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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The continent of Africa is at the center of many of the most critical American security concerns. Global threats have become more complex, with violent extremist organizations (VEOs) expanding their reach and near-peer competitors challenging the rules-based international system. These threats are converging on the African continent, and a security dilemma involving insurgencies, coups, natural disasters, and poor governance has plagued Africa for years. However, U.S.-led efforts to stabilize the continent have not been effective, and competitors such as China and Russia are filling the gaps left by the U.S. This essay argues that the U.S. should prioritize supporting and strengthening African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to address African security concerns more effectively. Multilateral military cooperation through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has shown some success in combatting VEOs, and prioritizing and supporting regional cooperation can be a potentially cheaper, wider-reaching, and more effective U.S. strategy in Africa. By analyzing statistics, quantitative and qualitative research, testimony before congress, and official U.S. strategies, this essay highlights the importance of Africa to the future of American security. If the U.S. does not adjust its current strategy to produce better and longer-lasting results, it risks losing credibility as the premier security partner on the African continent. More concerning, the U.S. risks losing the enormous economic and political benefits that will depend on relationships with African nations. With increasing influence from China and Russia, the U.S. must act quickly to support regional cooperation in Africa to ensure a secure, stable, and friendly continent that is crucial to American security.					
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**Africa's Security Dilemma: Finding a Better Way Forward by Supporting Regional Cooperation**

## Introduction

United States security has rapidly become more complex over the last decade, with near-peer competitors challenging the rules-based international system to the expansion of violent extremist organizations across entire regions. The continent of Africa is at the center of many of the most critical American security concerns. Since 2014, in Sub-Saharan Africa the number of terrorist attacks have fluctuated between 1,500 to 2,200 attacks per year. Additionally, in 2019, Sub-Saharan Africa surpassed the Middle East North Africa region regarding the number of terrorist attacks that took place.<sup>1</sup> While broadly overlooked and underappreciated in a world of faster-paced and more advanced threats, a secure and open Africa is vital to larger United States (U.S.) national priorities. In the latest U.S. Strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa and the broader 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS), Africa is attracting more interest as its geostrategic importance gains domestic and international recognition. The 2022 U.S. Strategy<sup>2</sup> explicitly states that Sub-Saharan Africa is critical to advancing U.S. global priorities, and the NDS<sup>3</sup> announced a shift into a "by, with, and through" approach toward working with African partners and allies.

On paper, 2022 may be a turning point away from years of military coups, corruption, violence, exploitation, and degrading U.S. influence. However, words on paper are much different from the reality on the ground and identifying solutions to overwhelming security questions has been challenging. Despite the challenges, there has been some success in the fight

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<sup>1</sup> START (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism). (2022). *Global Terrorism Database 1970 - 2020* [data file]. <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>

<sup>2</sup> National Security Council. (2022). *U.S. Strategy Toward SUB-SAHARAN Africa*. [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/U.S.-Strategy-Toward-Sub-Saharan-Africa-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. (2022). *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*. [defense.gov](http://defense.gov). <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>

against VEOs in Mozambique. An African coalition has realized military success without much assistance from Western partners through cooperation between the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Rwanda. With that being said, many U.S. efforts to support African security have been less than ideal. However, the success in Mozambique through the cooperation of regional partners offers a new angle. The U.S. strategy in Africa should prioritize supporting regional cooperation amongst African states to promote sustainable solutions for enduring African problems.

### **The Wake-Up Call**

Understanding Africa's statistics is essential to understanding the geostrategic importance of the continent and why the U.S. must prioritize Africa's security issues. The area that Africa covers is approximately 11.7 million square miles.<sup>4</sup> For comparison, the area that the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, and U.S. islands and territories equals is approximately 3.8 million square miles.<sup>5</sup> Africa is immensely vast, and so is its economic, political, and strategic importance.

Unsurprisingly, such a large continent must support a large population, and by 2050 it is estimated that Africa will be home to a quarter of the entire earth's population. Mega cities are becoming more frequent in Africa with the United Nations estimating a population of 15 million in Lagos, Nigeria as of 2021. Furthermore, projections published in the *Environment and Urbanization* journal estimate that by 2100, 38 of the world's 100 most populous cities will be in

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<sup>4</sup> Desjardins, J. (2020, February 24). *Mapped: Visualizing the true size of Africa*. mining.com. <https://www.mining.com/web/mapped-visualizing-the-true-size-of-africa/>.

