in analyzing data collected from qualitative sources (Biereenu-Nnabugwu, 2006).

Creation of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM)

The journey to the establishment of AFRICOM could be traced to 1999, when the Department of Defense (DoD) opened the African Center for Security Studies to support the development of U.S. strategic policy toward Africa - a move that was seen as a precursor to its creation of AFRICOM. At the time AFRICOM was conceived, DOD stressed that there were no plans to have a significant troop presence on the continent as the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) located at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti provided the only U.S. military base in Africa (<https://www.afri.com.mil/article/34251/us-africa-command-in2021-drivin>

g-shared-goals-through-engagement). The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, however, marked a turning point in U.S. strategic policy toward Africa. The events of 9/11 forced a reassessment of and placed greater attention on the presence of extremists on the continent. One result was the creation of the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa in 2002, ostensibly to capture Islamic fighters fleeing from Afghanistan and the Middle East.

Some other factors that necessitated the creation of AFRICOM include the distraction and overstretching of existing Combatant Commands. For instance, by the mid-2000s, the European and Central Commands had become overstretched due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The European Command was primarily focused on relations with European allies and Russia, while the Pacific Command was primarily focused on China, India, and North Korea. Hence, in 2006, Congress authorized a feasibility study on the creation of a new command for Africa to consolidate current operations and activities on the continent under one commander (Ploch, 2011). In the same year, General James L. Jones of the European Command pointed out that his Command's staff was spending more than half its time on African issues, up from almost no time three years earlier (Brown, 2013). General Bantz Craddock, Jones's successor, also remarked that Africa in recent years had posed one of the greatest security challenges to the U.S. European Command and that a separate command for Africa was needed to provide better focus and increase synergy in support of U.S. policy and

engagement. In line with the advice of General Craddock, President Bush decided in 2007 to create AFRICOM (Brown, 2013).

AFRICOM was officially launched as a sub-unified command under EUCOM on October 1, 2007, and became a stand-alone command on October 1, 2008 (Ploch, 2011). AFRICOM's first commander, Army General William E. Kip Ward, former Deputy Commander of EUCOM, retired in 2011, transferring command authority to General Carter F. Ham, formerly Commanding General of U.S. Army Europe, on March 9. The mission statement of AFRICOM specifies that the: United States Africa Command, in concert with interagency and international partners, builds defense capabilities, responds to crisis, and deters and defeats transnational threats in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity (cited in Ploch, 2011).

In 2002, the George W. Bush administration, in its National Security Strategy, outlined a more focused and strategic approach toward Africa, which emphasized that "U.S. security strategy must focus on building indigenous security and intelligence capabilities through bilateral engagement and coalitions of the willing" (The White House, 2002). As a result, the U.S. military planners and their civilian counterparts, who historically had not regularly identified issues on the African continent as strategic priorities for the U.S. military, began to engage in a wide array of activities aimed at protecting trade interests, reducing armed conflict, and countering terrorism. It was in line with this shift of

strategic actions that the United States government provided development programmes and security assistance to help strengthen security in Africa, particularly the waterways. To this end, the Bush Administration, in 2005, introduced the National Strategy for Maritime Security, with the facilitation and defence of commerce as top national priorities (Feldt, Roell & Thiele, 2013).

In 2007, U.S. Naval Forces Europe launched the African Partnership Station (APS). Under this new initiative, a navy ship was deployed to the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) for seven months not only to serve as a sea base of operations and a floating schoolhouse from which to provide assistance and training to the Gulf states, but also to conduct maritime security operations to protect shipping routes in the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean (Feldt, Roell & Thiele, 2013). Above all, the U.S. government, on February 7, 2007, announced officially the decision to create a Unified Combatant Command for Africa, known as United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) as a new U.S. government approach to protect its trade interests and national security objectives in Africa and its surrounding waters (Pham, 2014). Created ostensibly to address concerns over the administrative division of responsibility for U.S. military efforts and engagement in Africa, AFRICOM's establishment reflects an evolution in American perceptions of its strategic interests in Africa. Hence, the U.S.-Africa Command operations cover all parts of the African continent except for Egypt. It also includes all island countries commonly

