



August 2015

REGIONALLY ALIGNED FORCES

DOD Could Enhance Army Brigades' Efforts in Africa by Improving Activity Coordination and Mission-Specific Preparation

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-568](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

In support of the Department of Defense's (DOD) increasing emphasis on strengthening partner nations' security forces, the Army is aligning its forces with geographic combatant commands to provide tailored, trained, and responsive forces to meet the commands' requirements. In 2013, AFRICOM became the first combatant command to be allocated an Army regionally aligned brigade combat team—the first of three to date—which was tasked to the command primarily to support security cooperation.

The House Report accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 included a provision that GAO assess DOD's efforts to plan for and employ these brigades in Africa. This report assesses, among other things, the extent to which (1) AFRICOM has clearly identified and synchronized security cooperation activities for the brigades in Africa and (2) the brigades have been prepared to meet mission requirements in Africa. The term 'synchronize' refers to coordination efforts by AFRICOM and its components to achieve unity of effort across the command. GAO reviewed documents and data and interviewed DOD and Department of State officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD develop a coordination mechanism to improve planning for activities, assess mission-specific training for aligned forces, identify and provide mission-specific equipment for the brigades, and that DOD and the Department of State coordinate on providing passports to the brigades. Both concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-15-568](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

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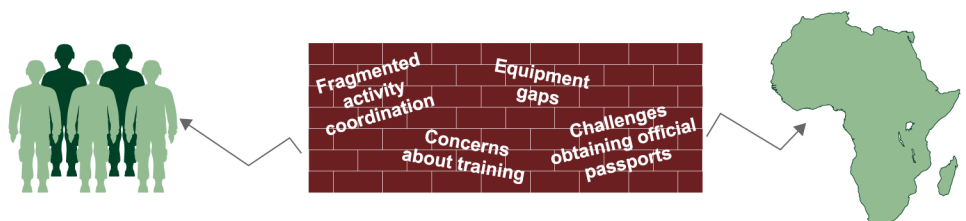
DOD Could Enhance Army Brigades' Efforts in Africa by Improving Activity Coordination and Mission-Specific Preparation

What GAO Found

U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) identifies and synchronizes security cooperation activities through various planning processes, but the brigades allocated to AFRICOM sometimes lack key information about these activities. The brigades have conducted hundreds of security cooperation activities, such as exercises with partner nations, throughout Africa. As part of AFRICOM's planning processes, the Offices of Security Cooperation—located in U.S. embassies in Africa—work with U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) to identify and develop security cooperation activities based on the needs of the host nation and AFRICOM's objectives. The brigades are tasked to conduct many of these activities, but they sometimes lack timely and complete information about the activities, such as activity objectives, which can compromise their effectiveness. While personnel from USARAF and the Offices of Security Cooperation coordinate informally, they do not always have a shared understanding of the activity objectives or involve the brigades in planning. Furthermore, USARAF does not have a formal mechanism that includes both the Offices of Security Cooperation and the brigades to shape activities and address information gaps. As a result, the brigades' ability to conduct activities may be challenged, and the resources invested may not have the anticipated effect.

The brigades have been trained and equipped for their core missions, which has generally prepared them to meet requirements in Africa, but opportunities exist to enhance their mission-specific preparation. The brigades' core training is estimated to cover 90 to 95 percent of the skills needed to support activities in Africa. The brigades have developed regionally-focused, mission-specific training programs to cover the remaining skills. Some Army officials identified concerns about how this training is being supported, but the Army may not have the information it needs to address these concerns, because it has not completed an Army-directed assessment of training for regionally aligned forces. In addition, the brigades have experienced some equipment gaps, particularly in communications systems, because the Army has not fully identified mission-specific equipment requirements or established, or applied, a mechanism to ensure that brigades have the necessary equipment. Furthermore, the Army and the Department of State have not agreed on a process for providing official passports to brigade personnel before their employment period. As a result, the brigades have faced challenges in obtaining passports that have limited their ability to deploy the appropriate personnel to Africa. Without action on these issues, the brigades' ability to fully support the mission in Africa may be affected.

Brigades Face Coordination Challenges and Gaps in Mission-Specific Preparation



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-15-568

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Abbreviations

AFRICOM	U.S. Africa Command
DOD	Department of Defense
USARAF	U.S. Army Africa

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August 26, 2015

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Department of Defense (DOD) is placing increasing emphasis on engaging and strengthening partner nation security forces to deter aggression and shape security environments around the world. In accordance with this emphasis, the Army is regionally aligning its forces to geographic combatant commands with the intent of providing tailored, trained, responsive, and consistently available forces to meet combatant command requirements, including operations, crisis response, and security cooperation.¹ The Army anticipates that proactive and sustained engagement by regionally aligned forces will reduce the likelihood of future conflict involving the United States by strengthening partner nations' abilities to respond to potential crises, and enhance the cultural awareness and regional expertise of its forces. In fiscal year 2013, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) became the first geographic combatant command to receive an Army regionally aligned force, when a brigade combat team was allocated to the command primarily to support theater security cooperation. According to AFRICOM and U.S. Army Africa

¹ Security cooperation is a broad term that describes activities undertaken by DOD to encourage and enable international partners to work with the United States to achieve strategic objectives. These activities include all DOD interactions with foreign defense and security establishments that build relationships to promote specific U.S. security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations (also referred to as security force assistance), and provide service-members with peacetime and contingency access to host nations.

(USARAF) officials, allocating brigades through DOD's standard process for requesting forces—rather than separately requesting forces for each individual activity that requires support—enables AFRICOM to more efficiently and predictably access Army brigade capabilities to support multiple security cooperation activities.

Although these reports were not about Army regionally aligned forces, we have previously reported on challenges DOD has experienced in planning and preparing forces to conduct security cooperation activities globally and we have made recommendations to address these challenges. For example, in 2012, we recommended that DOD provide additional guidance to combatant commands to clarify how they should plan for and track activities to build partner nation capability and capacity—also known as security force assistance.² In 2013, we recommended that theater commanders establish clearer end states, objectives, milestones, and mission specific information to guide advisors' efforts in Afghanistan.³ We have also made recommendations to DOD to improve the way in which the military services track general purpose forces with advising experience and to more clearly define capability, support, and equipment requirements for advisors in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴ DOD has taken some actions in response to these recommendations, including more clearly defining the capabilities required of advisors and facilitating advisors' access to transportation and security, and providing additional guidance to combatant commanders on planning for security force assistance activities.

A report from the House Committee on Armed Services included a provision that we assess DOD efforts to plan for and employ brigade combat teams as regionally aligned forces (hereafter known as “the

² GAO, *Security Force Assistance: Additional Actions Needed to Guide Geographic Combatant Command and Service Efforts*. [GAO-12-556](#). (Washington, D.C.: May 10, 2012).

³ GAO, *Security Force Assistance: More Detailed Planning and Improved Access to Information Needed to Guide Efforts of Advisor Teams in Afghanistan*. [GAO-13-381](#). (Washington, D.C.: April 30, 2013).

⁴ GAO, *Security Force Assistance: The Army and Marine Corps Have Ongoing Efforts to Identify and Track Advisors, but the Army Needs a Plan to Capture Advising Experience*, [GAO-14-482](#). (Washington, D.C.: July 11, 2014). GAO, *Iraq and Afghanistan: Actions Needed to Enhance the Ability of Army Brigades to Support the Advising Mission*. [GAO-11-760](#). (Washington, D.C.: August 2, 2011).

brigades”) in Africa. For this report, we assessed the extent to which (1) AFRICOM has clearly identified and synchronized⁵ security cooperation activities for the brigades in Africa, (2) the brigades have been prepared to meet mission requirements in Africa, and (3) the brigades have been able to sustain core mission readiness while deploying for missions in Africa.⁶

To determine the extent to which AFRICOM has clearly identified and synchronized security cooperation activities for the brigades in Africa, we reviewed key documentation such as theater- and country-level plans, guidance, and policy documents—including operations orders, task orders, and brigade after-action reports. We also interviewed relevant officials from AFRICOM, USARAF, the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, Offices of Security Cooperation from six U.S. embassies in Africa, Army Forces Command, and the three brigades that have been allocated to AFRICOM to date. To determine the extent to which the brigades have been prepared to meet requirements in Africa, we reviewed key documentation, such as execute and fragmentary orders, training requirements, brigade training plans, operational needs statements establishing equipment shortages, and passport regulations. We also interviewed relevant officials from AFRICOM, USARAF, Army Headquarters, Army Forces Command, the three brigades allocated to AFRICOM to date and their parent divisions, and the Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs. To determine the extent to which the brigades have been able to sustain core-mission readiness while deploying in response to security cooperation and other requirements in Africa, we reviewed readiness policies, Army guidance on readiness for regionally aligned force units, and readiness data reported by the brigades in the Defense Readiness Reporting System. We also interviewed officials from Army Headquarters, Army Forces Command, and the three brigades allocated to AFRICOM to date.

⁵ In this report, we use the term ‘synchronize’ or ‘synchronization’ to refer to planning and coordination efforts undertaken by AFRICOM and its service component commands (including USARAF), and Embassy Country Teams, among others, to achieve unity of effort in time, space, and purpose to produce results and mitigate potential for duplication, overlap, or fragmentation.

⁶ See H.R. Rep. 113-446 at 249-250 (2014) accompanying H.R. 4435, a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015.

