

U.S. SUPPORT TO AFRICAN CAPACITY FOR PEACE OPERATIONS: THE ACOTA PROGRAM

Africa is home to the majority of current United Nations (UN) peace operations, where more than 45,000 peacekeepers serve in seven operations. With the stress of these current missions and more operations on the horizon—like in Sudan, where 10,000 new UN peacekeepers are anticipated—the international community faces shortages in well-trained forces to meet requirements. African countries have increased their contributions to UN operations, as well as offered troops for missions led by the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). To help support these peacekeeping efforts and to increase their skills and readiness, countries such as the United States offer training programs to African nations.

The United States has provided training support to African militaries through the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program (ACOTA) program.¹ Since 2002, this program has helped sub-Saharan African countries develop and sustain a deployable capacity for peace operations, within Africa and other conflict zones.

This short paper summarizes the ACOTA program, its history, and how it has tried to fill gaps in existing African peacekeeping capacity. ACOTA is slated to become part of the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), a new and larger program to support training of forces in Africa and other regions, which was announced in June 2004 at the Group of 8 (G8) Summit in Sea Island, Georgia.

CAPACITY GAPS & AFRICA

The gaps in support for complex peace operations are well known. The United Nations continues to improve its ability to organize, deploy and manage peacekeeping missions since the release and partial implementation of the Brahimi Report of August 2000.² Yet the United Nations must get the troops and police that it needs for peace operations from its member states, and a shortage of capable, available and sustainable peacekeepers continues to plague UN peace operations.

By the close of 2004, nearly 78 percent of all deployed UN military personnel and civilian police were in Africa (see Table 1). The anticipated mission in Sudan will put the continent's share of total UN missions at 8 out of 17, and heavier demands on UN peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic

¹ The ACOTA program was known as the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) during the Clinton administration.

² UN General Assembly and Security Council, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, A/55/305-S/2000/809, 21 August 2000. This report is also referred to as the “Brahimi Report” after the panel’s chairperson Lakhdar Brahimi. For analysis on the progress of implementing the report’s recommendations, see *The Brahimi Report and the Future of Peace Operations*, by William J. Durch, Victoria K. Holt, Caroline R. Earle and Moira K. Shanahan, The Henry L. Stimson Center, Washington DC, December 2003.

of Congo (DRC) will raise the number of UN police and troops deployed in Africa to nearly 75,000 by mid-2005.

African countries have made laudable contributions to international peace processes under *ad-hoc* arrangements, as contributors to UN missions, and through regional and subregional organizations, such as the AU and ECOWAS. African conflict management efforts such as through mediation and shuttle diplomacy are well known but African-led peacekeeping and, more notably, peace enforcement operations have faced huge stumbling blocks. Many African militaries lack the requisite training, equipment and logistic capability to effectively undertake and sustain such operations—either alone or as part of multinational missions. While the AU, ECOWAS and other subregional groups are trying to develop more capacity, such efforts are still nascent.

| UN MISSIONS IN AFRICA (as of 31 December 2004) | | | |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|---|
| MISSIONS (AREA OF OPERATION) | Military | Civilian Police | Total Military Personnel & Civilian police |
| MINURSO (Western Sahara) | 222 | 2 | 224 |
| UNAMSIL (Sierra Leone) | 5,409 | 118 | 5,527 |
| MONUC (DRC) | 11,415 | 155 | 11,570 |
| UNMEE (Ethiopia/Eritrea) | 4,701 | 207 | 4,908 |
| UNMIL (Liberia) | 14,684 | 1,097 | 15,781 |
| UNOCI (Côte d'Ivoire) | 5,995 | 213 | 6,208 |
| ONUB (Burundi) | 5,475 | 82 | 5,557 |
| AFRICA - Total | 47,901 | 1,874 | 49,775 |
| TOTAL, MILITARY PERSONNEL & CIVILIAN POLICE SERVING IN UN MISSIONS | | | 63,909 |

