

Africa Contingency Operations Training Assistance

Developing Training Partnerships for the Future of Africa

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Africa is a continent of immense social diversity, rich in human and natural resources. Regrettably, its history has been marred by images of governmental corruption, failed states, and shattered economies. The collapse of apparent “bright spots” such as Côte d’Ivoire suggests the presence of only a very dim light at the end of the tunnel. As fledgling governments struggle to hold on to order and stability, various groups undoubtedly will continue to challenge their rule. Thus, the requirement for competent and capable peacekeeping and peace-enforcement forces remains strong.

How extensively should the United States involve itself in African peacekeep-

ing? Since it has at least peripheral interest in ensuring that the continent doesn’t disintegrate, should America directly participate in these operations or find ways to help Africans help themselves? The administration of Pres. George W. Bush clearly favors the latter option. Funding for direct US involvement in African peacekeeping is on the decline—from \$31 million in fiscal year 2003 to a projected \$9 million in 2004.¹ Conversely, forecasts for the Africa Contingency Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA) program call for funding to increase from \$10 to \$15 million over the same period.

Is the United States getting the most for its money from ACOTA? Evidence in-

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dicates that ACOTA has instituted some beneficial changes to its predecessor—the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI). This article argues that the United States should continue to support ACOTA, redouble its follow-up efforts to measure effectiveness, and initiate the formation of training partnerships with key African nations, beginning with South Africa. It briefly reviews ACRI’s history, describes the Bush administration’s design for ACOTA to improve upon ACRI’s success, outlines the potential for US-African partnerships, and offers recommendations for implementation.

Background

The United States experienced few successes with its involvement in African peacekeeping operations during the early 1990s. Public perceptions of Rwanda and Somalia put the administration of Pres. Bill Clinton between a rock and a hard place with regard to the scope of US involvement on the continent. Prior to Somalia, the United States had taken a more active role in African peacekeeping, but American attitudes toward operations in Africa took a drastic turn for the worse on 3 October 1993—a fateful day for US forces. President Clinton’s subsequent Presidential Decision Directive 25 made it very clear that the United States was not interested in an expanded role in African peacekeeping.² America’s renewed timidity toward involvement in Africa undoubtedly contributed to the Clinton administration’s reluctance to enter Rwanda in 1994. The absence of timely US support in the early stages of the genocide that occurred there lingers in the memories of many African leaders.

The looming crisis in Burundi in 1996 acted as a catalyst for the United States to engage more actively in African opera-

tions. In the aftermath of Rwanda, influential leaders on the continent and the international community sought ways for African nations to tackle their problems effectively without constantly requiring help from the United States or other Western nations.³ Initially, America offered assistance by suggesting the creation of an African Crisis Response Force (ACRF)—an indigenous African military force, trained and equipped with the help of the US military, available for deployment to trouble spots on the continent. This concept seemed to offer a perfect way for the United States to help prevent a repeat of a Rwanda- or Somalia-type catastrophe while minimizing the number of US boots on the ground. Given the frequency of such contingencies and Africa’s interest in more effectively handling its own problems, ACRF seemed a logical approach to avoiding the severity of future Rwanda-style scenarios.

Unfortunately, ACRF was not well received by most African nations. When Warren Christopher, then the US secretary of state, went to Africa in October 1996 to present the idea, many of the implementation details remained incomplete.⁴ Additionally, African leaders were troubled that the United States had not consulted them, and the unsolicited offer of a US-trained standing military force may have created anxiety about the prospect of American “imperialism” reminiscent of recent European colonial history. Finally, many African leaders felt that ACRF did not appropriately recognize the burgeoning influence of regional agencies such as the Organization of African Unity.

Committed to salvaging the ACRF concept and resolving the objections to it, the United States formed an interagency working group in early 1997. Led by Marshall McCallie, former US ambassador, the group recommended softening the objec-

tives of the initiative, focusing on the long-term capability of African peacekeeping forces, and crafting a relationship with the United Nations (UN).⁵ Consequently, ACRF evolved into ACRI, a plan that aimed to enhance the peacekeeping capability of military forces from a number of African nations, which would retain operational control of their units.⁶ The facelift proved successful: by mid-1997, seven African countries had signed up for eight battalions to be trained under ACRI.⁷

After ACRI's inception, US military and contractor personnel trained nearly 9,000 troops from eight African nations under the program.⁸ Their training entailed all aspects of tactical- and operational-level peacekeeping tasks, including interaction with a variety of nongovernmental organizations. Units with ACRI-trained soldiers participated in at least nine peacekeeping operations during the initiative's five-year history.⁹ After conducting the initial training, US teams returned every six months to help develop indigenous sustainment capability within the host-nation units.¹⁰ From the outset, America intended the program to serve a dual purpose—make a “present impact” on existing conflicts and build long-term capacity to engage in future crises.¹¹