<sup>5</sup> US Census Bureau. (2021, December 16). *State Area Measurements and Internal Point Coordinates*. Census.gov. <https://www.census.gov/geographies/reference-files/2010/geo/state-area.html>

Africa.<sup>6</sup> Such a large increase in population will only exacerbate any stress that governments are currently struggling with on the continent regarding security and humanitarian issues. It is worth noting that Africa's current population is also the youngest in the world, with 40% of people under the age of 15.<sup>7</sup> These statistics are also accompanied by a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate that, since the year 2000, has managed to outperform the global GDP by 2% and the fact that Africa not only maintains 60% of the world's arable land but also holds a third of the world's mineral reserves.<sup>8</sup> Apart from Africa's economic potential, African states are also positioned as increasingly influential global political powers.

Currently, Africans represent 28% of United Nations (UN) general assembly votes, and African states hold three of the fifteen United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seats.<sup>9</sup> It is likely that African states will only continue to enhance the amount of influence they can exert on global decisions and within international bodies of governance. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly regarding issues of most concern to the U.S., Africa is situated at the crossroads of the world and represents a large gateway that connects multiple U.S. Areas of Responsibility (AoRs), Combatant Commands (CCMDs), and Sea lines of Communication (SLOCs). Africa gives access to numerous strategic chokepoints, such as the Strait of Gibraltar, Red Sea, and

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<sup>6</sup> Hoorweg, & Pope, K. (2017). Population predictions for the world's largest cities in the 21st century. *Environment and Urbanization*, 29(1), 195–216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247816663557>

<sup>7</sup> Townsend, S. (2021). *Statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army commander United States Africa Command Before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services*. [www.africom.mil](http://www.africom.mil). <https://www.africom.mil/document/33691/usafricom-statement-for-record-hasc-20-apr-2021-gen-townsendpdf>

<sup>8</sup> Townsend, S. (2022). *Statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army Commander, United States Africa Command Before the Senate Armed Forces Committee*. [www.armcd-services.senate.gov](http://www.armcd-services.senate.gov). <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/AFRICOM%20FY23%20Posture%20Statement%20%20ISO%20SASC%2015%20MAR%20Cleared.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Townsend, S. (2022). *Statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army Commander, United States Africa Command Before the Senate Armed Forces Committee*. [www.armed-services.senate.gov](http://www.armed-services.senate.gov). <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/AFRICOM%20FY23%20Posture%20Statement%20%20ISO%20SASC%2015%20MAR%20Cleared.pdf>

Mozambique Channel. Additionally, the SLOCs connected to Africa run through the Mediterranean and Red Seas, and considering the Cape of Good Hope, connects the U.S. East Coast to East Africa, the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia.<sup>10</sup>

Africa is a land of vital opportunity that the United States should prioritize for its security today and 100 years from now. Africa has land to help feed a growing global population, access to minerals that make modern technology possible, growing influence in international politics, and a surplus of young people to lead the continent towards economic success in the 21st century. However, Africa is plagued by complex political and security dilemmas that severely hamper its ability to recognize its potential. Unfortunately, Africa has been historically viewed as an afterthought in immediate and long-term United States national security strategies.

### **The Problems**

Africa's dynamic security environment requires the United States to continuously rebalance efforts to address long-term and short-term security concerns. Long-term threats, such as adversarial access to quantum computing and addressing climate change must be balanced with current threats, such as an aggressive Russia and Chinese expansionism. If one steps back from the cacophony of threats requiring the undivided attention of the United States, one might see that Africa is at the center of them all. Many of the materials needed to create quantum computers are found in Africa. The Sahara Desert is growing due to climate change. The Chinese government is successfully outpacing the U.S. in diplomacy and influence on the continent, and in some cases, African countries are turning to Russian private military companies (PMCs) for

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<sup>10</sup> Townsend, S. (2021). *Statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army commander United States Africa Command Before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services.* [www.africom.mil](http://www.africom.mil).  
<https://www.africom.mil/document/33691/usaficom-statement-for-record-hasc-20-apr-2021-gen-townsendpdf>

security assistance. Africa urgently requires the attention and support of the United States to overcome its immense political and security challenges.

Due to colonialism, many African countries are relatively new with some exceptions such as Liberia and Ethiopia who gained their independence in 1847<sup>11</sup> and 1896<sup>12</sup>, respectively. Since the larger period of African independence movements, taking place between the 1950s and 1970s, African nations have struggled to create and maintain democracies.<sup>13</sup> Many African countries have suffered under brutal dictatorships, autocratic regimes, insurgencies, coups, natural disasters, and overall poor governance. As a result of many of these events, corruption runs rampant, and social grievances are high across the continent.<sup>14</sup> In 2019, a World Bank report stated that 85% of Sub-Saharan Africans still lived in poverty. Worse, 85% of Africans lived on less than \$5.50 per day.<sup>15</sup> Many regions actively experience conflict between armed groups, and issues associated with access to food, clean water, medical care, and safety.