The United States and other G8 countries have acknowledged the linkages between stability in Africa and their own national security concerns. In its 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS), the Bush Administration highlighted the growing importance of addressing failed and failing states, regional disputes and conflicts. When violence erupts and states falter, the NSS suggests that the United States will work with other countries to help alleviate suffering and restore stability. Specifically, the U.S. would, “help strengthen Africa’s fragile states.”³

The roots of ACOTA come in part from the difficult choices of the 1990s. Powerful, yet contradictory, public views emerged from US responses to crises in Somalia and Rwanda. In Somalia, images of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu triggered anger and deep apprehension about US peacekeeping in Africa. Months later, the Rwandan genocide claimed over 800,000 lives without timely major power intervention to halt it,

³ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, page 9.

leaving the United States to ask itself what more could have been done to stop the killing. One answer was helping to train and support African militaries willing to participate in peace operations. With African countries increasing their involvement in dealing with crises on the continent, the United Nations, United States, Great Britain, France and other countries have recognized the value of assisting both individual countries and regional organizations in Africa to enhance their peace operations capacity.

US TRAINING FOR PEACE OPERATIONS: ACOTA

The ACOTA program enjoys perhaps the highest profile of all US-Africa military assistance arrangements. With an annual budget of \$15 million, ACOTA has trained over 17,000 African troops from 10 countries.⁴ ACOTA participants from Senegal, Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia and Malawi have served in most of the UN missions cited above in Table 1. Moreover, participants have served under the African Union banner and as part of multinational missions in the Balkans.

The ACOTA program has *five* main objectives:

1. Train and equip African militaries to respond to peace support and complex humanitarian requirements
2. Build and enhance sustainable African peace support training capacity
3. Build effective command and control
4. Promote commonality and interoperability
5. Enhance international, regional and sub regional peace support capacity in Africa

Before transitioning to the ACOTA format, the US ran the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) for four years (1997-2001). This program focused on traditional peacekeeping responsibilities like convoy escort, communications, and logistics rather than more complex missions. More robust mandates and unpredictable operating environments led US decision-makers to rethink the traditional approach employed by ACRI. Thus, under ACOTA, peace enforcement training was added.

Training Approach. The ACOTA Program of Instruction (POI) is a collection of training modules sanctioned by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Each partner country selects a course of instruction tailored to its specific needs and capabilities. Lethal training can be incorporated at the recipient country's request. The program also provides instruction on the role of non-governmental and international organizations in peace operations. Command and staff training is done using computer simulation, and seeks to improve interoperability in multinational deployments. A module on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention is also mandatory.

ACOTA employs a *train-the-trainer* methodology. Funding constraints, high military turnover in many partner countries, and the perishable nature of the training require that a local training capacity is maintained for continuity and momentum once US trainers depart. Training is conducted in three phases over an 18-month period. The first phase of training is performed by US trainers in the host country. The second phase is conducted jointly by US trainers and previously trained forces from

⁴ ACOTA is funded through the Voluntary Peacekeeping Operations account of the US Department of State.

phase one. The third phase is led almost entirely by the recipient country trainers, with US personnel serving as advisers.

Administrators have also adapted the program for countries in need of immediate pre-deployment training. For example, Ethiopia agreed to send forces to the newly-formed AU mission in Burundi (AMIB) in 2003 but was in fact unprepared and ill-equipped for immediate deployment. ACOTA trainers conducted an abbreviated three-week session, incorporating 23 of the 156 POI elements, for the Ethiopian contingent. The program also provided radios, mine detectors, generators, computers, water purification units, sleeping bags and tents.

Most of the original ACRI recipients have continued to participate in the revamped ACOTA program. Domestic unrest, however, has made some participants ineligible for further training.⁵ Country eligibility requirements are based on four main criteria: level of civilian oversight of the military, human rights record, competency and professionalism of military, and track record of deployment. Host countries, however, are responsible for vetting and selecting the forces to be trained.

Country-Specific Packages. ACOTA funding and direct support for partner countries is traditionally dispersed as country-specific packages. Packages include both training and deployment supplies such as Global Positioning System (GPS) navigation equipment, uniforms, office supplies, communications equipment, portable lights and water purifiers. Additional supplies may include generators and robust communications capabilities such as satellite phones. Equipment packages do not include lethal equipment or vehicles unless specifically requested and approved.

