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AFRICOM: The U.S. Navy's Emergent Missions and Capability Gaps

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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10 May 2007

Abstract

AFRICOM: The U.S. Navy's Emergent Missions and Capability Gaps

The recent creation of AFRICOM provides the United States and the new Combatant Commander the opportunity to create comprehensive security initiatives that meet the specific needs of African partners. As the U.S. Navy increases its engagements on the continent, it will find that it lacks critical capabilities which are essential to conduct the maritime missions it will be assigned. An analysis of the expected missions and the current capabilities of the U.S. Navy reveals specific areas where the service needs to improve. Specifically, the U.S. Navy lacks capabilities in the maritime regulatory and domestic law enforcement environments. While the service has extended its capabilities with the Littoral Combat Ship and the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command, both initiatives have failed to completely bridge the capability gaps. Finally, the paper draws the conclusion that the U.S. Navy should expand its capabilities to include some missions performed domestically by the U.S. Coast Guard. The addition of these new capabilities will enable the U.S. Navy to more effectively engage with African navies and coast guards.

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INTRODUCTION

In February 2007, the Department of Defense announced the President's decision to formally create U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) as a new Regional Combatant Command.¹ This initiative followed years of studies and discussions that argued that the current system of dividing the continent among three combatant commanders failed to adequately address regional security. Under the current system, African initiatives are framed against the competing backdrop of ongoing tensions in areas such as North Korea, Taiwan, China (PACOM), the Balkans, Russia (EUCOM), Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan (CENTCOM). The creation of this new command enables the United States and the AFRICOM Commander to create a comprehensive (minus Egypt) regional security plan that will increase both regional and global security.

Increasing capabilities for partner navies and coast guards will be the cornerstone of U.S. maritime initiatives on the continent. In addition to the U.S. Navy, the AFRICOM Commander will have at his disposal various organizations such as the U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of State, and others, to address maritime issues; however, it is the U.S. Navy that will bear the largest burden of responsibility for implementing the commander's maritime initiatives. As engagement opportunities increase on the continent, the U.S.

Navy will find that it currently lacks critical capabilities that will be essential to meet the needs of many African nations. Under AFRICOM, the Navy will find its role expanding from partnering operators to subject matter expert trainers in regard to maritime criminal activities, protection and preservation of natural resources, and coastal and littoral operations. In an effort to meet the unique maritime needs of the AFRICOM Combatant Commander, the U.S. Navy must expand its skill sets to include those missions more closely aligned to those performed by African navies and coast guards.

ANALYSIS

Force Composition and Culture

The U.S. Navy stands as the last blue-water naval superpower on the seas. As the dominant force in global maritime security, African nations will look to the service for assistance to increase their own maritime security. In most cases, the only similarity between the U.S. Navy and African maritime forces is their commonly shared title, "Navy." The responsibilities of most African maritime forces are more aligned with traditional coast guard missions. With a few exceptions, such as Algeria, South Africa, and Libya, African maritime forces are smaller, more defensively focused, brown-water navies and coast guards.²

With increased engagement and marginal littoral capabilities, the U.S. Navy will find it has little in common with its African partners. Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (JTF-HOA) is an ongoing security initiative that was instituted to fight transnational terrorism through cooperative operations.³ In an AOR encompassing the African countries of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia, and Sudan, the U. S. Navy is leading a coalition effort to combat transnational terrorism and maritime criminal activities in the region. The initiative, however highlights the large divergence in capabilities which exist between the U.S. Navy and local maritime forces. See figure 1 for a comparison of capital assets.

