



# **EAST AFRICA COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATION NORTH AND WEST AFRICA COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATION**

**LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS**



**JULY 1, 2020–SEPTEMBER 30, 2020**

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

A 2013 amendment to the Inspector General Act established the Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) framework for oversight of overseas contingency operations and requires that the Lead IG submit quarterly reports to Congress on each active operation. The Chair of the Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency designated the DoD Inspector General (IG) as the Lead IG for the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. The DoS IG is the Associate IG for the operations. The USAID IG participates in oversight of the operations.

The Offices of Inspector General (OIG) of the DoD, the DoS, and USAID are referred to in this report as the Lead IG agencies. Other partner agencies also contribute to oversight of the operations.

The Lead IG agencies collectively carry out the Lead IG statutory responsibilities to:

- Develop a joint strategic plan to conduct comprehensive oversight of the operations.
- Ensure independent and effective oversight of programs and operations of the U.S. Government in support of the operations through either joint or individual audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations.
- Report quarterly to Congress and the public on the operations and on activities of the Lead IG agencies.

### METHODOLOGY

To produce this quarterly report, the Lead IG agencies submit requests for information to the DoD, the DoS, USAID, and other Federal agencies about the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation, the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation, and related programs. The Lead IG agencies also gather data and information from other sources, including official documents, congressional testimony, policy research organizations, press conferences, think tanks, and media reports.

The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of IG audits, inspections, investigations, or evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified the data and information cited in this report. The DoD, the DoS, and USAID vet the reports for accuracy prior to publication. For further details on the methodology for this report, see Appendix B.

### CLASSIFIED APPENDIX

This report normally includes an appendix containing classified information about the U.S. mission to degrade or contain VEOs—including al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their associated forces—in designated regions of Africa. Due to the coronavirus disease–2019 pandemic, the Lead IG agencies did not prepare a classified appendix this quarter.

## FOREWORD

We are pleased to submit this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) quarterly report to the U.S. Congress on the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. This report discharges our individual and collective agency oversight responsibilities pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978.

The purpose of the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation is to degrade VEOs—including al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their associated forces—in designated regions of East and North Africa and contain them in designated regions of West Africa.

This quarterly report describes the activities of the U.S. Government in support of the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation, as well as the work of the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to promote the U.S. Government’s policy goals in Africa, during the period July 1 through September 30, 2020.

This report also discusses the ongoing and completed oversight work conducted by the Lead IG agencies and our partner oversight agencies during the quarter.

In 2019, the Secretary of Defense rescinded the overseas contingency operation designation for the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. Pursuant to the Inspector General Act, Lead IG responsibilities and authorities cease at the end of the first fiscal year in which the total amount appropriated for the contingency operation is less than \$100 million. Since FY 2020 appropriations relating to continuing military training, support, or operations in East Africa and North and West Africa were not associated with a designated contingency operation, Lead IG reporting responsibilities for the operations conclude with this report.

Oversight of activities related to ongoing counterterrorism operations will continue under our individual statutory authorities. We remain committed to providing appropriate and timely oversight of these operations.



**Sean W. O'Donnell**  
Acting Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Defense

**Matthew S. Klimow**  
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U.S. Department of State

**Ann Calvaresi Barr**  
Inspector General  
U.S. Agency for International  
Development



**On the Cover**

(Top row): A U.S. Army Security Force Assistance Brigade soldier trains a Djiboutian soldier (USAFRICOM photo); Somali youth create masks to fight the spread of COVID-19 (U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu photo); U.S. Ambassador to Somalia Donald Yamamoto and Somali Minister of Finance Abdirahman Beileh, joined by Prime Minister Mohamed Roble, sign a bilateral agreement to reduce and restructure debt owed by the Somali government to three U.S. Government agencies. (U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu photo); (Bottom row): Djiboutian soldiers perform a live fire exercise in Djibouti. (U.S. Air Force photo)

## MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD INSPECTOR GENERAL



**Sean W. O'Donnell**

I am pleased to present this Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) report on the status of the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. The purpose of these operations is to degrade al-Qaeda, ISIS, their associated forces, and other violent extremist organizations (VEO) in designated regions of East and North Africa and contain them in designated regions of West Africa.

Due to the sunset of Lead IG authority, this will be the final quarterly report on these operations, concluding more than 2 years of interagency oversight and reporting. However, the U.S. counterterrorism mission and diplomatic and humanitarian assistance activities in these regions of Africa will continue.

In East Africa, al-Shabaab attacks in Somalia continued during the quarter. U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) said that al-Shabaab “remains adaptive, resilient, and capable of attacking Western and partner interests in Somalia and East Africa.”

The United States and the international community continued to train, advise, accompany, and equip Somali forces as they battled al-Shabaab. The Somali government, however, has not met milestones for the development of its security forces. During the quarter, the United States worked with the Somali government to revise plans to transition security responsibilities to Somali forces.

In North Africa, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and ISIS-Libya did not conduct any known attacks this quarter. Both VEOs are significantly degraded and currently pose no threat to the U.S. homeland and a minimal threat to U.S. interests in the region. Ceasefires between the UN-backed Government of National Accord and the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army held during the quarter and both parties participated in UN-sponsored peace talks. However, the presence of foreign fighters and dozens of local armed militias could jeopardize ongoing efforts to demilitarize the conflict and reach a sustainable political solution to the civil war.

In West Africa, VEOs were neither degraded nor contained during the quarter. Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) continued to expand in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. In August, the U.S. Government suspended security assistance to the Malian government—a key counterterrorism partner in the region—following a coup by Malian army officers. Some intelligence sharing continued and many humanitarian assistance activities will likely continue. In September, following pressure from the DoS and the international community, the Malian military leaders agreed to form a transitional government and hold democratic national elections within 18 months.

The U.S. Government will continue to face many challenges as it works to degrade and contain the evolving and dynamic VEO threats in Africa. In particular, the DoD said that it needs to remain postured to proactively identify these threats, determine their scope and scale, and respond appropriately, despite the challenges of USAFRICOM's limited footprint on the continent. As the VEO threat cannot be addressed through military action alone, the U.S. Government will need to effectively leverage and coordinate the diplomatic, humanitarian, and development capabilities of multiple agencies to address the underlying drivers of extremism, including poor governance, humanitarian crises, and lack of economic opportunity.

Despite the termination of Lead IG oversight and reporting, my Lead IG colleagues and I will continue to provide oversight of U.S. Government activities in these regions in Africa under our respective statutory authorities. Finally, I would like to thank the men and women of the Lead IG agencies who work tirelessly to execute their oversight missions in these regions of Africa.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sean W. O'Donnell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Sean W. O'Donnell**

Acting Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Defense





A neighborhood in Nairobi, Kenya. (WFP/Alessandro Abbonizio photo)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## SUNSET OF LEAD IG REPORTING

In May 2018, pursuant to Section 8L(b)(1) of the Inspector General Act of 1978, the Chairman of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency designated the DoD Inspector General (IG) as the Lead IG for the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. Since designation, the Lead IG has reported quarterly on these operations and produced joint strategic oversight plans for the operations in the annual Comprehensive Oversight Plan for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) for FYs 2019 and 2020.

In 2019, the Secretary of Defense rescinded the OCO designations for the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. Pursuant to the Inspector General Act, Lead IG responsibilities and authorities cease at the end of the first fiscal year in which the total amount appropriated for the contingency operation is less than \$100 million. As a result, for Lead IG reporting purposes, FY 2020 appropriations relating to continuing military training, support, or operations in East Africa or North and West Africa were not associated with a designated OCO.

Accordingly, Lead IG responsibilities for these operations met the sunset provision of Section 8L at the end of FY 2020 and therefore, this is the final Lead IG quarterly report on the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. Oversight of activities related to ongoing counterterrorism, diplomatic, and humanitarian assistance operations in Africa will continue under the individual statutory authorities of the DoD OIG, the DoS OIG, and the USAID OIG, and other oversight agencies of the U.S. Government.

## EAST AFRICA

Al-Shabaab, an associated force of al-Qaeda, continued to launch attacks during the quarter.<sup>1</sup> Al-Shabaab employed insurgent-style tactics, including ambushes, hit-and-run attacks, and improvised explosive device (IED) operations.<sup>2</sup> According to USAFRICOM's director of intelligence, the command has observed "a definitive shift" in recent months in al-Shabaab's focus to attack U.S. interests in the region.<sup>3</sup>

The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) did not report any ISIS-Somalia attacks during the quarter, but ISIS media claimed the group conducted several grenade attacks in Mogadishu.<sup>4</sup> USAFRICOM reported that recent Somali and U.S. counterterrorism operations against ISIS-Somalia have likely degraded the group's operational capabilities.<sup>5</sup> USAFRICOM reported that it conducted seven airstrikes against al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia targets during the quarter.<sup>6</sup>

The United States works alongside the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, and other international partners to support the development of the Somali security forces and seeks to strengthen Somalia's ability to counter violent extremist organizations (VEO). However, Somalia has not met many security-related milestones outlined in the 2017 London Security Pact and the Somali Transition Plan. The two plans identified 2021 as the year in which Somalia should be able to assume responsibility for a significant portion of its security, including the fight against al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia.<sup>7</sup>







**U.S. Air Force Major General Dagvin Anderson, Commander of SOCAFRICA, visits troops during a September visit to Somalia, Djibouti, Chad, and Niger. (USAFRICOM photo)**

During the quarter, the U.S. Government supported the Somali government’s efforts to revise the Somali Transition Plan.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the DoD and DoS continued activities to support the development of the Somali security forces, including the training and equipping of the Danab Advanced Infantry Brigade.<sup>9</sup>

In September, the United States and Somalia signed a bilateral agreement to reduce and restructure the debt that the Somali government owed to the U.S. Government.<sup>10</sup> The agreement follows Somalia’s recent achievement of a critical debt relief milestone under the World Bank and International Monetary Fund’s debt relief framework.<sup>11</sup>

USAID reported that it had made adjustments to its programming to accommodate Somali government restrictions and health considerations related to the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.<sup>12</sup> USAID also enhanced programming to address harm, exploitation, and abuse—particularly among women and children—during the pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

## NORTH AFRICA

VEOs in North Africa remained degraded during the quarter. There were no attacks against civilian targets attributed to ISIS-Libya or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) during the quarter.<sup>14</sup> However, the DoS reported that there were lethal clashes between ISIS-Libya and local security forces.<sup>15</sup> USAFRICOM said it took no action against the two groups other than “monitoring” due to their degraded state.<sup>16</sup> ISIS-Libya and AQIM control no territory in Libya and neither group currently poses a threat to the U.S. homeland. They pose only a minimal threat to U.S. interests in Libya.<sup>17</sup>

U.S. airstrikes in 2019 reduced ISIS-Libya to fewer than 100 fighters, USAFRICOM reported.<sup>18</sup> ISIS-Libya had an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 militants at its peak in 2016, according to media reporting.<sup>19</sup> AQIM has roughly 500 fighters across Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia, and it has limited capability to attack U.S. interests in North Africa.<sup>20</sup>

A tenuous de facto ceasefire between the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) and the self-described Libyan National Army (LNA) remained in place at the end of the quarter.<sup>21</sup> The Libyan civil conflict is complicated by foreign countries attempting to exploit the unrest for their own interests. The DoS reported that Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and, to a lesser degree, Egypt and France, are the primary supporters of the LNA, while Turkey supports the GNA.<sup>22</sup> The UN Panel of Experts on Libya issued formal reports alleging that Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Qatar, and Turkey have transported weapons to Libya in violation of a UN embargo. Russia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates have also sent either military forces or mercenaries to Libya.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the quarter, the DoS engaged with leaders on both sides of the civil conflict and supported UN-led negotiations toward a political solution in Libya, which continued during the quarter.<sup>24</sup> The DoS reiterated that the U.S. Government remains opposed to all foreign military interference in Libya.<sup>25</sup>



**A U.S. Army soldier helps a Djiboutian soldier secure a weapon during a training exercise. (U.S. Air Force photo)**

## WEST AFRICA

USAFRICOM said that VEOs were neither degraded nor contained in West Africa.<sup>26</sup> Violence involving VEOs in the Sahel and Lake Chad region continued during the quarter, according to ACLED data.<sup>27</sup>

USAFRICOM said that although no VEO in West Africa posed a direct threat to the U.S. homeland, its assessment of the threat could change during the next 3 years if VEOs are left unchecked.<sup>28</sup> Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), an associated force of al-Qaeda operating in the tri-border region of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, expanded operations against Malian security forces in closer proximity to the capital of Bamako.<sup>29</sup>

European and African counterterrorism efforts also increased this quarter, with pockets of success in some areas of the Sahel and Lake Chad region.<sup>30</sup> While USAFRICOM provided

assistance to partners in West Africa, this support was limited due to COVID-19 and associated risks to allies and U.S. personnel.<sup>31</sup>

In August, the U.S. Government suspended security assistance to the Malian government, one of its key counterterrorism partners in the region, following a coup by Malian army officers. In September, Malian military leaders agreed to form a transitional government, with military officers holding several leadership positions.<sup>32</sup> The U.S. military paused support and training activities to the Malian Armed Forces, although USAFRICOM continued broad intelligence sharing with the Malian military to continue to disrupt and degrade VEOs in the region.<sup>33</sup>

According to the DoS, direct U.S. political engagement, as well as robust diplomatic support to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), contributed to the Malian military junta's acceptance of an 18-month limit on the transition to a democratically elected civilian government, as well as other concessions.<sup>34</sup>

The DoS also raised concern over alleged human rights abuses inflicted by security forces in Mali and other nations in West Africa, including Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger. The DoS added that it continued to conduct all necessary Leahy Law vetting for security assistance programs in the region.<sup>35</sup>

USAID reported that although there were positive health indicators regarding the spread of COVID-19 in West Africa, the virus has resulted in severe economic consequences across the region.<sup>36</sup> Government-imposed travel restrictions decreased economic opportunities and increased the size of vulnerable populations that were already facing multiple interrelated crises, especially food insecurity.<sup>37</sup>

## Lead IG Oversight Activities

This quarter, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies completed 11 reports related to the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. These reports examined various activities that support the East Africa and the North and West Africa counterterrorism operations, including USAFRICOM's response to the COVID-19 outbreak; DoS oversight of staffing and embassy operations in countries that support the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation; and DoS management of awards for humanitarian assistance and counterterrorism programs. As of September 30, 16 projects related to the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation were ongoing.

Lead IG investigative agencies coordinated on 11 open investigations related to the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and 3 open investigations related to the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. The open investigations involve procurement and grant fraud, corruption, computer intrusion, theft, and human trafficking.





Danab Brigade recruits conduct physical training and basic drills in Kismayo, Somalia. (DoS photo)

# THE QUARTER IN REVIEW

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## THE QUARTER IN REVIEW

### DoD Continues Combatant Command Review of USAFRICOM

Throughout the past year, U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) and other combatant commands undertook reviews of their resources and activities to align with the objectives articulated in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which shifted the focus of U.S. strategy from counterterrorism to threats posed by Russia and China (what is often referred to as “great power competition,” “global power competition,” or GPC).<sup>1</sup> The 2018 strategy stated that “inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security,” while acknowledging that threats from terrorist groups remain.<sup>2</sup>

As of the end of the quarter, the Secretary of Defense had not announced decisions regarding Combatant Command Review options for USAFRICOM.<sup>3</sup> However, USAFRICOM has begun to adjust its resources as a result of the ongoing Combatant Command Review.<sup>4</sup> In July, USAFRICOM announced that it was developing plans to relocate its headquarters, currently in Stuttgart, Germany, to align with national security and defense priorities.<sup>5</sup> The DoD said that it is evaluating options for USAFRICOM headquarters relocation in conjunction with efforts to realign its forces in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

During the quarter, USAFRICOM had approximately 5,100 personnel in Africa, based primarily in Djibouti. Between 650 and 800 troops were operating in Somalia, and 760 troops were deployed to West Africa.<sup>7</sup>

### USAFRICOM Revises Its Campaign Plan

During the quarter, USAFRICOM began to review its campaign plan.<sup>8</sup> USAFRICOM said that it undertook the revision to better align the plan with the priorities listed in the 2018 National Defense Strategy. The revised plan incorporated guidance provided by the Secretary of Defense throughout the Combatant Command Review process.<sup>9</sup> At the end of the quarter, the draft campaign plan was awaiting final approval by the USAFRICOM commander.<sup>10</sup>

USAFRICOM said that the draft campaign plan puts greater emphasis on the ways in which the command will counter the strategic ambitions of global competitors on the African continent, and the ways in which the command supports and cooperates with partners and allies for operations, actions, and activities related to violent extremist organizations (VEO).<sup>11</sup>

USAFRICOM’s current campaign plan has six lines of effort, including three that focused on specific objectives in the geographic areas of Somalia, Libya, and West Africa. The proposed campaign plan organizes the campaign according to five functional lines of effort: 1) Enable War Plans and GPC; 2) Counter VEOs; 3) Respond to Crises; 4) Strengthen Partnerships; and 5) Set the Theater. These proposed lines of effort support four campaign objectives: 1) Enable War Plans and GPC; 2) Disrupt VEO Threats to the Homeland; 3) Respond to Crises to Protect U.S. Interests; and 4) Coordinate Action with Allies and Partners to Achieve Shared Security Objectives.<sup>12</sup>

**USAFRICOM has approximately 5,100 personnel in Africa, based primarily in Djibouti. Between 650 and 800 troops were operating in Somalia, and 760 troops were deployed to West Africa.**



**Mira Mehta (center), founder of Tomato Jos, part of the Prosper Africa initiative, celebrates the opening of a tomato processing facility in Nigeria. (DoS photo courtesy of Tomato Jos)**

## USAID: Shifting Strategic Resources to Global Power Competition

As USAID has worked to align its strategies and programs with the 2018 National Security Strategy—the whole-of-government strategy that also emphasizes strategic competition with China and Russia—it has identified challenges associated with this shift.<sup>13</sup>

USAID seeks to counter the influence of global powers through two initiatives: a USAID-wide GPC effort and Prosper Africa.<sup>14</sup> USAID seeks to highlight distinctions between the U.S. assistance model and that of authoritarian states, especially China.<sup>15</sup> During the quarter, USAID piloted “GPC Champion” missions, including five USAID missions in Africa. These select USAID missions will 1) lead GPC messaging, programming, and partnerships in collaboration with interagency counterparts in the field; 2) provide a model for cross-agency and cross-mission learning to inform investments; 3) demonstrate the use of data to inform specific program and partner choices; 4) galvanize interagency China working groups in the field to inform strategic planning, investments, and metrics; 5) shape and oversee programming options with USAID resources, including with Countering Chinese Influence Funds, as available; and 6) participate in regular calls with USAID GPC leadership to resolve issues and report on progress. After 6 to 8 months, USAID will assess which policies and programs were most successful and use those insights to develop a GPC plan for the Africa region.<sup>16</sup>

Prosper Africa is a whole-of-government initiative to substantially increase two-way trade and investment between Africa and the United States.<sup>17</sup> USAID reported that USAID’s leadership is critical to the initiative’s success. USAID said that Prosper Africa will unlock African markets for a greater number of U.S. firms and, in the process, offer African government partners a clear alternative to models that would otherwise saddle their countries with unsustainable debt.<sup>18</sup>

USAID reported that it is constrained in its ability to respond to strategic changes associated with the National Security Strategy. USAID said that it does not have sufficient resources to fund the analyses and technical assistance needed to build the capacity of East African institutions to be equal strategic partners. Additionally, most of USAID’s development funding in Africa is earmarked, meaning it is difficult to adjust programs in response to changing dynamics, threats, and opportunities.<sup>19</sup>



A U.S. Army Security Force Assistance Brigade soldier trains a Djiboutian soldier. (USAFRICOM photo)





## EAST AFRICA

The East Africa Counterterrorism Operation seeks to disrupt, degrade, and deny victory to al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia in Somalia and neighboring countries.<sup>1</sup> USAFRICOM said that its desired end state in East Africa “is one in which terrorist organizations are not able to threaten the U.S. homeland, U.S. persons, international allies or destabilize the region.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite many years of sustained Somali, U.S., and international counterterrorism pressure, the terrorist threat in East Africa is not degraded: al-Shabaab retains freedom of movement in many parts of southern Somalia and has demonstrated an ability and intent to attack outside of the country, including targeting U.S. interests.<sup>3</sup> Somalia’s security forces are unable to contain the threat from al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia, which poses a smaller but still potent threat, without significant international support. The coming year will bring significant challenges to Somalia, as its government seeks to hold national elections and combat the coronavirus disease–2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, and the international community reviews how and whether it will continue to support the ongoing development of the Somali security forces.