associated with Africa such as Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles (Crawley, 2017). It also seeks to enhance maritime security in Africa since Africa's coastlines and waterways, particularly the GoG, have been volatile and highly susceptible to illegal fishing, trafficking, piracy and other forms of criminality in recent years. The rising insecurity in waterways is seen to potentially constitute a threat to the U.S. interests, including how to secure access to energy resources in Africa (Okumu, 2017).

The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) has about eleven combatant commands in different parts of the world. The headquarters of the U.S. Africa Command was at the Kelley Barracks in Stuttgart, Germany. U.S. AFRICOM conducts U.S. military operations across the 53 African countries except Egypt which is covered by the U.S. Central Command (CENCOM). It has diverse aspects of responsibility which includes fighting regional conflicts and maintaining U.S. military relations with African countries (Mueller, 2015).

The U.S. AFRICOM which is headed by a Commander who reports directly to the Secretary of Defense operates along with African military personnel to support their military operations. The U.S. embassies in various African countries are used to facilitate the purpose of U.S. AFRICOM, although U.S. military operations had been ongoing in Africa before the creation of AFRICOM in 2007. These military operations were conducted across three unified commands namely: United States European Command (EUCOM) for West Africa, United

States Central Command (CENTCOM) for East Africa, and United States Pacific Command (PACOM) for Indian Ocean waters and islands off the east coast of Africa. Hence, the creation of AFRICOM represented the unification of these commands for a more robust and effective military operations in Africa.

The birth of AFRICOM followed a 2004 global posture review after which the U.S. Department of Defense installed a number of Cooperative Security Locations (CSLs) and Forward Operating Sites (FOSs) across the African continent, under the umbrella of EUCOM. Later the Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, was declared a base for AFRICOM facilities on the African continent. The U.S. considers certain areas in Africa of great military interests, including the Sahara/Sahel region – the Joint Task Force Aztec Silence conducts anti-terrorist operations (Operation Enduring Freedom - Trans Sahara); Djibouti in the Horn of Africa – Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa is located (overseeing Operation Enduring Freedom - Horn of Africa), and the Gulf of Guinea (Fellows, 2005).

Following the creation of AFRICOM in 2007, the United States Congress approved \$500 million for the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI), a six-year programme, to support countries fighting counterterrorist wars against Al Qaeda which had firm control in some African nations including Algeria, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Nigeria, and Morocco (Lobe, 2007). Therefore, at the birth of AFRICOM, the U.S. policy towards Africa, at least in the medium-term, focused more on countering terrorism, recognizing the

increasing importance of African oil to U.S. energy needs and exploring the Gulf of Guinea oil resources, and the dramatic expansion and improvement of Sino-African relations since 2000 (U.S. Africa Command, 2018).

Northham (2007) explains that the creation of AFRICOM was first initiated by the Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld in 2006 when he set up a sub-committee to marshal out measures for the creating a new Unified Command for the African continent. The recommendations emanating from the work of the planning committee was assessed and Rumsfeld made recommendations to the then President George W. Bush (Schogol, 2006). President George Bush approved the recommendations for a Unified Command and then authorized the creation of AFRICOM. This was communicated to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee on 6 February 2007, by Robert Gates who served as the Defense Secretary (Garamone, 2007). Admiral Robert Moeller who became the first Director of the transition team for AFRICOM coordinated the logistics and other official arrangements for the take-off of the military Command which was to be based in Stuttgart, Germany (Crawley, 2007).