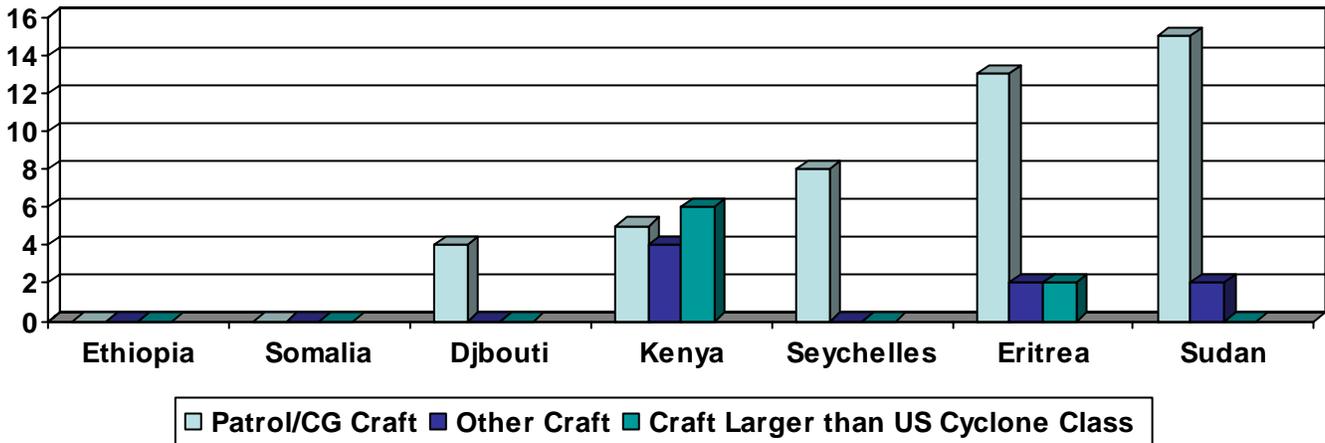


Figure 1

The divergence of capacity and capabilities is not limited to the HOA region.⁴ Figure 2 highlights the significant differences between the U.S. Navy and African maritime forces

in Gulf of Guinea region.⁵ The situation is consistent throughout Africa.

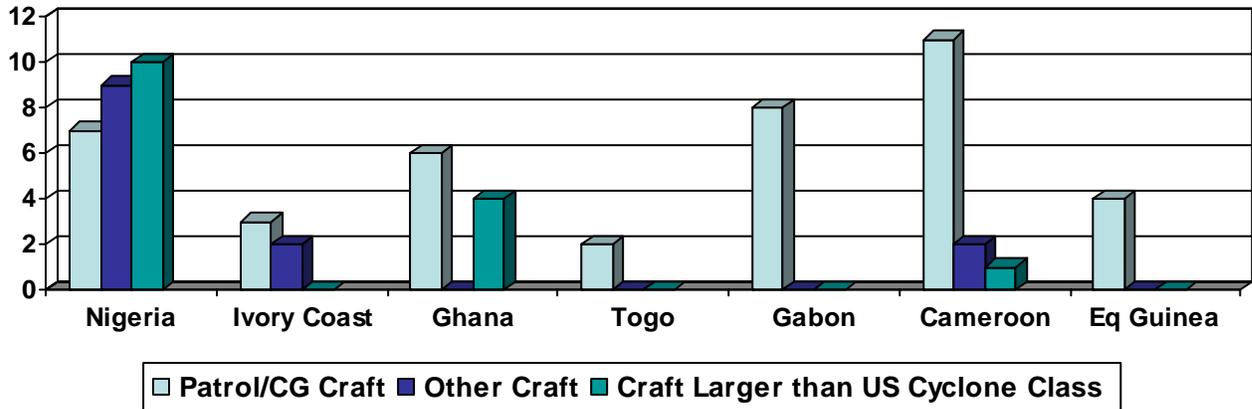


Figure 2

Although not a comprehensive list of all African navies, the above graphs are representative of the force composition of most navies that the U.S. Navy will engage with on the continent.⁶ Although the service has initiated some programs which have extended its operational reach closer to shore, it remains largely a blue-water navy with limited brown-water and littoral operations capabilities. The relatively low capacity for the U.S. Navy to conduct coastal patrol missions was reduced even further by the recent decision to keep three of its available eight Cyclone Class patrol ships on long term loan to the U.S. Coast Guard.⁷ While arguably a windfall for the U.S. Coast Guard, the reduction in patrol craft inventory for the U.S. Navy means there will be limited opportunities to engage African navies and coast guards with like forces.