We conducted this performance audit from June 2014 to August 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Engagement with Partner Nation Security Forces through Security Cooperation

DOD engages with partner nation security forces through a range of security cooperation efforts. Security cooperation is the broad term used to define those activities undertaken by DOD to build relationships that promote specified U.S. interests, build partner nations' capabilities for self-defense and coalition operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to host nations.⁷ These activities are carried out under various statutory authorities and programs that allow DOD to engage with partner nations across a range of activities, such as sending out military liaison teams, conducting seminars and conferences, and training and equipping partner nations' security forces in support of U.S. national policies and objectives. DOD also provides forces to support the Department of State's security assistance programs, such as the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program. DOD coordinates security cooperation activities with and through the Department of State and its Embassy Country Teams.⁸

AFRICOM's Planning Processes

AFRICOM is one of DOD's six geographic combatant commands and is responsible for a variety of functions including planning for and conducting missions such as security cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and combat operations. AFRICOM is supported by its component commands—USARAF, Air Forces Africa, Naval Forces Africa, Marine Forces Africa, Special Operations Command Africa—which, along with each of the military services, are responsible for organizing, training

⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual No. 3-22, *Army Support to Security Cooperation* (Jun 21, 2013).

⁸ Country Teams are the center of U.S. Embassy operational decision-making. They are located in virtually all U.S. Embassies and Consulates and include the Ambassador, heads of all Embassy sections and U.S. government agencies at the post.

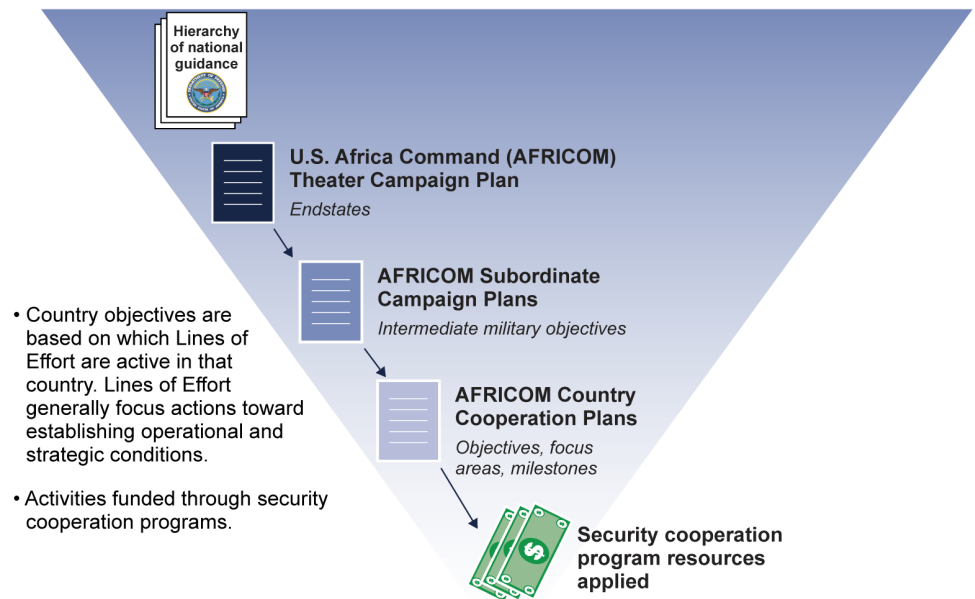
and equipping their forces to execute AFRICOM operational requirements. As part of its planning responsibilities, AFRICOM develops a campaign plan, which is a joint, multiyear plan that reflects the command's strategy to achieve certain end states within its area of responsibility, including activities to shape the environment and deter conflict.⁹ This plan is informed by a hierarchy of national and strategic guidance and guides the development, organization, and integration of activities conducted in Africa. AFRICOM's current campaign plan sets forth specific lines of effort, such as countering violent extremist organizations, strengthening defense institutions, and peacekeeping and crisis response.¹⁰ The campaign plan also includes intermediate military objectives, which are intended to be resource-informed, measurable, and achievable objectives with a one-to-two year time horizon that build toward the command's identified end states. Subordinate campaign plans, such as the East Africa Campaign Plan and individual country cooperation plans, which are currently being developed, are intended to further define and scope these intermediate military objectives by region and country. In addition, AFRICOM's country cooperation plans for each country in Africa are intended to include objectives, focus areas, and milestones that are specific to the country and identify the program resources available to meet those objectives and milestones, which then in turn drive the identification of individual security cooperation activities.¹¹ These planning processes are depicted in figure 1 below.

⁹ DOD defines the term "end state" to mean the set of required conditions that define achievement of the commander's objectives.

¹⁰ AFRICOM is currently re-writing its Campaign Plans, including country cooperation plans.

¹¹ Security cooperation is conducted through a variety of different programs under Title 10 and Title 22, U.S. Code, that provide the geographic combatant commands with authorities and funding to carry out different types of activities. For example, AFRICOM trains and equips partner nation military forces through National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2006, Section 1206 which authorizes DOD to provide training, equipment, and supplies to a foreign country's military forces in order for that country to conduct counter terrorist operations, among other things. AFRICOM assigns personnel to manage each program, including developing and coordinating proposals for activities.

Figure 1: AFRICOM Planning Process



Source: GAO analysis of AFRICOM information. | GAO-15-568

AFRICOM's security cooperation programs in Africa are coordinated through Offices of Security Cooperation and Defense Attaché Offices in approximately 38 nations. These offices are staffed by military personnel and are located within the U.S. embassies. They manage DOD's security cooperation programs under the guidance of AFRICOM and serve as DOD's representatives to the U.S. Embassy Country Teams to ensure that DOD activities conducted in country are coordinated with and through the Department of State. Their mission is to enhance the long-term bilateral defense relationship between the United States and the host nation.

Army Brigades Allocated to AFRICOM

AFRICOM submits requests for forces to support its operations—including security cooperation activities—through the Global Force Management process. The Global Force Management process enables DOD to manage the availability of U.S. military forces by assigning and allocating forces to meet rotational and emergent force requirements within each geographic command. AFRICOM and USARAF officials said that obtaining forces through this process to support individual security cooperation activities can be slow and unpredictable because each

request for forces competes with requests from the other geographic combatant commands and with other strategic priorities, which can make it difficult for the commands to plan for security cooperation or respond to emerging requirements.

To better support the combatant commands and be globally responsive and regionally engaged, the Army is in the process of aligning its total force to geographic combatant commands—including the Active Component, Army National Guard, and Army Reserves. Under its regional alignment of forces policy, the Army has identified three categories of aligned forces:

- **Assignment:** Assigned forces are placed under a combatant commander's authority for a relatively permanent period of time at the direction of the Secretary of Defense through the Global Force Management process.
- **Allocation:** Allocated forces are temporarily provided on a rotational basis to combatant commands through the Global Force Management process in response to specific requests for capabilities and at the direction of the Secretary of Defense. Allocation conveys specific authorities for the use of the forces by combatant commands. The Army brigade combat teams aligned to AFRICOM since 2013 are allocated forces.
- **Service Retained, Combatant Commander Aligned:** All Army forces that are not assigned or allocated fall into this category. This type of alignment does not create any formal relationship between the aligned forces and combatant commands but does allow for some coordination between the two.

The allocation of a brigade to AFRICOM in 2013 was initiated in response to AFRICOM's request for a brigade combat team through the Global Force Management system to conduct security cooperation and other activities in support of its campaign plan.¹² Historically, AFRICOM had to submit a separate request for forces through the Global Force Management process to support each individual security cooperation activity that the command conducted. However, with this allocation,

¹² According to USARAF officials, AFRICOM's initial request was for a brigade combat team. The Command has since additionally requested allocated Army forces in the form of theater enablers.

AFRICOM was granted authority by the Secretary of Defense to utilize personnel from the brigade to conduct individual security cooperation activities in accordance with strategic guidance and within certain timeframes. AFRICOM maintains accountability of the engagements by producing and endorsing an annual operations order to the Joint Staff and Army Forces Command. Any other use of the brigade, or request for capabilities that the allocated brigade cannot provide, requires AFRICOM to submit a new request for forces through the Global Force Management system. Since 2013, three brigade combat teams have been allocated to AFRICOM.

- 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division was the first brigade allocated to AFRICOM and was employed in support of AFRICOM from April 2013 to June 2014.
- 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division was employed in support of AFRICOM from June 2014 to February 2015.¹³
- 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division is expected to be employed in support of AFRICOM from February 2015 to October 2015.¹⁴

During their employment periods, the brigades are based at homestation and then deploy groups of personnel or units from the United States to Africa to conduct individual security cooperation activities, as needed. The brigades have been and one continues to be used to conduct security cooperation activities in five categories: (1) security assistance, (2) combined exercises, (3) military contacts, (4) information sharing/intelligence cooperation, (5) and humanitarian assistance. The majority of brigade security cooperation activities are planned and supported by AFRICOM in Stuttgart, Germany and USARAF in Vicenza, Italy. Each of the allocated brigades has also been tasked with a security and crisis response mission under the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn

¹³ 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division was to be inactivated in June 2015 so its allocation was for less than one year.

¹⁴ 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division was reflagged as 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division during its employment in Africa as part of the Army's ongoing restructuring initiatives, but we will refer to it consistently as 4th Brigade throughout this report. 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division is also expected to have a shorter period of allocation as the Army is moving toward using infantry or stryker brigades instead of armored brigades to support the mission in Africa.

of Africa,¹⁵ which required each brigade to deploy a battalion task force to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti for the duration of its alignment.¹⁶ These battalion task forces also conduct some security cooperation activities in support of the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa. In addition, the brigades have supported a significant number of activities for the Department of State, such as providing units or individual mentors to train African forces for peace keeping support operations. Figure 2 shows personnel from the 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division conducting live fire and search and seizure training in Senegal.

Figure 2: Brigade Personnel Conduct Live Fire and Search and Seizure Training with African Partner Security Forces in Senegal June 2014



Source: Army. | GAO-15-568

¹⁵ The Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa was established in 2002 as part of DOD's efforts to combat terrorism. It is the military's main operational presence in Africa and AFRICOM's only task force. Its area of interest includes 10 countries in East Africa.

¹⁶ The Army chose to use battalions from the allocated brigades to fill the security and crisis response requirements in Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, but these requirements are separate from the brigades' allocation to AFRICOM for security cooperation.