Changes for ACOTA. In June 2004, President George W. Bush proposed the **Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI)**, to help meet the earlier-agreed goals of the G8 Africa Action Plan.⁶ GPOI is expected to absorb the ACOTA program, and build on current G8 efforts for conflict prevention and peace support operations in the region, including existing US, UK and French bilateral programs. GPOI's main objective is to increase the number of well-trained military and police personnel for use in international peace support operations through the provision of training, logistic support and equipment. As proposed, GPOI will train and equip 50,000 troops in Africa and another 15,000 in Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean over a five-year period at an estimated cost of \$650 million.

Additional Training Programs. Two other US aid programs provide at least some training to African military. One is the **Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capabilities (EIPC) program**, created in 1996 "to help increase the pool of armed forces capable of participating in multinational peace support operations."⁷ Language instruction is offered along with courses on doctrine, human rights law, defense budgeting and humanitarian assistance. Only a few African countries have taken part since the program's inception and, with an annual budget of less than \$2 million (fiscal year 2005), EIPC primarily gives participants access to multinational peace support training environment

⁵ Côte d'Ivoire participated in ACRI, but is no longer a partner country. Countries embroiled in conflict are discontinued from or not accepted into the ACOTA program.

⁶ For more information, see *The G8 Partnership with Africa: Sea Island and Beyond*, Council on Foreign Relations, May 2004.

⁷ EIPC Information paper, https://www.ccmr.org/public/library_file_proxy.cfm/lid/1860/f/eipc_info_paper.pdf

that enhances their familiarity with, and to some extent their ability to operate with, officers from other troop contributing countries, including countries from outside Africa.

The Bush administration has also viewed the issue of African security assistance through the lens of the Global War on Terror. In 2004, it pledged \$125 million for the **Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI)** over a five-year period, with elements of training that are similar to those of peace operations. Formerly the *Pan Sabel Initiative*, TSCTI pairs US Special Forces training teams with their counterparts in countries such as Mali, Chad, Niger and Mauritania. African forces are trained on border security to combat weapons and narcotics smuggling, and on other elements of foreign internal defense – skills that can be easily transferred to the peace support operations arena.

LOOKING AHEAD

ACOTA is the focal point of US efforts to partner with African militaries to train effective peacekeeping forces – and for good reason. The program has been praised for its ability to prepare participants for actual missions and for its realistic approach to training design. Despite these successes, there are several ACOTA-related issues to highlight as GPOI implementation gets underway:

- **Funding & Commitment.** Considering its objectives, the ACOTA program has accomplished a good deal on a limited budget, but it was originally designed to have a budget closer to \$50 million per year. Programs of this kind require consistent and long-term commitment, particularly in light of increased insecurity in the region and high demand for peace operations.
- **US Interagency Coordination.** ACOTA has been managed through the Bureau of African Affairs at the US Department of State in cooperation with the Department of Defense, but has not been at the center of a consistent US security approach to Africa. Nor has the program been aimed at providing support for African institutions to better organize and manage peace operations, such as the AU and ECOWAS.
- **Harmonization.** Recognizing the importance of post-conflict transitional security, the G8 Africa Action Plan called for better harmonization of bilateral training programs in Africa and the creation of a “Center of Excellence” for training international police in Vicenza, Italy. By including some police training, GPOI could further enhance international military *and* civilian peace support operations training. These initiatives could improve ACOTA’s effectiveness.

GPOI could fill a critical gap in African peace operations capability and the international efforts intended to close it. Three major problems faced by ACOTA – sufficient funding, coordination and transitional security concerns – may now receive increased attention through GPOI, if it is funded and realized as planned. By the end of 2004, the US Congress had agreed to spend over \$100 million on GPOI, with 80 percent of these funds coming from a transfer from the Department of Defense budget to the State Department Voluntary Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) budget. The

remaining 20 percent will come from rolling the ACOTA and EIPC program budgets, also funded through PKO, into the GPOI framework.

US training programs provide an opportunity for improving international peace operations capacity. GPOI also presents an opportunity to further harmonize and expand the training efforts by ACOTA over the last three years.

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