Unfortunately, the dissimilarities do not end with size and force composition. The force make-up of a navy reflects how leaders prioritize particular missions. Currently, only eight of the U.S. Navy's 276 active surface vessels, or less than 3% of the fleet, are dedicated coastal patrol craft.⁸ If expressed in terms of a percentage of the U.S. Navy's total budget, the figure would be dismal at best. The Navy's capacity to conduct coastal patrol operations has been reduced even further by the arrangement with the U.S. Coast Guard.⁹ The dissimilarities in force composition and priorities will be a barrier to effective engagement. Simply stated, the U.S. Navy does not speak the same language as the navies it will train. The situation is similar to two persons attempting to communicate while speaking wholly different dialects of Chinese; for all the similarities, effective communication is impossible.

Maritime Criminal Activity

Maritime criminal activities are global concerns that impact international trade and undermine economic stability and worldwide security. Criminal activities such as piracy, the proliferation of small arms, human trafficking, and the illegal drug trade are serious security concerns.

Economically, these crimes undermine the ability of emerging

and stabilizing states to engage in legitimate trade. With increased engagement, the U.S. Navy will be called upon to increase the capabilities of African countries to combat these crimes. Again, the expectation will go beyond coalition operations, but rather transform into a trainer-trainee relationship. In order to meet this requirement, the U.S. Navy must first be prepared to combat the threat.

A careful study of anti-piracy methods offers insight into common tactics which are applicable across the spectrum of maritime criminal activities. The past decade has seen a dramatic increase in maritime piracy in the African theatre. Once by and large isolated to the Horn of Africa, piracy has rapidly spread to the Gulf of Guinea and other regions. Piracy is truly a continental problem with global implications. The piracy pandemic has been facilitated by several factors. The primary enablers are weak or ineffective governance and a lack of maritime awareness. Additionally, pirates find their efforts eased by a hospitable maritime environment ideally suited for piracy. Pirates skillfully use the numerous inlets, rivers, estuaries, and the littorals to make quick attacks and escapes.¹⁰

The best methods to combat piracy are to increase maritime domain awareness while simultaneously fielding a force capable of deterring and defeating pirates. The latter

is the simplest, but its success depends on the former. To defeat pirates, maritime responders must be able to operate in the same environment as the pirates. While the presence of a large blue-water taskforce is both impressive and formidable, it is virtually impotent in its ability to engage pirates in the littorals or coastal regions. Pirates can ply their trade with the comfort that they have only to retreat to less navigable waters to avoid being apprehended.

While the U.S. Navy possesses a contingent of patrol craft and a small boat force ideally suited for this mission, they are unavailable due to other operational commitments. As previously discussed, there are too few Cyclone Class patrol craft due to operations in the Middle East and the agreement with the Coast Guard. The formation of the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC) is a step in the right direction, but falls short of bridging the capabilities gap. The Navy's Riverine Group, a subordinate command of the NECC, is an impressive organization designed for brown-water operations. The Group is comprised of three squadrons. Each squadron is staffed by approximately 224 sailors who operate 12 riverine craft.¹¹ These units and their crews are focused entirely on the GWOT and are on an indefinite deployment rotation to the Middle East.¹² The riverine forces maintain a combat posture for the GWOT and are not designed, trained or intended for

operations to counter maritime criminal activities.¹³ The Navy's new Naval Coastal Warfare Group (NCWG) is another initiative to extend the Navy's reach into the littorals. Subordinate to the NECC, like the riverine forces, these forces are designed as a force protection asset. These units deploy around the world to protect high-value assets and provide point security.¹⁴ Although they possess an equally impressive compliment of small craft and firepower, they too lack the needed law enforcement expertise.¹⁵ Even if riverine and NCWG forces were freed from their current obligations, these units would still lack the requisite crew competencies and law enforcement expertise to combat piracy and other criminal activities. In spite of its NECC's advances, the U.S. Navy is simply not postured to deter criminal activities and gain control of the contested littoral and brown-water regions. The ability to conduct brown-water and littoral operations is a critical skill set needed by African navies and coast guards. The U.S. Navy can't realistically expect to increase the capabilities of other maritime services, due to its own deficiencies.

