



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on December 29, 2012

U.S. Troops to be in up to 35 African Countries

The news on Christmas Eve that a U.S. Army brigade will begin sending small teams into as many as 35 African nations in 2013 indicates a still-expanding role for an all-volunteer Army that has been stretched nearly to the breaking point in recent years by a nearly nine-year war in Iraq and the ongoing war in Afghanistan now in its 11th year.



According to the Associated Press [report](#), teams from the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division will “target” countries including Libya, Sudan, Algeria and Niger, where al-Qaeda-linked groups have been active. The mission will also will assist nations such as Kenya and Uganda that have been battling al-Shabaab militants on the front lines in Somalia, the AP reported.

Concerns about terrorist threats in Africa have grown in part from reports of a rise of al-Qaeda-linked groups on the continent, including the Boko Haram in Nigeria. They have also been heightened by this year’s September 11 attack by militants on the U.S. diplomatic post in Benghazi, Libya that killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. The level of security at the facility and the alleged failures of the U.S. intelligence and military to detect and defend against the attack have been subjects of heated debate in Washington ever since.

The Army mission in Africa will be to conduct a wide array of exercises and training programs among the African nations, whose great diversity of languages and culture is expected to create a considerable challenge for the mission. Col. Matthew McKenna, who will begin training soldiers for the mission at Fort Riley, Kansas in March, described the difficulties that the language barriers alone present.

“In a very short time frame we can only teach basic phrases,” he told the AP. “We focus on culture and the cultural impact — how it impacts the African countries’ military and their operations.” Thomas Dempsey, a professor with the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, spoke of differences in culture and history as well as language among the many nations on the vast continent.

“How do you train for that in a way that would be applicable wherever they go?” asked Dempsey, a retired Army colonel. “The security challenges differ so dramatically that, to be honest, I really don’t think it’s feasible to have a continental training package.”

The emphasis will apparently be on training African forces to defend their nations against insurgencies and terrorist attacks rather than on U.S. military operations, though Army officials noted the ability for American forces to launch attacks. The mission will have what has been described as a small drone, or unmanned bomber, capacity.

“If they want them for [military] operations, the brigade is our first sourcing solution because they’re



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prepared,” Gen. David Rodriguez, the head of U.S. Army Forces Command told the AP. “But that has to go back to the secretary of defense to get an execute order.”

The 2nd Brigade — known as the “Dagger Brigade” — is receiving its regular combat training first, and then will move on to the more specific instruction needed for the deployments, such as language skills, cultural information, and other data about the African nations. In addition to the Pashtun and Farsi languages used mainly in Afghanistan and Iran, the soldiers are expected to learn French, Swahili, Arabic or other languages, in addition to features of the various local cultures.

“What’s really exciting is we get to focus on a different part of the world and maintain our core combat skills,” said Col. Jeff Broadwater, the brigade commander. “You see those threats [in Africa] in the news all the time.”

The U.S. Africa Command, created with little fanfare in 2007, has thus far not resulted in the creation of American bases or a noticeable exercise of significant U.S. military influence on the continent. In fact, the command is based in Stuttgart, Germany, rather than on the African continent. Yet many African nations are reported to be eager for U.S. training and support as they struggle to build their own military forces to deal with everything from piracy to drug trafficking and insurgent attacks.

The new mission reflects the growing role of a U.S. military that already has the world divided into six unified regional commands around the globe and has taken on an expanded security and “peacekeeping” operation in what has often been described as a “new world order.” It is a role in sharp contrast with the older American tradition of avoiding regional conflicts and defending against attacks aimed at the United States. Critics of current U.S. foreign policy have argued that taking sides either for or against insurgencies in far-off lands has only increased threats to American security by multiplying the number of enemies of the United States throughout the world. Some have argued that the United States, whose post-World War II network of alliances was established for the stated purpose of containing and deterring the Soviet Union, is now looking for new opportunities to flex its military muscles and expand its influence across the globe.

“The creation of the US African Command (Africom) of course pointed to US involvements in wars on the continent, and indeed the US has since fought a war in Libya, deployed troops of Uganda, and is planning for another war in Mali,” [wrote](#) Jason Ditz at Antiwar.com. A growing role for the U.S. military on the continent will lead to still more U.S. wars, he predicted. “Since the establishment of Africom, officials seem to figure that with enough troops and enough countries involved, the question of what wars and where can be worked out at their leisure.”



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