### The VEO Threat in East Africa

U.S. military activities conducted in support of the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation focus on the VEO threat in Somalia.<sup>4</sup> Al-Shabaab, an associated force of al-Qaeda that has been active in Somalia and neighboring countries since 2006, maintains influence in many areas of the country.<sup>5</sup> ISIS-Somalia is active mainly in Somalia’s northeastern Puntland region.<sup>6</sup>

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) reported that the VEO threat to U.S., Western, and local interests has varied over the past decade and has increased in the past 3 years.<sup>7</sup> At its height in 2010, al-Shabaab controlled most of southern Somalia. From 2010 through 2014, al-Shabaab conducted attacks in Djibouti, Kenya, and Uganda. From 2014 through 2016, a series of counterterrorism operations in Somalia coincided with a reduction in al-Shabaab attacks in East African capitals. In 2019, al-Shabaab conducted its first attack in Nairobi in nearly 5 years, “signaling a resumption of the group’s capability to project attacks beyond Somalia,” the DIA said.<sup>8</sup> Within Somalia, the group has sustained its capability to conduct both small-scale and complex attacks despite personnel and territorial losses due to counterterrorism operations. In 2015, ISIS-Somalia emerged as a competitor to al-Shabaab, although ISIS-Somalia does not match al-Shabaab’s manpower and military capabilities.<sup>9</sup>

The DIA said that a lack of socioeconomic opportunities and poor governance could contribute to increased violent extremist activity in East Africa in the next 5 years.<sup>10</sup> The lack of socioeconomic opportunities stems from low or unequal growth, high poverty and unemployment, and limited economic development.<sup>11</sup> These conditions are present in several East African states and may be exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on African economies. Poor governance includes a lack of governance, state repression, and marginalization of some groups—conditions present

in the region. The DIA reported that ongoing and upcoming political transitions or elections in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and Tanzania, and ethnic tensions or violence in Ethiopia and Kenya also represent potential instability triggers that VEOs could exploit.<sup>12</sup>

The East Africa Counterterrorism Operation is part of a U.S. Government effort to promote stability and security, good governance, and economic growth in Somalia and neighboring countries.<sup>13</sup> USAFRICOM conducts airstrikes and combined operations with the Somali National Army (SNA).<sup>14</sup> The DoD and DoS support the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the SNA, including the SNA's advanced infantry unit, the Danab Brigade. The U.S. diplomatic and development communities reestablished their presence in the country when the USAID mission and the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu opened at the Mogadishu airport in June 2019 and October 2019, respectively.

## STATUS OF THE CONFLICT

### Al-Shabaab: “Definitive Shift” to Target U.S. Interests

Over the past year, USAFRICOM has characterized al-Shabaab as the most “dangerous,” “capable,” and “imminent” threat on the African continent.<sup>15</sup> This quarter, USAFRICOM assessed that al-Shabaab “remains adaptive, resilient, and capable of attacking Western and partner interests in Somalia and East Africa.”<sup>16</sup> USAFRICOM said that al-Shabaab has the intent to attack the U.S. homeland, though it currently lacks the ability to do so.<sup>17</sup>

**USAFRICOM’s director of intelligence, Rear Admiral Heidi Berg, told reporters that in recent months, the command has observed “a definitive shift” in al-Shabaab’s attacks to focus on U.S. targets in the region.**



Items captured from al-Shabaab locations. (DoS photo)

In September, USAFRICOM’s director of intelligence, Rear Admiral Heidi Berg, told reporters that in recent months, the command has observed “a definitive shift” in al-Shabaab’s attacks to focus on U.S. targets in the region.<sup>18</sup> In the past year, al-Shabaab launched three attacks that killed or injured U.S. personnel: at Baledogle Airfield in Somalia in September 2019; at Manda Bay, Kenya, in January 2020; and in southern Somalia in September 2020.<sup>19</sup> Over the quarter, Rear Admiral Berg said, USAFRICOM observed a “significant uptick” in al-Shabaab’s use of vehicle-borne IEDs against U.S., Somali, and AMISOM forces.<sup>20</sup>

In August, al-Shabaab vowed to “concentrate their military operations” on U.S. targets.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Rear Admiral Berg said, al-Shabaab has used its propaganda more frequently to broadcast exaggerations of its attacks.<sup>22</sup>

In September, Major General Dagvin Anderson, Commander of Special Operations Command Africa (SOCAFRICA), spoke at a policy event and described the growing al-Shabaab threat.<sup>23</sup> He highlighted an aviation plot involving a Kenyan national recruited by al-Shabaab.<sup>24</sup> At the time of his arrest in July 2019 in the Philippines, the individual was training to be a pilot and was in possession of firearms and explosives.<sup>25</sup> The plot, while interdicted in an early stage, involved a “significant investment in time and money and resources to make that happen,” Major General Anderson said.<sup>26</sup>

In September, the DoS assessed that al-Shabaab does not pose an existential threat to the Somali government. However, while al-Shabaab controls less territory than it did a decade ago, “the group continues to operate with relative impunity, particularly in areas that lack adequate government administration or security presence.”<sup>27</sup> The DoS noted that al-Shabaab retains influence in large areas of rural Somalia through coercion, control over local economies and commercial transit points, and, in some cases, the provision of village-level governance, security, and administration.<sup>28</sup>

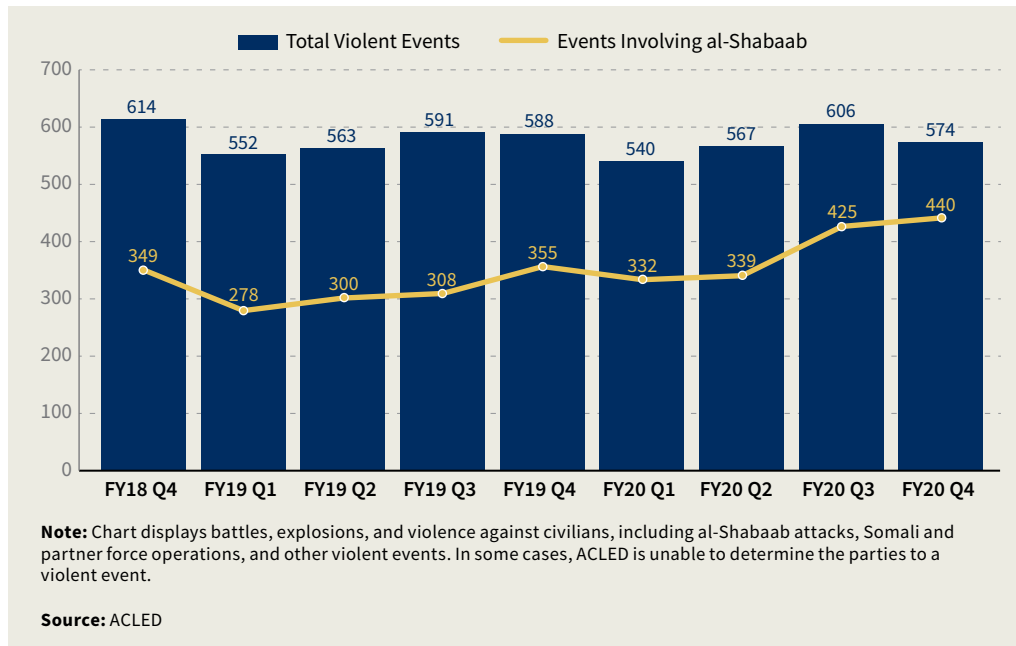
## Assessing the VEO Threat

The DIA said that the following metrics provide insight into changing VEO threats in Africa:

The most valuable metric for monitoring changes in the VEO threat in Africa is the frequency and complexity of their attacks. The **number of attacks** as well as **tactics, techniques, and procedures** used during attacks are observable and serve as measurable indicators of VEO capabilities and fluctuations in the VEO threat. VEO **press statements** released to coincide with attacks provide valuable insight into shifting strategic intentions guiding attacks. Other observable metrics can be useful in assessing changes in the VEO threat in Africa, including **numerical strength of the group** (when available), **span of territorial control** (where relevant), and **demonstrated freedom of movement**. Understanding groups’ **funding levels** could be a relevant metric, but the supporting data for assessing this metric is often unavailable or incomplete.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 1.

**Violent Events in Somalia, July 2018–September 2020**



**Al-Shabaab Employs Insurgent-Style Tactics Against the SNA and AMISOM**

Violence associated with al-Shabaab, including the group’s attacks and operations by security forces to counter it, continued during the quarter, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), an organization funded in part by the U.S. Government. While it is difficult to identify the parties in all of the violent incidents displayed in Figure 1, the data show that the scale of the conflict as a whole has remained at elevated levels.<sup>30</sup>

As in previous quarters, al-Shabaab focused its efforts on countering the movements of the SNA and AMISOM, especially in southern Somalia.<sup>31</sup> In particular, al-Shabaab continued to shift its fighters to counter SNA and AMISOM operations that seek to clear al-Shabaab from towns south of Mogadishu to Marka.<sup>32</sup> As in previous quarters, the Lower Shabelle, Banadir, and Lower Juba regions experienced the most violence during the quarter, according to ACLED data.<sup>33</sup>

Consistent with previous quarters, al-Shabaab employed insurgent-style tactics, including ambushes, hit-and-run attacks, and IED operations.<sup>34</sup> As noted above, USAFRICOM reported an increase in al-Shabaab vehicle-borne IED attacks during the quarter, including an increase in vehicle-borne IED attacks in Mogadishu.<sup>35</sup> In August, an al-Shabaab vehicle-borne IED attack at Lido Beach in Mogadishu resulted in 25 casualties.<sup>36</sup> On September 7, al-Shabaab used a vehicle-borne IED to attack a U.S.-accompanied SNA unit in southern Somalia, killing three Somali personnel and wounding one U.S. military service member.<sup>37</sup>

**USAFRICOM estimated that al-Shabaab had between 5,000 and 10,000 fighters, reflecting no change from the previous quarter.**

Al-Shabaab also attempted assassinations of military leaders and mid-level government officials in Mogadishu and Kismayo.<sup>38</sup> In mid-July, al-Shabaab attempted to assassinate the Somali Chief of Defense Forces using a vehicle-borne IED, but failed.<sup>39</sup> In September, an al-Shabaab suicide bomber killed the chairman of the Jubaland Chamber of Commerce and seven others in Kismayo.<sup>40</sup>

Al-Shabaab controls or exerts influence in large portions of southern Somalia and, to a lesser extent, central Somalia. The group's largest concentration of fighters is in the Lower Shabelle and Lower Juba regions.<sup>41</sup> At a September policy organization event, Major General Anderson said that al-Shabaab had created a "de facto safe haven" in southern Somalia that, with difficult terrain and unsympathetic clan networks, was very difficult for Somali and international forces to penetrate and influence.<sup>42</sup> USAFRICOM reported that there was little change in al-Shabaab's areas of influence or control during the quarter.<sup>43</sup>

USAFRICOM estimated that al-Shabaab had between 5,000 and as many as 10,000 fighters, reflecting no change from the previous quarter.<sup>44</sup>

As in the previous quarter, USAFRICOM said that it observed no significant changes in al-Shabaab's violence or tactics that it could directly attribute to the pandemic.<sup>45</sup> Last quarter, al-Shabaab announced that it had opened a COVID-19 clinic in Jilib.<sup>46</sup> This quarter, USAFRICOM said that al-Shabaab had made no changes in the services that it claimed to provide to address the pandemic.<sup>47</sup> There were no significant instances of al-Shabaab directly targeting COVID-19-related aid efforts.<sup>48</sup>

## **Al-Shabaab Attacks Civilians and Security Forces in the Border Region**

USAFRICOM assessed that al-Shabaab is "intent and capable" of conducting attacks in Kenya, particularly in the areas along the porous Somalia-Kenya border.<sup>49</sup> Al-Shabaab violence in the four Kenyan counties (Garissa, Lamu, Mandera, and Wajir) that border Somalia increased in 2019 reaching a peak in the second quarter of FY 2020.<sup>50</sup> During the past two quarters, however, the number of al-Shabaab-involved violent events in the Kenyan border counties declined compared to that peak, according to ACLED data.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, USAFRICOM reported that during the quarter, al-Shabaab "intensified" its attacks in the Kenyan counties that border Somalia. These attacks targeted Kenyan police, security forces, and schools.<sup>52</sup> In July, al-Shabaab unsuccessfully attempted to attack telecommunications towers in Garissa, Mandera, and Wajir counties with the intent to disrupt government services.<sup>53</sup> Al-Shabaab also threatened to kill or kidnap Western tourists in Kenya, which USAFRICOM said demonstrated the group's "enduring intent to harm Americans."<sup>54</sup>

Al-Shabaab also targeted Kenyan forces in Somalia, including those operating in the Banadir and Lower Shabelle regions as part of the AMISOM mission.<sup>55</sup> Al-Shabaab has stated its intent to compel Kenyan forces to withdraw from Somalia.<sup>56</sup> During the quarter, al-Shabaab media claimed that the group had attacked Kenyan forces in three locations in Lower Juba.<sup>57</sup>

## ISIS-Somalia Weakened, but Still Active

Compared to al-Shabaab, ISIS-Somalia has conducted few attacks in Somalia over the past 2 years, mostly in the northern Bari province and in Mogadishu.<sup>58</sup> ACLED did not report any ISIS-Somalia attacks in northern Somalia during the quarter, but ISIS media claimed the group conducted several grenade attacks in Mogadishu.<sup>59</sup>

USAFRICOM reported that recent Somali and U.S. counterterrorism operations against ISIS-Somalia have likely degraded ISIS-Somalia’s operational capabilities.<sup>60</sup> In July, USAFRICOM conducted an airstrike against ISIS-Somalia after the group attacked partner forces. The strike killed seven ISIS-Somalia fighters.<sup>61</sup> In addition, Somali security forces arrested several ISIS-Somalia fighters and captured IED and other explosive materials.<sup>62</sup>

ISIS-Somalia has retained a “steady but small presence” in northern Somalia, USAFRICOM said.<sup>63</sup> USAFRICOM estimated the group’s force size to be in the low hundreds.<sup>64</sup> Though small, the group continues to follow the guidance that ISIS core leadership issues through the weekly ISIS publication, al-Naba.<sup>65</sup>



August 2020 cover of al-Naba weekly newspaper issued by Central Media Office of the Islamic State.

## U.S. Airstrikes and Joint Operations Target Al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia

USAFRICOM conducted seven airstrikes in Somalia during the quarter.<sup>66</sup> (See Table 1.) In the first, second, and third quarters of FY 2020, USAFRICOM conducted 7, 33, and 9 strikes, respectively.<sup>67</sup> The airstrike on August 25 killed Abdulqadir Commandos, whom USAFRICOM described as a “senior al-Shabaab leader.”<sup>68</sup>

Table 1.

USAFRICOM Airstrikes in Somalia, July–September 2020

Date of Strike	Location of Strike	Strike Type	Results
July 9	Hantiwadaag	Offensive	1 enemy combatant killed 1 vehicle destroyed
July 21	Timirshe	Collective self-defense	7 enemy combatants killed
July 29	Jilib	Offensive	1 enemy combatant killed 1 enemy combatant wounded
August 20	Kurtun Warey	Offensive	1 enemy combatant killed 1 vehicle destroyed
August 24	Dar es Salaam	Collective self-defense	6 enemy combatants killed 3 enemy combatants wounded in action (uncorroborated)
August 25	Saakow	Offensive	1 enemy combatant killed
September 21	Jana Cabdalle command outpost	Self-defense	1 damaged Humvee destroyed

Source: USAFRICOM J33 Fires, response to DoD OIG request for information, 20.4 EA 10, 10/7/2020.

USAFRICOM reported that during the quarter, it received an allegation from an online media source that as many as eight civilians were killed as a result of a joint Somali-U.S. military operation on September 17; the incident remained under investigation at the end of the quarter. USAFRICOM also announced that it verified two civilian injuries resulting from a February 17 airstrike and determined that allegations of civilian casualties relating to incidents on May 18 and July 29 were unsubstantiated. USAFRICOM said that it uses “all reasonably available tools to assess civilian casualty reports, including intelligence, open source reporting, and inputs from the public and the NGO community.”<sup>69</sup>

During the quarter, U.S. special operations forces supported several ground operations against al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia. SOCAFRICA reported that the majority of U.S. counterterrorism operations against al-Shabaab took place in the areas south of Mogadishu and in the Lower Shabelle region. These operations focused on building combat outposts for partner forces to restrict al-Shabaab’s freedom of movement, disrupt its command and control, and interdict IED facilitators.<sup>70</sup> As a result of these operations, SOCAFRICA said, U.S. and partner forces expanded their influence and disrupted al-Shabaab’s ability to collect taxes and produce explosive devices.<sup>71</sup>

## **PARTNER FORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The U.S. Government works alongside the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, and other international partners to fulfill their political and materiel commitments to support Somalia’s security reform adopted during the 2017 London Conference on Somalia. This conference resulted in a non-binding Security Pact. Following the conference, the Somali government drafted a Somalia Transition Plan to enable Somalia to gradually transfer security responsibilities from AMISOM to the Somali security forces in 2021.<sup>72</sup>

The Somali government and its international supporters are approaching a critical year for the transition of security responsibilities. Both the Security Pact and the Somalia Transition Plan identified 2021 as the year during which Somalia should be able to assume responsibility for a significant portion of its security, including the fight against al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia.<sup>73</sup> As detailed below, Somalia is far from reaching the goals of these two agreements.

The DoD and the DoS, through the Military Advisory Group-Somalia (formerly known as the Military Coordination Cell) at the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu, contribute to the oversight and coordination of international efforts to support Somalia’s security sector reform under the Security Pact. The Military Advisory Group-Somalia works with leaders from Somalia, AMISOM troop-contributing countries, and international stakeholders—including, but not limited to, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and Turkey—to coordinate operations, activities, and investments to improve the professionalism of Somalia’s security forces.<sup>74</sup>

## Somali Security Forces Behind on Professionalization Milestones

As Somalia approaches its 2021 transition year, its security forces have not yet met established milestones for the development of their operational and institutional capabilities. Both the Security Pact and the Somalia Transition Plan envisioned that, by now, Somalia’s forces would have developed specific capabilities and would be able to provide security as the population voted in national elections (now postponed until 2021) and AMISOM forces prepared to withdraw.<sup>75</sup>

Most of Somalia’s progress to date relates to the establishment of security institutions. The Somali government has established an army, police force, maritime force, and central security administrative bodies, such as a national security council—all part of the “national security architecture” envisioned in the Security Pact.<sup>76</sup> In particular, USAFRICOM highlights the growth and operational success of Somalia’s advanced infantry brigade, called the Danab Brigade.<sup>77</sup> In addition, the SNA, with AMISOM support, has improved security in population centers and completed the transfer of the national stadium and a military academy—both in Mogadishu—from AMISOM to the SNA.<sup>78</sup>



A police officer serving under AMISOM stands guard in Mogadishu, Somalia. (AMISOM photo)

### OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY

The Somali security forces have not met many of the milestones related to operational capability. The Somalia Transition Plan envisioned that by the end of 2020, the Somali security forces would play a “leading operational role, continue to degrade al-Shabaab, build and hold positions along [major supply routes] and continue to strengthen population centers.”<sup>79</sup> As of the end of the quarter, Somali security forces continue to rely on international support for operations, and al-Shabaab is not degraded to the point where Somali security forces can contain its threat independently.<sup>80</sup> Further details about the Somali security forces’ operational capabilities are not publicly releasable.

### INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Many of the Somali security forces’ operational limitations are rooted in institutional challenges. For example, one Security Pact milestone is for the Somali government and member states to “have capacity to support and oversee Somali Security Institutions.”<sup>81</sup> USAFRICOM reported that both the federal and state security ministries, have “a modest ability” to oversee their forces, “but they are dependent on the generosity of international donors to develop any capabilities.”<sup>82</sup>



USAFRICOM reported improved performance among the SNA's top leadership, a focus of the U.S. Government's mentoring and advising efforts.<sup>83</sup> USAFRICOM noted that its engagements with key Somali leaders are sometimes constrained by the limited ability of U.S. military staff to travel outside Mogadishu due to security constraints. In addition, USAFRICOM said that limited training available for mid-grade officers slows the extension of professionalized leadership to lower ranks.<sup>84</sup>

The Somali security forces continue to rely on the international community for financial support, the DIA said, but even this support is not sufficient.<sup>85</sup> Somali security forces sometimes go unpaid for months.<sup>86</sup>

### **EXTENDING SECURITY**

While USAFRICOM has reported incremental progress among federal security institutions, the Somali government has not yet been able to “extend state authority across Somalia”—another Security Pact milestone.<sup>87</sup> Instead, forces associated with the federal member states and clan-based militias often serve as the primary provider of security in their respective areas. While these sub-national forces conduct offensive operations against al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia, they often do not coordinate activity with each other and sometimes work at cross purposes.<sup>88</sup>

The DIA said that unresolved power issues between the federal government and federal member state authorities, as well as competing clan loyalties, have weakened SNA command and control across the country.<sup>89</sup>

### **Somalia Begins Rewrite of Its Transition Plan**

This quarter, the United States and members of the international community joined the Somali government to review and rewrite the Somali Transition Plan.<sup>90</sup> The DoS stated that implementation of the transition plan is “badly off track,” as detailed above.<sup>91</sup> The United Nations Security Council requested the Somali government rewrite the transition plan when it renewed the AMISOM mandate in May.<sup>92</sup>

The Somali government is leading the rewrite of the Somalia Transition Plan. USAFRICOM reported that the Somali National Security Advisor created a working committee to lead the rewrite process and three working groups that focus on 1) operations; 2) institutional capacity building; and 3) supporting activities, including stabilization activities.<sup>93</sup>

To facilitate the rewrite, the Military Advisory Group-Somalia used a detailed tracker of tasks related to the transition of security responsibilities from AMISOM to the SNA.<sup>94</sup> Originally developed in 2018, the tracker has been updated periodically and includes tasks related to operational objectives, institutional capacity milestones, and security conditions.<sup>95</sup>

The Somali government and the international community reviewed the tracker and determined which of the tasks have been completed and which need to be addressed before the 2021 security handover.<sup>96</sup> USAFRICOM reported that, according to the tracker, “progress made in building institutional capacity has exceeded progress made in completing operational objectives and in establishing security conditions.”<sup>97</sup>

In late September, the Somali National Security Advisor released a draft of the revised transition plan and requested stakeholder feedback.<sup>98</sup> USAFRICOM described the draft of the transition plan as “a solid first draft as opposed to an actionable plan.”<sup>99</sup> The draft, USAFRICOM said, is “overly ambitious,” and advisors have recommended that the final plan include tasks that are more “realistic” and within the scope of the Somali government’s capabilities.<sup>100</sup>

USAFRICOM advisors in Mogadishu reported that while the current draft of the transition plan addresses strategic goals, it lacks specific planning milestones in other areas. Going forward, USAFRICOM said, advisors will continue to try to shape the draft into a “realistic, actionable plan.”<sup>101</sup> For example, the advisors will recommend that the Somali government consider focusing operations on al-Shabaab strongholds in the Lower and Middle Shabelle and Jubaland.<sup>102</sup>

The updated transition plan will inform a January 2021 UN-mandated joint assessment on post-2021 security arrangements, as well as the next UN Security Council AMISOM mandate renewal debate in February 2021.<sup>103</sup> The United Nations requested that the African Union provide an update in November about renewing the AMISOM mandate. This update, USAFRICOM said, will require the Somali government to further refine the transition plan.<sup>104</sup>

## U.S. Government Supports Danab Brigade Training and Development

The primary focus of DoD and DoS support to the SNA is on the development of the Danab Advanced Infantry Brigade. Danab Brigade units are now operational in four of Somalia’s five member states and are recognized as the most capable ground assault forces in the SNA by the U.S. government and international community. According to the DoS, both Somali government and federal member state leaders strongly support development of the Danab Brigade.<sup>105</sup>

USAFRICOM reported this quarter that the Danab Brigade conducted approximately 80 percent of SNA offensive operations in Somalia and nearly all counterterrorism operations against al-Shabaab.<sup>106</sup> The Danab Brigade is not a special operations force, but it has greater capabilities than the SNA.<sup>107</sup> Although Danab Brigade units have performed relatively well, according to the DoS, their progress has been hampered by inadequate troop generation, normal attrition, and combat losses.<sup>108</sup>

The DoS funds basic training of Danab Brigade soldiers through a grant to Bancroft Global Development, the nonprofit organization that provides the training. Upon completion of basic training, Danab Brigade soldiers proceed to DoD-led collective training.<sup>109</sup>

The DoS reported that 270 soldiers began a basic training course that started September 1 and has an anticipated November 30 graduation date. The 270 soldiers were selected from a pool of 447 civilians recruited from the Lower Shabelle region.<sup>110</sup> SOCAFRICA reported that during the quarter, 50 soldiers began and completed collective training, which was led by U.S. Army Security Force Assistance Brigade soldiers.<sup>111</sup>

**The DoS reported that 270 soldiers began the most recent Danab Brigade basic training course.**



**Danab Brigade recruits at a basic training camp in Kismayo, Somalia. (DoS photo)**

USAFRICOM reported that the Danab Brigade had 945 soldiers at the end of the quarter, out of a total of 3,000 soldiers authorized in the 2017 London Security Pact.<sup>112</sup>

For FY 2020, the DoS obligated \$25.9 million in contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements to fund the development of the Danab Brigade. This included a \$14.7 million grant to Bancroft Global Development to mentor and train both Danab Brigade and Ugandan forces. The DoS reported that a monitoring and evaluation contractor has begun the initial evaluation of the progress of projects in Somalia funded through Peace Keeping Operations funds toward stated objectives, including those related to the development of the Danab Brigade.<sup>113</sup>

### **Operation Badbaado: SNA Makes Limited Progress**

U.S. support to the SNA—both the Danab Brigade and conventional forces—includes operational, technical, and material support to Operation Badbaado, a phased, SNA-led ground offensive operation to clear, seize, and hold al-Shabaab strongholds along the Shabelle River, limit al-Shabaab’s freedom of movement, and disrupt al-Shabaab’s attack networks in Mogadishu.<sup>114</sup> The goals of Operation Badbaado are to create a security cocoon around Mogadishu; degrade al-Shabaab; and develop the SNA’s long-term institutional capacity.<sup>115</sup> Approximately 8,300 Somali security forces, including more than 600 Danab Brigade soldiers, participated in Operation Badbaado during the quarter.<sup>116</sup>

This quarter, USAFRICOM reported that the SNA made some progress toward the goals of Operation Badbaado. SNA forces, with support from U.S. special operations forces, conducted operations to increase security around Mogadishu.<sup>117</sup> USAFRICOM reported that during the quarter, and at the request of Somali security forces, it transferred defensive barriers and other construction materials to the Somali security forces to establish forward operating bases in southern Somalia. USAFRICOM said that this request highlights the Somali Chief of Defense Forces’ “confidence in delegating operation and tactical control for major operations to the Brigade commander,” who conducts hold operations.<sup>118</sup>



**Danab Brigade soldiers conduct ground operations. (DoS photo)**

U.S. and international forces continued to train the SNA during the quarter. For example, USAFRICOM said that it expected additional Somali security forces to be available at the end of the quarter, following completion of a Turkish-led training program.<sup>119</sup> USAFRICOM noted that while the Somali security forces have benefited from training provided by international partners, foreign governments are often reluctant to provide these forces with weapons and equipment required for deployment.<sup>120</sup>

USAFRICOM said that Operation Badbaado will continue to require partner support. In particular, its operational success will depend heavily on an effective Somali security sector and political reform, and the creation of much higher force protection capabilities by the SNA, including the Danab Brigade. In addition, long-term success against al-Shabaab will depend on the Somali government's ability to provide security, stabilization, and good governance in the liberated areas.<sup>121</sup>

## **DoS OIG Identifies Problems with Leahy Vetting in Somalia**

A recently completed DoS OIG audit of DoS foreign assistance grants and cooperative agreements in Somalia revealed, among other findings, that there were ongoing issues with the required Leahy vetting of Somali security forces, increasing the likelihood that funds could be inadvertently provided to individuals or units that had previously committed gross human rights violations.<sup>122</sup> Under the provisions of the Leahy Law, the DoS and the DoD are required to verify that foreign security forces that receive U.S. Government assistance have not been credibly implicated in the gross violation of human rights.<sup>123</sup>

The DoS OIG audit team examined approximately \$51.5 million (out of \$57 million total) in foreign assistance grants and cooperative agreements the DoS had allocated to the Bureau of African Affairs (AF) and the Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT) for use in Somalia from

FY 2017 through FY 2019. The DoS OIG found that while CT generally followed DoS guidance for Leahy vetting, AF did not. The audit showed that AF officials were not applying the Leahy vetting requirements and that an AF official removed the requirements from one award at the UN implementer's request, both of which are contrary to DoS policy.<sup>124</sup> (See page 67.)

### **COVID-19 Halts AMISOM Troop Rotations**

USAFRICOM reported that AMISOM troops from Uganda and Burundi were unable to rotate during the quarter due to COVID restrictions.<sup>125</sup> This inability to rotate troops, USAFRICOM said, limited progress toward meeting the goals of the Somalia Transition Plan.<sup>126</sup>

Despite the halt in troop rotations, AMISOM continued its activities during the quarter. For example, a Burundian forces lieutenant general assumed command of AMISOM, relieving a lieutenant general from Ethiopia.<sup>127</sup> In addition, AMISOM worked to reestablish the African Data Sharing Network, which facilitates information sharing across the region.<sup>128</sup>

USAFRICOM also reported that AMISOM forces received aircraft that will further enable AMISOM operations. During the quarter, Uganda delivered two UH-1 "Huey" helicopters, purchased by the U.S. Government, and two Bell-412 helicopters to Ugandan forces in Mogadishu. The four helicopters will be based at Baledogle Military Airfield to provide airlift and reconnaissance capabilities to AMISOM operations.<sup>129</sup> Previously, AMISOM relied on UN support and aviation assets to conduct aerial supply operations.<sup>130</sup>

USAFRICOM reported that in September, the U.S. forces planned to join Danab, Kenyan AMISOM forces, and the Jubaland Security Forces for a combined operation. During the final phases of mission preparation, Kenyan defense officials recalled their forces from the operation, which would have relied on Kenyan construction assets for completion. This inability to support each other, USAFRICOM said, is "a major challenge to success of operations to degrade [al-Shabaab]."<sup>131</sup>

### **U.S. Military Support to Kenya Slows Due to COVID-19**

USAFRICOM reported that U.S. special operations forces did not conduct in-person capacity-building operations with Kenyan forces during the quarter due to COVID-19 risk mitigation and geographic distance between SOCAFRICA elements and their Kenyan partners.<sup>132</sup>

However, USAFRICOM reported that U.S. special operations personnel maintained close contact with the Kenyan Ranger Regiment during the quarter, including visits to two of their training facilities.<sup>133</sup> They also met with Kenyan defense leaders to develop relationships and to support planned counterterrorism-related engagements in the future.<sup>134</sup>

U.S. special operations forces also supported Kenyan forces through the provision of intelligence and other assets, when possible.<sup>135</sup>

## DoS: Security Sector Reforms Improve Performance of the SNA

Security sector reforms implemented with U.S. and international partner assistance over the past year have demonstrably improved the performance of the SNA in combating al-Shabaab, according to the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu.<sup>136</sup> The completion of reforms within the SNA, and the extension of key reforms to police and federal “Darwish” gendarmerie units, will be critical to consolidating and accelerating these gains, the embassy said.<sup>137</sup>

In August, the embassy noted several important security sector achievements over the past year, including:

- **Biometric registration and electronic pay:** The biometric registration of SNA soldiers and their enrollment in electronic mobile money payment systems, as well as the introduction of a competitive tendering process for logistics contracts, have helped to address issues of corruption and accountability. Somali and international monitors are now able to verify the amount and timeliness of soldiers’ pay.<sup>138</sup>
- **Leadership Reforms:** President Mohamed Abdelahi Farmaajo and former Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre appointed a new generation of leaders committed to supporting a reform process. U.S. mentors are working with Ministry of Defense and SNA leaders to develop institutional leadership skills.<sup>139</sup>
- **Lower Shabelle Campaign:** SNA forces, operating in conjunction with AMISOM peacekeepers and the U.S.-trained Danab Advanced Infantry Brigade, secured five key bridge towns in the Lower Shabelle region outside of Mogadishu. This region is home to almost 10 percent of the country’s population and is the source of 45 percent of Somalia’s agricultural production, according to UN and USAID studies.<sup>140</sup>
- **SNA Human Rights Accountability:** Historic clan dynamics have enabled al-Shabaab to position itself as “protector” against the Somali government. Recent clearing operations used better-disciplined, clan-balanced Danab Brigade and “October 14th Brigade” units and locally generated Darwish paramilitaries to hold terrain and establish basic rule of law.<sup>141</sup>

In the coming months, the embassy intends to continue its security sector reform efforts, focusing specifically on:

- **Continued operations against al-Shabaab:** The Danab Brigade, other SNA forces, and regional partner forces will continue operations focused on the al-Shabaab heartland.
- **Advising Key Leaders:** The embassy will continue to engage Ministry of Defense, SNA, and Somali police leadership to encourage implementation of financial and procurement reforms, the development of recruitment and training programs, and the provision of weapons and equipment to trained forces.
- **Security Sector Reform, Phase Three:** As biometric registration (Phase One) and health screening (Phase Two) is completed, the embassy will support Ministry of Defense leadership in developing asset, weapons, and vehicle tracking and financial management reforms (Phase Three) within the SNA and the Somali police. The embassy will also advocate for the implementation of the SNA Pensions and Gratuities Act, critical legislation that establishes a retirement and pensions system for soldiers and their families who are currently enlisted for life.<sup>142</sup>

The embassy noted the country team is using the Somalia Transition Plan review process to encourage Somalia to define a strategic vision for Somali-led security by the end of 2021, and to use that vision to reinvigorate needed security sector reforms.<sup>143</sup>



The President of Somalia, Mohamed Abdelahi Farmaajo. (UN photo)

## DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

### Somali Leaders Announce Revised Election Plans

During the quarter, the Somali government and federal member states reached an agreement on how to proceed with presidential and parliamentary elections.<sup>144</sup> Contrary to previous commitments to hold one-person, one-vote elections, the parties agreed to an indirect, clan-based process.<sup>145</sup> President Farmaajo announced that parliamentary elections will take place in December 2020 followed by the presidential elections in February 2021.<sup>146</sup> The agreement follows negotiations during the quarter that were stalled due to political infighting between the president and the country's regional leaders. Observers say that technical aspects of the elections, such as voter registration and the deteriorating security situation in Somalia, will continue to challenge the Somali government as it prepares for the elections.<sup>147</sup>

According to the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu, electioneering has “soaked up political bandwidth,” and progress on security sector reforms is now likely to slow and even be reversed in the coming year.<sup>148</sup> The embassy noted that the following four areas present risks that will require engagement by the United States and international partners.<sup>149</sup>

First, reform champions within the Ministry of Defense and SNA may be at risk of removal or reassignment as political leaders seek to place allies and remove potential rivals. The embassy has strongly signaled that removing military officers for political reasons is unacceptable, runs counter to the Somali government's goal of developing a professional military, and undermines donor-country confidence.<sup>150</sup>

Second, the Somali government has consistently failed to collaborate with the federal member states on security, a key part of its commitments in the 2017 Security Pact and a critical factor undermining progress on the rewrite of the Somalia Transition Plan.<sup>151</sup>

Third, the Somali government has consistently struggled to fund weapons, vehicles, and communications equipment for existing and newly trained troops and police. As elections approach, any diversion of resources from the security sector will exacerbate already-acute force generation challenges faced by the SNA and Somali National Police.<sup>152</sup>

Finally, of the five troop-contributing countries (Djibouti, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda) that constitute the AMISOM peacekeeping mission, only Uganda has engaged in joint combat operations with SNA troops; those operations were conducted in the Lower Shabelle region.<sup>153</sup>

### Somalia Achieves Debt Relief Milestone

In September, U.S. Ambassador to Somalia Donald Y. Yamamoto and Somali Minister of Finance Abdirahman Beileh met in Mogadishu to sign a bilateral agreement to reduce and restructure the debt that the Somali government owed to the U.S. Government.<sup>154</sup>

The agreement followed Somalia's recent achievement of a critical debt relief milestone. Under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, a country must cross two hurdles to be eligible for debt relief: "Decision Point" and "Completion Point." In March 2020, Somalia reached the Decision Point threshold after a satisfactory track record under IMF and World Bank program oversight and after the Somali government drafted a poverty reduction strategy paper.<sup>155</sup>

As discussed on pages 25-31, Somalia's economy faces multiple crises, including the coronavirus pandemic, floods, and locusts.<sup>156</sup> At the end of 2019, Somalia's international debt was approximately \$5.2 billion, 58 percent of which was held by members of the Paris Club, a group of the world's largest creditors, including the United States, Somalia's largest creditor. More than \$1 billion of Somalia's total outward debt is owed to the DoD (68 percent), the Department of Agriculture (30 percent), and USAID (2 percent).<sup>157</sup>

To reach the Completion Point milestone, Somalia must take several additional steps, including implementing agreed reforms, such as publishing audited financial accounts and enacting an extractives industry income tax law. The Somali government must also continue its satisfactory track record under IMF and World Bank programs, formally adopt its draft poverty reduction strategy, and successfully implement that strategy for one year.<sup>158</sup>

The U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu noted that by the time Somalia reaches the Completion Point, the U.S. Government will have forgiven the \$1 billion of debt it is owed by the Somali government. This, combined with debt forgiveness from Paris Club members and others, will reduce Somalia's total external debt from \$5.2 billion to \$557 million, or 9 percent of GDP.<sup>159</sup> Ambassador Yamamoto commended the Somali government on its progress toward economic reform, noting that "working through the debt relief process will allow Somalia to







**U.S. Ambassador to Somalia Donald Yamamoto and Somali Minister of Finance Abdirahman Beileh, joined by Prime Minister Mohamed Roble, signed a bilateral agreement to reduce and restructure debt owed by the Somali government to three U.S. Government agencies. (U.S. Embassy Mogadishu photo)**

regain access to financial support from international financial institutions so that it can invest in poverty reduction and economic growth.”<sup>160</sup>

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

### USAID Somalia Develops New 5-Year Strategy

During the quarter, the USAID Mission in Somalia neared completion of the process to develop its Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). The CDCS is a USAID strategy document to define the key areas for investment, and expected goals and results, over the next 5 years. The CDCS will focus on addressing the drivers of violent extremism and improving the ability of Somalis to adapt to recurrent shocks. USAID expects to complete the CDCS by December 2020.<sup>161</sup>

The process of developing the CDCS began following the establishment of a USAID Mission in Somalia in 2019. The CDCS will replace a strategic framework that has been in place since 2016.<sup>162</sup> The strategic framework outlined USAID objectives to support systems and processes that enable inclusive governance, service delivery, and inclusive economic growth.<sup>163</sup> A CDCS is the strategic document that USAID typically uses in countries where it maintains a bilateral mission and has a development process codified in USAID policies.<sup>164</sup>

The USAID Somalia Mission considered current budgets, lessons learned, monitoring and evaluation data, and interagency strategies while developing the CDCS.<sup>165</sup> USAID organized working groups to select geographic areas of focus, determine the concentration on marginalized populations, and develop the results framework.<sup>166</sup> A representative from the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) participated in the working groups to share experience from OTI’s recently closed program in Somalia and provide insight related to a CDCS development objective related to countering violent extremism.<sup>167</sup>

Through the CDCS process, USAID also engaged local partners and government ministries to incorporate their perspectives.<sup>168</sup> USAID reported that its working-level relationships across the Somali government were not significantly affected by the recent replacement of Somalia’s prime minister, noting that it has worked with the Somali government through many political transitions.<sup>169</sup>

### USAID Continues COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies, as Reported Cases Remain Low

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the number of reported COVID-19 cases and deaths in Somalia remained low compared to other countries, with 3,588 confirmed cases and 99 deaths as of September 30.<sup>170</sup> However, USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs (BHA) reported that underreporting and a lack of testing mean that WHO and the Somali government have not established a complete understanding of epidemiological trends in Somalia. Instead of actively identifying and testing suspected



cases, the Somali government focused on testing those admitted to hospitals. BHA expressed concern that the Somali government may be reducing surveillance and contact tracing with the decline in the number of new confirmed cases.<sup>171</sup>

BHA reported that the Somali government's COVID-19 restrictions eased somewhat during the quarter but continue to affect BHA programs. The Somali government allowed domestic and international flights to resume, but travelers must obtain COVID-19 test certificates, which BHA reported is time- and resource-intensive. BHA implementers resumed travel, while working within these travel requirements. However, the border between Somalia and Kenya remains closed, requiring humanitarian organizations to airlift supplies from Mogadishu to locations near the border.<sup>172</sup>

In addition, BHA implementers resumed training sessions—temporarily suspended due to the pandemic—for water use committees and community animal health workers. To adapt to COVID-19 restrictions and mitigate transmission risk, BHA staggered training sessions and reduced the number of participants. BHA also revised training materials to include information on COVID-19 prevention methods. Some implementers have been able to resume delayed assessments and beneficiary registrations. BHA said that it intends to integrate COVID-19 considerations into its humanitarian response framework and technical guidelines and that it expects most COVID-19 program adaptations to remain in effect over an extended period.<sup>173</sup>



**Somali youth create masks to fight the spread of COVID-19. (U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu photo)**

Despite the pandemic, BHA implementers reported that they achieved up to 80 percent of FY 2020 program goals. A few implementers have requested 3-month, no-cost extensions to complete planned activities. More significant program disruption, according to BHA, was mitigated by in-country, local staff, who directly or remotely monitor activities and ensure program continuity.<sup>174</sup>

## **USAID Enhances Abuse Prevention Programs During the Pandemic**

BHA reported that, even prior to the pandemic, Somalia was known for widespread harm, exploitation, and abuse, especially of women and girls. Such abuse known in the humanitarian community as “protection violations.”<sup>175</sup> The United Nations reported that al-Shabaab uses sexual violence as a social control strategy in areas under its influence, with women and girls being abducted and forced to marry al-Shabaab fighters. The United Nations also verified cases of SNA personnel perpetrating conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>176</sup>

As in other countries, COVID-19 restrictions—such as school closure and movement restrictions—negatively impacted women and girls, according to BHA. For instance, an assessment conducted by a BHA implementer of more than 2,000 adults and children in Somalia found that 43 percent of respondents were worried that the COVID-19 outbreak may lead to an increase in intimate partner violence, and 17 percent of respondents knew at least one girl who had undergone female genital mutilation since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>177</sup> According to the assessment, approximately 20 percent of families sent children to work to generate income lost due to the pandemic.<sup>178</sup>