African military leaders were also communicated about the establishment of the new Command by the first Commander of AFRICOM, General Kip Ward, who visited various African nations to inform about the operations of the new Command. General Ward was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on 28 September 2007, and this marked the official commencement of

AFRICOM operations in Africa as a sub-unified Command of EUCOM with its headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. However, the U.S. Africa Command (2018) noted that AFRICOM became a fully operational Command and was merged with U.S. pre-existing military outfits in Africa on the 1st of October 2008. The U.S. government under the administration of President George Bush pronounced that Africa Command "will strengthen our security cooperation with Africa and create new opportunities to bolster the capabilities of our partners in Africa. Africa Command will enhance our efforts to bring peace and security to the people of Africa and promote our common goals of development, health, education, democracy, and economic growth in Africa" (The White House, 2007).

Since its establishment, AFRICOM has engaged in capacity building, pursued through the implementation of three programmes, namely, the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA), Africa Partnership Station (APS), the African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership Program (AMLEP), and the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET) with a view to improving African militaries' capabilities by providing selected training and equipment necessary for multinational peace support operations and to strengthen maritime safety and security in Africa, improve the interoperability between maritime forces of the participating nations, as well as the skills of individual sailors and develop participant nations' capabilities to monitor and enforce their own territorial

waters and exclusive economic zones. More than ten years after its establishment, it has become imperative to examine the operations and activities of AFRICOM against the background of the objectives it was created to achieve.

Providing security assistance and other stability supporting operations in Africa was an essential component of the United States government's security strategy during the Cold war, due to ideological confrontation between her and the former Soviet Union. However, at the end of the Cold War, the U.S. security assistance to Africa drastically declined due to de-ideologization of the international politics. However, the U.S. security assistance to Africa, which had declined at the end of the Cold War, picked up in the late 1990s in response to the threat of terrorism and other forms of political instability on the continent (Ploch, 2010).

In 2002, the George W. Bush administration, in its National Security Strategy, outlined a more focused and strategic approach toward Africa, which emphasized that "U.S. security strategy must focus on building indigenous security and intelligence capabilities through bilateral engagement and coalitions of the willing" (The White House, 2002, p.5). As a result, the U.S. military planners and their civilian counterparts, who historically had not regularly identified issues on the African continent as strategic priorities for the U.S. military, began to engage in a wide array of activities aimed at protecting trade interests, reducing armed conflict, and countering terrorism. It was in line with this shift of strategic actions that the United States government

provided development programmes and security assistance to help strengthen security in Africa, particularly the waterways. To this end, the Bush Administration, in 2005, introduced the National Strategy for Maritime Security, with the facilitation and defence of commerce as top national priorities (Feldt, Roell & Thiele, 2013). In 2007, U.S. Naval Forces Europe launched the African Partnership Station (APS). Under this new initiative, a navy ship was deployed to the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) for seven months not only to serve as a sea base of operations and a floating schoolhouse from which to provide assistance and training to the Gulf states, but also to conduct maritime security operations to protect shipping routes in the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean (Feldt, Roell & Thiele, 2013). Above all, the U.S. government, on February 7, 2007, announced officially the decision to create a Unified Combatant Command for Africa, known as United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) as a new U.S. government approach to protect its trade interests and national security objectives in Africa and its surrounding waters (Pham, 2014).

Created ostensibly to address concerns over the administrative division of responsibility for U.S. military efforts and engagement in Africa, AFRICOM's establishment reflects an evolution in American perceptions of its strategic interests in Africa. Hence, the U.S.-Africa Command operations cover all parts of the African continent except for Egypt. It also includes all island countries commonly associated with Africa such

as Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles (Crawley, 2017). It also seeks to enhance maritime security in Africa since Africa's coastlines and waterways, particularly the Gulf of Guinea, have been volatile and highly susceptible to illegal fishing, trafficking, piracy and other forms of criminality in recent years. The rising insecurity in waterways is seen to potentially constitute a threat to the U.S. interests, including how to secure access to energy resources in Africa (Okumu, 2017).