ACOTA: ACRI for the Twenty-first Century

The Bush administration's plan for building peacekeeping capacity in Africa closely resembles President Clinton's ACRI program. ACOTA, the new program, retains most of the components of ACRI. On the surface, the changes appear cosmetic, merely “de-Clintonizing” the program for the new administration by changing its name. A closer examination, however, reveals a few key distinctions between the two. The US Department

of State fine-tuned ACOTA's objectives in several areas to capitalize upon lessons learned from its five-year experience with ACRI. Most notable were modifications instituted to resolve three key ACRI shortfalls: (1) lack of appropriately tailored packages, (2) perishable nature of the training, and (3) absence of peace-enforcement training.

ACOTA architects intend to add substantial specificity to their recipient nations' programs. Peacekeeping requirements vary greatly among African nations, so any training or equipment provided must be carefully planned to meet the recipient's needs. Initial ACRI training provided by US special forces was conducted using the same basic syllabus for each country. According to Theresa Whelan, director of the Office of African Affairs for the US Office of the Secretary of Defense, the existence of a “fixed curriculum” was a glaring ACRI deficiency.¹² Scott Fisher of the US Department of State Interagency Group on ACOTA acknowledged that the same basic program of instruction was used for all recipient nations, albeit “tweaked” by the on-scene battalion commander to meet individual requirements of each military.¹³

Greg Engle, director of the Office of Regional and Security Affairs at the US Department of State, contends that “tailoring of individualized programs is a key difference” between ACOTA and ACRI.¹⁴ ACOTA's training packages are formalized and vetted during detailed planning conferences conducted prior to the first training event. Training is matched to the individual operational requirements of the recipient, and equipment delivered as part of the package is specifically adapted to a country's blueprint.¹⁵ For example, ACOTA personnel spent two weeks in Ethiopia in February 2003 during the second meeting with that nation to lay the groundwork for a tailored program. Two planning conferences were

completed with Kenya in February and May 2003 to lay similar groundwork for that country's program, which began in June 2003. Clearly, ACOTA puts much more emphasis on training packages designed expressly for the customer.

The second area targeted for improvement under ACOTA involved the challenge of creating an enduring peacekeeping capacity in the recipient nations. Despite attempts to stress continuity, ACRI-trained troops remain a perishable asset. Although accurate statistics are elusive, a number of these troops were lost to HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. Additionally, according to US Embassy officials interviewed in Dakar, Senegal, unit effectiveness is diffused by a lack of unit cohesion—that is, soldiers trained under ACRI are often dispersed across a nation's military as a matter of numerical necessity, without regard to the impact on unit effectiveness.¹⁶ When the time comes to deploy peacekeepers on short notice, the task becomes a pickup game that fails to inspire confidence in the quality of the soldiers who arrive for the operation.

ACOTA seeks to ensure the continuity of trained peacekeepers by strongly emphasizing the “train-the-trainer” concept. According to Engle, ACOTA takes an entirely different approach than ACRI, focusing on enhancing the country's ability to train its own troops.¹⁷ Ghana's first ACOTA event concentrated almost exclusively on the development of Ghanaian training doctrine and strategy.¹⁸ In their follow-on event, conducted from 13 January to 11 April 2003, US personnel trained Ghanaian instructors and then monitored the soldiers who taught peacekeeping skills to indigenous troops. The United States is also developing a methodology for certifying host instructors. Additionally, future training funding will be tied to the host nation's commitment to utilize the certi-

fied trainers. ACOTA planners are optimistic that this more aggressive train-the-trainer approach will effectively hold African nations' feet to the fire, propagating peacekeeper training and creating a more capable force.

The third major ACRI area addressed by ACOTA entailed a failure to provide training to cope with the full range of potential action likely to be encountered by the recipient nation's soldiers. ACRI training packages effectively addressed operations categorized under chapter 6 of the UN Charter as peacekeeping tasks but did not prepare troops for peace-enforcement operations—oftentimes the precise skill set needed on short notice to quell conflict on the continent. Introduction of ill-equipped and/or untrained units into this environment can be deadly and, ultimately, counterproductive. ACOTA training now includes a provision for peace-enforcement tasks such as light-infantry operations and small-unit tactics.¹⁹ Additionally, each ACOTA package contains between just under \$1 million to \$2 million worth of equipment, including combat paraphernalia, that the recipient retains after the completion of training. Finally, although agreements for training involvement are made bilaterally, ACOTA puts increased emphasis on the participation and consultation of subregional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States and the Southern African Development Community.²⁰ These organizations play a critical role in initiating and/or legitimizing peace-enforcement operations on the continent insofar as their “buy-in” to ACOTA enables the multinational integration essential to the success of those operations.