Africa's political and social dysfunction is at the core of why Africa is a global frontline for VEOs today, specifically for terrorist organizations engaged in radical Islamic jihad. Much of the Islamic terrorism that started in the Middle East has consistently and rapidly spread over the last few years across Africa. To make matters worse, many of the active terrorist groups in

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<sup>11</sup> Office of the Historian. (2016). Founding of Liberia, 1847. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/liberia>

<sup>12</sup> Ram. (1980). The Survival of Ethiopian Independence [Review of *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*]. *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines*, 14(1), 169–178. Canadian Association of African Studies. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/484284>

<sup>13</sup> Bruhl, J. (2022, June 14). *America Ignores Africa at Its Own Peril*. War on the Rocks. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/06/america-ignores-africa-at-its-own-peril/>

<sup>14</sup> Ogharanduku. (2017). Violent Extremism and Grievance in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Peace Review (Palo Alto, Calif.)*, 29(2), 207–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2017.1308732>

<sup>15</sup> Castaneda Aguilar, R. A., Jolliffe, D., Fujs, T., Lakner, C., & Prydz, E. (2019, October 3). *85% of Africans Live on Less Than \$5.50 Per Day*. World Bank Blogs. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/85-africans-live-less-550-day>

Africa align with either al-Qaeda or the Islamic State taking up the standard tenets of hatred of the west and the use of mass violence as a means to achieve political ends.

Although the Global War on Terrorism has largely come to an end with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in August 2021, the U.S. still considers international terrorism a priority. It supports the global prevention, suppression, and destruction of terrorist organizations that pose a security threat to Americans and U.S. interests. Understandably, most African leaders also express that a primary concern is the presence of VEOs within their countries.<sup>16</sup> VEOs have become increasingly agile at leveraging social grievances and political instability to open wide fronts to wage jihad across Africa. The Islamic State has effectively created a franchise model that has spread from North Africa through Central Africa and is now active in Southern Africa. One example of the extent of success VEOs are having on the continent is a recent Islamic State publication calling for its members to relocate to African countries.<sup>17</sup> While Africa Command (AFRICOM) states that countering violent extremist organizations (C-VEO) is one of our most successful incentives for U.S.-Africa partnerships and is a line of effort that near-peer competitors cannot match, VEOs are still gaining strength and rapidly spreading across Africa.

VEOs are the primary concern for African leaders, but only one of many concerns for the United States. China and Russia are heavily involved in the continent and, in the case of China, highly focused on their long-term goals. Due to the slow or, in some cases, nonexistent progress in defeating VEOs and building state security, some African nations, including Mali, Mozambique, and the Central African Republic (CAR), have hired the Russian PMC Wagner

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<sup>16</sup> Townsend, S. (2021). *Statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army commander United States Africa Command Before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services.* [www.africom.mil](http://www.africom.mil).  
<https://www.africom.mil/document/33691/usafricom-statement-for-record-hasc-20-apr-2021-gen-townsendpdf>

<sup>17</sup> Lake Chad Basin Project. (2022, October 31). *As Terrorists Claim New Ground, an African Strategy is Vital.* ISS Africa.  
<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/as-terrorists-claim-new-ground-an-african-strategy-is-vital>

Group to supplement their forces.<sup>18</sup> Due to unclear reasons, the U.S. and its allies and partners have experienced difficulty in reassuring African nations that the U.S. and the west are the most capable and effective security partners among what is available to African governments.

The ultimate consequence for U.S. strategy in Africa concerning the employment of the Wagner Group is the effect it has on the regions in which they operate. As an allegedly private, less morally conscious organization, the Wagner Group has only exacerbated regional instability. The Wagner Group is likely not interested in the well-being of African citizens or the governments attempting to suppress violent conflicts. One can argue this with evidence supporting the allegation that the Wagner Group actively targets civilians and only serves to destabilize the conflicts African governments hired them to resolve.<sup>19</sup> The allegations of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Wagner Group are not new. In 2022, the French military even provided evidence that the Wagner Group tried to frame French troops by burying bodies in shallow mass graves near a base the French had transferred to the Malian armed forces.<sup>20</sup> The employment of the PMC serves as a stark reminder of the cruelty African leaders can tolerate or how desperate they are to end the conflicts in their countries. In stark contrast, the Chinese government operates in a much more coordinated and sophisticated manner. The Chinese government threatens much more than the U.S.'s objective to eliminate VEOs and stabilize regional security effectively.