Since its establishment, AFRICOM has engaged in capacity building, pursued through the implementation of three programmes, namely, the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA), Africa Partnership Station (APS), the African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership Program (AMLEP), and the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET) with a view to improving African militaries' capabilities by providing selected training and equipment necessary for multinational peace support operations and to strengthen maritime safety and security in Africa, improve the interoperability between maritime forces of the participating nations, as well as the skills of individual sailors and develop participant nations' capabilities to monitor and enforce their own territorial waters and exclusive economic zones. More than ten years after its establishment, it has become imperative to examine the operations and activities of AFRICOM against the background of the objectives it was created to achieve.

Generally, the U.S. government has provided only little details about current U.S. deployments in African countries in this region, but there have been U.S. military operations across the region, with most recent ones in Cameroon, Chad, Mali and northern Nigeria among others. However, Keating (2023) asserts that all these deployments have given concerns about the nature of the various missions. He maintains that the level of threat these VEOs pose to U.S. interests have been clearly defined, and whether the missions actually protect U.S. national interests or undermine it since these missions rather attract terrorist organizations wherever they have footprints. In other words, U.S. military footprints everywhere they move attract attention of their enemies – global terrorist networks like ISIS and al-Qaeda and such could culminate into global threats. Despite attracting the terrorist groups, the U.S. troops have not generally launched a direct attack to these groups in Africa, except for some few instances when the Americans themselves come under attack.

Although there have been some instances such as in Niger and Somalia, where U.S. supposed “noncombat missions” have morphed into full-fledged combatant unit, using the U.S. military facility and capability on behalf of the host country to launch offensive against terrorist groups. Meanwhile, U.S.-trained military officers in Burkina Faso and Mali, are said to have participated in military coups; while in Nigeria they have allegedly engaged in human rights abuses (Keating, 2023).

Nonetheless, it is generally believed that the number of U.S. troops deployed against terrorist groups in Africa is relatively moderate and not overwhelmingly high; and no country across the world has ever had more U.S. troops than what was seen at the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — with over 168,000 and 110,000 troops deployed to those countries, respectively. It is instructive that the “Global War on Terrorism” may no longer be the defining feature of American military deployments, U.S. forces are currently stationed in (and in a few cases, actually fighting in) a remarkable number of countries with little public debate or awareness back home about what exactly they are doing (Keating, 2023).

Command Structure and Operational Scope of AFRICOM

The U.S. Africa Command has a set of clearly defined objectives which captures U.S. interests especially as it relates to the Gulf of Guinea. According to Waldhauser (2017), the operational scope of the U.S. Africa Command is focused on five aspects as follows:

1. Neutralize al-Shabaab and transition the security responsibilities of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS)
2. Degrade violent extremist organizations in the Sahel Maghreb and contain instability in Libya.
3. Contain and degrade Boko Haram.

4. Interdict illicit activity in the Gulf of Guinea and Central Africa with willing and capable African partners
5. Build peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster response capacity of African partners.

The U.S. Africa Command has been carrying out full operations on the African continent in line with the U.S. strategic interests. For example, Sperber (2019) noted that the U.S. AFRICOM had an airstrike on Mogadishu, Somalia on 18 March 2019 which was an attack on "the terrorist network and its recruiting efforts in the region", particularly the al-Shabaab. Three terrorists were killed during the attack, although there were a number of civilian casualties.

U.S. Africa Command (2022a) notes that the essence of setting up the U.S. Africa Command was to foster effective security engagements as a means of facilitating a stable and secure political environment in Africa in support of U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. policy circle takes cognizance of interlink between security, development, and diplomacy, and this has been incorporated in the operational framework of AFRICOM. This goal required U.S. experts to achieve them, thus, the U.S. Africa Command included management and staff members from the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Treasury, and other U.S. government agencies involved in Africa. AFRICOM is staffed by 1,500 personnel. In addition, the command has military and civilian personnel assigned at Camp Lemonnier, Djibuti, RAF Molesworth, United Kingdom, MacDill

Air Force Base, Florida, and in Offices of Security Cooperation and Defense Attaché Offices in about 38 African countries (Report of the U.S. Africa Command, 2018).