The Global Protection Cluster—a network of NGOs, international organizations, and UN organizations led by UN High Commissioner for Refugees—reported a significant increase sexual assaults in the past 6 months. Community representatives responded that a sexual assault had occurred in 7 percent of settlements or villages in March, which increased to 23 percent by August.<sup>179</sup> Sixty-eight percent of service providers responded that COVID-19 had resulted in an increase of gender-based violence, according to an assessment from the UN Population Fund.<sup>180</sup>

## **HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE**

BHA programs to prevent and mitigate harm, exploitation, and abuse continued during the quarter. BHA funded mental health and psychosocial support and responded to the needs of children and marginalized groups and launched additional programming. At the outset of the pandemic, BHA provided an additional approximately \$1.6 million for protection programming to support first responders and social workers, facility management, and service provision.<sup>181</sup>

Specifically, BHA programs sought to build capacity of targeted communities to identify and respond to child protection needs and risks. This included training child protection case workers and for first responders to be trained on psychological first aid to deliver information in a sensitive way and to handle gender-based violence disclosures. BHA also funded protection-related services, such as mental health and psychosocial services for

children and families, gender-based violence prevention awareness, and alternative care arrangements for children impacted by COVID-19.<sup>182</sup>

BHA reported that it funded vocational training centers for gender-based violence survivors and children. BHA supported safe houses and other community-based organizations' efforts to manufacture COVID-19 mitigation supplies—such as face coverings, hand sanitizer, and soap.<sup>183</sup>

BHA's COVID-19 response programs also included protection measures. BHA-funded COVID-19 infection prevention and control actions at health facilities ensured accessibility for survivors to access life-saving clinical management of rape, referrals for more specialized care, and other health facility-based protection services. BHA provided cash assistance to beneficiaries to supplement lost livelihoods, which BHA said possibly prevented harmful practices, such as survival sex and children being disenrolled from school to earn money.<sup>184</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

USAID's parliamentary support program, Damal, is a 21-month, \$2.5 million program to strengthen the Somali Federal Parliament's oversight capabilities, including engagement with other federal and regional representatives, civil society, and the media.<sup>185</sup> In consultation with representatives of the women's caucus in the Somali parliament, Damal identified civil society organizations to participate in public meetings on drivers for the increase in gender-based violence.<sup>186</sup> Additionally, Damal monitored the potential reintroduction of the Sexual Offense Bill in parliament and intends to support public consultations and hearings, if scheduled.<sup>187</sup>

**USAID implementers train young farmers in Mogadishu to operate and manage greenhouses. (U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu photo)**



**According to USAID, AgroBank and IBS Bank loaned \$1.1 million to more than 200 small businesses and farmers, helping businesses survive the pandemic and creating 1,154 new jobs.**

## **USAID Facilitates \$1.1 Million in Loans for Small Businesses and Farmers**

According to the World Bank, COVID-19 has been detrimental to the Somali economy, as reduced remittances, jobs, and livestock exports have lowered consumption. The World Bank estimated that, due to the pandemic, annual growth in Somalia will have decreased from 3.2 percent growth to between negative 2.5 to 3.0 percent growth. The World Bank assesses that the large economic shock will cause people to lose formal sector jobs and turn to the informal economy for income.<sup>188</sup>

USAID's 6-year, \$74 million Growth, Enterprise, Employment, and Livelihoods program seeks to promote inclusive growth in Somalia. USAID said that the program seeks to accelerate Somalia's integration into the global economy by improving Somalia's competitiveness in export markets, reducing reliance on imports, facilitating market connections, and spurring new investments. In particular, in regions recovering from conflict and natural disasters, the program seeks to increase the quantity and quality of fish, agriculture, and dairy products for the domestic and international markets.<sup>189</sup>

USAID reported that the program responded to the economic impacts of the pandemic by expanding access to financing for Somali businesses. The program helped businesses submit loan applications, built the capacity of banks to review applications, and incentivized banks to offer reduced loan rates. For every dollar USAID invested in technical assistance and rate subsidies, \$10 was provided in loans. According to USAID, AgroBank and IBS Bank loaned \$1.1 million to more than 200 small businesses and farmers, helping businesses survive the pandemic and creating 1,154 new jobs.<sup>190</sup>

## **USAID Provides More than \$20 Million for Desert Locust Response**

In a September report, the USAID-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network and the UN's Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit reported that they expect the desert locust infestation in Somalia to present a serious risk to pastureland and crops through late 2020. The report said that the cereal harvest in northwest Somalia in November is expected to be 45 percent below the 2010-2019 average, primarily due to the desert locusts and erratic rain. The desert locust infestation—combined with past and ongoing shocks, such as flooding and COVID-19 socioeconomic impacts—have resulted in up to 2.1 million people facing food shortages, coping through strategies such as the depletion of livelihood assets, or worse food insecurity through December if they do not receive humanitarian assistance.<sup>191</sup>

USAID reported that BHA has provided more than \$20 million in FY 2020 for the East Africa desert locust response. In northern Somalia, aerial and ground teams conducted control activities against immature swarms.<sup>192</sup> BHA and its implementers also continue to track and monitor the desert locust situation and develop strategies to forecast movements, mitigate impacts, and eradicate pests.<sup>193</sup>



A U.S. Air Force C-130 at Air Base 201 in Agadez, Niger. (USAFRICOM photo)

## NORTH AFRICA

Under the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation, USAFRICOM seeks to degrade ISIS-Libya and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in North Africa. The U.S. Government has met its objective to degrade ISIS-Libya and AQIM in North Africa to the point where they are unlikely to conduct external operations against U.S. interests.<sup>1</sup>

While the VEO threat in North Africa is currently degraded, the ongoing civil conflict between the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) and the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army (LNA) has created conditions that could foster VEO growth in the future, including economic instability, ungoverned spaces, and a humanitarian crisis with regional implications. Libya has also become an arena for global power competition, with Russia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and other nations sending military personnel, mercenary fighters, financial support, and equipment to groups on both sides of the conflict.<sup>2</sup>

### The VEO Threat in North Africa

The DIA assessed that the current threat from both AQIM and ISIS in North Africa may be at its lowest point in a decade, following the June 2020 killing of AQIM emir Abdelmalek Droukdal by French special forces and the September 2020 death of ISIS-Libya leader Abu Muadh al-Iraqi during an LNA operation. The threat posed by ISIS-Libya has continued to decline due to U.S. and local counterterrorism operations; it likely will struggle to reconstitute its network if counterterrorism pressure continues.<sup>3</sup> AQIM is likely still able

**The DIA identified several drivers of conflict that could lead to increased instability in North Africa, including widespread unrest, political upheaval, civil conflict, environmental pressures leading to land competition, and migrant flows.**

to tap into facilitation networks in North Africa to support Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in the Sahel, where attacks have steadily risen since 2017. ISIS-inspired attacks still remain a threat in North Africa, the DIA said, pointing to occasional attacks in urban areas of Tunisia and a late 2018 attack against Scandinavian tourists in Morocco.<sup>4</sup>

The DIA identified several drivers of conflict that could lead to increased instability in North Africa, including widespread unrest, political upheaval, civil conflict, environmental pressures leading to land competition, and migrant flows. These conditions could provide VEOs the opportunity to bolster recruitment, spread their message, and increase freedom of movement, which could result in increased levels of attacks. However, the DIA noted that ISIS-Libya has struggled to capitalize on the recent and ongoing civil war in Libya because security pressure has disrupted its leadership cadre and kept the group from reconstituting. Similarly, according to the DIA, AQIM has been unable to tap into widespread unrest and political protests in Algeria, probably because the group's propaganda and messaging do not resonate well with the majority of protestors.<sup>5</sup>

To counter the VEO threat in North Africa, USAFRICOM retains the ability to conduct airstrikes in Libya and provides equipment, intelligence, logistical assistance, and security training to security forces in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. During the quarter, U.S. counterterrorism activities in North Africa were limited to monitoring VEOs for indications of resurgence and providing support to partner forces in the region.<sup>6</sup> USAFRICOM withdrew ground forces from Libya in 2019 due to the instability caused by the civil conflict.<sup>7</sup> The DoS conducts its diplomatic efforts from the Libya External Office (also referred to as the U.S. Embassy in Libya) which is co-located with the U.S. Embassy in Tunis.<sup>8</sup>

## STATUS OF THE CONFLICT

### VEOs Degraded, but “Potential Threat” Remains

Neither ISIS-Libya nor AQIM conducted attacks against civilian targets during the quarter, continuing a trend of diminished activity over recent quarters.<sup>9</sup> However, ISIS-Libya clashed with local security forces during the reporting period.<sup>10</sup> USAFRICOM said that it observed no changes during the quarter in the potential threat that the two groups pose to the U.S. homeland. However, USAFRICOM said that VEOs in North and West Africa “could pose a potential threat to the U.S. homeland during the next 3 years if left unchecked.”<sup>11</sup>

### ISIS-LIBYA

ISIS-Libya, which currently has fewer than 100 fighters, operates primarily in southwestern Libya.<sup>12</sup> USAFRICOM assessed that ISIS-Libya has not recovered from U.S. airstrikes in September 2019 that killed several of its leaders and “significantly degraded” ISIS-Libya's sustainability and influence in the region.<sup>13</sup> USAFRICOM assessed that ISIS-Libya does not currently pose a threat to the U.S. homeland and it poses a “minimal” threat to U.S. interests in Libya.<sup>14</sup>

The DoS reported that during the quarter, the GNA and its aligned militias conducted operations against ISIS-Libya. On July 5, the Misratan Joint Operations Room captured

Omar Dabbous, an alleged ISIS fighter, after receiving a warrant for his arrest from the public prosecutor in Tripoli. On July 6, the GNA announced the Zawiya Criminal Investigations Department had captured members of a Zawiya-based cell.<sup>15</sup> On July 9, GNA Minister of Interior Fathi Bashagha announced a suspected ISIS fighter had been arrested in Zawiya in early July, in addition to another group of ISIS fighters in Abu Grein in late June. Both cells were allegedly planning attacks.<sup>16</sup>

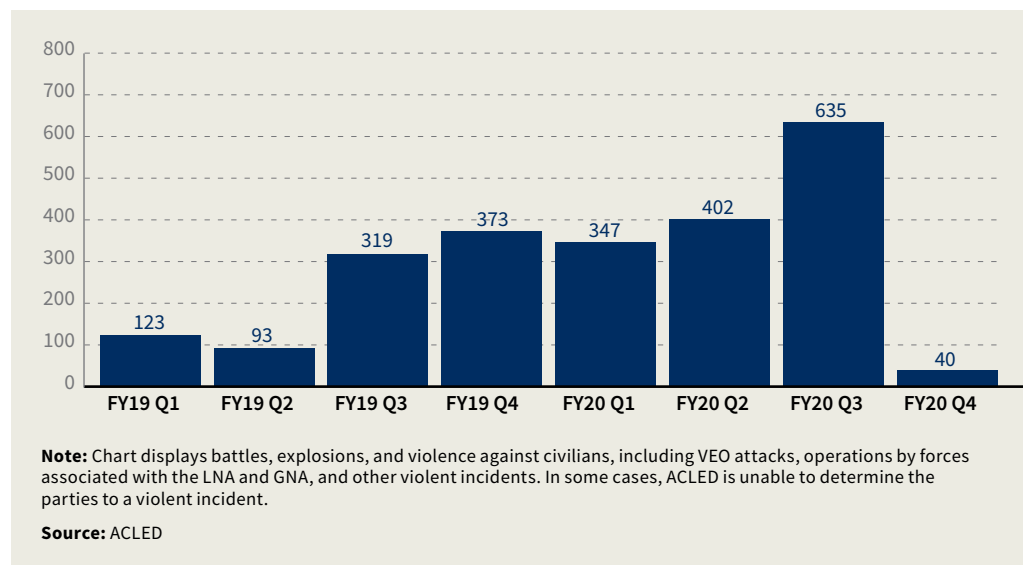
In addition, LNA and LNA-aligned forces took action against ISIS-Libya during the quarter, according to the DoS. On September 14, the LNA-aligned 116th Battalion conducted an operation in the southern Libyan city of Sebha that eliminated the emir of ISIS-Libya, Abu Muadh al-Iraqi, and eight other ISIS militants from Libya, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Niger, and Cote d'Ivoire. Two women were also arrested in the raid, both of whom were married to ISIS fighters.<sup>17</sup>

On September 21, the LNA announced the 128th Brigade and 116th Battalion arrested an ISIS member in the town of Ghadduwah who was connected to the cell in Sebha that was disrupted earlier that month. On August 16, the LNA's Khalid bin Waleed Brigade killed three ISIS fighters in Ghadduwah following a military operation in Murzuq that had arrested a number of ISIS-linked fighters on August 12.<sup>18</sup>

The DIA assessed that ISIS-Libya likely relies on facilitation networks in order to recruit and bring in foreign fighters to join the group in Libya, though there is no known connection between foreign fighters associated with ISIS-Libya and foreign fighters engaged in the civil conflict in Libya. If anything, the DIA said, ISIS facilitation activities are probably impeded by movement constraints due to the civil conflict and to COVID-19.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 2.

**Violent Events in Libya, October 2018–September 2020**





**In late August, with the de facto truce from June still in place, the GNA and the eastern-based House of Representatives, which supports the LNA, released separate but nearly simultaneous statements announcing a ceasefire.**

## AQIM

USAFRICOM assessed that AQIM has even less capability than ISIS-Libya to conduct attacks against the U.S. homeland or U.S. interests in Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia.<sup>20</sup>

USAFRICOM said that AQIM likely has fewer than 500 fighters.<sup>21</sup> These fighters are concentrated in southwestern Libya, western Tunisia, and eastern Algeria, but do not control any territory.<sup>22</sup>

## Rivals in Libyan Civil Conflict Reach a Tenuous Ceasefire

After a year of escalating violence related to the civil war between the GNA and LNA, armed conflict in Libya subsided considerably during the quarter.<sup>23</sup> The near cessation of violence followed the GNA's defeat of the LNA in Tripoli in June and an Egyptian-brokered call for a ceasefire. While neither side officially agreed to the ceasefire, violence decreased shortly thereafter.<sup>24</sup> (See Figure 2.)

In late August, with the de facto truce from June still in place, the GNA and the eastern-based House of Representatives, which supports the LNA, released separate but nearly simultaneous statements announcing a ceasefire.<sup>25</sup> While it did not reject the rival proposal, the GNA said it would not discuss peace with LNA leader Khalifa Haftar, who in turn dismissed the GNA ceasefire as a “marketing” stunt.<sup>26</sup> Despite the rhetoric, neither side resumed fighting through the end of the quarter.<sup>27</sup>

Following the August ceasefire announcements, the LNA partially lifted its 8-month shutdown of oil exports.<sup>28</sup> The DoS said the energy sector in Libya had fully reopened after the end of the quarter.<sup>29</sup>


















The international community—including the United States—welcomed the simultaneous ceasefires.<sup>30</sup> After the quarter ended, the military representatives of the GNA and House of Representatives signed a UN-brokered formal “permanent” ceasefire, with future discussions scheduled in November aimed at a broader peace agreement.<sup>31</sup> The UN launched the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum that aimed to form a new executive authority and chart the path toward elections.<sup>32</sup>

Libya has experienced several short-lived ceasefires over the course of the conflict, but the current, extended pause in the fighting has created space for political negotiations and hope that the conflict has entered a new phase that will result in a resolution of the conflict.<sup>33</sup> (See pages 40-41.)

The situation in Libya remains tenuous. The GNA accused the LNA of violating the ceasefire multiple times during the quarter.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the continued presence of armed militias and foreign actors complicates efforts to disarm and demilitarize the conflict.<sup>35</sup> (See pages 38-39.) During a high-level virtual meeting convened on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that despite the ceasefires, competing agendas among foreign states and their methods to attain access, influence, and economic gain through military interference calls into question “the basic commitment to peace of all involved.”<sup>36</sup>

Figure 3.

Nations Supporting the GNA and LNA

	 Diplomatic	 Military	 Economic	 Intelligence/ Counterterrorism	 Social Media Disinformation
<b>Supporting the Government of National Accord (GNA)</b>					
 Turkey	●	●	●	●	●
 Qatar	●	●			
 Italy	●			●	
 Germany	●				
<b>Supporting the Libyan National Army (LNA)</b>					
 Russia	●	●	●	●	●
 Egypt	●	●	●		
 United Arab Emirates	●	●	●		
 France	●	●		●	
 Chad		●			
 Jordan		●			
 Sudan		●			
 Saudi Arabia			●		

Sources: USAFRICOM J22, response to DoD OIG request for information, 20.4 NWA 11A and 11B, 9/28/2020; Lead IG analysis derived from open sources.

Foreign Forces Remain in Libya

The U.S. Government has expressed concern about the movement of foreign fighters to Libya to fight in the conflict.<sup>37</sup> USAFRICOM estimated that, as of the end of the quarter, there were at least 10,000 foreign mercenaries and proxy forces deployed in Libya to bolster both GNA- and LNA-aligned defenses and secure their respective territories during the ceasefire.<sup>38</sup>

Several nations provide military, financial, and other support to the GNA and LNA. (See Figure 3.) USAFRICOM said that it “does not see value” in U.S. military assistance to either party in the conflict until a ceasefire is established and the two sides negotiate plans for demobilization and a political framework.<sup>39</sup>

Of particular concern are the increasing number of paramilitary forces in Libya from Russian private military companies, including the Wagner Group, which the DoS described as a surrogate for the Russian Ministry of Defense.<sup>40</sup> USAFRICOM said that the Wagner Group’s priorities in Libya were the defense of Sirte, al-Jufra air base, and the defensive line between the two locations.<sup>41</sup>

**USAFRICOM estimated that there were approximately 2,000 Russian-backed Syrian fighters in Libya, also reflecting no change from last quarter.**

USAFRICOM estimated that there were approximately 2,000 Wagner Group personnel in Libya during the quarter, reflecting no change from last quarter.<sup>42</sup> USAFRICOM estimated that there were approximately 2,000 Russian-backed Syrian fighters in Libya, also reflecting no change from last quarter.<sup>43</sup>

The DIA said that reporting on who is financing the Wagner Group’s continued presence in Libya is “ambiguous.”<sup>44</sup> The DIA assessed that the United Arab Emirates may provide some financing for the group’s operations.<sup>45</sup>

Over the last few quarters, Turkish-backed Syrian fighters arrived in Libya to support the GNA. USAFRICOM estimated that there were approximately 5,000 Turkish-backed Syrian fighters in Libya, reflecting no change since last quarter.<sup>46</sup>

Turkish forces in Libya provided weapons and training to GNA-aligned militias. Turkish-backed GNA forces captured Watiyah air base near Tripoli in May, a military facility previously under LNA control, and cleared IEDs in Libya’s capital. Turkey has hundreds of regular military personnel deployed to Libya in order to train GNA-aligned militias and to operate Turkish military equipment, according to USAFRICOM and the DoS.<sup>47</sup>

The DoS reported that armed forces from a number of African nations are also fighting in Libya in support of both sides of the conflict, with most fighters backing the LNA.<sup>48</sup> According to a media report, an estimated 3,000 fighters from Sudan were deployed to support pro-LNA forces during the quarter.<sup>49</sup> A UN panel of experts reported in June that Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries were fighting on both sides of the Libyan civil conflict.<sup>50</sup> Supporters of both sides if the conflict have violated the UN arms embargo, the DoS reported.<sup>51</sup>

## **No Evidence that VEOs Benefit from the Civil Conflict**

USAFRICOM’s intelligence director, Rear Admiral Berg, told reporters in September that the command is “concerned about terrorists infiltrating” mercenary groups in Libya.<sup>52</sup> Rear Admiral Berg said that Libya’s neighboring countries are also concerned about the potential destabilizing effect of thousands of Syrians operating in Libya.<sup>53</sup> USAFRICOM continues to monitor foreign fighters, she said, but the command had “not seen definitive evidence of great numbers or an extensive presence of terrorists” among the foreign fighters in Libya.<sup>54</sup>

The LNA regularly claims that GNA fighters—particularly Turkish-backed Syrian fighters—are members of VEOs.<sup>55</sup> USAFRICOM assessed that, while extremists with prior links to historic Libya-based VEOs probably were involved in fighting around Tripoli last quarter, they likely fought for monetary and personal reasons rather than for ideological objectives.<sup>56</sup>

## **Russia Continues to Transfer Equipment to Libya**

Through a series of press releases over the last two quarters, USAFRICOM has provided overhead imagery that shows, in the command’s assessment, that Russia supplied Wagner Group forces operating in Libya with equipment such as armored vehicles, air defense systems, fighter aircraft, and other materiel.<sup>57</sup> In May, USAFRICOM published photographs of what it said were at least 14 Russian fighter jets in Libya supporting the LNA.<sup>58</sup> In July, USAFRICOM published photos of what it said were IEDs that the Wagner Group placed in and around Tripoli.<sup>59</sup>

# Militias Foster Instability in Libya

The Libyan National Army (LNA), which is battling the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) for control of the country, is made up of several militias of varying size and capability. LNA-aligned militias receive support from the Wagner Group, as well as airstrike and logistics support from the United Arab Emirates, according to the DIA. The GNA also relies on militias to provide security and project power in and around Tripoli and other strongholds. Turkey has sent materiel and personnel to support GNA militias, including engineers and technicians who operate air defense systems and unmanned military aircraft. In July, several GNA militias joined together under the Joint Force, an umbrella group funded by the Libyan Ministry of Interior.