In addition to supporting AFRICOM-directed security cooperation activities, Army guidance directs the brigades to maintain readiness for their core missions—to fight and win “decisive action” operations globally. Decisive action is broadly defined as tasks related to the continuous, simultaneous combinations of offense, defense, and stability or defense support of civil authorities.¹⁷ To achieve and maintain readiness for decisive action, the brigades conduct a combination of unit and individual training. They report their core mission readiness monthly in the Defense Readiness Reporting System, which provides the data that are used to assess readiness in several areas, including personnel availability, supply, equipment operability, and training.

AFRICOM Identifies and Synchronizes Security Cooperation Activities, but the Allocated Brigades Sometimes Lack Key Information about the Activities

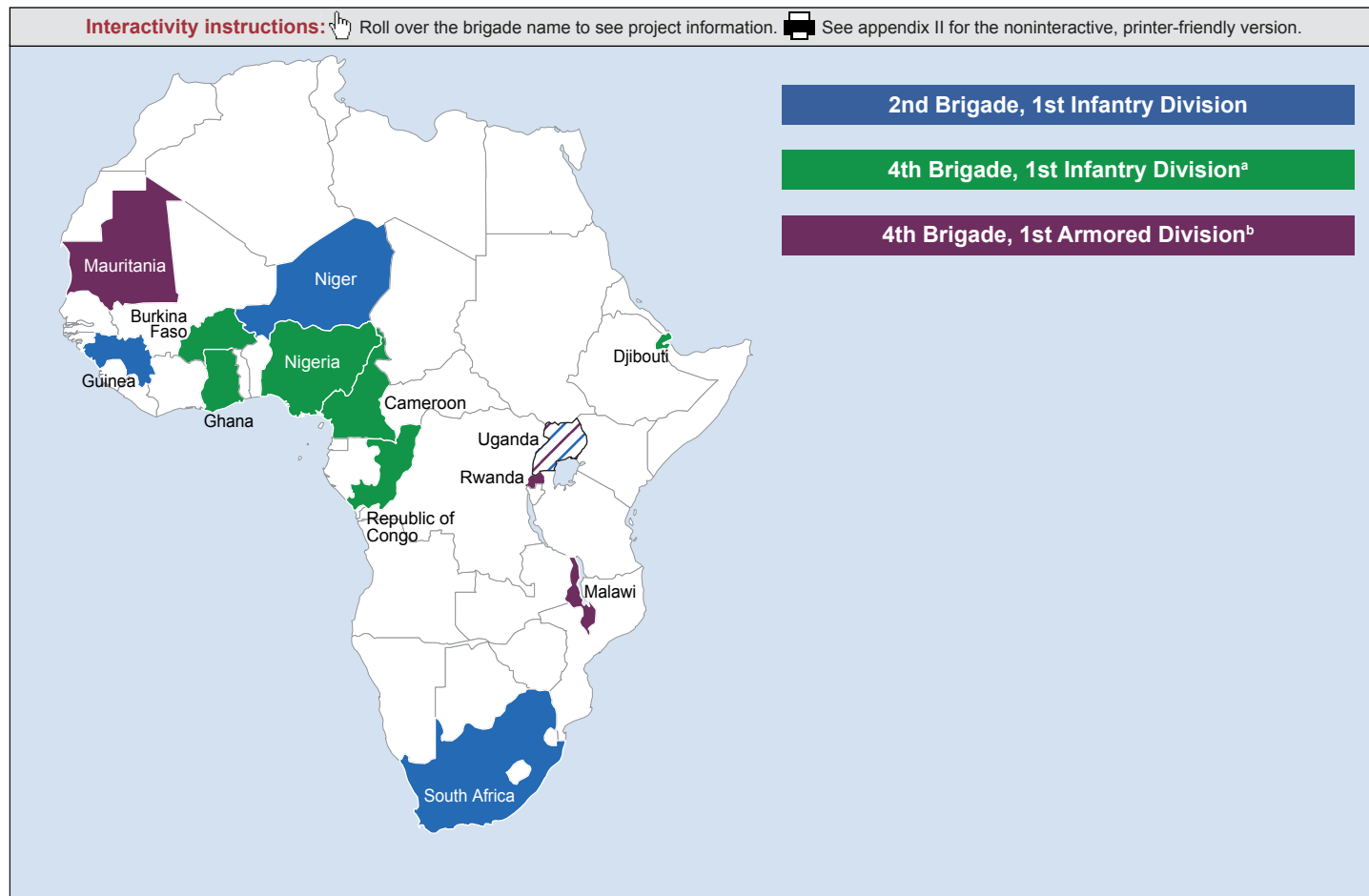
The brigades have conducted a range of security cooperation activities identified and synchronized through AFRICOM's campaign planning process. Within the construct of AFRICOM's broader planning processes, the Offices of Security Cooperation and USARAF have primary responsibility to develop and coordinate individual security cooperation activities conducted by the brigades based on theater- and country-level objectives. However, the brigades sometimes lacked timely and complete information required to effectively carry out these activities.

The Brigades Have Conducted Hundreds of Security Cooperation Activities throughout Africa

Since they were first allocated in 2013, the brigades have conducted hundreds of security cooperation activities in Africa. These activities have ranged in focus, duration, complexity, and location. Figure 3 below provides information on the activities conducted by the brigades, including some examples of specific activities, as reported by the brigades or parent divisions.

¹⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*. (May 2012).

Figure 3: Examples of Security Cooperation Activities Conducted by the Allocated Brigades in Africa



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Army information. | GAO-15-568

Note: The countries highlighted represent the examples cited in the figure and do not include all countries in which the brigades have conducted activities.

^a As of February 6, 2015.

^b As of May 18, 2015.

AFRICOM, USARAF, the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa, and U.S. embassy officials stated that the brigades' availability and capabilities have been an important tool for addressing increased demand for security cooperation activities in Africa and supporting efforts to enhance partner nation capabilities. During our review of after action reports submitted by the 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, which was the brigade allocated to AFRICOM during the majority of our review, brigade personnel also generally reported that their efforts enhanced the partner nations' capabilities after the activity was completed. AFRICOM officials told us that the Command is in the process of rewriting its intermediate military objectives and developing associated measures of effectiveness to assess security cooperation activity outcomes so that they can ascertain the effect of these activities.

The Army and USARAF have also been examining other options for meeting security cooperation requirements in Africa in the future. For instance, USARAF has proposed that the Army make adjustments to the alignment of forces in AFRICOM, including allocating or assigning an entire division—which is substantially larger than a brigade—and either assigning or habitually allocating units in order to maintain institutional knowledge among forces and facilitate long-term relationships, among other expected benefits. The Army also is examining the possibility of creating a multi-functional battalion task force that could potentially be allocated to AFRICOM to conduct smaller-scale security cooperation activities. The degree to which such proposals may be implemented in the future is unclear at this time.

AFRICOM's Campaign Planning Process Includes Mechanisms to Improve Synchronization of Security Cooperation Plans and Activities across Components

Development of security cooperation activities begins with AFRICOM's planning process. AFRICOM's campaign planning process includes mechanisms to synchronize security cooperation activities across the command. Planning for security cooperation involves multiple stakeholders, including each of the service component commands, AFRICOM's special operations component, the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, program managers responsible for identifying resources to support security cooperation activities, and the Offices of Security Cooperation at U.S. embassies in Africa. Each of the components and the task force plans for and conducts individual security

cooperation activities that are derived from the campaign planning process, utilizing available forces.¹⁸

AFRICOM officials said that synchronizing activities across the command can be a challenge, but the command has taken several steps to refine and synchronize security cooperation activities including establishing a number of mechanisms as part of AFRICOM's annual campaign planning process. According to officials, these mechanisms are intended to achieve unity of effort by the different stakeholders and to ensure that the activities being conducted in Africa support the command's identified objectives. Such mechanisms include

- **Conferences:** AFRICOM leads interagency conferences to discuss theater- and country-level objectives, resources, and supporting activities. For example, in September 2014, AFRICOM held its annual Theater Synchronization Conference, which involved officials from AFRICOM, its components, the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, and Offices of Security Cooperation. When we observed the conference, theater, regional, and country objectives and supporting activities were discussed and refined with the intention of synchronizing planned activities within and across countries. Similarly, in January 2015, the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa held its first annual Theater Security Cooperation Synchronization Conference, which brought together planners from AFRICOM and the service components, as well as the Offices of Security Cooperation to refine and synchronize regional- and country-level objectives, milestones, and security cooperation activities for the 10 countries in the Task Force's area of interest.
- **Guidance Related to the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa:** With each of the components supporting activities in East Africa, AFRICOM recently instructed the service components to coordinate activities conducted in East Africa through the Combined Joint Task Force's headquarters to ensure that the Task Force has visibility over efforts in its area of interest. The Combined Joint Task

¹⁸ We have previously reported on challenges related to planning and interagency collaboration in programs that aim to build partner nation capabilities and capacity for counter-terrorism efforts in Africa. See GAO, *COMBATING TERRORISM: State Department Can Improve Management of East Africa Program*. [GAO-14-502](#). (Washington, D.C.: Jun 17, 2014); and, GAO, *COMBATING TERRORISM: U.S. Efforts in Northwest Africa Would Be Strengthened by Enhanced Program Management*. [GAO-14-518](#). (Washington, D.C.: Jun 24, 2014).

Force has also established a Joint Activities Synchronization Board, which it uses to validate and approve security cooperation activities to ensure that they are aligned with the command's objectives.

