



A Marine from the Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Africa demonstrates combat engineer skills for Burundi National Defense Forces personnel.

Helping African Union Forces With Peacekeeping Operations in Somalia

Through a building partner capacity program, the U.S. Africa Command has enabled East African nations to be better prepared to confront their national security threats.

■ By Maj. Michael A. DeCicco

The U.S. military has a rich history of long-term achievements in building partner capacity (BPC). Continuing the tradition, the Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Africa is currently engaged in a BPC program in East Africa.

Conflict, overseas contingency op-

erations, and peacekeeping missions over the past decade have revealed the military's institutional adaptability in expanding force protection and sustainment to overmatch destabilizing enterprises.

In East Africa, the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) has been developing partner-nation capabili-

ties in an enduring campaign against violent extremism.

AMISOM Versus Al-Shabab

Marine Corps Forces Africa, one of AFRICOM's components, has led an ongoing project to share best practices with a coalition of African nations performing peacekeeping

operations in Mogadishu under the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) charter. The project's success is a contributing factor to AMISOM's breakthrough against al-Shabab, an al-Qaida affiliate, and ultimately will result in a more secure Somalia.

When AMISOM forces, led by more than 5,000 troops from the Uganda People's Defense Force and the Burundi National Defense Forces, initiated their first peacekeeping operations in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 2007, they were hemmed in by a tough and determined terrorist network. Al-Shabab, which means "the youth," preyed upon Somalia's lack of governance and committed extremist violence in the name of stability while using maritime proximity to illegally finance its operations.

AMISOM's progress ebbed and flowed until early 2012. Constant pressure by AMISOM forces encouraged a major turning point by driving out al-Shabab and returning near total control of Mogadishu to the coalition. Simultaneously, Kenya Defense Forces advanced from the south to wrest control from al-Shabab in the key port city of Kismaayo, Somalia.

Although tactical unit-level sustainment was less complex when peacekeeping operations were confined to one city, the achievements in early 2012 reformulated battlefield space and time dynamics. These operations made AMISOM's lines of communication longer than they had been in the previous five years. Without the resource flexibility needed to adapt to such changes, AMISOM quickly recognized its sustainment capability gaps.

Expanding BPC programs with AFRICOM, such as basic combat skills through the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program, became a priority for this partnership, particularly as AMISOM's force structure grew from 10,000 to 17,000 troops with contributions from Djibouti and Sierra Leone.

Sustaining Peacekeeping Operations

Infantry and armored combat units delivered the punch to return Somalia's key urban terrain to its people, but the principle effort in peacekeeping operations is sustainment.

Several AMISOM troop-contributing countries have combat experience gained during regional conflicts

first focusing on force protection using combat engineers.

The objective was to develop the capabilities of the Uganda People's Defense Force and Burundi National Defense Forces to maintain freedom of maneuver within the expanding battlespace.

Sustainment needs were the criti-

By sharing U.S. military tactics, techniques, and procedures with partners engaged in East African operations, AFRICOM is enhancing force protection, sustainment, and combat engineer mission capabilities. As a result, Somalia has a vastly improved security situation and a recognized elected government.

in the 1990s and 2000s. During that time, they obtained critical tactical and operational skills in small to mid-sized units.

Unfortunately, logistics employment practices were not as proactively developed, possibly because of a lack of funding and equipment or a pattern of living off the land during war.

Through staff talks, conferences, cooperation plans, exercises, and training events, AFRICOM has accessed these nations' strategic and institutional leaders and set the conditions for maturing their enduring sustainment capabilities. The United States has invested tens of millions of dollars and dozens of U.S. forces to share best practices with units deploying to AMISOM.

Through the global force management model for apportioning troops to commanders, the U.S. Marine Corps deployed the 150-troop Special-Purpose MAGTF Africa to Sigonella Naval Air Station, Sicily, under Marine Corps Forces Africa for BPC programs—specifically in Uganda and Burundi.

Using the 2006 National Defense Authorization Act sections 1206 (authority to build the capacity of foreign military forces) and 1207 (security and stabilization assistance), the Marines began BPC by

cal reason for protecting the lines of communication from al-Shabab, and force protection weighed heavily on the mission. Given the competition for counterterrorism funds among all geographic combatant commands, it was important to place force protection as a high priority.

The interagency teams that were anchored to the capability gap solutions process (including AFRICOM, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Department of State–Africa Bureau, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, and U.S. Ambassadors and Chiefs of Mission) determined the most pressing need was protecting forces from an increasing number of asymmetric threats, such as antipersonnel and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices.

Until counterterrorism funding was made available, AMISOM forces would need to continue supporting themselves through organic logistics capabilities. Food, ammunition, and spare parts were delivered from their home countries monthly through flights sponsored by the Department of State and the United Nations.

Training AMISOM Forces

The first of approximately 35 Marines and Sailors from Special-Purpose



Uganda People's Defense Force troops receive combat training from a Marine from the Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Africa.

MAGTF Africa deployed in January 2012 to Uganda and Burundi. Programs of shared learning for peace-keeping operations were repeated in 10-week cycles. The programs included instruction in obstacle clearing, fighting position improvement, marksmanship, combat lifesaving, and counter-improvised explosive device awareness.

After two years of performing this mission, the Ugandans and Burundians now have seven combat engineer companies operating in Somalia. Sustainment training, which began in January 2013 and included convoy training, maintenance management, and supply system accountability, has generated four new logistics companies.

Before each cycle of training, instructors prepare by assessing the incoming class, conducting after action reviews of previous courses, and reviewing the curriculum. The whole-of-government approach synchronized the Department of Defense national military strategy with

Department of State policies.

The training is further complemented by contracted mentors who have partnered with AMISOM forces since 2007. These mentors solidify concepts learned from Special-Purpose MAGTF Africa for everyday operations, such as the equipment training (on wreckers, fuel trucks, water trucks, and bulldozers) that was delivered in Mogadishu through the 2006 National Defense Authorization Act.

Historically, BPC programs stem from a need to address factors such as instability and little or no governance. AMISOM was established to counter extremist threats imposed by those factors in Somalia. Designing and implementing a BPC program is a multiyear and multi-interest shared vision process.

By sharing U.S. military tactics, techniques, and procedures with partners engaged in East African operations, AFRICOM is enhancing force protection, sustainment, and

combat engineer mission capabilities. As a result, Somalia has a vastly improved security situation and a recognized elected government.

Special-Purpose MAGTF Africa demonstrates that when the objectives of BPC are synchronized with a common operational picture across services and government entities, the United States can influence global partners to be better poised to confront their national security threats.

Maj. Michael A. DeCicco is a force management officer serving as the J-5 desk officer for Uganda and Burundi at U.S. Africa Command in Stuttgart, Germany. He holds a bachelor's degree in economics from The College of New Jersey and a master's degree in homeland security from American Military University. He is a graduate of the Infantry Officer Basic Course, the Combined Logistics Officer Advanced Course, the Support Operations Course, and the Army Force Management School.