Libya’s militias have not always remained unified under the GNA or LNA. The militias emerged from an environment of desperate economic circumstances and fragmented politics. The groups are often motivated by financial gain and, as a result, often compete against one another for monetary incentives

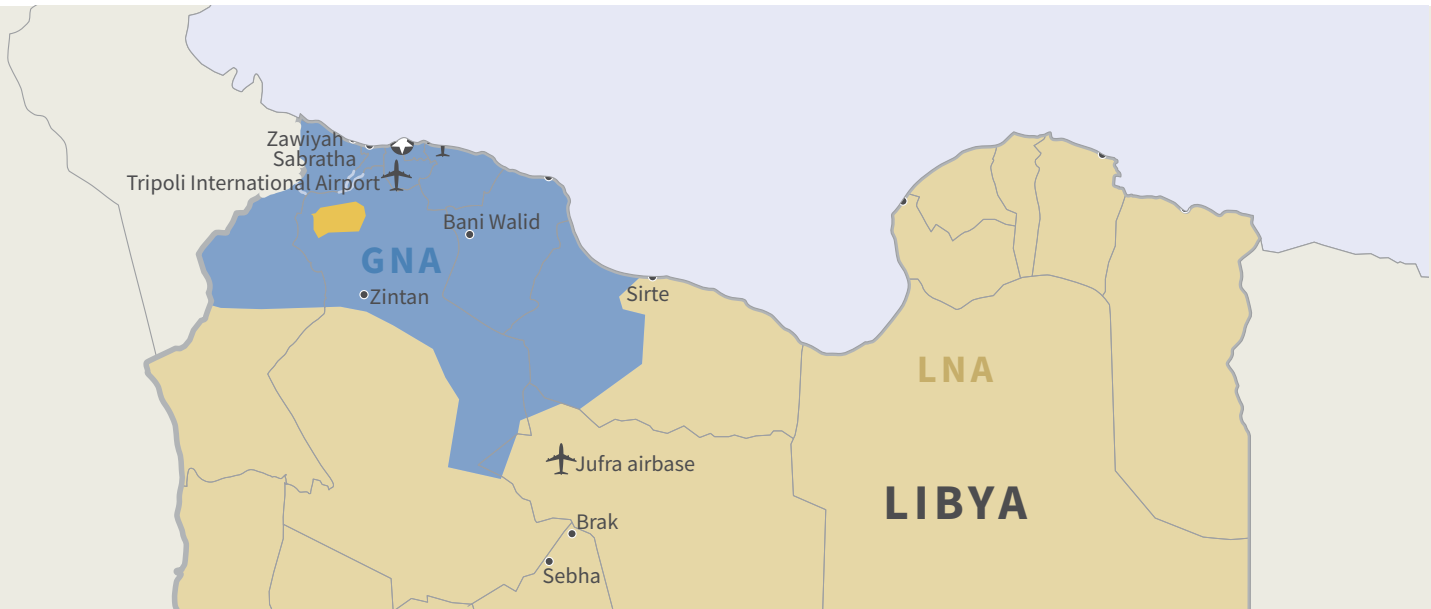
from their backers. The fragmented nature of the militias generates additional violence and risk to civilians. GNA and LNA leaders who are negotiating a peace deal do not have regular communication with or full command of their militias’ fighters. And even when a political deal is achieved, a nascent political leadership with little control over fighters and their weapons could create conditions for VEO regrowth in Libya.

Following the GNA defeat of LNA forces at Tripoli in June 2020, the DoS said there was “an imperative to address militias” on both sides of the conflict, noting that militias, armed groups, and foreign fighters pose a danger to civilians. USAFRICOM, which coordinated with the GNA to conduct airstrikes against ISIS-Libya in September 2019, said that it does not see value in military assistance to any party in Libya other than counterterrorism efforts until the GNA and LNA negotiate plans for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of their respective militias as part of a Libya-led political solution.

## MILITIAS SUPPORTING THE GNA

Name	Capabilities	Impact on the Conflict
<b>Zintan</b> 4,500 fighters	Experienced fighters; new equipment; fighters are split between the GNA and LNA.	<b>Significant</b> Leads Joint Protection Force in southern Tripoli, which incorporates Chadian mercenaries to conduct operations with local militias; instrumental in recapturing Gharyan and Tripoli International Airport.
<b>Misratah 301st Battalion</b> 1,500 fighters	Large fighter base that includes, coordinates, and supervises Turkish fighters; supported by Turkish officers.	<b>Significant</b> Conducted joint operations to retake southern Tripoli; secured Tripoli International Airport; served in a coordinating role.
<b>Special Deterrence Force</b> 1,500 fighters	Elite force with crime fighting, intelligence, and surveillance capabilities; new equipment.	<b>Significant</b> Holds the only functioning airport (Mitiga) in Tripoli; serves as GNA counterterrorism and investigations unit.
<b>Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade</b> 1,300 fighters	Experienced fighters with demonstrated operational capability; new equipment; access to illicit finance network.	<b>Significant</b> Fighters hold key terrain; has conducted joint operations with local armed groups in Tripoli.
<b>Abu Salim</b> 800 fighters	Experienced fighters with strong religious ties to community; new equipment.	<b>Significant</b> Controls a Tripoli suburb and directly repelled LNA forces.
<b>Nawasi Brigade</b> 700 fighters	Experienced fighters with strong community ties; special operations capabilities; access to new equipment, including heavy weapons.	<b>Moderate</b> Able to secure naval port and other military sites; acts as an intelligence agency.
<b>Misratah Bunyon al-Marsus</b> 6,000 fighters	Fighters provide general security services and joint operations.	<b>Minimal</b> Able to mobilize fighters but has a divisive anti-Haftar stance that prevents collaboration with other militias.
<b>Nasr Brigade</b> 1,200 fighters	Contributes individual fighters to support militias.	<b>Minimal</b> Controls oil infrastructure in Zawiyah; supplements other militias around Tripoli International Airport.
<b>Misratah al-Samud</b> 50-100 fighters	Access to heavy weapons, tanks, older arsenals; receiving Turkish materiel support.	<b>Minimal</b> Augmented militias to defend Tripoli.

Sources: USAFRICOM J22, response to DoD OIG request for information, 20.4 NWA 10A, 9/28/2020; DIA, response to DoD OIG request for information, 20.4 NWA 10B, 9/29/2020; DoS, press release, “U.S.-GNA Discussions on Militia Demobilization,” 6/26/2020.



**MILITIAS SUPPORTING THE LNA**

Name	Capabilities	Impact on the Conflict
<b>106th Brigade</b> 5,000 fighters	Large force but experienced significant casualties during Tripoli campaign due to inexperienced fighters; small arms, artillery, armor, air defense systems.	<b>Significant</b> Core LNA unit; one of the best units in the LNA. Members have been accused of criminal activity; led by Khalid Haftar, son of LNA leader Khalifa Haftar.
<b>Tareq ben Ziyed</b> 600 fighters	Battle tested fighters; small arms, armor, and artillery.	<b>Significant</b> Core LNA unit; fought in Derna and Tripoli; led by Saddam Haftar, son of LNA leader Khalifa Haftar.
<b>73rd Brigade</b> Size unknown	Small arms, armor, and artillery.	<b>Significant</b> Core LNA unit; fought in Tripoli.
<b>Saeqa</b> Size unknown	Small arms.	<b>Moderate</b> Core LNA unit; sent some fighters to fight in Tripoli.
<b>9th (Kani) Brigade</b> 4,000 fighters	Small arms, light artillery, and rockets.	<b>Significant</b> Allowed LNA forces to pass through Tarhuna, a logistics staging area, en route to Tripoli.
<b>604th Battalion</b> Size unknown	Small arms.	<b>Significant</b> Initially supportive of the GNA but flipped to support the LNA in January 2020; allowed LNA forces to seize Sirte, a main anchor of the LNA's defensive line.
<b>12th Brigade</b>	Small arms.	<b>Moderate</b> Provides security at southern oil fields; part of the force that shut down production at al-Sharara in June.
<b>128th Battalion</b> Size unknown	Small arms.	<b>Moderate</b> Joined LNA expecting a quick victory; provides security at southern oil fields; part of the force that shut down production at al-Sharara in June.
<b>Tawhid Battalion</b> Size unknown	Small arms.	<b>Moderate</b> Participated in the Tripoli campaign.
<b>Al-Wadi Brigade</b> Size unknown	Small arms.	<b>Moderate</b> Participated in the Tripoli campaign.
<b>Sabul al-Salam Battalion</b> Size unknown	Small arms.	<b>Minimal</b> Nominally aligned with the LNA, but ethnically distinct from core LNA units; deployed from al-Kufra to Sabratha in summer 2019.

Rear Admiral Berg said in September that it is likely that Wagner Group personnel are piloting the fighter aircraft.<sup>60</sup>

A particular concern for USAFRICOM are the Pantsir-S1 Air Defense Systems that Russia has brought into Libya. These systems were used to shoot down Italian and U.S. drones in 2019. Rear Admiral Berg said that USAFRICOM is concerned that Russian-backed operatives are either unwilling or unable to positively identify aircraft and de-conflict airspace before engaging targets in the air.<sup>61</sup>

Rear Admiral Berg stated that USAFRICOM assessed there were no Russian S-300 or S-400 surface-to-air missile defense systems currently on the ground in Libya.<sup>62</sup> Questions about the advanced anti-aircraft systems surfaced after images of possible S-300 or S-400 systems in Libya were published by a risk consulting firm.<sup>63</sup> The S-300 and S-400 are surface-to-air missile systems that are more advanced than the Pantsir-S1s that brought down the U.S. and Italian drones. The systems could potentially neutralize Turkish drones, which have had a major impact on the conflict, if pro-GNA forces advance on Sirte and al-Jufra.<sup>64</sup>

USAFRICOM has also observed Russian IL-76 aircraft activity that is consistent with the transport of equipment, logistical support, fuel, and ammunition to the Libya conflict zone.<sup>65</sup>

## DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

### DoS Supports UN-Led Ceasefire and Peace Talks

During the quarter, the DoS participated in ongoing, UN-led efforts to achieve a political resolution to the Libyan civil conflict. On August 10, U.S. Ambassador to Libya Richard B. Norland traveled to Cairo to consult with senior Egyptian officials about steps to achieve a lasting ceasefire, realize a full withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries, and support UN-facilitated political dialogue. The ambassador stated that he welcomed the momentum generated by Egypt's efforts to resolve the conflict, including the call for a ceasefire in June, and underscored U.S. support for all responsible Libyan leaders who are seeking a peaceful resolution to the conflict that restores Libya's sovereignty, promotes economic reforms, and prevents further foreign escalation.<sup>66</sup>

On August 27, the DoS and the U.S. Embassy in Libya hosted a virtual Berlin Process meeting on Libya co-chaired by the United Nations. The United States welcomed statements from Libyan Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj and Libyan House of Representatives Speaker Agila Saleh supporting a ceasefire and the resumption of oil production to alleviate the pressing needs of Libyans. U.S. representatives voiced their

Libyan Prime Minister  
Fayeze al-Sarraj.  
(DoD photo)





**U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Kelly Craft (UN photo)**

support for Libyan efforts to build on this momentum toward a peaceful political solution that preserves Libyan sovereignty under the UN-led process.<sup>67</sup>

On August 30 and 31, Ambassador Norland spoke with Libyan political figures and officials to assess progress regarding a ceasefire and resumption of oil production in Libya. According to the U.S. Embassy in Libya, Norland told Prime Minister al-Sarraj that his statement, along with that of House Speaker Saleh, represented very positive developments and agreed with the Prime Minister on the need for the UN-hosted “5+5” participants—5 military officers representing the GNA and 5 officers appointed by the LNA—to focus immediately on the modalities of a ceasefire and how to establish an effective demilitarized solution in central Libya that begins the process of de-escalation and departure of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya.<sup>68</sup>

On September 2, the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Kelly Craft, briefed the UN Security Council on the situation in Libya and described Libya as being at a critical juncture. The ambassador stated the United States welcomed the declaration calling for a ceasefire, demilitarization, resumption of oil sector operations, and a return to UN-facilitated political talks.<sup>69</sup>

On September 9, General Townsend and Ambassador Norland spoke via video conference with newly appointed Libyan Minister of Defense Salah Eddine al-Namrush to reiterate their support for continued intra-Libya dialogue under the UN-led process. General Townsend and Ambassador Norland also conveyed U.S. support for Libya’s counterterrorism and security sector reform efforts, and together called for a lasting ceasefire, de-escalation of fighting in central Libya, and the departure of all foreign military and mercenary forces from Libya.<sup>70</sup>



## DoS Presses External Actors to Support Berlin Conference Commitments

The DoS noted this quarter that the U.S. Government remains opposed to all foreign military interference in Libya, supports UN-led negotiations toward a sustainable ceasefire, and backs an immediate return to a UN-facilitated political process.<sup>71</sup> The DoS continued to press external actors to abide by the commitments they made at the Berlin Conference in January, including sustaining and monitoring a ceasefire, supporting the UN-sanctioned arms embargo, and a return to a Libyan-led political process under the auspices of the United Nations.<sup>72</sup> The DoS noted there is a growing consensus among sovereignty-conscious Libyan actors that the departure of all foreign forces is essential to Libya's stability.<sup>73</sup>

The DoS stated that, during the quarter, it saw Egypt take a more constructive approach and was encouraged by this positive development. The DoS further noted that Turkey had refrained from military escalation this quarter and had expressed its support for UN-mediated intra-Libyan dialogue. At the same time, however, the DoS remained

Alleged Russian combat vehicles, air defense systems, and military cargo aircraft at Libya's al-Khadim Airfield, shown in overhead images released by USAFRICOM in July 2020. (USAFRICOM photo)



concerned by the continued presence of Turkish-backed Syrian fighters in Libya and the influx of Russian military armaments—including advanced fighter jets—and Russian Ministry of Defense proxies such as the Wagner Group. The DoS urged foreign parties to de-escalate their military involvement in Libya and used its influence to encourage diverse Libyan participation in UN-facilitated security and political negotiations.<sup>74</sup>

The DoS reiterated this quarter that countering malign Russian influence remains a U.S. foreign policy priority worldwide. According to the DoS, the United States opposes any arrangement that allows Russia to dictate outcomes in Libya and called on Russia and all Libyan and external actors to support UN-led negotiations toward a sustainable ceasefire, the resumption of oil sector operations, and an immediate return to UN-facilitated political negotiations.<sup>75</sup> During the quarter, the DoS continued to press external actors to abide by the commitments they made in Berlin and immediately suspend all military operations, and halt the ongoing transfer of foreign military equipment and fighters to Libya.<sup>76</sup>

The DoS also urged NATO allies to use their influence to press Libyan leaders to de-escalate the conflict, support implementation of an immediate ceasefire, and engage in a UN-facilitated political process to work for a peaceful solution. The DoS encouraged the allies to remain unified against the threat of a permanent Russian military foothold on NATO's southern flank.<sup>77</sup>



## WEST AFRICA

Through the North and West Counterterrorism Operation, USAFRICOM seeks to contain Boko Haram, ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their associated forces in designated countries in West Africa.<sup>1</sup> As of the end of the quarter, VEOs in the Sahel were neither degraded nor contained.<sup>2</sup> During the quarter, VEOs in West Africa continued to expand geographically, conduct attacks, and threaten partner interests in the region.<sup>3</sup>

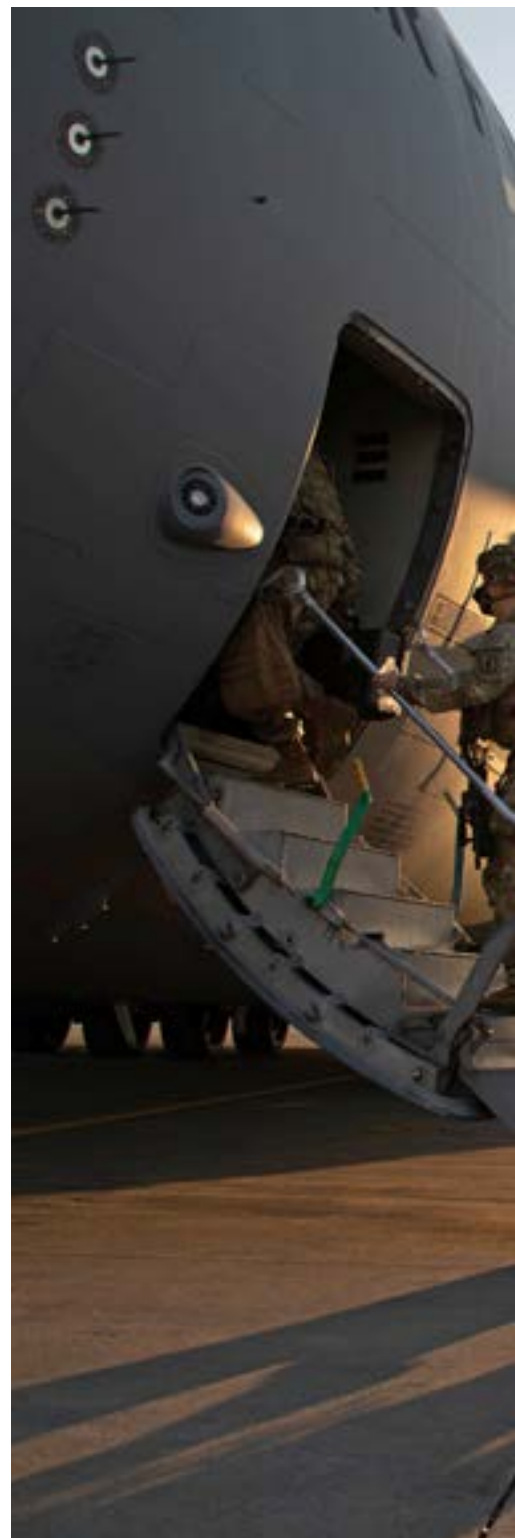
### The VEO Threat in West Africa

According to the DIA, the VEO threat in West Africa has increased exponentially over the last 10 years. French counterterrorism operations since 2013 have likely denied VEOs the ability to establish permanent control of and consistent safe havens in the Sahel region, notably in northern Mali. However, the 2012 Tuareg rebellion in Mali created instability that led to the growth of al-Qaeda- and ISIS-aligned groups that continue to expand operations throughout the Sahel. Increased French and regional security force operations have forced VEOs from traditional operating areas in Mali, and growing ethnic violence enabled allowed the VEOs to expand into Burkina Faso and threaten West African coastal states.<sup>4</sup>

The DIA assessed that political upheaval, popular protests, ethnic conflict, environmental pressures leading to competition for resources, and heavy-handed regional security force tactics against civilians will likely provide opportunities for VEOs to expand operations over the next 5 years. Historically, the DIA said, VEOs in West Africa have taken advantage of under-governed areas in rural regions to establish a presence and conduct operations, often exacerbating tensions between citizens and the government to create instability and radicalize local populations. The DIA assessed that the COVID-19 pandemic will likely negatively affect state budgets across West Africa—with many forecast to enter into a period of negative growth—making comprehensive government reform and development projects cost prohibitive.<sup>5</sup>

France provides the primary counterterrorism force in West Africa, with 5,100 military personnel in the region.<sup>6</sup> A coalition of 5,000 troops from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger—known as the G5 Sahel Joint Force—as well as partner nation militaries, also conduct counterterrorism operations with varying degrees of coordination.<sup>7</sup>

USAFRICOM described its approach in West Africa as a combination of multilateral support to European allies and bilateral security force assistance to African partner nations.<sup>8</sup> The DoD provides support to partner operations primarily in the form of intelligence and logistics support.<sup>9</sup> The United States does not conduct direct strikes in the Sahel and Lake Chad region, according to USAFRICOM, except in cases of self-defense.<sup>10</sup> USAFRICOM said that, in coordination with U.S. embassies, it ensures that DoD bilateral and regional activities support DoD policy goals and complement the efforts of U.S. embassy country teams.<sup>11</sup>

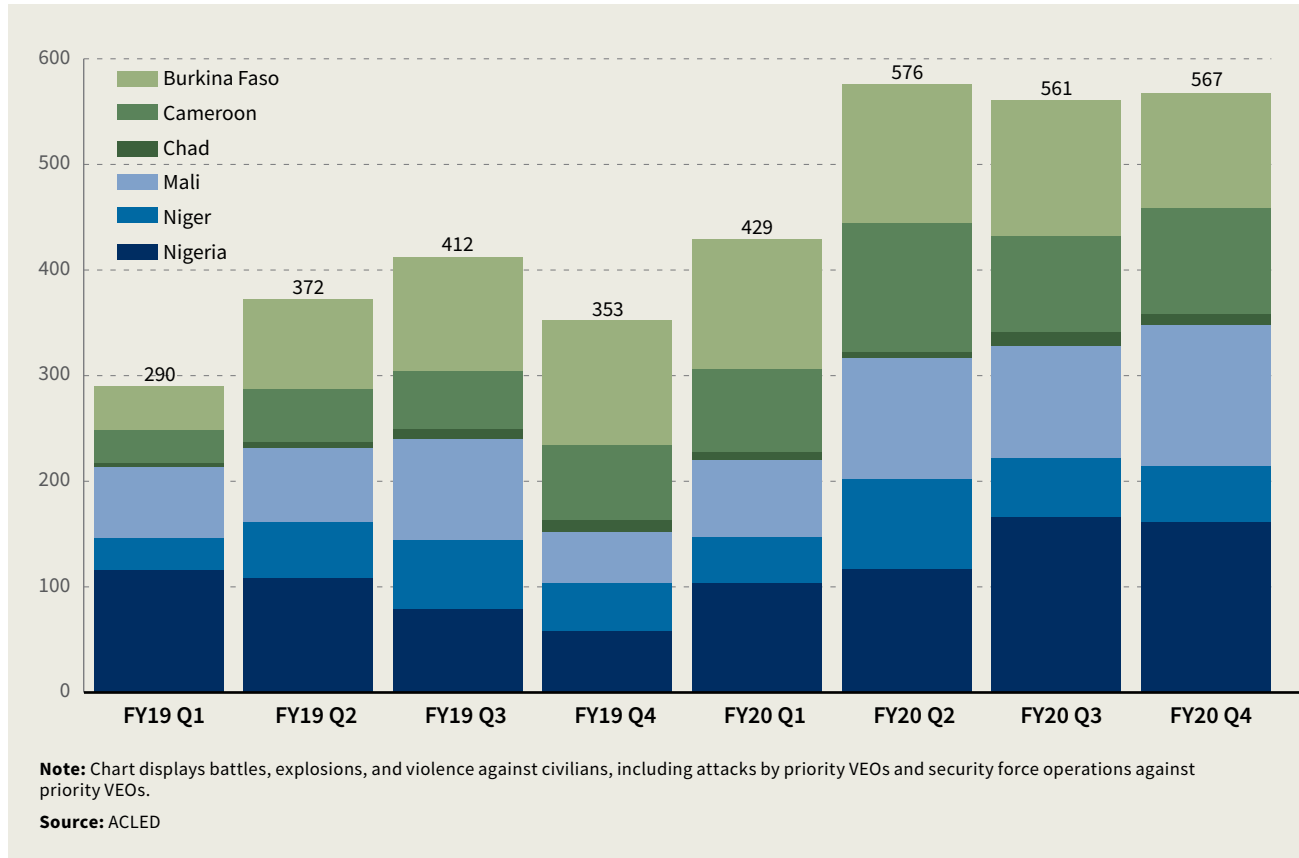


U.S. Army soldiers board a C-17 Globemaster III during a USAFRICOM North and West Africa response exercise in Italy. (USAFRICOM photo)



Figure 4.