- **Country-Level Meetings:** As part of AFRICOM's process for developing country plans, it holds country coordination meetings—typically for those countries with a large number of engagements—that include the components and officials from the host nation to develop, review, and synchronize proposed security cooperation activities in the broader context of country and regional goals. For instance, the Office of Security Cooperation in Uganda held a program review meeting with the Ugandan People's Defense Forces in December 2014 to discuss Ugandan capability needs and coordinate security cooperation efforts for the coming year. Officials said that while it would be beneficial to hold these in each country annually, it is logistically difficult to do so. According to AFRICOM and Department of State officials, each country plan should be reviewed and validated by the corresponding U.S. embassy to ensure that DOD's objectives and supporting activities are aligned with and in support of Department of State objectives and plans within that country. The country plans also identify AFRICOM component responsibilities for supporting key objectives, focus areas, and milestones.

The Offices of Security Cooperation and USARAF Identify, Develop, and Support Individual Security Cooperation Activities for the Brigades to Conduct

Based on the objectives and end states identified through AFRICOM's broader planning processes, the Offices of Security Cooperation and USARAF have key roles in identifying, developing, and supporting individual security cooperation activities for the brigades.

Officials from AFRICOM, USARAF, and Offices of Security Cooperation told us that the Offices of Security Cooperation generate many of the initial concepts for security cooperation activities ultimately supported by the brigades, based on their evaluation of the country-level objectives and the force capability needs of the host nation. Because they are typically located in the U.S. embassies, Office of Security Cooperation personnel are often best positioned to inform country-level capability assessments and coordinate with the host nations to identify their needs.¹⁹ For

¹⁹ The presidential policy directive on security sector assistance highlights the importance of considering partner nation capacity needs, among other factors, when implementing security sector assistance. The White House, Presidential Policy Directive 23 on Security Sector Assistance (Washington, D.C.: April 5, 2013).

example, one Office of Security Cooperation Chief stated that he routinely attends security cooperation activities conducted by the U.S. forces in his country, and that doing so provides him with an opportunity to assess the performance of the country's security forces. He uses this information to develop ideas for further security cooperation activities. Offices of Security Cooperation also represent the interests of the U.S. embassy Country Team and are responsible for ensuring that security cooperation activities conducted by DOD, including the brigades, are aligned with the objectives and efforts of the U.S. Ambassador in that country.

Once proposed activities have been identified by the Offices of Security of Cooperation, USARAF is responsible for further developing the concepts for those activities in coordination with the Offices of Security Cooperation, identifying resources and authorities to support the activities, and validating the proposed activities in consideration of the country-level objectives and in coordination with AFRICOM. USARAF has established a working group and review boards to facilitate this process, including a security cooperation working group to guide and coordinate concept development, and synchronization, resourcing and final decision boards that collectively review and determine whether to approve and move forward with planning an activity. USARAF officials said that, in addition to these mechanisms, component officials responsible for planning activities are consistently engaged in informal conversations with the Offices of Security Cooperation regarding the proposed activities.

Security cooperation activities that are identified and validated through these processes are tasked to the brigades and other executing units on both annual and emergent bases. USARAF provides an annual baseline projection of validated security cooperation activities for the coming fiscal year—via AFRICOM and Army Forces Command—to the brigades to aid in their preparation.²⁰ Emergent security cooperation activities may also be generated for execution in the same fiscal year and are tasked to the brigades on an individual basis as they are approved or through quarterly updates to USARAF's annual projection. For example, the United States is in the process of equipping one country with Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles to support its deployments to Somalia, but late

²⁰ Once security cooperation activities have been validated, AFRICOM is required to submit a message to Army Forces Command formally requesting capabilities from the brigade to support those activities. Army Forces Command then issues deployment orders to the brigade to deploy in support of the approved activities.

changes to the location where the vehicles are being shipped was expected to result in potential emergent requirements for the brigades, to provide training to the host nation on those vehicles. According to USARAF planning documents and officials, there are an increasing number of emergent activities, which the brigades are being used to support. USARAF officials told us that emergent activities accounted for 51 percent of 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division's activities. AFRICOM and USARAF officials attributed the number of emergent activities in Africa to a dynamic planning environment with security threats and opportunities that change quickly and to the uncertainty of funding, among other factors. USARAF officials told us that as a result of this environment, emergent activities may develop with limited warning, challenging the command's planning. Furthermore, planned activities are frequently cancelled or delayed as a result of the dynamic environment. For example, the 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division was tasked to support 188 baseline and emergent activities as of May 2015 according to brigade documents. Of the 188 activities that the brigade was tasked with, 74 have been canceled and 26 placed on hold; USARAF officials said these cancellations and delays are due mostly to changing conditions on the ground that are driven by the host nation.

The Brigades Sometimes Lack Timely and Complete Information Necessary to Effectively Conduct Security Cooperation Activities

While USARAF and the Offices of Security Cooperation are responsible for supporting the brigades' preparation for the individual activities, officials from each brigade also told us that the information they receive for upcoming security cooperation activities is often untimely or incomplete. USARAF is generally responsible for clarifying key information about the activities with the Office of Security Cooperation while the Office of Security Cooperation is responsible for discussing activity logistics with the host nation, including who will attend, what equipment is available, and where the activity will take place. To enhance the brigades' awareness of activities and facilitate coordination, the brigades have each embedded a liaison officer with a small support team inside USARAF's headquarters. This team provides the brigades with updated activity information and relays any questions the brigades may have, among other things. In addition to the formal notifications that the brigades receive, USARAF's fiscal year 2015 Operations Order, which establishes policies to guide USARAF's planning efforts, states that USARAF personnel are responsible for developing task orders for each

security cooperation activity.²¹ USARAF officials noted that they try to provide task orders to the brigades 90 days in advance of each activity to guide their preparation. Task orders are intended to identify an activity's key details, such as the task, purpose, and desired end state.

Although USARAF has a process in place to provide task orders to executing units, we found that the brigades have not always received activity information in a timely manner. Brigade officials told us that task orders are often provided late and sometimes not at all. Specifically, brigade officials from one team that deployed reported that they did not receive a task order before deploying to conduct a logistics training activity. These officials obtained a copy of the final task order through alternative communication channels five days after arriving in country and while brigade officials used previous experience to prepare as best as they could, they did not receive a clear breakdown of the activities objectives—which would have helped them develop a better program of instruction—before deploying. USARAF officials said that while offices responsible for planning and refining individual activities aim to provide task orders 90 days in advance of an activity, they often provide them to the brigades less than 30 days before execution, which in turn challenges the brigades' ability to prepare for the activity. According to officials, these delays in providing some task orders are due to the challenges of planning activities within a dynamic environment. USARAF officials also said that while some task orders are very detailed, others may lack key details due to a number of challenges including the planners' ability to confirm activity details with the host nation through the Offices of Security Cooperation prior to the activity execution date or the increasing workload of USARAF staff, who are often planning multiple activities at any one time.

Officials from each brigade told us that the information they receive about upcoming security cooperation activities is often untimely or incomplete. The brigades may be aware before deploying that they do not have complete information, but they are often unable to fully communicate and collaborate with USARAF and the applicable Office of Security Cooperation to get the information they need in the right time frame because they may not have approval from USARAF to contact the Offices of Security Cooperation directly or may not know whom to speak with at

²¹ U.S. Army Africa, *Annual Operation Order FY2015* (Vicenza, Italy: May 29, 2014)

USARAF. In other instances, the brigades may not know that there is an information gap or miscommunication until they arrive in country. In addition, officials from each brigade cited concerns regarding the completeness of the information they receive before an activity, which they said can affect their ability to effectively prepare for and conduct security cooperation activities. Brigade officials identified the following issues they have experienced:

- **Objectives unclear or inaccurate:** Brigade officials cited instances where activity objectives were not clearly articulated to them or where they prepared to conduct one type of activity when the Office of Security Cooperation and the host nation had expected them to conduct a different activity. For example, one team deployed for an activity with the understanding that they would be conducting artillery training with the host nation, but when the team arrived in country it discovered that it was supposed to conduct a site survey for future training activities. This misunderstanding was not clear to the brigade, the Office of Security Cooperation, or USARAF until the team arrived in country. As a result, brigade officials had to work with the country team to quickly revise their approach to the execution of the activity and then return two months later to conduct the initially planned activity. In an after-action report documenting this activity, brigade personnel noted that earlier and more direct communication with security cooperation personnel at the embassy are necessary to confirm the purpose and intent of activities before execution. In the case of another activity, brigade personnel deployed to conduct a survey of training sites, plans, and logistics for future activities. Brigade personnel noted that in the lead up to the activity it was difficult to understand the purpose of their survey which made it difficult to properly plan and prepare for the activity. The personnel that conducted the activity stated that once the brigade is tasked with an activity, it would be helpful for USARAF and the brigade personnel executing the activity to discuss the activity in advance.
- **Personnel skill requirements not clearly defined:** Brigade officials cited instances where the activity information they received did not clearly identify personnel skill requirements and that, as a result, the brigades did not deploy the right personnel to fully conduct the activity. For example, brigade officials who deployed to conduct vehicle maintenance training said that they did not find out until two weeks prior to deploying what type of vehicles they would be training host nation personnel to maintain. As a result, they did not have enough time to train their personnel specifically for maintaining those types of vehicles before they deployed. Instead, they had to send

general mechanics, who, because they did not have expertise on the specific vehicles themselves, were not fully prepared to train host country personnel to maintain them.