Generally, some African countries initially indicated interests to serve as host to AFRICOM as they considered the financial benefits it will bring to their countries (The Economist, 2007). In fact, Liberia showed public interest and eagerness to serve as headquarters of AFRICOM, and more recently, Nigeria also showed same interest to host AFRICOM in 2021. Although there had been initial resistance and some form of hostility by African nations, including Nigeria, South Africa and Libya during the formative stages of AFRICOM as they expressed fears over Western domination of their military operations (BBC News, 2008). President George Bush stated at the time that the U.S. had no intention of building new military bases in Africa. However, the U.S. now has one base for AFRICOM on the continent, which is the Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, having about 2,300 troops stationed in the base; the troops had been inherited from USCENTCOM upon the formation of AFRICOM.

The U.S. military operations in Africa is evaluated to be both larger in terms of quantity as well as quality compared with any other non-African country's bases on the continent. There are specific aspects of more robust operations in U.S. military operations such as the capacity to defend U.S. interests on the continent and deter any serious competition to its control of natural

resources and Africa's expansive markets. The two important roles the U.S. military pursues in Africa include the following:

1. **Gendarme Functions:** This underscores the U.S. military's role in providing an advantage to the United States and its ruling elites, and the capacity to work in close cooperation with the armies of the other NATO nations, to achieve a broader Western interest in line with the neoliberal and capitalist principles. Kwame Nkrumah had argued in 1965, that 'Africa's raw materials are an important consideration in the military build-up of the NATO countries. This is because their industries, such as strategic and nuclear factories, are mainly dependent on the primary materials that come from poor countries (Nkrumah 1965). U.S. interests in this regard are geared towards entrusting their militaries with the mandate to ensure a steady flow of raw materials for their energy corporations at home as well as maintaining unhindered flow of goods through shipping routes. The Interagency Task Force in Fulfilment of Executive Order 13806, for example, covers the responsibility of US military operations together with NATO partners to police the global community in favour of capitalist interests. Just like the U.S. the French military plays similar role in Africa, where its military presence in Niger is for the actualization of the interests of the French energy sector, which requires the uranium mined in Arlit (Niger). One

in three French light bulbs is powered by the uranium from this town in Niger, which is heavily occupied by French troops.

2. **The New Cold War:** This has to do with the increasing pressure mounted by the U.S. against Chinese interests in Africa. It can be observed that Chinese private and public commercial interests are increasing daily on the African continent as a whole, in which Chinese companies are rapidly displacing U.S. firms and other Western interests in the region. Hence, there is a renewed bid by the U.S. military presence to contain the expansive move of China on the continent. The U.S. government's New Africa Strategy (2019) described this development in competitive terms: 'Great power competitors, namely China and Russia, are rapidly expanding their financial and political influence across Africa. They are deliberately and aggressively targeting their investments in the region to gain a competitive advantage over the United States'.

Generally, this suggests that resource exploitation has been at the heart of U.S. military involvement in African countries. First of all, African countries are heavily dependent on U.S. and other Western nations to export their raw materials in exchange for foreign capital. African countries are thus controlled by the influence of multinational corporations and they lack of sufficient industrialization in a range of African countries. Africa's

condition of dependency was perfected by colonial policies which promoted asymmetric global order that conditioned economic activity in Africa based on the extraction and growth of raw materials which were then sold through colonial concessions to the West. Unfortunately, even though post-colonial African political elites inherited this form of dependency or neocolonialism, they preferred to derive rents from it and have not altered the dependency structures (Tricontinental, 2021).