Implementing maritime domain awareness (MDA) is a more difficult element in combating piracy. Often, maritime security problems are a symptom of frail governance and a weak regulatory environment.¹⁶ A stronger, more robust system of

laws and regulations leads to greater awareness. Increased awareness is the by-product of greater interaction between the government and the civilian maritime community. Once awareness is enhanced, a government can attempt to gain and maintain control of its territorial waters.

Many navies and coast guards in Africa focus the majority of their efforts on law enforcement missions. Looking for assistance in increasing their regulatory control, it can be expected that many African states will ask the U.S. Navy for assistance in establishing and strengthening their domestic maritime laws and regulations. While the U.S. Navy has extensive experience enforcing international regulations and security sanctions, its expertise does not extend fully to domestic governance. The creation of the Navy's Maritime Civil Affairs Group (MCAG) is another initiative captured under the charter of the NECC. The MCAG's capabilities are focused on three distinct maritime specific civil affairs (CA) functional areas; commercial port operations, harbor and channel construction and maintenance, and marine fisheries and resources.¹⁷ MCAG personnel provide host nation assistance through a two step process. Initially, they conduct a comprehensive assessment of a maritime functional area infrastructure such as port operations or harbor design. Then, they provide the host nation with a comprehensive plan

to address deficiencies.¹⁸ However, the MCAG lacks the legal expertise to address identified problems and is unable to provide host nations with advice on how to formalize domestic laws and regulations to achieve a desired end state.¹⁹ While the MCAG is capable of identifying the ends and ways of a particular problem, its capabilities are found to be lacking in its inability to provide the means to achieve a particular desired end state through the establishment of applicable laws and regulations.

The combined lack of an agile brown-water/littoral force and a dearth of capabilities and experience in the creation and enforcement of domestic laws will impede the U.S. Navy's ability to train African navies and coast guards to effectively conduct operations to counter maritime criminal activities.

Protection of Natural Resources

An abundance of natural resources offers hope to many African countries attempting to free themselves from a seemingly perpetual cycle of poverty and desperation. A rich supply of fish stock and offshore oil reserves hold great promises for economic development in that they provide an opportunity for many countries to emerge from their current situations and become more stable. While there are many

reasons for optimism, historical precedent dictates caution and careful planning. The potentially destructive combination of a strong sense of desperation and a lack of effective governmental oversight can lead to hasty decisions that yield short-term gains, but at a cost to long term sustainability.

Over the past decades, many African countries have paid a terrible price for implementing short-sighted programs that produced quick profits. Mauritania's and Senegal's liberal fishing agreements with Asian and European countries have nearly depleted their fishing stock and ruined their maritime trade.²⁰ In Senegal, over fishing by foreign countries has depleted fish stock to the point that it now takes an entire month to catch what was once caught in four days.²¹ The detrimental impacts of these decisions are not limited to the fishing community. The long term implications span nearly the entire economic spectrum.

Offshore oil reserves provide another glint of hope for emerging and stabilizing African countries. Many nations on the continent possess a promising amount of oil reserves in their territorial waters, but are struggling with the means to produce, manage, and market its supplies. Nowhere on the continent is this more evident than in the Gulf of Guinea (GOG). Equatorial Guinea, with its population of approximately 550,000 people, has risen rapidly to be West

Africa's third largest oil exporter. The country's progress has been accelerated by nearly \$5 billion in outside investments.²² The tiny island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe has fewer than 200,000 citizens and occupies approximately 1000 square kilometers; however, for what it lacks in land and people, it makes up for in oil reserves.²³ It is estimated that this small nation possesses an oil reserve of somewhere between 4 to 10 million barrels of oil.²⁴

The situation found in Senegal, Mauritania, Equatorial Guinea, and São Tomé and Príncipe are not uncommon in Africa. The inevitable question is how these countries should take advantage of their resources without sacrificing their long-term viability in a global economy. The best long term solution is found through establishing and enforcing laws that regulate the petroleum and fishing industries.