Although ACOTA clearly addresses ACRI's three key deficiencies, it remains on a pure donor-to-recipient basis. Additionally, ACOTA contracts largely ex-

cluded states envisioned by the United States as key to its involvement on the continent. These states could prove especially influential and could facilitate—perhaps even improve upon—peacekeeping training in their regions. Thus, the possibility of establishing partnership arrangements with principal African states, beginning with South Africa, becomes especially important.

South Africa: First “Anchor” Peacekeeper-Training Partner?

Despite the best intentions of ACOTA to help Africans help themselves, the program has enjoyed only minimal involvement from America’s so-called anchor states—namely South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya. According to Dr. Jendayi Frazer, the US National Security Council’s director of African Affairs, US policy on the continent under the Bush administration is built around developing the capabilities and understanding the role of these four regional “pillars.”²¹ Despite this intent, Kenya is the only anchor state to participate in ACRI to date, and ACOTA planners are currently completing their first meeting to solidify Ethiopia’s involvement. Additionally, all of the ACOTA proposals dealing with anchor states—including the proposed conference with South Africa—stress US training to the recipient nation, an approach that ignores involving anchor states in training other African nations’ forces.

Perhaps the most intriguing potential ACOTA participant is South Africa, whose interest in effective regional peacekeeping is straightforward. An “island” of first world prosperity on a third world continent, South Africa is gravely affected by any instability in its region. The 1999 war in Angola had spillover effects on Namibia,

showing how conflict in one state can influence its neighbors.²² Indeed, southern Africa is fraught with weak and unstable regimes. Any conflict on South Africa’s borders could have a devastating effect at a critical juncture in the development and transformation of such governments. Similarly, migration can have potentially catastrophic social and economic effects. For example, approximately eight million illegal immigrants reportedly crossed South Africa’s borders in 1990 alone,²³ and the five million illegal entries to that country in 1994 cost it an estimated \$2 billion. Clearly, instability on South Africa’s borders is not in its best interest.

Since South Africa alone cannot successfully accomplish the daunting peacekeeping tasks required in southern Africa, it should help ensure that other African nations can successfully employ their military forces in a peacekeeping role. Regrettably, according to Gen Siphwe Nyanda, chief of the South African National Defense Force (SANDF), other African states expect more force projection on the continent from the SANDF,²⁴ which has deployed nearly 1,000 soldiers to four locations in Africa. General Nyanda contends that greater regional involvement from South Africa would become problematic, especially regarding sealift, airlift, and air defense. Virtually all military officials interviewed in March 2003 during a visit to Africa by students from the US Air War College agreed that getting the troops to the fight and sustaining them—by means of tactical lift—were among the most significant limiting factors in the SANDF’s peacekeeping ability.²⁵

Given these limiting factors and South Africa’s vested interest in better regional-peacekeeping capabilities, would that country benefit from involvement with the United States in ACOTA training? Opinions on the utility of this type of as-

sistance within the country appear mixed. Henri Boshoff—a retired South African officer, veteran of several African peacekeeping operations, and senior analyst for the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria—has participated in initial discussions regarding South African involvement in ACOTA. He argues that little need exists for direct US training of soldiers and staff in the country due to the SANDF's extensive, practical peacekeeping experience.²⁶ At the tactical level, Boshoff maintains that South African troops are perhaps better qualified than US personnel who would conduct the ACOTA training. The current manning of US ACOTA training teams may underscore this assertion: due to current operations-tempo realities, as of February 2003, no uniformed US military personnel are involved in ACOTA. The total instructor cadre consists of contractors.²⁷

SANDF's official military position toward ACOTA is more positive, however. Mosioua Lekota, South Africa's defense minister, recently acknowledged his military's need for better trained troops and staff members.²⁸ He contends that other African countries routinely expect South Africa to play a leading role—diplomatically and militarily—when peacekeeping needs arise on the continent. Lekota asserts that this burden of regional leadership demands the ability to provide technical expertise to others, and he welcomes US assistance in this regard. Maj Gen Jan Lusse, chief of Joint Operations at Headquarters South African Joint Forces, agrees that current demand far exceeds capacity. He feels that ACOTA training would prove useful in South Africa's quest to build a more robust peacekeeping force.²⁹