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<sup>18</sup> Fasanotti, F. S. (2022, March 9). *Russia's Wagner Group in Africa: Influence, commercial concessions, rights violations, and counterinsurgency failure*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/02/08/russias-wagner-group-in-africa-influence-commercial-concessions-rights-violations-and-counterinsurgency-failure/>

<sup>19</sup> Fabricius, P. (2022, September 16). *Wagner is Being Used in Africa as a Proxy to Target Civilians*. ISS Africa. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/wagner-is-being-used-in-africa-as-a-proxy-to-target-civilians>

<sup>20</sup> Doxsee, C., & Thompson, J. (2022, May 11). *Massacres, executions, and falsified graves: The Wagner Group's mounting humanitarian cost in Mali*. Retrieved from <https://www.csis.org/analysis/massacres-executions-and-falsified-graves-wagner-groups-mounting-humanitarian-cost-mali>

Unlike the United States and Russia, China is less concerned with security issues in Africa and has expertly used its soft power to target African economic and political spheres of influence. Through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Chinese government has fast-tracked its presence all over the continent. From highways to ports to telecommunications towers, China has become Africa's premier partner for development and economic investment.<sup>21</sup> While there are questions to be raised about debt traps and the predatory nature of the Chinese government, the U.S. cannot ignore China's impact on Africa. At the core of the security issues in Africa are the social issues that China is addressing through investments that will likely make everyday life easier for the average African and enhance Africa's economic output.

As the U.S. focuses on C-VEO, its primary line of effort in African partnerships, it needs to catch up regarding diplomatic and economic investment. In a statement made before the Senate Armed Forces Committee in March 2022, U.S. General Stephan Townsend, Commander of AFRICOM, hinted at a similar call to action. In his statement, General Townsend noted that at the time, there were still five ambassador nominees pending confirmation, and congressional budgets restricted United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in what it could accomplish due to budget restraints.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, as of 2019, China supports 46 port projects in Africa and operates 11 of them.<sup>23</sup> Of particular concern to the U.S. may be that many of these

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<sup>21</sup> Nantulya, P. (2019, March 22). *Implications for Africa from China's one belt one road strategy*. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/implications-for-africa-china-one-belt-one-road-strategy/>

<sup>22</sup> Townsend, S. (2022). *Statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army Commander, United States Africa Command Before the Senate Armed Forces Committee*. [www.armed-services.senate.gov](http://www.armed-services.senate.gov). <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/AFRICOM%20FY23%20Posture%20Statement%20%20ISO%20SASC%2015%20MAR%20Clear.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Chimbela, C. (2019, June 21). *Making Chinese Investment in African Ports Work*. [dw.com](http://www.dw.com). <https://www.dw.com/en/making-chinese-investment-in-african-ports-work-despite-risks/a-49282176>

ports are in west Africa and may signal future aspirations of building military ports on the Atlantic coast or that the U.S. government supports no port projects in Africa at all.

In addition to its 53 embassies on the continent<sup>24</sup>, China also maintains its only overseas military base in Djibouti, a mere 12 kilometers from the U.S. naval expeditionary base, Camp Lemonnier.<sup>25</sup> China's militaristic ambitions in Africa are likely close behind their economic ambitions as they attempt to project force and influence across the continent. As more Chinese citizens become involved with African infrastructure projects, it will also give Beijing a plausible cause to enhance its military presence in Africa. In 2022, China improved its base in Djibouti by adding a sizeable naval pier and is currently planning to establish a second base in west Africa.<sup>26</sup>

While the U.S. is a more capable and reliable military partner in Africa, Camp Lemonnier and the small assortment of satellite locations elsewhere in Africa will find it hard to compete with multiple full-sized Chinese military bases should the Chinese continue to develop military capabilities in additional regions of Africa. AFRICOM oversees an extremely large AoR with limited resources and multiple mission sets, including C-VEO, and competing with near-peer adversaries on the continent. In terms of funding, in FY2022, AFRICOM had \$161.5 million worth of unfunded priorities.<sup>27</sup>

## The Solutions

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<sup>24</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee. (2022, November 21). *China Regional Snapshot: Sub-Saharan Africa*. Committee on Foreign Affairs. <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/china-regional-snapshot-sub-saharan-africa/#:~:text=China%20also%20has%20an%20estimated,One%20Belt%20One%20Road%20initiative>.