**Violent Events Involving VEOs in West Africa, October 2018–September 2020**



**STATUS OF THE CONFLICT**

**VEOs Remain Uncontained in Sahel and Lake Chad Region**

USAFRICOM has identified four groups in West Africa as “priority” VEOs: ISIS in the Greater Sahara, ISIS-West Africa, JNIM (an associated force of al-Qaeda), and Boko Haram (which is not associated with either al-Qaeda or ISIS).<sup>12</sup>

As of the end of the quarter, VEO activity in the Sahel was neither degraded nor contained, USAFRICOM reported. The command said that JNIM continues to expand its operations and capability in southeast Burkina Faso and southwest Niger.<sup>13</sup>

Last quarter, USAFRICOM observed that VEOs had expanded geographically to attack targets in the northern parts of the West African coastal states, including an attack in Côte d’Ivoire.<sup>14</sup> USAFRICOM reported that VEOs did not conduct any attacks in the coastal countries during the quarter, but the command remains concerned about possible southward expansion.<sup>15</sup> The DIA assessed there are several reasons VEOs might seek to expand, or

relocate, to coastal regions: to escape pressure from security forces; to build prestige by opening additional fronts to conduct operations; to access to intercontinental and transnational trafficking networks; or to exploit local populations.<sup>16</sup>

Violence associated with primary VEOs, including VEO attacks and security force operations to counter them, has nearly doubled in the past 2 years, according to ACLED data. VEO activity in Africa during the quarter was consistent with high levels of violence in recent quarters, as shown in Figure 4.<sup>17</sup>

Major General Anderson of SOCAFRICA said this quarter that compared to VEO threats elsewhere on the continent, the expansion of VEOs in West Africa is a “deeper strategic concern.”<sup>18</sup> USAFRICOM assessed that it is unlikely these VEOs currently have the capability to directly threaten the U.S. homeland.<sup>19</sup> However, USAFRICOM also assessed that VEOs in West Africa could potentially pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland during the next 3 years if left unchecked.<sup>20</sup>

### JNIM: CONTINUED EXPANSION

JNIM, assessed to have 1,000 to 2,000 fighters a year ago, currently has an estimated 2,000 combatants among its various sub-groups in the Sahel, according to a DIA assessment.<sup>21</sup> The group seeks to push French and international security forces out of Mali. USAFRICOM and the DIA reported that JNIM’s leaders pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda emir Ayman al-Zawahiri and the Taliban when the group formed in 2017, indicating alignment with al-Qaeda regional goals, including the elimination of Western influence.<sup>22</sup>

USAFRICOM reported that JNIM is capable of conducting asymmetric attacks, kidnap-for-ransom operations, and paramilitary operations against regional, host nation, UN, and French forces in its stronghold in northern and central Mali.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, JNIM also increased operations against Malian security forces in central Mali, near the capital, Bamako.<sup>24</sup> During the quarter, JNIM continued to hold an American aid worker in Niger after abducting him 4 years ago.<sup>25</sup>

SOCAFRICA reported that JNIM militants conducted a complex attack against French forces in late July that included a mortar barrage, two suicide vehicle-borne IEDs, and a ground assault force. A French soldier died in the attack.<sup>26</sup> In early September, two French soldiers were killed and one soldier was wounded when their armored vehicle hit an IED in the Kidal region of Mali, SOCAFRICA said, citing media reporting.<sup>27</sup> No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but JNIM is active in the area. According to media reporting, 45 French soldiers have died serving in the region since 2013.<sup>28</sup>

USAFRICOM said JNIM’s ability to conduct more attacks is attributable to many factors, including a lack of cohesion among international and African partner forces and lack of cross-border security that allows VEOs to travel fluidly and seek refuge. Additionally, most regional and Western counterterrorism efforts are focused on the Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger tri-border region, allowing an opportunity for JNIM to expand operational control southward toward coastal states without much friction.<sup>29</sup>

**Major General Anderson of SOCAFRICA said this quarter that compared to VEO threats elsewhere on the continent, the expansion of VEOs in West Africa is a “deeper strategic concern.”**



### ISIS IN THE GREATER SAHARA: WEAKENED, BUT STILL A THREAT

USAFRICOM reported that ISIS in the Greater Sahara had suffered substantial casualties due to French counterterrorism pressure and its conflict with JNIM. The group is currently assessed to have fewer than 500 fighters operating in the Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger border region, a slight increase from an estimated 200 to 300 fighters at the beginning of FY 2020.<sup>30</sup>

In March, General Townsend expressed concern that al-Qaeda and ISIS had forged a collaborative relationship that was unique to West Africa.<sup>31</sup> Since then, cooperation has turned to conflict. USAFRICOM reported in late April that JNIM and ISIS in the Greater Sahara had been engaged in intense fighting over JNIM defections and ISIS in the Greater Sahara's territorial expansion in Mali.<sup>32</sup> Through the end of this quarter, the two groups intensified hostilities against each other. JNIM is steadily pushing ISIS in the Greater Sahara out of Mali and into other regions of the Sahel, according to USAFRICOM.<sup>33</sup>

General Stephen Townsend gives a challenge coin to a U.S. marine. (U.S. Army photo)

ISIS in the Greater Sahara is the most prominent group operating in western Niger, even though JNIM is also establishing a presence in that region, USAFRICOM said. On August 9, an ISIS in the Greater Sahara attack in the Koure Giraffe Preserve killed six French NGO workers, a Nigerien driver, and a local guide. According to USAFRICOM, ISIS core leadership claimed the attack a month later, showing pictures of the French aid workers just before their execution.<sup>34</sup>

### **ISIS-WEST AFRICA: THREAT AGAINST AID WORKERS**

Operating in the Lake Chad region, ISIS-West Africa has the largest presence of any VEO in West Africa with an estimated 3,500 to 5,000 fighters. This force size estimate has not changed over the course of FY 2020.<sup>35</sup>

ISIS-West Africa claimed responsibility for a July attack in northeast Nigeria that killed five Nigerian aid workers.<sup>36</sup> Shortly after the attack, ISIS-West Africa stated through its digital media outlet that it would target Nigerians working for international aid agencies and civilians who helped the military.<sup>37</sup> ISIS-West Africa claimed all people who work for such organizations, including Muslims, were legitimate targets.<sup>38</sup>

Analysts said that ISIS-West Africa's willingness to target and kill Muslims is a recent development, although the group has abducted and executed aid workers in the past.<sup>39</sup> They cited several possible reasons for this shift, including: retaliation against villagers who challenged ISIS-West Africa's expansion of governance efforts; a change in ISIS-West Africa leadership in February that resulted in an escalation in the use of brutality against non-compliant civilians; and a show of force in the wake of recent government military "battlefield successes" against the group.<sup>40</sup>

### **BOKO HARAM: ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS ADD TO CAMEROON'S GROWING SECURITY THREATS**

Boko Haram is based primarily in northeast Nigeria and is the most prominent VEO operating in Cameroon, according to USAFRICOM. Boko Haram has approximately 1,500 to 2,000 fighters, a force size estimate that is consistent with previous quarters.<sup>41</sup>

In Cameroon, Boko Haram operates in the Far North Region, targeting civilians.<sup>42</sup> USAFRICOM reported that dual refugee crises from the Lake Chad region and Central African Republic add to a wide range of security threats in Cameroon. The competing security challenges in the Far North Region, the Anglophone crisis—a conflict between the government of Cameroon and English-speaking separatists—and instability along the shared border with the Central African Republic could challenge the Cameroonian government's ability to maintain its security posture against Boko Haram, USAFRICOM said.<sup>43</sup>

Since the beginning of FY 2020, Boko Haram has expanded operations in Cameroon due, in part, to conflict with ISIS-West Africa along the Niger-Nigeria border, including Boko Haram raids on villages within territory claimed by ISIS-West Africa.<sup>44</sup> USAFRICOM said that Boko Haram, ISIS-West Africa, and other VEOs were all competing for the loyalty of bandit groups in northwest Nigeria as of early July.<sup>45</sup>

## European Forces Maintain Counterterrorism Pressure in West Africa

SOCAFRICA said that French counterterrorism operations continued during the quarter at an “effective pace.”<sup>46</sup> The DoD noted that European partners in West Africa, including France, have well-developed operational capabilities, though they often rely on the United States for intelligence and logistics support.<sup>47</sup>

French forces have been conducting counterterrorism operations, primarily in Mali, through a large-scale operation called Operation Barkhane. SOCAFRICA reported that it provided intelligence and operations support, coordinated through Operation Barkhane, and remained in communication with French forces in the region. SOCAFRICA reported that this support contributed to “incremental improvement” in partner operations in the region.<sup>48</sup> In August, French Defense Minister Florence Parly said that Operation Barkhane will continue in West Africa, despite a coup that overthrew the Malian government.<sup>49</sup> (See page 51.)

SOCAFRICA also reported that Task Force Takuba—a European advise-and-accompany force intended to add security capacity along Mali’s border region—deployed approximately 50 French and Estonian personnel to Gao, Mali, in mid-July and began work with Mali’s 132nd Motorized Infantry Company.<sup>50</sup>

In January 2020 congressional testimony, General Townsend said that African and European partners must do more to combat VEOs in West Africa.<sup>51</sup> While France has not indicated it plans to remove forces from the region, the head of the French Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Francois Lecointre, said during a radio interview that “we will never achieve definite victory.”<sup>52</sup> He added that determining conditions for the end of France’s engagement in Mali will be “complicated.”<sup>53</sup>

European governments have been deepening their security, diplomatic, and economic ties with Africa in recent years. The DIA explained that Europe has been experiencing increased migration from West Africa since 2015 as conflict, lack of economic opportunity, and climatic variance have all contributed to population displacement. The migration crisis and the expanding threat of terrorism prompted European governments to deploy forces across West Africa.<sup>54</sup>

## G5 Sahel and French Forces Target VEOs in the Tri-Border Region

USAFRICOM reported that a joint French and G5 Sahel Joint Force operation called Operation Sama resulted in reduced freedom of movement for ISIS in the Greater Sahara, JNIM, and other VEOs in the tri-border region of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The current phase of the operation is scheduled to be completed in November 2020.<sup>55</sup>

Operation Sama, which does not include U.S. forces or assistance, is a “large-scale” multinational counterterrorism effort in the tri-border area. The United Nations described the operation as a coordinated and revised strategic concept of operations under a joint command.<sup>56</sup>

USAFRICOM reported that it had not observed any instances during the quarter in which partner forces diverted their CT forces to support pandemic-related operations.<sup>57</sup>



## Mali Coup Complicates Support to a Critical Counterterrorism Partner

On August 18, Malian Armed Forces Colonel Assimi Goita led Malian military forces in a coup against the country's government, leading to the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.<sup>58</sup> These actions came after years of instability, terrorist violence, and allegations of government corruption that sparked mass protests against the government, known as the "June 5 Movement."<sup>59</sup>

The following day, on August 19, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo stated that the U.S. Government strongly condemned the mutiny and joined the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union, as well as other international partners, in denouncing it. Pompeo called for all political and military actors to work toward a restoration of the constitutional government and urged stakeholders in Mali "to engage in peaceful dialogue, to respect Malians' rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and to reject violence."<sup>60</sup>

### U.S. SUSPENDS SECURITY ASSISTANCE

In late August, the DoS assessed that events in Mali—which it initially called a "mutiny"—constituted a coup d'état that resulted in the overthrow of a duly elected government.<sup>61</sup> This official determination triggered statutory restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance, pursuant to Section 7008 of the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act.<sup>62</sup> There are specific exceptions to Section 7008 that allow some forms of development and humanitarian assistance to continue.<sup>63</sup>

The U.S. Government suspended security force assistance to Mali immediately following the coup determination. However, USAFRICOM continued counterterrorism intelligence sharing with G5 nations, including Mali, and maintained a small team in the country.<sup>64</sup> The DoS and USAID legal departments worked together to determine which of their agency's activities were affected by Section 7008 restrictions and which may be able to continue with certain approvals and existing authorities. USAID said that it expected the majority of its programming in Mali to continue.<sup>65</sup>

French forces continued their counterterrorism support to Mali's armed forces, including advise, assist, and accompany operations, USAFRICOM said.<sup>66</sup> The European Union Training Mission in Mali suspended training activities with Mali's armed forces, even though France called on the European Union to resume training. USAFRICOM assessed that Malian armed forces' ability to combat VEOs will likely be degraded without international assistance.<sup>67</sup>

### DOS PROMOTES RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

The U.S. Embassy in Bamako continued to engage with actors from across the political spectrum in Mali. The DoS Special Envoy for the Sahel Region, Ambassador J. Peter Pham, traveled to the region three times to meet with key interlocutors during the quarter.<sup>68</sup>

According to the DoS, its top priorities in Mali remained the protection of U.S. citizens; the fastest possible return to constitutional order and a democratically elected government; accountability for alleged human rights abuses by Malian security forces; and the implementation of the Algiers

*(continued on next page)*

## Mali Coup Complicates Support to a Critical Counterterrorism Partner *(continued from previous page)*

Accord, as part of a comprehensive political solution to insecurity. DoS principals told the Malian transitional government that accountability for security force abuses will remain a top priority, even if there is a pause in any specific assistance programs as a result of the Section 7008 designation.<sup>69</sup>

### SLOW STEPS TO DEMOCRACY

On September 21, a transition committee, selected by the military junta, announced the formation of a transitional government. The transitional government will serve for 18 months, at which point Mali will conduct national elections to elect a civilian government. The transitional government is led by Interim President Bah N'Daw, a retired colonel-major and former Malian defense minister. Colonel Goita, the coup leader, was appointed interim vice president. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Moctar Ouane was appointed as prime minister.<sup>70</sup>

According to the DoS, direct U.S. political engagement, as well as robust diplomatic support to ECOWAS, contributed to the coup leaders' acquiescence to an 18-month limit on the transitional period, as well as other concessions.<sup>71</sup>

ECOWAS pressured the junta to appoint a civilian prime minister by halting economic assistance and closing borders to Mali, according to media reporting.<sup>72</sup> After Ouane's appointment, ECOWAS lifted all sanctions to support the transitional government even though at least four cabinet posts (defense, security, territorial administration, and national reconciliation) were filled by military officials.<sup>73</sup>

## BUILDING PARTNER CAPACITY

### DoD, DoS Provide Support to G5 Sahel Partners

This quarter, USAFRICOM reported that advising operations, routine logistics, force flow, and key leader engagements during the quarter were limited due to the presence of COVID-19.<sup>74</sup>

In August, USAFRICOM announced that it had transferred \$8 million in military equipment to Niger to support Nigerien security forces and G5 Sahel Joint Force partners fighting VEOs in the region. The equipment included 15 armored personnel carriers, 4 armored command vehicles, 3 armored ambulances, 2 land cruiser ambulances, and 4 armored vehicle mechanic tool sets. The United States will also provide maintenance support for this equipment.<sup>75</sup>

During the quarter, the DoS continued to support the G5 Sahel Joint Force and other West African countries through the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership Program (TSCTP), a multi-faceted program that seeks to help partner nations develop security institutions and deliver effective security and justice services.<sup>76</sup> TSCTP programs seek to build collaborations between civilians and security forces, support rehabilitation and integration of VEO defectors, support women as peace and security leaders, and build cross-border networks of government and civil society actors who can identify and mitigate recruitment and radicalization to violence.<sup>77</sup>

The DoS reported that the United States continued to bilaterally provide equipment, training, and advisory support to all members of the G5 Sahel Joint Force for the purpose of countering terrorism, with the exception of Mali, due to the August coup, and Mauritania, which remained under Trafficking in Persons restrictions during the period. The DoS granted a waiver for the G5 Defense College in Mauritania to allow limited programming.<sup>78</sup>

### **DoS OIG Audit Identifies Challenges in TSCTP Interagency Coordination and Implementation**

Established in 2005, the TSCTP program was intended to be a whole-of-government mechanism that leveraged DoD, DoS, and USAID tools and programs to address the underlying drivers of radicalization in North and West Africa. A DoS OIG audit released in September found that interagency coordination and execution of TSCTP activities on the ground was insufficient and uncoordinated.<sup>79</sup>

The audit team reviewed eight TSCTP awards implemented in North and West Africa between FY 2015 and FY 2020 and valued at \$209.6 million. The DoS OIG found that the DoD, DoS, and USAID principals met regularly to formulate strategic priorities and share information, including during an annual conference. Despite this strategic-level coordination of TSCTP projects in Washington, officials from the DoD and DoS told DoS OIG that the execution of TSCTP projects on the ground in partner countries was uncoordinated.<sup>80</sup>

The DoS OIG identified three obstacles to effective U.S. interagency coordination in the partner countries. First, the authorities and responsibilities related to the management of TSCTP programs were not clearly defined. The DoS Bureau of African Affairs (AF)—the bureau responsible for formulating, managing, and overseeing TSCTP projects—did not have the formal authority to direct other DoS bureaus or agencies, or to enforce standardization of the program. Office of Security Cooperation officials—DoD personnel assigned to the embassies to help implement security assistance—in Cameroon, Niger, and Burkina Faso told the DoS OIG that they were unaware of any documentation that designated their formal responsibility to monitor TSCTP projects. DoS officials from other DoS bureaus that implemented TSCTP projects told the DoS OIG they needed greater clarity on AF's roles and responsibilities as the TSCTP lead.<sup>81</sup>

Second, a lack of knowledge management systems and processes hindered effective coordination on the ground in partner countries. The DoS OIG determined that AF had not regularly maintained a central repository of information on TSCTP projects that was accessible to embassy personnel or to other bureaus or agencies elsewhere. For example, officials in Cameroon and Niger told the DoS OIG that obtaining an understanding of the scope and history of TSCTP projects was challenging, if not impossible. According to an Office of Security Cooperation official in Cameroon, there was no tracking system to manage the history of TSCTP projects and therefore she had to hunt down pieces of information to get an understanding of a project's status. The DoS OIG found there was no comprehensive list of TSCTP projects. Instead, each DoS bureau maintained its own.<sup>82</sup>

Third, staffing shortages and continued vacancies at U.S. embassies in the North and West Africa made it difficult to directly oversee TSCTP projects. Since 2016, the DoS has categorized Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Mauritania as “historically difficult to fill” embassies. Despite monetary and other incentives for staff to take positions at these posts, chronic understaffing has persisted at these embassies.<sup>83</sup> According to the DoS OIG, in 2019, TSCTP annual conference participants noted inadequate human resources as an ongoing, systemic issue. Participants said the DoS was not providing embassies the staff necessary to implement the TSCTP, and that it was difficult to attract qualified and talented staff to the Sahel region. They stated the DoS was not providing the training needed to properly manage and implement TSCTP projects, and that staff implementing TSCTP projects in the field were ill-equipped to manage programmatic requirements.<sup>84</sup>

The DoS OIG determined that the deficiencies identified in the audit occurred, in part, because AF had not adequately attended to longstanding challenges associated with the execution of foreign assistance, including through the TSCTP. During their review of the audit team’s findings, AF officials acknowledged their lack of progress in addressing these challenges but said the DoS had not appropriately prioritized the bureau’s needs, particularly in staffing. The DoS OIG made 13 recommendations to address the identified TSCTP deficiencies and will continue to assess DoS efforts to implement the recommendations. The DoS OIG concluded that, until these deficiencies are addressed, the U.S. Government will have limited assurance that the TSCTP is achieving its goals of building counterterrorism capacity and addressing the underlying drivers of violent extremism in North and West Africa.<sup>85</sup> (See page 65.)