The U.S. military maintained that AFRICOM is essentially positioned as a mission to protect and advance U.S. interests in Africa which includes the maintenance of a free, open, and stable environment. According to Townsend (2022), Africa's geostrategic importance has attracted growing attention at the world stage which accounts for the drive by U.S. strategic rivals to seek ways to also leverage both soft and hard investments into political influence, but sometimes they use malign, and hard military advantage to achieve their ambitions. However, U.S. AFRICOM has been stationed as a ground force on the African continent to subdue the rival interests, particularly by promising and providing access to a stable and prosperous African continent, and supporting African governments politically, economically, and militarily. AFRICOM therefore secures U.S. investments, protect her interests and advance her objectives in a dynamic and important region of the world.

The role of African union was established to promote the unity and solidarity of African Countries, defend state sovereignty, eradicate colonialism, promote international cooperation and coordinate and harmonize member states policies. Consideration should be given to placing an observer on staff at each peacekeeping mission and the Africa division of the UN Peacekeeping staff. Another important partner for AFRICOM is the African Union (AU). The AU is an especially relevant actor due to its legitimacy among the African people. The AU was conceived and founded by Africans as an organization focused on solving Africa's problems. The AU is modeled on the UN and is currently the only continent-wide organization capable of addressing wide-scale concerns. Of note, Morocco is not a member of the African Union. The AU is a successor to the now defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU) and has a significantly different vision than its predecessor. Whereas the OAU was focused on promoting unity among African nations and the principle of non-interference, the AU is focused on the economic and social advancement of Africans and the 15 principles of non-indifference (a direct outcome of the Rwandan genocide). In keeping with these principles, the AU recognizes the importance of military support as evinced in the AU vision statement: "As a continental organization it focuses on the promotion of peace, security and stability on the continent as a prerequisite for the implementation of the development and integration agenda of the Union." The AU is a relatively new organization, officially launched in Durban, South

Africa on 9 July 2002, and has made significant progress toward becoming a continental authority for dispute resolution despite only seven years of existence.

The AU's Peace and Security Council is the organ tasked with the resolution of disputes and prevention of conflict. Member states of the AU have come to a general agreement that African Regional Economic Communities (REC) should establish African standby brigades as part of a total African Standby Force (ASF). Standby brigades are envisioned to be regional forces that are reserved for peacekeeping, stability or humanitarian assistance missions. The African Union Roadmap on Common Defence and Security Programme calls for the stand-up of five regional brigades in North, South, East, West and Central Africa. To date, brigades have been "formed" in Eastern (not affiliated with a REC); Western (Economic Community of West African States); Southern (South Africa Development Community) and Central (Economic Community of Central African States) Africa – no progress has been made on a North African standby brigade. At present, AFRICOM has a liaison serving with the Western Africa Standby Force; has presidential determinations supporting liaison with the Southern Standby Force and is seeking presidential determinations for the remaining standby forces. These brigades are still in their infancy – there is much work to be done in the areas of command & control, equipment and training before these forces are fully effective. Notably, these units will be modeled upon UN forces (primarily the Standby Force High

Readiness Brigade) “The African Standby Force will be trained to UN standards under UN doctrine - Training should be conducted according to UN doctrine and standards, and should draw on the available training materials, training aids and courses available through the UN system.” Thus, any training support from AFRICOM should account for difference in US and UN doctrine. The AU envisions receiving significant international assistance for the training of the ASF “the Union and Regions have benefited from other financial and material assistance programmes such as the ACRI (US), RECOMP (France), as well as support from the British (BPST), Norwegian, Canadian, Danish and other Nordic countries.” The aforementioned international organizations, agencies and NGOs play important roles on the African continent and successful collaboration with these entities is essential to U.S. success. Successful collaboration, in turn, requires established relationships, authorities and division of labour.