- **Key information about host nation security forces' capabilities missing or incorrect:** Brigade officials said that they often did not have sufficient information about the host nation security forces' capabilities to effectively target their training efforts, which forced them to refine or develop new programs of instruction mid-event. For example, brigade personnel deployed to provide field artillery training to a host nation with the understanding that personnel attending the training from the host nation would have at least a basic level of proficiency that would enable brigade trainers to focus the activity on refining and enhancing the host nation's fire support skills. When brigade personnel arrived in the host nation they learned that none of the artillery personnel present had conducted live fire training with their howitzers and other large caliber mortars in over a year. As a result, brigade staff spent time developing follow-on artillery training to bring the host nation's live fire artillery skills to a basic proficiency level, instead of working with the available artillery personnel to refine and advance their abilities.
- **Logistics and support incorrect or uncoordinated:** Brigade officials noted instances where information about an activity—such as translation services, equipment logistics and communications plans—was not fully coordinated before deploying. For example, brigade officials deployed to a host nation to provide training on preparing intelligence information and when they arrived in country they discovered that they were required to pay for their interpreters and drivers directly with cash, which was unexpected. Brigade personnel were unable to use the local ATMs to obtain the cash, so an USARAF official present had to cover the costs. Had the USARAF official not been present, the brigade personnel may have had difficulty completing the activity. In another example, brigade personnel deployed to conduct vehicle maintenance training. However, when the team arrived, the host nation asked to change the starting date twice which the brigade personnel were not able to support. The brigade personnel sent to conduct this activity noted in their after action report that USARAF, the embassy, and host nation need to better coordinate key activity logistics, such as the starting date.

USARAF and Office of Security Cooperation officials noted that they rely on each other to develop and coordinate activities, but officials cited challenges that limit their ability to do so. USARAF officials stated that the Offices of Security Cooperation, which may be staffed by personnel from

different services (e.g., the Navy or Air Force), may not always know what questions or information they should be communicating to the host nation to effectively shape Army security cooperation activities. In addition, according to USARAF and Office of Security Cooperation officials, the increasing number of activities being conducted in Africa, coupled with manning shortages, challenges the ability of the Offices of Security Cooperation to fully coordinate individual activities with the host nation, AFRICOM, USARAF, the other service components, and DOD executing units, including the brigades. Furthermore, Office of Security Cooperation personnel stated they may have limited insight into the development and validation of security cooperation activities proposed by USARAF, which makes it challenging to coordinate and refine activities. For instance, one Office of Security Cooperation chief noted that he had proposed several activities based on his assessment of the host nation's security forces, but he received a list of approved activities from USARAF that was significantly different and was unaware of how those activities had been developed and why certain capabilities were being targeted. Another Office of Security Cooperation chief said that he sometimes receives activity proposals from AFRICOM and its components that, particularly for emergent activities, do not include specifics on the activity. This lack of information challenges his ability to coordinate those activities with the host nation. In those instances, he said that he will ask for greater details on the activity or put such activities on hold until he can obtain sufficient information from the component.

According to the Army's Field Manual for *Army Support to Security Cooperation*, security cooperation personnel should have a clear and timely understanding of their objectives and operational environment to effectively plan and conduct their activities.²² Furthermore, according to GAO leading practices for interagency coordination, when coordination mechanisms are not formalized or fully utilized, the result can be a patchwork of activities that waste scarce funds and limit the effectiveness of missions.²³ Defining coordination mechanisms can help agencies

²² Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual No. 3-22, *Army Support to Security Cooperation* (Jun 21, 2013)

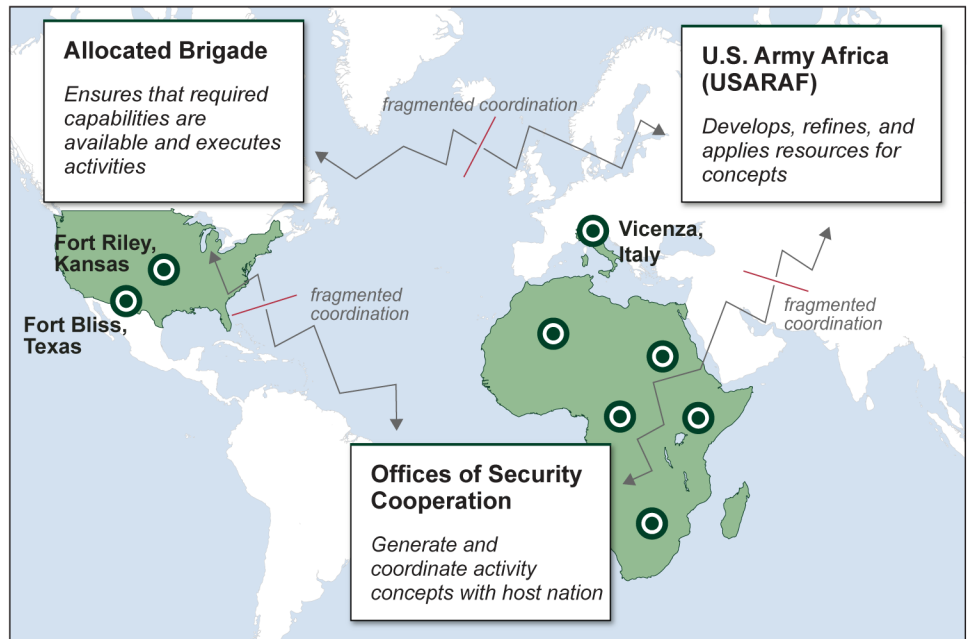
²³ GAO, *Interagency Collaboration: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight of National Security Strategies, Organizations, Workforce, and Information Sharing*. [GAO-09-904SP](#). Washington, D.C.: September, 2009.

clarify key details about strategy implementation, such as the purpose of an activity.

Brigades sometimes lack complete and timely information, which they need to effectively conduct activities, because USARAF, which is responsible for formally validating security cooperation activities, has not established a formal mechanism to consistently share information with country stakeholders such as the Office of Security Cooperation and the brigades in order to address information gaps and shape the activity in advance. Conferences like AFRICOM's Theater Synchronization Conference can provide an opportunity to discuss and synchronize activities on an annual basis, but the significant number of emergent activities and frequent changes to planned activities limits their effectiveness for refining the details of activities leading up to execution. Further, while USARAF's fiscal year 2015 Operation Order identifies the need to coordinate activity concepts with the Offices of Security Cooperation, it does not specify a clear mechanism for doing so and USARAF, the Offices of Security Cooperation, and the brigades lack a collective venue for coordination, which they would need in order to respond to dynamic activity requirements and to ensure a shared understanding of critical information.²⁴ For instance, officials said that USARAF planners and the Offices of Security Cooperation informally contact one another on an individual basis to discuss proposed activities, but they do not consistently and formally meet to discuss upcoming activities. Furthermore, the brigades are rarely involved in these informal conversations and often do not have the authority to contact the Offices of Security Cooperation directly until shortly before they deploy. Given the challenges faced by the Offices of Security Cooperation, Office of Security Cooperation officials said that the best method for refining activity concepts and ensuring that they are completed in a timely manner is to hold a meeting where key stakeholders can discuss activity details in advance. Such a meeting could also help to refine the task orders that USARAF issues to the brigades to ensure that they capture all critical information and could provide an additional venue to further improve synchronization of activities within AFRICOM. Figure 4 depicts the fragmented way in which activity information is coordinated between USARAF, the Offices of Security Cooperation, and the brigades.

²⁴ U.S. Army Africa, *Annual Operation Order FY2015* (Vicenza, Italy: May 29, 2014).

Figure 4: Fragmented Coordination While Developing Security Cooperation Activities



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) information. | GAO-15-568

Without a formal and consistent mechanism for stakeholders to coordinate upcoming activities and ensure that information about the activities is timely and complete, the brigades' ability to effectively conduct security cooperation activities may be challenged and the resources invested may not have the anticipated effect.

The Brigades Have Generally Been Prepared to Meet Requirements in Africa, but Limitations Exist With Regard to Mission-Specific Training, Equipping, and Access to Passports

The brigades have been trained and equipped for their core decisive-action missions, which has generally prepared them to meet requirements in Africa.²⁵ The brigades conduct decisive-action training for their core missions and then augment this training with programs they develop specifically to prepare for deployments to Africa, but opportunities exist to enhance training for the allocated brigades. All three of the brigades that have been allocated to AFRICOM to date have experienced gaps in communications capabilities, because mission-specific equipment requirements for operating in Africa have not been clearly identified, and no consistent mechanism has been established to ensure that brigades have mission-specific equipment as they begin their missions. In addition, delays in obtaining official passports have affected the brigades' ability to meet certain time and personnel requirements, sometimes leading to delayed activities or the deployment of personnel not considered the best-suited for the activity—simply because they had passports.

Concerns Identified About Mission-Specific Training Programs that Augment Decisive-Action Training and Support Requirements in Africa

The brigades are expected to train for both their decisive-action and AFRICOM-directed missions. To help accomplish this, Army Forces Command has published Regionally Aligned Forces Pre-Deployment Training Requirements to identify the decisive-action and mission-specific training required for regionally aligned force units, including the brigades allocated to AFRICOM. The brigades develop training programs to address these requirements, but Army stakeholders have identified some concerns about how brigade training is being conducted, supported, and funded.