## **USAFRICOM Builds Intelligence and Logistics Support Capacity in Niger**

USAFRICOM supports counterterrorism operations by European and African partner forces in West Africa through the provision of ISR and logistics.<sup>86</sup> This quarter, USAFRICOM provided an update on its intelligence and logistics infrastructure in Ghana and Niger.

USAFRICOM inaugurated the West Africa Logistics Network, a logistics hub in Ghana intended to be a shared-expense supply hub supporting U.S., African, and European partners across the continent, in 2019.<sup>87</sup> USAFRICOM reported that the West Africa Logistics Network was terminated in May 2020 due to changes in distribution requirements in West Africa. The distribution center’s location in Ghana remains a cooperative security location, but has not been active since May.<sup>88</sup>

In Niger, USAFRICOM maintains ISR and logistics capabilities at Air Base 201, located in a desert region near the city of Agadez.<sup>89</sup> USAFRICOM also has a smaller presence at Niger Air Base 101 located near the capital of Niamey.<sup>90</sup>

The DoD obligated more than \$60 million to construct Air Base 201.<sup>91</sup> It became operational in 2019, following many construction delays.<sup>92</sup> USAFRICOM said that it considers the base complete and usable, although current operations at Air Base 201 are conducted under waivers until further construction is funded and completed.<sup>93</sup> When complete, Air Base 201 will include a runway, hangars, life support facilities, living quarters, roads, utilities, a perimeter fence, and other infrastructure.<sup>94</sup>

U.S. forces have increasingly relied on Air Bases 101 and 201. These facilities now account for a significant majority of SOCAFRICA personnel and cargo operations.<sup>95</sup> USAFRICOM reported that the Air Base 201 provides “critical” basing for remotely piloted aircraft, casualty evacuation and logistics support to regional operations, and air advisor training to Nigerien Armed Forces personnel.<sup>96</sup>

VEOs and criminal groups have been observed in the area around Air Base 201, but pose a “low risk” of attack against the facility. During the past quarter, there were no VEO attacks against Air Base 201, USAFRICOM said.<sup>97</sup> Nigerien personnel support Air Base 201 by providing base and airfield defense.<sup>98</sup>

USAFRICOM reported that pandemic-related restrictions did not significantly impact operations from Air Base 201 during the quarter. However, the restrictions did generate logistical, morale, and rotational challenges for personnel who are posted at the facility.<sup>99</sup>

## Niger Inaugurates New Border Security Headquarters

In September, Ambassador Pham and U.S. Ambassador to Niger Eric Whitaker spoke at the opening of the new Directorate of Territorial Surveillance headquarters in Niamey. The directorate headquarters was funded as part of a \$2.9 million project by the DoS Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) in collaboration with the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Nigerien government. The project is part of a broad international assistance effort to improve border security in Niger and complements other international efforts. The Directorate of Territorial Surveillance—the Nigerien National Police directorate charged with border management—plays a key role in preventing transnational crime while supporting regular migration, cross-border trade, and regional collaboration.<sup>100</sup>



**U.S. Ambassador to Niger Eric Whitaker cuts the ribbon at the dedication ceremony for Air Base 201 in Agadez, Niger, in January 2020. (USAFRICOM photo)**

The new headquarters features state-of-the-art facilities for passport and visa services and a dedicated training room for Border Management Information Systems. DoS INL worked in close collaboration with the DoS Bureau of Counterterrorism and the U.S. Embassy in Niamey’s Regional Security Office to install integrated border management systems that merge the capabilities of the U.S.-provided Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System with the IOM’s Information Data Analysis System. These systems provide a centralized and holistic understanding of cross-border movement through airport and land border crossings.<sup>101</sup>

## DIPLOMACY AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

### DoS Remains Concerned About Alleged Human Rights Abuses in the Sahel

According to the DoS, the U.S. Government remained concerned this quarter about alleged human rights abuses by security forces in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. The U.S. Embassy in Niamey, as well as Ambassador Pham, said that failure to investigate and hold parties accountable may impact U.S. foreign assistance to that nation.<sup>102</sup>

Human rights organizations have documented dozens of alleged instances of human rights violations by security forces in West Africa. In September, the National Commission on Human Rights in Niger released a report alleging that the Nigerien army was responsible for the extra-judicial killings of 102 civilians in late 2019.<sup>103</sup> International organizations have also documented abuse of civilians by security forces in Burkina Faso and Mali.<sup>104</sup>

During the quarter, the Government of Burkina Faso agreed to allow the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to open an office in Ouagadougou, one of a series of actions intended to address ongoing human rights abuses in that country. The DoS said the agreement was a positive step indicating the government's willingness to engage on these important issues.<sup>105</sup>

The DoS noted that it continues to conduct all necessary Leahy vetting for security assistance programs in West Africa. According to the DoS, staffing levels have not hindered the timely processing of the required vetting cases, the details of which are not publicly releasable.<sup>106</sup>

## Special Envoy Continues Security-Related Efforts for Sahel Region

During the quarter, Ambassador Pham traveled throughout West Africa in support of U.S. Government security activities in the region. In September, he visited Mauritania and Niger where, in addition to discussions about bilateral priorities, he sought to underscore U.S. support for regional institutions, including meeting with Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou, who just completed 15 months in the ECOWAS presidency. Ambassador Pham also met with Mauritanian President Mohamed Ghazouani, the current chair of the G5 Sahel, and Maman Sidikou, the Executive Secretary of the G5 Sahel based in Nouakchott. Pham noted that ECOWAS and the G5 Sahel had “acted together to keep the region and the international community working in concert for restoration of constitutional government by a timely civilian-led transition in Mali.”<sup>107</sup> During the same trip Ambassador Pham traveled to France, where he met with a range of officials and emphasized U.S., French, and African shared security objectives for the Sahel region.<sup>108</sup>

The DoS established the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel Region in March to “maximize” U.S. diplomatic efforts to counter VEOs in the region.<sup>109</sup> Speaking to a policy organization in September, Ambassador Pham said that one of his mandates is to improve coordination between the United States and other international actors that support West African efforts to counter violent extremism. Ambassador Pham said that as Special Envoy, he also seeks to promote stability in Mali, promote increased state legitimacy in West Africa, and counter the spillover effects of instability. Pham again reiterated the U.S. condemnation of the coup in Mali, support for ECOWAS and the G5 Sahel organizations, and the need for increased humanitarian assistance funding for Niger, Mali, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso.<sup>110</sup>



Workers at a World Food Programme warehouse prepare bags of food for distribution in Kano, Nigeria. (WFP/Damilola Onafuwa photo)

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

### Positive Signs Emerge in Efforts to Contain COVID-19

Since the first case of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa was reported in Nigeria in February, the health effects of COVID-19 in the region remain unclear given the poor data collection; however, movement restrictions and shutdowns have had significant social and economic consequences.<sup>111</sup> There are, however, indications that interventions in West African countries are curbing the effects of the outbreak. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported that, as of mid-September, the number of COVID-19 cases was increasing, but at a slower rate; active infections had declined for 2 months; and overall new cases were lower than during the early phase of the pandemic.<sup>112</sup>

In Nigeria, a longitudinal phone survey conducted by the World Bank in July found that 83 percent of respondents reported washing their hands after being in public all or most of the time, and 74 percent reported wearing a mask all or most of the time.<sup>113</sup> However, another survey conducted in June by a USAID implementer showed that 33 percent of respondents in Adamawa, Yobe, and Borno states believed that COVID-19 did not exist.<sup>114</sup>

Despite an increase in public knowledge of the virus in the region, testing for COVID-19 remains inadequate. For instance, media reports indicate that Nigeria has the capacity to test 10,000 samples per day; however, due to logistical and infrastructure challenges the country was only capable of testing 2,500 samples per day.<sup>115</sup> The director of the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control said in an interview that stigmatization of people with COVID-19 and insufficient efforts to promote testing by state governments has undermined overall testing rates in his country.<sup>116</sup> Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso struggled to understand the spread of COVID-19 in parts of their countries due to VEO activity.<sup>117</sup>

## COVID-19 Strains Economic and Educational Opportunities

COVID-19 has resulted in severe economic consequences for West African civilians. The World Bank phone survey in Nigeria found that economic opportunities had slowly improved for both rural and urban populations; however, job opportunities improved more quickly in rural areas than urban areas.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, since the onset of the pandemic, nearly 33 percent of households reported taking out a loan, which they used primarily to pay for food, and farm and non-farm business inputs.<sup>119</sup>

In Nigeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso, COVID-19-related travel and health restrictions worsened food security among vulnerable populations. In Nigeria, the World Bank reported the incidence of severe food insecurity in June 2020 was nearly six times higher than in January/February 2019, and continued to increase during the quarter.<sup>120</sup> The global nature of the pandemic has also reduced remittance flows to many poor households in Sahelian countries like Burkina Faso.<sup>121</sup> In Burkina Faso, government restrictions on market gatherings and inconsistent supply chains also meant that international aid in the form of cash transfers may still not allow for sufficient access to food.<sup>122</sup> BHA reported that in Niger, the World Food Programme (WFP) faced major food pipeline gaps due to delayed deliveries of cereals by local suppliers, as well as backlogged international procurement mechanisms due to the COVID-19 crisis. BHA reported that, where feasible, WFP implemented cash-based transfers instead of food distributions to avoid extended lead times related to food procurement.<sup>123</sup>

The pandemic has also limited access to education. In Nigeria, according to the World Bank survey, 38 percent of households with children who attended school prior to the school closures reported that their children were not engaged in any learning or education activities during the 7 days prior to the interview.<sup>124</sup> In Cameroon, primary and secondary education facilities have officially reopened, but where COVID-19 cases spiked, parents opted not to send their children to school.<sup>125</sup>

## USAID Responds to COVID-19 in West Africa

As of September 30, BHA obligated \$74.6 million in supplemental funding in West Africa to address COVID-19; BHA implementers had reported expenditures of only \$9.2 million (12 percent) by the end of September to USAID.<sup>126</sup> (See Table 2.) BHA worked with implementers to meet the food, health, water, sanitation, hygiene, and protection needs of individuals impacted by COVID-19 in the Central Sahel and Lake Chad region. BHA implementer activities included hygiene promotion; risk communication and community

**In Nigeria, Niger, and Burkina Faso, COVID-19-related travel and health restrictions worsened food security among vulnerable populations.**



Table 2.

**USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance COVID-19 Response**

Country	Obligated by End of FY 2020	Reported Expenditures by End of FY20	Sector/Sub-Sectors
<b>Nigeria</b>	\$33,951,428	\$4,420,638	Food, Health, WASH, and Protection
<b>Cameroon</b>	\$10,000,000	\$768,140	Health, WASH, RCCE, Food Security
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	\$9,000,000	\$1,009,561	Health, WASH, RCCE
<b>Niger</b>	\$8,000,000	\$2,200,001	Health, WASH, RCCE
<b>Chad</b>	\$7,000,000	\$623,937	Food Security, Health, RCCE, WASH
<b>Mali</b>	\$6,700,000	\$200,000	Health, WASH, Food Security
<b>Total</b>	\$74,651,428	\$9,222,277	

**Note:** WASH: Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene; RCCE: Risk Communication and Community Engagement

**Source:** USAID BHA, response to USAID OIG request for information, 10/2/2020.

engagement; provision of handwashing stations; and infection prevention and control in health facilities. Additionally, implementers expanded and improved water systems, constructed emergency latrines, and distributed other water, sanitation, hygiene, and protection items. BHA also worked with the WFP to address acute food insecurity due to COVID-19, particularly in densely populated urban areas impacted by decreased economic activity, movement restrictions, and rising food prices.<sup>127</sup>

BHA's largest COVID-19 supplemental funding allocation was directed to Nigeria, where implementing organizations are supporting the food, water, and health needs of target populations affected by COVID-19. BHA reported that COVID-19 activities included repairing and upgrading sanitation facilities, repairing water supply sources and associated water monitoring technologies, construction of additional latrines and bathing showers, in addition to distributing non-food sanitation and hygiene items to target populations.<sup>128</sup>

In Adamawa, a state in northeast Nigeria, BHA reported that an implementer conducted an assessment on effects of COVID-19 that found that decreased income generating opportunities remained a challenge. The assessment found 70 percent of the respondents claimed to have lost their main source of income due to COVID-19, while 33 percent of respondents said they do not believe in the existence of COVID-19.<sup>129</sup> As a result, BHA implementers continued to raise awareness of COVID-19, including sensitization sessions and door-to-door awareness sessions.<sup>130</sup>

BHA reported that its implementers in Nigeria also conducted community awareness sessions and door-to-door awareness campaigns. BHA implementers provided supplemental support to outpatient and inpatient healthcare facilities by distributing soap, detergent, and hand sanitizer to health care workers and nutrition clinics. The procurement of additional personal protective equipment and 5,000 COVID-19 prevention kits was underway by the end of the quarter.<sup>131</sup>

To address COVID-19-related food shortages and price spikes, BHA reported that an implementer met the food needs of approximately 480,000 people facing acute food insecurity in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states in northeast Nigeria—three states with high rates of VEO violence. This assistance primarily targeted people in densely populated urban areas who have been most affected by decreased economic activity, government-imposed movement restrictions, and rising food prices.<sup>132</sup>

## VEOs Target Civilians and Humanitarian Workers

Violence toward civilians and humanitarian workers has increased during the pandemic, according to media reports.<sup>133</sup> VEOs took advantage of state governments' limited capacity to address the complex health crisis while simultaneously countering terrorist threats.<sup>134</sup> VEOs also incorporated COVID-19 into their propaganda, using the pandemic as a justification for their violence.<sup>135</sup> In Nigeria, Boko Haram said the Nigerian government's anti-COVID actions constituted a "war on Muslims."<sup>136</sup>

Increased violence has led to increased displacement. For example, there were over 1 million IDPs in Burkina Faso as of September 30, representing close to 5 percent of the total population of the country.<sup>137</sup> BHA reported that 80 percent of Burkinabe IDPs were women and children, higher concentration of these vulnerable populations than in either Nigeria or Mali. BHA attributed the higher percentage of women and children IDPs to the fact that many men either were killed or forcibly recruited by VEOs before they could flee with their families. In response, BHA implementers conducted multi-sectoral programming that emphasized women and children IDP populations in Burkina Faso.<sup>138</sup>

In both the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, humanitarian aid workers and civilians were increasingly targeted by VEOs. In July, according to media reports, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for killing five aid workers in northeastern Nigeria.<sup>139</sup> In August, six aid workers, a local guide, and a driver were killed in Niger by ISIS in the Greater Sahara.<sup>140</sup> Ongoing violence directed at civilians and humanitarian workers endangered already vulnerable communities, as they experience food insecurity, the health impacts of COVID-19, and economic decline faced by many of the poorest households.<sup>141</sup>

## USAID Programming Challenged by Insecurity

BHA, the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), and USAID's Africa Bureau reported significant security challenges that prevented implementers from operating in certain areas.<sup>142</sup> BHA reported that in Nigeria, movement restrictions have made it difficult for implementers to deliver assistance to an IDP camp in Borno since August.<sup>143</sup> By mid-September, a BHA implementer was still unable to deliver the August food distributions to the IDP camp. The increased insecurity surrounding the IDP camp in Borno has also impacted IDP livelihoods by limiting access to farms and cross-border trade with Cameroon.<sup>144</sup>

BHA also reported security and humanitarian access constraints in Niger, Mali, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso following security events in those countries, such as the coup in Mali. In all instances, however, implementers were able to resume their activities after pausing operations and reassessing their capacity to deliver assistance safely.<sup>145</sup>

BHA reported that all implementers are required to have security plans and standard operating procedures to assess levels of insecurity and make decisions on when it is safe to resume movements and field operations. Additionally, implementers are expected to coordinate and share real-time incident tracking with security-focused NGOs and UN agencies such as the United Nations Department of Safety and Security.<sup>146</sup>

BHA reported that programming interventions in these fluid and insecure environments are largely carried out by local implementers. This arrangement of transferring decisions related to risk to each implementer largely reflects USAID's broader operating procedure of implementing USAID programs through third party organizations. Despite the local implementers' significant on-the-ground and nuanced knowledge of the operating environments, there is room for more direct oversight and input into decisions related to risk and security by the agency, considering the funding that USAID provides in these environments.<sup>147</sup>

### **USAID OTI Concludes CVE Program in Niger**

In July 2020, the International Organization for Migration concluded the OTI-funded portion of the Niger Community Cohesion Initiative (NCCI).<sup>148</sup> Begun in 2014, this program was originally established due to the high influx of Nigerian refugees that entered Niger as a result of Boko Haram-related violence in Nigeria, and, in Niger, the increased VEO recruitment in the Diffa region, and an increased youth unemployment bulge in the Agadez region.<sup>149</sup>

In August, the German Federal Foreign Office formally partnered with IOM to continue the NCCI program until December 2021, ensuring the NCCI program will operate in Niger after the end of OTI's funding.<sup>150</sup>

OTI reported that, over the course of the program, IOM administered 689 small-grant activities and reached 1.4 million beneficiaries with programs focused on strengthening youth resilience against VEO recruitment efforts, increasing local leaders' effectiveness in addressing violent extremists' threats, and preparing communities in Diffa for reintegrating former combatants. For instance, in the Diffa region, the program worked with local community networks to support youth employment programs for unemployed youth that otherwise might have been susceptible to VEO recruitment. A longitudinal evaluation of these youth employment activities found that 91 percent of the beneficiaries used their earnings to create small businesses. OTI reported that the program also established peace committees in Tillabéri that monitor and mediate community conflicts in the region and provided counter violent extremism training to over 148,119 women.<sup>151</sup>

The German phase of the NCCI program will pivot the scope of the programming to focus on increasing the government of Niger's capacity to deliver services to at-risk populations.<sup>152</sup>



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U.S. Army soldiers load pallets of cargo in support of CJTF-Horn of Africa.  
(U.S. Air Force photo)

# OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

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## OVERSIGHT ACTIVITIES

This section of the report provides information on Lead IG and partner agencies' completed and ongoing oversight work related to audits, inspections, and evaluations; Lead IG investigations; and hotline activities from July 1 through September 30, 2020.

As previously discussed, the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation concluded for Lead IG purposes as of the end of FY 2020. Oversight projects for these operations that began in FY 2020 or before, and were not completed by the end of FY 2020, will continue. Lead IG and partner oversight agencies will continue under their individual statutory authorities and publish their reports according to their agency procedures.

### AUDIT, INSPECTION, AND EVALUATION ACTIVITY

The COVID-19 global pandemic continued to affect the Lead IG agencies' ability to conduct oversight on projects related to overseas contingency operations. Due to the evacuation of many deployed staff and country-imposed travel restrictions, some oversight projects by Lead IG agencies have been delayed or deferred. For some projects, the scope of the work has been revised or narrowed. The Lead IG agencies reported that their personnel were able to conduct some work while teleworking and practicing social distancing.

Despite these constraints, the Lead IG agencies and their partner agencies completed 11 reports related to the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation during the quarter. These reports examined various activities, including: U.S. Africa Command's (USAFRICOM) response to the COVID-19 outbreak; DoS oversight of staffing and embassy operations in countries that support the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation, and DoS management of awards for humanitarian assistance and counterterrorism programs.

As of September 30, 16 projects related to the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation were ongoing.

### Final Reports by Lead IG Agencies

#### DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

##### *Evaluation of the U.S. Africa Command's Response to the Coronavirus Disease-2019*

DODIG-2020-132; September 30, 2020

The DoD OIG evaluated how U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Southern Command, and their component commands executed pandemic response plans, and the challenges encountered in implementing the response plans and the impact to operations resulting from COVID-19. The report is classified.

**DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL*****Audit of the Department of State Bureau of African Affairs Monitoring and Coordination of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership Program***

AUD-MERO-20-42; September 30, 2020

The DoS OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the DoS Bureau of African Affairs was monitoring and coordinating Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) projects in accordance with Federal and DoS requirements. During the audit, the DoS OIG reviewed eight TSCTP awards, consisting of six contracts, one cooperative agreement, and one grant implemented in North and West Africa between FY 2015 and FY 2020. These awards had a combined value of \$209.6 million.