AFRICOM’s Programmes and Operations

The programs conducted by AFRICOM, in conjunction with African military forces focus on reconnaissance and direct action. However, AFRICOM's directives are to keep American military forces out of direct combat as best as possible. Despite this, the United States has admitted to American troops being involved in direct action during missions with African military partners, namely in classified programmes (Morgan, 2018). As of 2023, there have been at least 315 confirmed drone strikes from AFRICOM operations in Somalia. Estimates place the total number of deaths at least 1,668,

with at least 33 civilians killed (New America 2023) Each AFRICOM operations has a specific mission. Some of the operations in North and West Africa target ISIS, and Boko Haram. In East Africa, missions focus on targeting terrorist group Al-Shabaab and piracy. (Turse, 2018). The largest number of US troops in Africa is in Djibouti and they perform a counter terrorism mission (Turse, 2017).

In January 2013, a senior Niger official told Reuters that Bisa Williams, the then-United States Ambassador to Niger, requested permission to establish a drone base in a meeting with Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou (BBC NEWS 2013) On 5 February, 2013 officials from both Niger and the U.S. said that the two countries signed a status of forces agreement that allowed the deployment of unarmed surveillance drones. (Crawford, Jamie, Lawrence, Chris, 2013) In that month, U.S. President Barack Obama sent 150 military personnel to Niger to set up a surveillance drone operation that would aid France in its counterterrorism efforts in the Northern Mali conflict. (Martinez, 2017). In October 2015, Niger and the U.S. signed a military agreement committing the two countries "to work together in the fight against terrorism" (Niamey AFP, 2017). U.S. Army Special Forces personnel (commonly referred to as Green Berets) were sent to train the Niger Armed Forces (FAN) to assist in the fight against terrorists from neighbouring countries (Martinez, (2017). As of October 2017, there are about 800 U.S. military personnel in Niger, most of who are working to build a

second drone base for American and French aircraft in Agadez (Haltiwanger, 2017). Construction of the base was expected to be completed in 2018, which will allow the U.S. to conduct surveillance operations with the General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper to monitor ISIL insurgents flowing south and other extremists flowing north from the Sahel region (Schmitt *et al.*, 2017).

The United States has roughly 400 troops in Somalia. American military forces work closely with African Union troops. Troops conduct raids with Somali troops and provide transport. American forces have engaged in firefights in self-defence and drone airstrikes have been called in to provide additional support (ABC News, 2017).

Maritime security strategies of AFRICOM in the Gulf of Guinea include but not limited to capacity building. This is pursued through the implementation of Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program (ACOTA), Africa Partnership Station (APS), the African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership Program (AMLEP), and the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET) (Pham, 2008; Ukeje & Ela, 2013).

AFRICOM'S Joint Exercise Programs include the following:

African Lion: Training exercises sponsored by the United States through AFRICOM and Morocco. Participants of this program came from Europe and

Africa to undergo training in various military exercises and skills. Exercises conducted during African Lion included "command-and-control techniques, combat tactics, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance operations", reported by AFRICOM to have improved the quality of operations conducted between the North African and United States military (US. AFRICOM, 2018)

Western Accord: Training exercises sponsored by AFRICOM, European, and Western African countries for the first time in 2014. The goal of this exercise was to improve African forces' skills in conducting peace support operations. An Ebola epidemic occurring from 2014 to 2015 resulted in the exercises being hosted by the Netherlands. During this exercise the mission command for the "United Nation's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission" in Mali was replicated. Name of exercise changed to United Accord sometime later (U.S. AFRICOM, 2018)

Central Accord: Training exercises conducted with the goal of increasing both the military knowledge and efficacy of collaborative interactions of the participating groups. Emphasis placed on crisis response tactics and fostering strong partnerships between participating groups. Forces came from Africa, the United States, and Europe. The Lake Chad Basin is an example of a regional mission conducted by The Multi-National Joint Task Force. (U.S. AFRICOM, 2018)

Eastern Accord: Series of training exercises originally began in 1998 with a series of exercises titled "Natural