Brigades Develop Decisive-Action and Mission-Specific Training

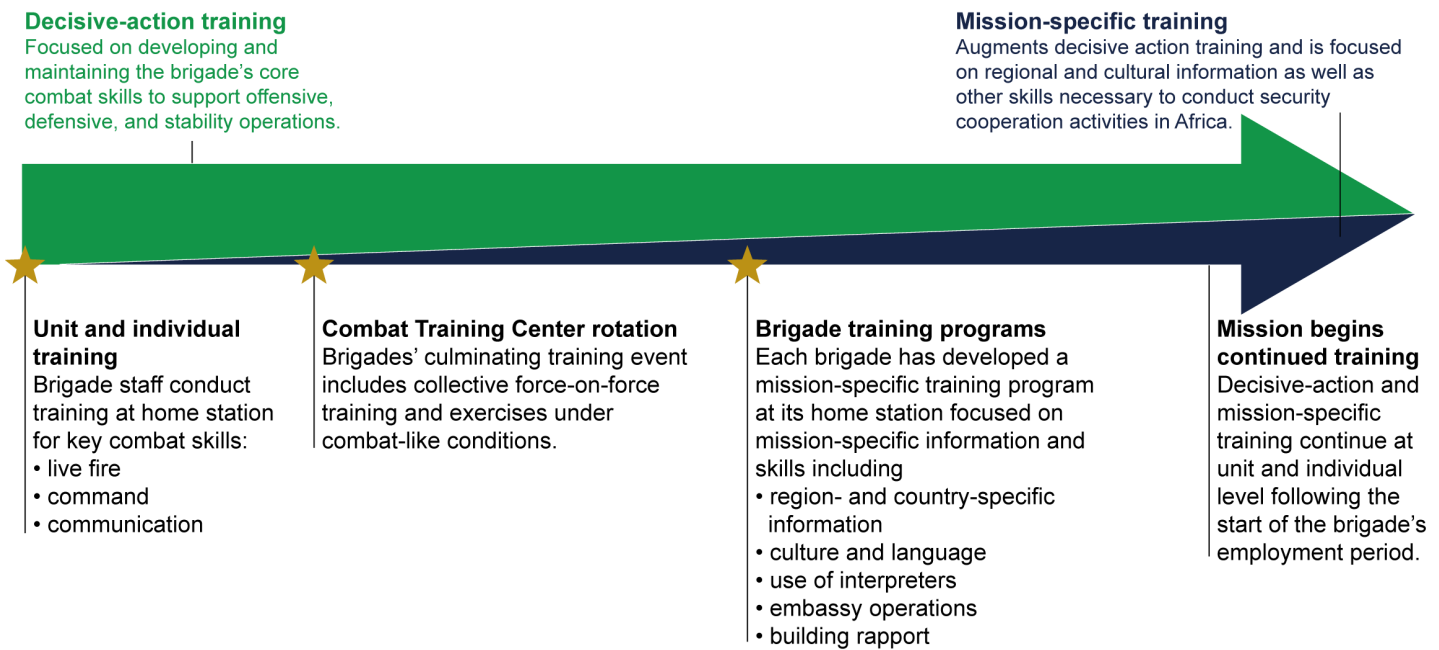
To date, three brigade combat teams have conducted both decisive-action and mission-specific training for deployments to Africa in support of AFRICOM and based on Army Forces Command guidance. The allocated brigades first conduct decisive-action training for their standard missions—including a rotation through one of the Army's Combat Training Centers—in order to remain globally responsive. Army and brigade officials estimated that decisive-action training also addresses about 90 to 95 percent of the training required to support security cooperation and other activities in Africa. In addition, the Army Forces Command training requirements identify regionally-focused training to augment decisive-

²⁵ Decisive action is broadly defined as tasks related to the continuous, simultaneous combinations of offense, defense, and stability or defense support of civil authorities.

action training and prepare the allocated brigades to conduct security cooperation activities. This training includes regionally-focused culture, language, use of interpreters, non-standard weapons, and peace-keeping support operations, among other things.

There is no standardized program of instruction for brigades allocated to AFRICOM, although individual organizations that support training may have standardized program offerings. Brigade commanders are expected to utilize the Army Forces Command training requirements as they analyze their missions to develop training for their units that will address both their decisive-action and AFRICOM mission-specific requirements. In some cases, the requirements specify how the brigades are to train for their missions in Africa, such as identifying which organization is to provide the training; in other cases, they do not. When no specific program is identified, the brigades have flexibility in determining how to meet the mission-specific training requirements. Figure 5 is a general time line of the brigades’ decisive-action and mission-specific training.

Figure 5: Timeline for Decisive-Action and Mission-Specific Training



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Army information. | GAO-15-568

To address tasks not covered as part of decisive-action training, Combat Training Center rotation, or through other specifically identified training organizations, each of the brigades has developed a mission-specific training program at its homestation. For example, as the first brigade allocated to AFRICOM, the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division developed a 5-day program referred to as Dagger University that included courses on the region, language, use of interpreters, embassy operations, and how to build rapport with partner nation forces. It also included situational exercises with cultural role players and simulated key leader engagements. The brigade used a number of external resources to develop this training, including the 162nd Infantry Training Brigade, the Army Training and Doctrine Command Culture Center,²⁶ the Asymmetric Warfare Group,²⁷ and the African Studies Department from nearby Kansas State University, which provided African cultural expertise and role players. The 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division created a similar program that it referred to as Dragon University. The 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division also developed a program at its homestation referred to as Highlander University, but this program did not incorporate external training organizations—such as Army Training and Doctrine Command—to the same extent.²⁸ Figure 6 shows brigade personnel first conducting mission-specific training at their homestation with the assistance of a role player and then interacting with security forces from Burkina Faso in 2014.

²⁶ The Army Training and Doctrine Command Culture Center provides relevant and accredited cultural competency training and education to Soldiers and Department of the Army civilians in order to build and sustain an Army with the right blend of cultural competency capabilities to facilitate a wide range of operations, now and in the future. The Culture Center is subordinate to the Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Management Office, which provides daily management oversight in directing, synchronizing, and integrating Army's culture, regional expertise, and language capabilities and requirements.

²⁷ The Asymmetric Warfare Group provides operational advisory support globally and rapid solution development to the Army and Joint Force Commanders to enhance Soldier survivability and combat effectiveness and enable the defeat of current and emerging threats in support of Unified Land Operations, which is how Army units seize, retain, and exploit the initiative to gain and maintain a position of relative advantage in sustained land operations to create conditions for favorable conflict resolution.

²⁸ 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division's training program was initially referred to as Highlander University. However, the brigade was reflagged as 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division during its employment in Africa as part of ongoing Army restructuring and the name of the training program was changed to Bulldog University at that time.

Figure 6: Brigade Personnel Train with Role Players to Prepare Them for Interacting with Host Nation Soldiers



Source: Army. | GAO-15-568

Army Stakeholders Identified Mission-Specific Training Concerns

USARAF, Army Forces Command, and brigade officials have generally expressed confidence in the brigades' capabilities to develop and execute mission-specific training—with assistance from external organizations in certain key areas where they do not have organic expertise, such as peace-keeping operations and non-standard weapons. One brigade commander noted when a brigade manages its own mission-specific training rather than using a standardized curriculum it can maintain scheduling flexibility, and young leaders reap benefits as they learn to plan and develop training programs based on analyzing missions.

However, Army stakeholders from a range of organizations have identified some concerns about how mission-specific training for regionally aligned forces is being conducted, supported, and funded, and in some cases they identified areas for improvement. For example, the Army held a Regionally Aligned Forces Table Top Exercise in December 2014 that included participants from across the Army to discuss challenges related to the implementation of the regionally aligned forces concept. One of the findings from this exercise was that the current unit approach to conducting mission-specific training is ad hoc, unfunded (i.e., no dedicated funding) and likely insufficient to meet all training requirements. The table top exercise also found that there is limited or poorly advertised institutional support for security cooperation and culture

and language training for regionally aligned units.²⁹ Findings from the table top exercise recommended that the Army identify capabilities to support regionally aligned forces training and facilitate unit training at homestation, including related funding. In addition, officials from Army Training and Doctrine Command said the brigades may not be aware of all of the training resources that exist in the Army and the extent to which the units take advantage of those resources is largely unit driven. For example, one Army Forces Command official said that the 85th Civil Affairs Brigade has expertise and training capabilities that the allocated brigades could leverage in support of their training programs, but it is not clear to what extent the allocated brigades are aware of this potential support. These officials noted that the Army does not have an entity to coordinate all of the organizations that can support training for regionally aligned forces consistently through different brigade rotations and may need a central organization with expertise to serve that function.

In addition, the 162nd Infantry Training Brigade provided some support and funding for training the first two brigades allocated to AFRICOM but was deactivated in 2014, which has implications for brigade training. According to documentation provided by 162nd brigade officials, the 162nd left behind a smaller advise and assist battalion—3rd Battalion, 353rd Regiment—with more limited resources.³⁰ To replace the training provided by the 162nd, the 3rd Battalion has developed a program—designed to train approximately 60 leaders in each course—that it is prepared to offer to brigades as part of a train-the-trainer model, although the brigades are not required to utilize this training. Battalion officials said that the 3rd Battalion is prepared to offer this course up to 20 times a year to regionally aligned force units across all geographic combatant commands. For example, the 3rd Battalion traveled to Fort Bliss in March and April 2015 to provide security cooperation training to about 180 brigade personnel from 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division through courses like cross-culture communications, and to facilitate training exercises that incorporate cultural role players. By way of contrast, the 162nd sent 13 mobile training teams to Fort Riley to train 3,400 soldiers

²⁹ Institutional Army organizations support operational units and provide the infrastructure necessary to raise, train, equip, deploy, and ensure the readiness of all Army forces.

³⁰ In addition to providing training to regionally aligned forces, the 3rd Battalion, 353rd Regiment has also been tasked with other missions, such as training individuals and teams of advisors deploying to Afghanistan.

from 2nd Brigade and 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. According to documentation provided by 162nd Brigade officials, these training teams were funded by the 162nd and incorporated other enablers, such as contractors with regional expertise and the Army Training and Doctrine Command Culture Center. Officials from 3rd Battalion said that the battalion expects to be able to fund its own instructor and travel costs related to the trainings, but future allocated brigades will likely have to fund the costs of additional training enablers to augment these courses, such as contractors with regional cultural expertise. According to battalion officials, if brigades have to pay for the additional enablers, they might be less likely to use them, and the region-specific training might not be as extensive.

In an effort to determine whether its mission-specific training approach for the regionally aligned forces was sufficient, the Army issued guidance in 2013 that established a requirement for Army Forces Command, with support from other Army training organizations, to conduct an assessment of the training and preparation of regionally aligned force units by January 2014, with follow-up assessments every six months.³¹ We have previously reported that training assessments provide opportunities to enhance the coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency of training.³² However, the Army may not have all of the information that it needs to make this determination or address stakeholder concerns because, as of March 2015, Army Forces Command had not completed this assessment. When we asked why the assessment had not been completed, officials from Army Forces Command said that the mission the brigades are conducting is not new and does not require a special assessment, as was initially thought when the requirement was established. In addition, these officials noted that every unit is currently assessed through brigade-level after-action reviews and the documentation of lessons learned. While an individual unit after-action review provides valuable insights on unit experiences, it may not provide the breadth of information necessary to address some of the concerns that were cited at the Army's table top exercise or by other stakeholders.