<sup>25</sup> Townsend, S. (2021). *Statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army commander United States Africa Command Before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services*. [www.africom.mil](http://www.africom.mil). <https://www.africom.mil/document/33691/usafricom-statement-for-record-hasc-20-apr-2021-gen-townsendpdf>

<sup>26</sup> Townsend, S. (2022). *Statement of General Stephen J. Townsend, United States Army Commander, United States Africa Command Before the Senate Armed Forces Committee*. [www.armed-services.senate.gov](http://www.armed-services.senate.gov). <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/AFRICOM%20FY23%20Posture%20Statement%20%20ISO%20SASC%2015%20MAR%20Clear.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Congressional Research Service. (2021, November 9). *Defense primer: Department of Defense Unfunded Priorities*. <https://sgp.org>. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/IF11964.pdf>

The United States government and military know that maintaining a presence in Africa is essential. However, many Americans are unlikely to realize the size of Africa, the complexity of the problems, or why the problems in Africa require U.S. intervention. Furthermore, Africa might be seen as a continent that contains no immediate threat to the U.S. As U.S. policymakers endlessly look to create lean budgets to reduce spending, U.S. forces in Africa are left with a lower-end budget that is viewed as acceptable given the unlikely event that the threats in Africa will have meaningful effects on Americans at home. Uninformed Americans and frugal policymakers will not help advance U.S. objectives in Africa, but by prioritizing enabling and supporting regional cooperation among African states, the U.S. can effectively achieve its goals.

Africa matters because of its potential to provide the U.S. with multiple partners that will help sustain the American people economically, combat the scourge of terrorism, work with the U.S. on matters of importance within international governing bodies, and compete with near peer adversaries. The countries of Africa will only continue to gain reputable status as the world eventually turns to Africa for resources, trade, and labor. Africa is at the intersection of terrorism and great power competition, and the U.S. will need to make meaningful investments on the continent to keep pace with China.

Africa faces issues at multiple levels of society. Food and water insecurity, corrupt governments, violent nonstate actors, disease, and a lack of access to modern technology and infrastructure have been enduring problems that still affect many Africans today. The U.S. has also been steadfast in support of combating these issues with varied success. With limited resources, AFRICOM, the Department of State, and USAID work relentlessly as the primary U.S. representation in Africa to achieve U.S. objectives on the continent. However, the U.S. must find a way to devote attention to solving the African problems that overlap with U.S. concerns.

Without considering the growing presence of near-peer competitors in Africa, achieving operational success is difficult as it is, given the scope and depth of African problems. However, success in Africa is not impossible. The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) enacted in 2003 has had tremendous effects<sup>28</sup> and the U.S. response to the West African Ebola outbreak in 2014 was a major contributor in containing the epidemic.<sup>29</sup> The truth is that U.S. African strategy will likely look better on paper than in reality for the near and medium term. The solution lies in leveraging the currently available funds and capabilities to enhance the efficacy of U.S. operations and policies in Africa.

Within the African Union, eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) promote integration between individual member states within each region.<sup>30</sup> The U.S. government works bilaterally with many African countries but working through African RECs may deliver better results. In 2017, an insurgency erupted in northern Mozambique, which is still active in 2023, and became the southernmost frontline for the Islamic State. After years of losing ground and control of entire cities to the insurgents, Mozambique's Government requested outside assistance in 2021. However, the U.S. and western nations did not answer the call for assistance. Instead, Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community deployed military and security forces to Mozambique quickly and efficiently to combat the insurgency.

An initial deployment of 1,000 Rwandan troops entered Cabo Delgado to secure the town of Mocimboa da Praia, which at the time, had been held by the insurgents since August 2020.