Persuading South Africa to step up to the table as a full ACOTA participant with the United States will not be easy. Formidable obstacles stand in the way of effec-

tive interaction. Because of US support to the former apartheid regime, relations with South Africa since 1994 have been strained. In September 2000, William Cohen, then the US secretary of defense, acknowledged that the process of building "a level of trust and mutual respect" would be a long-term endeavor.³⁰ Relations since then have remained cool and are currently extremely tense. During the Air War College visit mentioned above, members of the South African Parliament commented on a very clear rift that exists between US and South African positions on many issues, most notably the ongoing tensions with Iraq.³¹ Senior South African officials strongly disagree with US policies on global engagement, preferring that individual nations—or, at most, regions—sort out their own difficulties.

Cooperating with South Africa to enhance peacekeeping training on the continent may well provide a "best of both worlds" answer to this issue. The United States wants to see an expanded, sustainable peacekeeping capacity on the African continent. South Africa has similar interests but clings to a deep-seated philosophy of internal, grassroots solutions to one's own problems, devoid of external influence. The compromise may lie in a US training partnership with anchor states, using South Africa as the template for developing combined peacekeeping-training teams that work together to train other nations' forces. In fact, the door may already be open for this initiative. South Africa is the first nation on the continent invited to participate in Operation Phoenix, a newly proposed US program designed to establish a direct liaison between the SANDF and a US reserve-component organization.³² This is a tremendous engagement opportunity for the United States and South Africa, having the potential to better develop a mutual comprehension of

each other's interests and spearhead a better long-term relationship.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The United States has an ardent interest in stability on the African continent. The focus on counterterrorism following the events of 11 September 2001 underscores just one long-term consequence of weak and failed states in the region. President Bush's recently announced budget demonstrates his commitment to helping African nations tackle long-term issues such as HIV/AIDS. Projected spending for peacekeeping, however, implies that the administration is serious about Africans being prepared to conduct these operations themselves. Peacekeeping and peace enforcement may be analogous to "putting out fires," but they are bona fide requirements that will continue to emerge in Africa on extremely short notice. Neglecting this responsibility can have catastrophic human consequences.

US fiscal policies are sending a clear message to African governments to focus on building indigenous peacekeeping and peace-enforcement capability so they can help themselves when scenarios arise involving them or their neighbors—even though the United States stands ready to help. Like its predecessor, ACOTA is an effective bilateral tool to assist smaller African nations in developing this capability, but substantive participation from African anchor states has not been forthcoming. Several recommendations, however, could enhance the effectiveness of ACOTA.

First, the United States should continue to craft customized training packages for individual nations and strengthen the follow-up mechanism to ensure that these programs are appropriate and that the train-the-trainer concept is working. To accomplish this effectively, we must be

willing to remain engaged with these states after training is completed. A train-and-forget mentality will perpetuate diffusion of qualified personnel throughout the recipient nation. To the maximum extent practical, the United States must include its uniformed military forces in these ACOTA training activities to uphold the program's legitimacy and avoid a perception of waning US interests.

Second, America must intensify its efforts to involve major regional powers (anchor states) in the program. The next planning conference with South Africa should initiate efforts to transform the present donor-recipient association to a full partnership. Creating a training partnership—beginning with bilateral skills development and later expanding to a US/South African training team that delivers training to other African nations—has tremendous potential. The United States must also ensure that the unit chosen to participate in Operation Phoenix is qualified to be a peacekeeping partner. If the United States and South Africa can traverse the diplomatic hurdles to make this happen, the continent will have better indigenous peacekeeping forces and enhanced regional commonality in doctrine and tactics; perhaps most importantly, relations between the United States and South Africa will improve.

Like its predecessor, ACOTA faces significant obstacles before it can become Africa's saving grace in terms of peacekeeping. Practically speaking, the primary hurdle may have less to do with training than with the physical capacity to execute. African states lack the tactical mobility and logistics infrastructure to independently conduct peace-enforcement and peacekeeping operations. Some blame may be cast upon the more developed nations, such as South Africa, which arguably is undergoing a period of strategic confusion regarding its optimal force

structure. Despite a desperate need for more tactical airlift and logistical infrastructure for peacekeeping and peace enforcement, the SANDF instead is buying guided-missile frigates, submarines, and third-generation tactical fighters. Hopefully, a partnership with the United States

may serve to highlight some of this apparent force-structure mismatch. Regardless, the United States must face the reality that, for the foreseeable future, Africans will continue to need US assistance when crises emerge on their troubled continent. □

Notes

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