The DoS OIG found that the Bureau of African Affairs was not monitoring TSCTP contracts in accordance with Federal and DoS requirements. The DoS OIG determined that contracting officer's representatives had approved invoices for four contracts without adequate documentation. Moreover, the contracting officer's representatives relied on DoD partners to monitor contractor performance even though the DoD partners were not trained for this role and were not delegated the authority to perform this function. In general, the Bureau of African Affairs did not ensure that the assistance provided to host nations was used to build the host nations' counterterrorism capacity. Finally, the DoS OIG found that the Bureau of African Affairs did not effectively coordinate with stakeholders to execute this whole-of-government initiative.

As a result of these weaknesses, the DoS OIG considered the \$201.6 million spent on the six contracts as potential wasteful spending due to mismanagement and inadequate oversight.

The DoS OIG made 13 recommendations intended to improve the Bureau of African Affairs' monitoring and coordination of TSCTP projects. Among the recommendations were that the Bureau of African Affairs develop and implement procedures for conducting invoice reviews that include steps to independently verify contractor performance; and that the Bureau of African Affairs in coordination with the Bureau of Administration, Office of the Procurement Executive, identify and recover any costs determined to be unallowable and/or unsupported. The Bureau of African Affairs concurred with all 13 recommendations and the DoS OIG considered all 13 recommendations resolved pending further action at the time the report was issued.

***Management Assistance Report: Additional Guidance Needed to Improve the Oversight and Management of Locally Employed Staff Serving at Remote Missions***

AUD-MERO-20-40, September 25, 2020

During an ongoing audit of remote diplomatic missions, the DoS OIG identified challenges that remote missions face in overseeing and managing their locally employed staff. The DoS OIG issued this management assistance report to provide relevant DoS offices and posts with additional guidance to improve oversight and management of locally employed staff at remote missions before the final audit report is completed.

The DoS may evacuate an embassy or consulate to ensure the safety of personnel during natural disasters, political instability, or security threats. In some cases, a temporary evacuation may lead to an indefinite suspension of operations where all U.S. direct hire staff are ordered to depart the post. When this occurs, some overseas missions have established operations in a separate location, often in another country. This arrangement is referred to as a “remote mission.” In some instances, locally employed staff remaining in the host country may continue to work, depending on the remote mission’s needs.

While some guidance existed at the time of the audit, the DoS OIG identified areas where additional guidance may be needed. The DoS OIG made 14 recommendations, directed to several DoS offices and posts, to address known challenges encountered when locally employed staff supporting a remote mission must be overseen and managed remotely. Among the recommendations were for the Office of Overseas Employment to: distribute relevant policy to all staff at remote missions responsible for oversight of locally employed staff; and to coordinate with the Bureaus of Near Eastern Affairs and Western Hemisphere Affairs, to conduct outreach and education with remote missions to reinforce existing policies and emphasize the importance of applying policies consistently and equitably.

The DoS offices and posts to which the recommendations were directed concurred with 11 recommendations and did not concur with 3 recommendations. On the basis of these responses, the DoS OIG considered 13 recommendations resolved pending further action and 1 recommendation unresolved at the time the report was issued.

### ***Inspection of Embassy Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso***

ISP-I-20-18, September 24, 2020

The DoS OIG inspected the executive direction, policy and program implementation, and resource and information management operations of the U.S. Embassy in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

The DoS OIG found that the Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission had established clearly defined goals and priorities for the embassy. They effectively employed a wide variety of mechanisms to communicate and coordinate their activities with the Burkina Faso government. Moreover, the embassy provided reports to key stakeholders in Washington, D.C., regarding the growing extremist threat in northern Burkina Faso as well as on allegations of increased human rights violations. The DoS OIG found that the embassy continued to press the Burkina Faso government to address human rights violations even as government forces faced serious terrorist activity.

However, the DoS OIG identified some shortcomings in the embassy’s policy and program implementation, and resource and information management operations. For example, the embassy records management program did not adhere to department standards; the embassy did not comply with some elements of DoS overseas motor vehicle safety standards and maintained more official vehicles than authorized; and the embassy did not comply with DoS guidelines for managing classified and unclassified network user accounts for departing employees.





The DoS OIG made 10 recommendations to the U.S. Embassy in Ouagadougou to address the shortcomings identified in the report. Based on the responses received from the embassy, the DoS OIG considered all 10 recommendations resolved pending further action at the time the report was issued.

This quarter, the DoS OIG also completed a classified report resulting from the same inspection. The classified report was provided to authorized recipients.

### ***Audit of Department of State Foreign Assistance Grants and Cooperative Agreements in Somalia***

AUD-MERO-20-45, September 18, 2020

The DoS OIG conducted this audit to determine whether the DoS assessed potential risks associated with the implementation of foreign assistance awards in Somalia and executed compensating controls to mitigate those risks. During the audit, the DoS OIG reviewed one grant and three cooperative agreements with a total value of \$51.5 million. Two of the four awards were issued by the Bureau of African Affairs and the other two awards were issued by the Bureau of Counterterrorism.

The DoS OIG found that although the Bureau of African Affairs and the Bureau of Counterterrorism had assessed general risks associated with foreign assistance awards in Somalia and had executed some compensating controls to mitigate those risks, there were areas for improvement. The DoS OIG found that oversight officials in the two bureaus did not designate any of the four awards as “high risk” even though all of the awards were to be implemented in Somalia, where travel is restricted due to political instability and terrorism. The DoS OIG also found that the two bureaus did not: 1) establish standard operating



**Djiboutian soldiers perform a live fire exercise in Djibouti. (U.S. Air Force photo)**

procedures or document controls for managing risks; 2) document reviews of performance reports to demonstrate adherence with award terms; or 3) require documentation to be maintained in official award files. In addition, without a documented process to identify and mitigate risks, the bureaus are at greater risk for waste, fraud, and mismanagement, and both will have limited assurance that their awards comply with DoS requirements and achieve their intended purposes.

The DoS OIG made 10 recommendations that were intended to improve risk assessments, risk mitigation procedures, and vetting of foreign assistance grants and cooperative agreements in Somalia. Among the recommendations were that the Bureau of Administration, Office of the Procurement Executive reevaluate risk assessment processes to better account for the unique risks posed by certain high-threat environments. On the basis of the responses received from the bureaus and offices to which the recommendations were addressed, the DoS OIG considered two recommendations closed and eight recommendations resolved pending further action at the time the report was issued.

### ***Classified Inspection of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland***

ISP-S-20-16; July 6, 2020

The DoS OIG issued this classified report based on its inspection of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland. The DoS OIG published an unclassified report and a summary of that report was included in the previous Lead IG Quarterly Report on the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. This classified report was provided to authorized recipients.

## **U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

### ***Financial Audit of USAID Resources Managed by Acción Contra el Hambre (ACH) in Multiple Countries Under Multiple Awards, January 1 to December 31, 2017***

4-000-20-085-R, July 1, 2020

Acción Contra el Hambre (ACH) is a Spanish not-for-profit organization based in Madrid, Spain. ACH provides humanitarian assistance to developing countries through emergency feeding, water rehabilitation, and health programs.

ACH contracted with the independent certified public accounting firm Gelman, Rosenberg & Freedman, Bethesda, Maryland, to conduct the audit. The audit firm stated that it performed its audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. USAID OIG reviewed the report for conformance with professional standards.

Auditors examined approximately \$7.8 million in expenditures and concluded the fund accountability statement presented fairly, in all material respects, program revenues and costs incurred under the award for the period audited. The audit firm identified \$6,452 in total ineligible questioned costs; no material weakness in internal control; and one instance of material noncompliance.

***Financial Audit of USAID Resources Managed by Acción Contra el Hambre (ACH) in Multiple Countries Under Multiple Awards, January 1 to December 31, 2018***

4-000-20-086-R, July 1, 2020

ACH contracted with the independent certified public accounting firm Gelman, Rosenberg & Freedman, Bethesda, Maryland, to conduct the audit. The audit firm stated that it performed its audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. USAID OIG reviewed the report for conformance with professional standards.

Auditors examined approximately \$11.4 million in expenditures and concluded the fund accountability statement presented fairly, in all material respects, program revenues and costs incurred under the award for the period audited. The audit firm identified \$18,394 in total ineligible questioned costs; no material weaknesses in internal control; and one instance of material noncompliance.

***Financial Closeout Audit of USAID Resources Management by Health Initiative for Safety and Stability in Africa, Nigeria Under Cooperative Agreement AID-620-A-14-00007, January 1 to December 31, 2019***

4-620-20-092-R, July 14, 2020

Health Initiative for Safety and Stability in Africa (HIFASS) is an NGO incorporated in October 2007 to support the manpower needs of Nigerian Ministry of Defence military health facilities.

HIFASS contracted with the independent certified public accounting firm Ijewere & Co., Lagos, Nigeria, to conduct the audit. The audit firm stated that it performed its audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards, and USAID OIG reviewed the report for conformance with professional standards.

Auditors examined approximately \$2.8 million in expenditures concluded the fund accountability statement presented fairly, in all material respects, program revenues and costs incurred under the award for the period audited. The audit firm did not identify any questioned costs; no material weaknesses in internal control; and no instances of material noncompliance.

***Financial Audit of USAID Resources Managed by The Alliance for International Medical Action in Multiple Countries Under Multiple Awards, January 1 to December 31, 2018***

4-000-20-104-R, August 20, 2020

The Alliance for International Medical Action (ALIMA) is an international NGO organized under the French Association statutes of 1901. ALIMA's principal headquarters is located in Dakar, Senegal. ALIMA's principal mission is to unite initiatives by individuals and groups who will, by their action, improve the health status of low-income populations.

ALIMA contracted with the independent certified public accounting firm Gelman, Rosenberg & Freedman in Bethesda, Maryland, to conduct the audit. The audit firm stated that it performed its audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing

Standards, and USAID OIG reviewed the report for conformance with professional standards.

Auditors examined approximately \$8.2 million in expenditures and concluded the fund accountability statement presented fairly, in all material respects, program revenues and costs incurred under the award for the period audited. The audit firm reported \$2,426 in total ineligible questioned costs; no material weaknesses in internal control; and one instance of material noncompliance.

***Financial Closeout Audit of USAID Resources Managed by Association for Reproductive and Family Health in Nigeria, Under Cooperative Agreement AID-620-A-14-0004, January 1 to December 31, 2019***

4-620-20-108-R, September 11, 2020

The Association for Reproductive and Family Health (ARFH) was established in 1989 as a Nigerian Non-Governmental Organization. The organization has been managing public health grants funded by USAID, the Centers for Disease Control, and other organizations.

ARHF contracted with the independent certified public accounting firm Ijewere & Co., Lagos, Nigeria, to conduct the audit. The audit firm stated that it performed its audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. USAID OIG reviewed the report for conformance with professional standards.

Auditors examined approximately \$2.5 million in expenditures and concluded the fund accountability statement presented fairly, in all material respects, program revenues and costs incurred under the award for the period audited. The audit firm did not identify questioned costs; no material weaknesses in internal control; and no instances of material noncompliance. However, the audit firm did identify an amount of \$34,440 for ineligible terminal benefits that are not yet resolved or refunded.

## Ongoing Oversight Activities

As of September 30, 2020, 19 projects related to the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation were ongoing. Lead IG and partner agencies have suspended or modified estimated completion dates for some ongoing oversight projects due to the force health protection conditions established in response to COVID-19.

Table 1 lists the title and objective for Lead IG and partner agencies' ongoing oversight projects. The tables also list ongoing projects that the DoD OIG suspended due to COVID-19. Those projects will restart when the DoD OIG force health protection conditions permit.

Table 1.

**Ongoing Oversight Projects by Lead IG Agency, as of September 30, 2020**

Report
<p><b>DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL</b></p> <p><b><i>Evaluation of Combatant Command Counter Threat Finance Activities in Support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, and U.S. European Command Priorities</i></b> To determine whether U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command are planning and executing counter threat finance activities to impact adversaries' ability to use financial networks to negatively affect U.S. interests.</p> <p><b><i>Evaluation of U.S. Central Command Kinetic Targeting Processes and Reporting Procedures</i></b> To evaluate U.S. Central Command's target development and prosecution processes, as well as post-strike collateral damage and civilian casualty assessment activities. *** Suspended due to coronavirus disease-2019. The project will restart when force health protection conditions permit. ***</p> <p><b><i>Evaluation of Kinetic Targeting Processes in the U.S. Africa Command Area of Responsibility</i></b> To determine whether U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Special Operations Command established and followed targeting procedures in the U.S. Africa Command area of responsibility to reduce civilian casualties and collateral damage. *** Suspended due to coronavirus disease-2019. The project will restart when force health protection conditions permit. ***</p> <p><b><i>Audit of DoD's Management of Global Train and Equip Fund Resources Provided to U.S. Africa Command</i></b> To determine whether the DoD provided and accounted for Global Train and Equip Fund equipment to U.S. Africa Command partners in accordance with congressional appropriations and conducted end use monitoring of the transferred Global Train and Equip Fund equipment in accordance with U.S. law.</p>
<p><b>DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL</b></p> <p><b><i>Inspection of the Libya External Office</i></b> To evaluate the programs and operations of the Libya External Office.</p> <p><b><i>Classified Inspection of the Libya External Office</i></b> To evaluate the programs and operations of the Libya External Office.</p> <p><b><i>Audit of Remote Diplomatic Mission Operations</i></b> To determine whether the DoS has instituted adequate protocols to 1) inform the decision to establish a remote diplomatic mission; 2) identify and provide resources to support mission-essential functions; 3) guide daily operations; and 4) evaluate and mitigate risks associated with the execution of foreign assistance programs and initiatives that are overseen remotely.</p> <p><b><i>Audit of Department of State's Risk Assessments and Monitoring of Voluntary Contributions to International Organizations</i></b> To determine whether DoS policies, processes, and guidance for voluntary contributions ensure that risks are identified, assessed, and responded to before providing funds to public international organizations and funds are monitored to achieve award objectives.</p> <p><b><i>Inspection of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security Special Program for Embassy Augmentation Response</i></b> To evaluate the Special Program for Embassy Augmentation Response.</p> <p><b><i>Audit of Department of State's Post Security Program Review Process</i></b> To determine whether the DoS' Post Security Program Review process is sufficient to identify and resolve deficiencies in the management of selected posts' life safety, emergency preparedness, and information security programs.</p>

## U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

***Audit of USAID's Response to the Lake Chad Basin Complex Emergency***

To determine the extent to which USAID has 1) overseen its humanitarian assistance activities in the Lake Chad Basin; 2) adopted measures to mitigate the risks associated with implementers using waivers from competition in procurement in the Lake Chad Basin; and 3) adopted and verified that measures to prevent the diversion of aid from its intended beneficiaries are being followed in the Lake Chad Basin.

***Audit of USAID's Initiative Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse***

To 1) determine to what extent USAID has taken action to prevent and detect sexual exploitation and abuse; and 2) assess USAID's process for responding to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

***Audit of USAID's Self-Reliance Initiative***

To determine 1) to what extent are USAID's self-reliance metrics incorporated into its development programming strategy; and 2) what challenges does USAID face in implementing development activities as envisioned under the Journey to Self-Reliance Initiative.

***Audit of USAID's Reliance in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) Project***

To assess 1) to what extent USAID designed and monitored the implementation of RISE I activities to align with its resilience policy goals; and 2) to what extent USAID incorporated lessons learned from RISE I into RISE II.

***Audit of USAID's Contract Termination Practices***

To assess USAID's procedures guiding acquisition award terminations.

***Audit of the USAID Compliance with the Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act of 2014***

To determine the extent to which USAID has designated high priority countries and allocated water access, sanitation, and hygiene funding based on the Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act of 2014.

## INVESTIGATIONS AND HOTLINE ACTIVITY

The investigative components of the Lead IG agencies and partners continued to coordinate their investigative efforts through the Fraud and Corruption Investigative Working Group, which consists of representatives from the Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS, the DoD OIG's criminal investigative component), the DoS OIG, USAID OIG, the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations.

DCIS removed investigative personnel from Djibouti. DCIS is continually monitoring the force health protection conditions in the USAFRICOM area of operation in order to assess the viability of resuming deployments to the continent. DCIS investigators were able to work on cases related to the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation from Kuwait, Germany, and the United States. DoS OIG and USAID OIG investigators based in Germany have been teleworking from their residences.

During this quarter, the investigative branches of the Lead IG agencies and their partners coordinated on 11 open investigations related to the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and 3 open investigations related to the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. The open investigations involve procurement and grant fraud, corruption, computer intrusion, theft, and human trafficking.

## **USAID OIG/Investigations Identify Alleged Misconduct in Humanitarian Assistance Programming**

This quarter, USAID OIG investigators referred allegations of public international organization misconduct in the geographic areas of the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation to USAID. The disclosures related to humanitarian assistance programming in Somalia and Nigeria, including allegations of theft and diversion within USAID-funded awards. Public international organizations are now required to report credible allegations of prohibited conduct under USAID-funded activities to USAID OIG—a step resulting from a related OIG audit recommendation from 2018. The USAID OIG Office of Investigations assessed those disclosures, and transmitted recommendations to USAID’s Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning to determine whether future awards should include special provisions to mitigate any identified risks.

Each Lead IG agency maintains its own hotline to receive complaints and contacts specific to its agency. The hotlines provide a confidential, reliable means for individuals to report violations of law, rule, or regulation; mismanagement; gross waste of funds; or abuse of authority. The DoD OIG has an investigator to coordinate the hotline contacts among the Lead IG agencies and others, as appropriate. During the quarter, the investigator did not receive any complaints related to the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation.







Flood waters in South Sudan have displaced individuals and destroyed households. (WFP/ Musa Mahadi photo)

# APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A

# Classified Appendix to this Report

Previous editions of this quarterly report contained a classified appendix that provided additional information on the East Africa Counterterrorism Operations and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. Due to the coronavirus disease–2019 pandemic, the Lead IG agencies did not prepare a classified appendix this quarter.

## APPENDIX B

# Methodology for Preparing this Lead IG Quarterly Report

This report complies with section 8L of the Inspector General Act of 1978, which requires that the designated Lead IG provide a quarterly report, available to the public, on each overseas contingency operation, and is consistent with the requirement that a biannual report be published by the Lead IG on the activities of the Inspectors General with respect to that overseas contingency operation. The Chair of the Council of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency designated the DoD IG as the Lead IG for these operations. The DoS IG is the Associate IG for the operation.

This report's content was contributed by the three Lead IG agencies—DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG—and by partner oversight agencies. This report covers the period from July 1, 2020, through September 30, 2020.

To fulfill the congressional mandate to report on these operations, the Lead IG agencies gather data and information from Federal agencies and open sources. The sources of information contained in this report are listed in endnotes or notes to tables and figures. Except in the case of audits, inspections, investigations, and evaluations referenced in this report, the Lead IG agencies have not verified the information collected through open-source research or from Federal agencies, and the information provided represents the view of the source cited in each instance.

### INFORMATION COLLECTION

Each quarter, the Lead IG agencies gather information from the DoD, DoS, USAID, and other Federal agencies about their programs and operations related to the East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation. The Lead IG agencies use the information provided by their respective agencies for quarterly reporting and oversight planning.

This report also draws on current, publicly available information from reputable sources. Sources used in this report may include the following:

- U.S. Government statements, press conferences, and reports
- Reports issued by international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and think tanks
- Media reports

The Lead IG agencies use open-source information to assess information obtained through their agency information collection process and provide additional detail about the operations.

**REPORT PRODUCTION**

The DoD OIG, as the Lead IG for these operations, is responsible for assembling and producing this report. The DoD OIG, the DoS OIG, and the USAID OIG draft the sections of the report related to the activities of their agencies and then participate in the editing of the entire report. Once the report is assembled, each OIG coordinates a two-phase review process within its own agency. During the first review, the Lead IG agencies ask relevant offices within their agencies to comment, correct inaccuracies, and provide additional documentation. The Lead IG agencies incorporate agency comments, where appropriate, and send the report back to the agencies for a second review prior to publication. The final report reflects the editorial view of the DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG as independent oversight agencies.



## ACRONYMS

Acronym	
ACH	Acción Contra el Hambre
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
AF	DoS Bureau of African Affairs
ALIMA	Alliance for International Medical Action
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
BHA	USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
COVID-19	coronavirus disease–2019
CT	DoS Bureau of Counterterrorism
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FY	fiscal year
GDP	gross domestic product
GNA	Government of National Accord
GPC	great power competition
HIFASS	Health Initiative for Safety and Stability in Africa
IDP	internally displaced person
IED	improvised explosive device
INL	DoS Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
IOM	International Organization for Migration

Acronym	
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JNIM	Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin
Lead IG agencies	DoD OIG, DoS OIG, and USAID OIG
LNA	Libyan National Army
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCCI	Niger Community Cohesion Initiative
NEA	DoS Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OCO	overseas contingency operation
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OTI	USAID Office of Transition Initiatives
RCCE	Risk Communication and Community Engagement
SNA	Somali National Army
SOCAFRICA	Special Operations Command–Africa
TSCTP	Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership Program
USAFRICOM	U.S. Africa Command
UN	United Nations
VEO	violent extremist organization
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme





## ENDNOTES

### Executive Summary

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**A U.S. marine with Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Crisis Response-Africa, watches an MV-22B Osprey land in Albacete, Spain. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)**

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**U.S. Army soldiers prepare to board an aircraft in Djibouti.**  
(U.S. Air Force photo)



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