With limited resources and a high likelihood of exploitation and abuse, it is not surprising that local navies and coast guards provide the first line of defense for the protection and preservation of natural resources. Unfortunately, due to poor funding, antiquated equipment, insufficient force composition, and inadequate training most of these maritime forces possess neither the capacity nor the capability to accomplish their missions.

With increased engagement opportunities in the region, African nations will look to the United States for assistance. The Combatant Commander will look primarily to the U.S. Navy for assistance. On the surface, the MCAG appears to be the ideal instrument to provide the Combatant Commander with the needed expertise to advise African nations on the best methods to protect natural resources. Unfortunately, capability shortcomings prevent the MCAG from providing comprehensive solutions. As previously discussed, the unit's inability to provide host nations with regulatory advice on the establishment of laws and regulations is a critical inadequacy. Although maritime CA specialists will be able to address petroleum commercial infrastructure related issues, they will not be able to assist host nations with the preservation and protection of oil resources. While the Navy and the MCAG have attempted to address the protection of fisheries resources, they have decided not to extend this civil affairs expertise equally to the oil industry. The decision was based on the assumption that the U.S. Army's CA experts will continue to provide this assistance.²⁵ This is a surprising decision because of the sheer amount of oil which is collected, refined, stored, and transported in the maritime environment. Additionally, it is surprising because of the current force posture of U.S. Army CA specialists. These Army

personnel are already heavily engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq with little hope for a reduced tempo anytime soon.

While the U.S. Navy has increased its capabilities to assist host nations with the protection of their natural resources, its efforts fall short of being able to offer full spectrum assistance. If the U.S. Navy hopes to truly succeed in its endeavors, it must expand its capabilities to include the expertise to operate and influence in the regulatory environment and expand its CA functional areas to include the protection of petroleum and oil resources.

Littoral Combat Ship

The new Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) is the Navy's answer to the near-shore operations problem. While it is true the ship's shallow draft of approximately 14 feet moves the Navy's reach closer to shore, the ship's size of approximately 400' shows that it is still very much a blue-water vessel.²⁶ Although designed for both agility and speed, its improvements in these areas are relative to other large combatants. Its enhancements will vastly improve the Navy's maneuverability against other large ships, but not against the swift, smaller threats which populate the littorals. Additionally, it can be argued that the LCS is more of an effort to enhance the Navy's ability to conduct traditional missions closer to shore, and

not a significant improvement in defeating littoral threats. A key design feature of the ship, the interchangeable mission packages, supports this assertion. The ships ability to conduct antisubmarine, mine, and surface warfare closer to shore does not directly translate to an ability to combat littoral threats. With a price tag of nearly \$400 million each, the U.S. Navy could have built and trained a formidable brown-water force capable of conducting both military and law enforcement missions without sacrificing its position as the world's most powerful navy.²⁷ In fact, the creation of a true littoral and brown-water capability would extend the U.S. Navy's dominance to all maritime domains.