³¹ Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Fragmentary Order 1 to the Regionally Aligned Forces Execute Order*, Annex E, Operations: Assessments (Oct. 17, 2013).

³² GAO, *Human Capital: A Guide for Assessing Strategic Training and Development Efforts in the Federal Government*, [GAO-04-546G](#). (Washington, D.C.: March 1, 2004).

Given that three brigades have completed mission-specific training for AFRICOM-directed activities, and other brigades have been conducting training for missions in other geographic combatant commands, the Army should now be positioned to conduct an overall assessment of its approach to training aligned forces. The Army's 2013 *Fragmentary Order to the Regionally Aligned Forces Execute Order* includes a framework for the required assessment that specifies assessment questions for aligned units and training enablers—for example, how training is certified and whether the training is sufficient—and identifies collection methods that provide a base of information, which could be expanded upon to include additional questions and information sources, in order to address the concerns about the training that have been identified by various stakeholders. The Army has also commissioned the RAND Corporation to conduct a study on the estimated operational and institutional support costs of regionally aligned forces, including training costs. This study is expected to be published in August 2015 and could further inform the Army's assessment of its training approach. Absent an assessment of the allocated brigades' mission-specific training that expands upon the framework the Army established in its 2013 fragmentary order and fully considers the training concerns that have been identified, such as the degree to which institutional-level coordination or management of training is needed and how training programs should be funded going forward, and whether adjustments to its training approach are needed, the Army may be missing opportunities to enhance the effectiveness and sufficiency of training for brigades allocated to AFRICOM.

The Brigades' Standard Equipment is Generally Sufficient to Support Activities in Africa but Gaps in Mission-Specific Equipment Remain

The brigades allocated to AFRICOM have largely relied on their standard set of equipment to support their mission in Africa but have identified some capability gaps. The brigades are each equipped with the standard set of equipment needed to support their core decisive-action missions; they can leverage this equipment to support deployments in support of AFRICOM. According to Division and USARAF officials, the brigade's standard equipment set is generally sufficient for the mission in Africa. However, all three of the brigades have identified some capability gaps related to equipment—in particular communications equipment needed to maintain command, control, and voice and data communications capabilities while operating in Africa. While the brigades' standard equipment sets include communications equipment to support brigade and battalion-sized headquarters elements and for use in conjunction with large vehicles, they are not designed to support the many deployments by small teams required for the AFRICOM mission. Communications capability gaps can create risk for deployed teams by limiting their access

to communications they need for operational control and safety and limiting the Commander's situational awareness of deployed teams. Some of the communications equipment needs identified by the brigades are:

- satellite phones;
- Secure Internet Protocol Router/Non-Secure Internet Protocol Router Access Points, which are designed to provide satellite communications to small units at remote forward locations;
- mobile communications terminals that provide secure and non-secure internet service and can be transported with personnel on commercial airlines; and
- high-frequency radios that are compatible with those of African partner nations and can be used for training and exercises.

USARAF has been able to provide some communications equipment to the brigades, such as satellite phones, local cellular phones, locator beacons, and a mobile communications system, but USARAF officials told us that the equipment they could provide was not sufficient for the numerous brigade missions. The brigades were able to acquire much of the remaining equipment they needed for mission-specific communications through the Army's operational needs statement process, which operational commanders can use to document urgent needs for nonstandard capabilities and request capabilities to correct a deficiency or enhance mission accomplishment.

In addition to the communications equipment gaps for which the brigades requested equipment through operational needs statements,³³ they experienced other mission-specific equipment gaps, such as water purification systems, mosquito nets, cots, and medical supplies. Unit officials said that this type of equipment was obtainable without much

³³ 1st Infantry Division also submitted an operational needs statement for non-standard weapons and ammunition for use in training brigade personnel for security cooperation missions. In response to this requirement and similar requirements in other combatant commands, the Army has established a non-standard weapons course at Fort Bragg designed to provide training to Army general purpose force soldiers, including brigade personnel, on non-standard weapons.

The Army Has Not Fully Identified and Supplied Mission-Specific Equipment Needs in a Timely Manner

difficulty through the Army's supply system or the Army's rapid fielding initiative.³⁴

According to Army officials, the Army has policies and procedures that, when applied, can be used to fill the gaps between standard equipment sets and mission-specific equipment. For example, the brigades have been able to fill many of the communications equipment gaps that they identified by submitting operational needs statements, but in some cases delays in identifying these requirements—along with the process for validating and providing the equipment—have resulted in mission-specific equipment arriving late in the brigades' mission so that the brigades have had to operate without it. For example,

- The 1st Infantry Division submitted an operational needs statement for six Secure Internet Protocol Router/Non-Secure Internet Protocol Router Access Points in October 2013 to support brigade missions in Africa, as well as the Division's own mission in Africa;³⁵ the request was approved in November 2013, but the division did not receive these items until May/June 2014—the end of 2nd Brigade's mission.
- The 1st Infantry Division submitted a request for high-frequency radios for the 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division in May 2014, but the brigade did not receive them until December 2014—just before the mission was assumed by the next brigade.
- As of late April 2015—two months after assuming the mission— 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division still had not received two of the three communications equipment items that the brigade requested through the operational needs statement process.

The justifications supporting these equipment requests described the risks to the brigades of not having such equipment, including limiting their ability to conduct command and control; communications; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance without the requested

³⁴ The Rapid Fielding Initiative is an Army program that provides individual equipment to units preparing to deploy by fielding commercial-off-the-shelf technology.

³⁵ 1st Infantry Division headquarters was also aligned to AFRICOM as a service retained, combatant commander aligned force to provide a command and control capability for joint operations in the AFRICOM area of operations as needed, and if requested and approved through the Global Force Management system.

Access Points and to train and prepare to operate a multi-national radio network with African nations without the high-frequency radios.

The brigades have experienced capability gaps, because the Army has not fully identified the mission-essential equipment required for the brigades to operate in Africa as allocated forces throughout their period of employment and has not provided this equipment to the brigades in a timely manner. Army Forces Command guidance states that allocated units are to be equipped according to the appropriate requirements document for their mission—either their standard equipment set or a mission-essential equipment list, which is a tool the Army can use to address missions outside the scope of a unit's standard equipment set.³⁶ This guidance further states that the Army Service Component Command—USARAF in this case—is responsible for identifying mission-essential equipment that is not included as part of a unit's standard equipment set. In September 2012, we reported that identifying and validating needs and clearly establishing well-defined requirements can improve outcomes when managing programs.³⁷ USARAF officials said that no requirements had been initially identified, because it was not clear what mission-specific equipment would be required when brigades were initially allocated and beginning to operate in Africa. Officials said that USARAF is working on developing communications equipment requirements for the brigades and should be better positioned to fully identify mission-specific equipment requirements after the current brigade rotation, although they do not believe that mission-specific equipment requirements are extensive.

Mission-Specific Equipment
Not Consistently Transferred or
Provided to Follow-on Units

When the brigades obtain mission-specific equipment through operational needs statements to support their mission in Africa, this equipment is not consistently transferred to the follow-on unit to support its activities, for various reasons. In some cases, equipment obtained by the 1st Infantry Division to support requirements in Africa was purchased by the Army and thus it was transitioned to 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division (e.g., high frequency radios), but other equipment was not transferred because it was purchased by 1st Infantry Division and added to its property book,

³⁶ Army Forces Command, *Mission Alignment Order Fiscal Year 2015 and 2016*, Appendix 2 (Equipment) to Annex F (Sustainment) (January 2015).

³⁷ GAO, *Homeland Security: DHS Requires More Disciplined Investment Management to Help Meet Mission Needs*, [GAO-12-833](#). (Washington, D.C.: September 18, 2012).

or the transfer has been delayed. For example, the 1st Infantry Division had purchased several Secure Internet Protocol Router/Non-Secure Internet Protocol Router Access Points with its own funds in order to support division and brigade missions in Africa. Rather than transition this equipment to the follow-on brigade, the division is currently utilizing it for its mission in Iraq. As a result, the 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division submitted an Operational Needs Statement for these same items, but brigade officials said their request was rejected and, as of April 2015, they are still operating without these items.³⁸ As another example, officials from 1st Infantry Division said that while a number of satellite phones were being transferred to the 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division, attachments for the phones that facilitate secure communications were only on loan to the Division and would not be transitioning with the phones. Moreover, the transfer of the phones had been administratively delayed and the brigade did not receive the majority of the phones until early April 2015, even though it had assumed the mission in February 2015. USARAF officials said that for the equipment that USARAF has provided to the units, they are working with Army Forces Command for it to assume responsibility for training personnel on the equipment and transferring it between the brigades, but this has not yet been fully coordinated. Additionally, a USARAF official said that USARAF had obtained five additional Secure Internet Protocol Router/Non-Secure Internet Protocol Router Access Points in May 2015, three of which USARAF plans to rotate among the brigades to support security cooperation activities in Africa, although the details for how this process will work are not yet fully determined.