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<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2023). What is PEPFAR? Retrieved from <https://www.hiv.gov/federal-response/pepfar-global-aids/pepfar/>

<sup>29</sup> Widner, J. (2018, June). All Hands on Deck: The US Response to West Africa's Ebola Crisis, 2014–2015. Retrieved from [https://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/sites/successfulsocieties/files/JW\\_Ebola\\_USResponse\\_Final\\_June%2028%202018\\_JRG\\_0-3\\_1.pdf](https://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/sites/successfulsocieties/files/JW_Ebola_USResponse_Final_June%2028%202018_JRG_0-3_1.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> African Union. (2022, February 10). *Regional Economic Communities*. Regional Economic Communities | African Union. <https://au.int/en/recs>

Follow on troop augmentation throughout 2022 has led to the deployment of an additional 1,000 Rwandan troops since July 2021. In coordination with Rwanda, the SADC also deployed 3,000 troops into Mozambique shortly after Rwanda's July 2021 arrival. The SADC's initial response to Mozambique included 1,495 South African military members. In August, the SADC supplemented the initial response with 247 soldiers from Tanzanian, an additional 270 South Africans, 108 soldiers from Botswana, 70 military members from Lesotho, 16 from Angola, and a small contingent of experts from additional SADC countries. Although restricting their ability to conduct operations, Zimbabwe also offered to provide 303 soldiers for training purposes only.<sup>31</sup>

The results of the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) have been positive. They serve as an indicator that African nations do have the capacity to coordinate and deploy forces to conduct effective counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism (CT) operations. The small footprint of AFRICOM and other U.S. entities in Africa can be mitigated by prioritizing U.S. support for African RECs. AFRICOM conducts operations from Djibouti yet has no other significant military base on the continent to stage operations, restricting the range and ability of AFRICOM forces. Many African states also have limitations on what they can accomplish regarding security operations. Financially, AFRICOM will likely receive modest budget increases, but only enough to maintain its current operations. Due to the economic status of many African nations, funding security operations can also become too expensive.

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<sup>31</sup> Liu, S. (2021, September 15). *Responding to Mozambique's Islamic insurgency: Will Foreign Military Assistance Make a Difference?* Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. <https://gja.georgetown.edu/2021/09/15/responding-to-mozambiques-islamic-insurgency-will-foreign-military-assistance-make-a-difference>

A solution to AFRICOM's problem with range, ability to conduct operations, and budgeting is through closer coordination with and more considerable support for African RECs. While addressing each country's individual problems is necessary, the security issues in Africa are very much linked and affect entire regions. By elevating the scope to regional security, the U.S., coordinating by, with, and through African RECs, could start to secure and hold more extensive portions of VEO-held territory. Redirected U.S. support for RECs over individual nations could also be used as a soft power method to facilitate enhanced cooperation and transparency between African states. If the U.S. can bolster the RECs and help Africans understand the benefits of pursuing effective and honest multilateral security, the U.S. will be able to compound its current diplomatic, military, and aid efforts that only target individual African states. In addition to supporting the RECs, the U.S. should approach allies with overlapping interest in Africa such as France, Canada, and the U.K. to provide additional assistance to African states interested in pursuing stronger and more capable RECs.

Prioritizing more meaningful engagement with African RECs also serves a purpose in competition with Russia and China. Using the lessons learned through the SAMIM, the U.S. could help create a model, supplemented with U.S. advisors and trainers, that offers effective force projection and employment by RECs. The U.S. can help foster better civil-military relations and guide RECs towards building and sustaining professional and morally conscious defense forces that all follow similar programs due to the integration of training that would be found through the RECs. If effective, entire African regions may consider pursuing closer ties to the U.S. to help develop and maintain regional security, which is the first step to addressing follow on problems such as widespread social grievance and more significant economic issues. Success would depend on African support and buy-in, but any U.S. effort to enhance African

RECs might offer greater results for U.S. interests than the current push and pull that is happening with individual African nations now.

### **Conclusion**

The U.S. government must implement clear, attainable, and actionable goals that collectively work towards a desired long-term end state in Africa. While it is difficult to ignore Africa's immediate threats, years of short-term solutions will never produce long-term results. By working "by, with, and through" RECs, the U.S. can address entire regions and compound efforts that might've been spent on only one country. These efforts will enhance the chances of slowing or reversing near-peer influence on the continent. Regarding VEOs, by supporting RECs at large, the U.S. can help African states solve their own problems that require unique solutions tailored to each region.

A secure, open, and friendly Africa will be crucial for any global power trying to achieve its goals over the next century. Currently, the U.S. is struggling to find ways to secure its place in Africa's complex political and security environment while China and VEOs continue to gain influence. Creating a less violent and safer Africa is vital to addressing the political and economic issues that plague the continent and make it vulnerable to exploitation. Using the experience gained from the SADC mission in Mozambique, the U.S. could restructure its efforts to prioritize supporting African RECs. By supporting African RECs, the U.S. can build trust and transparency among African partners. With Africans in the lead, supported by the U.S., the U.S. will shore up the foundations of lasting African security as the continent realizes its true potential in the sphere of great power competition.