CONCLUSIONS

The U.S. Navy does not currently possess the capability to provide African navies and coast guards with the majority of their maritime needs. The service's blue-water over the horizon competencies are largely not applicable in the African littoral and brown-water environments. The U.S. Navy's dissimilar force composition, lack of experience combating maritime criminal activities and lack of familiarity in the regulatory enforcement will be roadblocks to successful and meaningful engagement. These areas must be addressed in order

for the U.S. Navy to speak and operate from a position of authority in the AFRICOM AOR.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To meet its responsibilities of enhancing the capabilities of African navies and coast guards, the U.S. Navy must expand its capabilities even further. The Navy's current disposition toward a blue-water force is the byproduct of the cold war and decades of a relatively low littoral threat. Additionally, the service has not had to concern itself with these missions because they are the responsibility of the U.S. Coast Guard at home. However, the emergence of a legitimate littoral threat and the U.S. Coast Guard's low capacity to assume a greater responsibility abroad, necessitates the U.S. Navy's need to create capabilities that are more aligned with those missions performed by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The creation of the NECC and the commissioning of the first LCS are steps in the right direction; however, the service still lacks the ability to operate across the full range of littoral missions. In order to succeed, the U.S. Navy should partner heavily with the U.S. Coast Guard. The Coast Guard can provide meaningful guidance and assistance as the U.S. Navy continues to expand its capabilities.

Figure 3 displays the current spectrum of operations for both the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Navy.²⁸ In many parts of Africa, the distinction between the two services is less distinct. If the U.S. Navy is going to have productive maritime interaction abroad, it must shift its capabilities to the left to meet the needs of its international partners. The far reaching improvements gained by this proposal are not isolated to the African theatre. The Navy's ability to perform these missions would be extremely beneficial in other parts of the world and would simultaneously improve national, regional, and global security through increased stability.

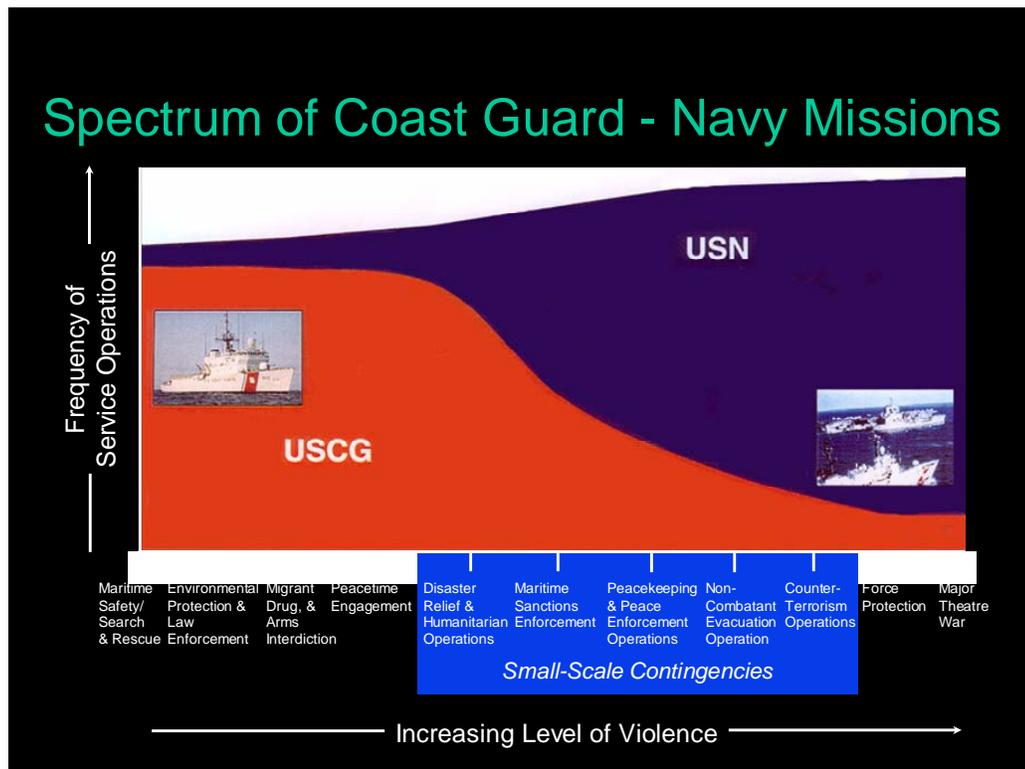


Figure 3

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