Fire". The Justified Accord was a further continuation of the large group of exercises conducted under the name Eastern Accord. Participating forces came from the United States and various African allies, conducted with the goal of improving coordinated operations in East Africa. Notable aspects of the training included discussion-based modules focused on peace-keeping endeavour (U.S. AFRICOM, 2018)

Southern Accord: Annual training exercise sponsored by AFRICOM in conjunction with allied African forces over several years. In 2014 partners also included the United Nation Integrated Training Service and U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute. Exercises focused around the goal of peacekeeping. In 2017, Southern Accord was renamed as United Accord. (U.S. AFRICOM, 2018)

Cutlass Express: Series of training exercises held at sea off the coast of East Africa. The Cutlass Express series was conducted by the United States Naval Forces Africa, a group within AFRICOM. Exercises performed at this time focused on maritime security, piracy countermeasures and interception of prohibited cargo. Express series included operations Obangame Express, Saharan Express, and Phoenix Express. (U.S. AFRICOM, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, empirical evidence suggests that AFRICOM has had a positive impact in the Gulf of Guinea by contributing to the decline in piracy incidents, building the capacity of regional security forces,

facilitating intelligence sharing and coordination, and engaging in diplomatic efforts. However, on-going challenges in the region require a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving various stakeholders to ensure long-term security and stability.

US AFRICOM plays a crucial role in addressing maritime security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea. By providing training, capacity-building support, and fostering regional cooperation, the command contributes to enhancing the capabilities of African nations to safeguard their maritime domains. US AFRICOM's efforts have a positive impact on the security and stability of the Gulf of Guinea, safeguarding vital trade routes, protecting natural resources, and promoting economic development in the region. The problem in maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea is the high prevalence of piracy, armed robbery at sea, and other maritime crimes. This region, located off the coast of West Africa, has witnessed a significant increase in attacks on vessels, resulting in economic losses, threats to human lives, and disruption of maritime trade.

Pirate attacks in the Gulf of Guinea involve armed individuals boarding ships, hijacking vessels, and kidnapping crew members for ransom. These criminal activities not only pose a direct threat to the safety and security of seafarers but also impact the region's economy and global trade.

In addition, as AFRICOM is countering extremism in the Gulf of Guinea, the emergence of transnational threats on Africa's Oil Coast is creating operational challenges

for AFRICOM as currently constructed. Overall, since its formation the command has achieved commendable results with minimal assets throughout Gulf of Guinea, yet to truly be effective the command needs additional means to achieve its organizational goals. As the continent persistently changes so must AFRICOM to achieve its end state. Similarly, through modification of its operational approach and organizational structure, the command can more effectively help Africans achieve a position of relative advantage while protecting vital U.S. and international interests.

Based on the conclusion above, we recommends that; while AFRICOM's impact in the Gulf of Guinea has been generally positive, it is important to note that challenges still persist. Factors such as poverty, governance issues, and socio-economic inequalities continue to contribute to security threats and spread of Violent Extremist Organisations in the region. Overall, effective maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea is crucial for ensuring safe and secure maritime trade, protecting the lives of seafarers, and fostering regional stability and development. Therefore, the impact of AFRICOM on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea should be seen as part of a broader effort involving regional governments, international partners, and other stakeholders which includes:

1. Enhanced Consultation with West African Leaders:
 - a. AFRICOM should prioritize regular and meaningful consultations with leaders from

West African countries. This engagement will foster trust, transparency, and cooperation in addressing maritime security challenges.

- b. By involving local stakeholders, AFRICOM can gain valuable insights into the specific security needs and concerns of the Gulf of Guinea region.
2. Joint Exercises and Operations:
 - a. AFRICOM should actively engage in joint exercises and operations with African partners. Collaborative efforts enhance interoperability, build capacity, and promote regional cooperation.
 - b. These joint activities can focus on areas such as intelligence sharing, coordinated patrols, and response to maritime threats.

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