The current allocated brigade has experienced communication capability challenges similar to those experienced by the initial brigades because, in addition to not fully identifying requirements, the Army has not established, or applied, a consistent mechanism to ensure that the brigades allocated to AFRICOM have the required mission-essential equipment at the start of their mission, whether through a coordinated transition of equipment between brigades or through other means. Further, while Army Forces Command guidance directs allocated forces to utilize the operational needs statement process to address gaps in

³⁸ Officials said that 4th brigade, 1st Armored Division was instead directed to obtain Secure Internet Protocol Router/Non-Secure Internet Protocol Router Access Points from a signal brigade that is also aligned to AFRICOM, but the signal brigade did not have any of the requested equipment items.

mission-essential equipment, the challenges experienced by the brigades in obtaining equipment through this process demonstrate the limitations of relying fully on this approach.³⁹ For example, Army Headquarters officials said that one of the challenges of obtaining non-standard equipment through Operational Needs Statements is that the process does not include clearly associated sustainment or training plans, whereas formal requirements documents, such as mission-essential equipment lists are developed with these considerations in mind.

To address the gaps in mission-essential equipment that the brigades have experienced, brigade and division officials have suggested that the Army establish a consistent mechanism to ensure that each successive brigade receives all mission-specific equipment at the outset of its mission, such as a mission-essential equipment set that is centrally-funded, maintained and rotated among brigades. The 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division developed a recommended list of equipment for such a set, which includes communications equipment as well as other equipment not included in the brigade's standard equipment sets that the brigade needed during its mission. This equipment included such items as mosquito nets, and laptops with the capabilities required to support exercises. The brigade stated that brigades need homestation access to this mission-essential equipment. Stakeholders at the Army's Regionally Aligned Forces Table Top Exercise also recommended that the Army identify mission-specific equipment acquisition, training, maintenance, and turnover policies for equipment requirements identified by the combatant commands. According to Army headquarters officials, a working group looked at regionally aligned force equipping issues and determined that the Army has existing policies, guidance, and procedures that, when applied, are sufficient to address mission-specific equipment needs, but more education regarding those policies, guidance, procedures, and processes is necessary to ensure that brigades' equipping needs are being met in a timely manner.

Without clearly identified, mission-specific equipment requirements and the establishment, or application, of a consistent mechanism for ensuring that brigades consistently receive mission-specific equipment at the outset of their missions, future brigades allocated to AFRICOM will likely

³⁹ Army Forces Command, *Mission Alignment Order (MAO) FY15 and FY16*, (Jan. 15, 2015)

continue to experience the same capability gaps and may repetitively request the same types of equipment, resulting in both inefficiencies and potential risk that brigades will not have the appropriate equipment to operate effectively in Africa.

Challenges and Delays in Obtaining Official Passports Have Affected Brigades' Ability to Meet Requirements

The brigades have experienced challenges and delays in obtaining official passports that have affected their ability to deploy to meet requirements in Africa because, in part, AFRICOM activity timeframes do not always facilitate timely compliance with Department of State passport procedures.⁴⁰ Servicemembers are generally required to use official passports to enter and exit a foreign country while performing official duties; although in some countries, bilateral agreements enable servicemembers to enter the country on their military orders.

Challenges Processing Large Numbers of Passport Applications

According to unit officials, the brigades had challenges at the installation level processing the volume of passport applications as well as quality control issues related to the applications. Most DOD installations have DOD passport agents who process official passport applications, however the volume of passport applications submitted to support the brigades' AFRICOM mission far exceed the number of applications these offices are staffed to process. For example, officials from the Fort Bliss passport office said that the office typically processes approximately 2,500 passports a year; however they estimated that their office had received and processed approximately 4,000 passport applications between October 2014 and February 2015 and brigade officials said that approximately 2,500 of the 4,000 passport applications processed were submitted in support of the 4th Brigade's mission in Africa. Army officials said that the number of passport applications submitted by the brigades has also challenged the Department of State's processing capacity.

In addition, officials from the Fort Bliss passport office, the Department of State, and Army Logistics Services Washington⁴¹ cited instances where brigade personnel filled out applications incorrectly. For example, brigade

⁴⁰ Official passports are no-fee passports that are issued to U.S. Government personnel traveling abroad in the course of their duties. They are issued, as required, to military members traveling overseas on temporary duty.

⁴¹ The Army's Directorate of Logistics Services Washington is the primary point of contact for DOD passport matters.

AFRICOM Activity
Timeframes May Not Align
with Passport Regulations

personnel sometimes submitted passport applications to travel to countries that do not require passports for military personnel, and the Department of State rejected those applications. In response to these challenges, the Army has taken steps to improve passport application processes for regionally aligned force units, such as issuing guidance on the process for obtaining passports and providing templates for brigades to use in submitting passport applications. This guidance also identifies a training course that personnel from aligned units can take to enable them to support passport and visa application processes and assist with quality control.

Division and brigade officials said that even with the Army's efforts to address the volume and quality of passport applications, the brigades face continuing challenges obtaining passports because AFRICOM activity timeframes do not always facilitate timely compliance with Department of State passport procedures, which require information on destinations, dates, and often supporting travel orders to clearly establish an applicant's need to travel to a specific country that requires a passport for entry. The brigades typically used one of two application types—routine or expedited. Army officials who used these processes said that normal processing time for routine passport requests was approximately 6-10 weeks, while the processing time for expedited passport requests averaged about 2-4 weeks. Each of the brigades initially attempted to process passport applications for a significant number of their personnel before assuming the mission, but unit officials said that the sheer number of applications being submitted by the brigades caused Department of State officials to question whether the passports were actually required.

Officials from the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs said the military was previously submitting a high volume of requests for official passports for entire units through a Department of State waiver process that allowed units blanket authority to apply for passports without identifying a specific travel destination. Officials said that the high volume of passport requests also created a backlog in passport processing, and while the military does not pay a fee for official passports, there are costs associated with processing applications and issuing passports, which officials estimate to amount to approximately \$110 per passport. These costs get passed on to the general public. In addition, officials said that thousands of passports obtained by DOD were being returned unused. For instance, between October 23, 2014 and November 5, 2014, the Bureau's Special Issuance Agency reviewed 1,689 no-fee passports—1,426 of them official passports—that were returned for proper disposition and found that approximately 55 percent of these passports had never

been used. Of the 920 passports that had never been used, the agency estimated that 482 were from DOD. As a result of these issues, the Department of State determined that it needed to be more stringent in reviewing passport applications, to ensure that the applicants had a validated requirement for official passports. Subsequently, the Department of State signed a Memorandum of Understanding with DOD in 2012 that invalidated existing unit blanket-waiver letters and required specific destination information to process individual official passport applications for military personnel except in specific circumstances.⁴² In addition, Department of State officials stated that on a case-by-case basis, the Special Issuance Agency may request travel orders to validate entitlement to an official passport; Army officials said that the Department of State is requesting travel orders routinely in the case of the allocated brigades.

However, brigades do not always receive deployment orders—required to generate travel orders—for activities in time to apply for passports. Brigade and division officials said that the brigades have been tasked with many emergent activities with execution dates that leave little time to apply for passports. They also said that the brigades are often informally notified in advance of activities for which they are to prepare. However, the activity may not be finalized and personnel may not have the official deployment orders necessary to apply for passports until weeks or even days before deployment. Officials from the 1st Infantry Division and 1st Armored Division said that they employed different tactics to work around the Department of State's constraints with varying degrees of success. For example, 1st Infantry Division officials said that they submitted a memorandum signed by a 1st Infantry Division general officer stating that any applications accompanying it were in support of validated deployments, but this was rejected by the Department of State, which division officials said continued to require official orders showing personnel deploying into a country that required official passports for entry. 1st Armored Division officials, on the other hand, said that they had success working with Department of State officials to find a solution that involved attaching the general Army Forces Command deployment order for the 4th brigade's overall mission to an AFRICOM administrative

⁴² Department of State and Department of Defense, *Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of State for Implementation of the DOD Passport Application Acceptance Program* (Washington, D.C.: October 3, 2012).

Delays in Obtaining Passports Have Affected Missions

message identifying the list of projected activities as of January 2015. This method was successful, although the administrative message did not include requirements for emergent activities. Brigades also had to utilize workarounds, such as submitting passport applications for more personnel than were actually needed for a specific event in order to try to build a pool of personnel with official passports that could be used for emergent requirements or to provide flexibility for planned events.

The brigades' inability to obtain adequate numbers of official passports in advance has resulted in some adverse effects for the brigades. For example, many countries in Africa require visas to enter the country. While the visa application process is controlled by the host country and varies by country, personnel cannot apply for a visa until they have a passport. Thus, a delay in obtaining a passport places further time pressures on the already constrained visa process, causing some activities to be delayed.⁴³ Brigade officials said that several of their activities were cancelled or delayed because some personnel could not obtain an official passport or visa in advance of the planned activity. In addition, brigade officials said that when the soldier best suited for an activity—and the commander's first choice—did not have a passport, they have been forced to deploy personnel that only meet the basic skill and capability requirements of the activity simply because they had a passport. In one instance, officials said their unit was unable to deploy its lead maintenance technician as requested because he did not have the official passport and visa necessary to support an emergent requirement. The Army's Field Manual for *Army Support to Security Cooperation* states that soldiers supporting security cooperation efforts need a variety of skills including technical proficiency and soft skills, noting that not every soldier is suited to be an advisor; thus, limiting a commander's choice of personnel could hinder mission-effectiveness.

Our work on results-oriented government states that to facilitate collaboration, agencies—which may need to find common ground while still satisfying their respective operating needs—need to address compatibility of standards, policies, and procedures that will be used in a

⁴³ We have previously reported on delays that U.S. personnel have faced obtaining visas that disrupted the delivery and oversight of U.S. assistance. See GAO, *PAKISTAN: Reporting on Visa Delays that Disrupt U.S. Assistance Could Be Improved*. [GAO-13-427](#). (Washington, D.C.: May 7, 2013).

collaborative effort.⁴⁴ According to officials from the Army and the Department of State, officials from the two organizations have met on a number of occasions to discuss the passport challenges experienced by the brigades, but have not agreed upon a consistent method through which personnel from these brigades can apply for official passports before they have deployment orders. While the 2012 Memorandum of Understanding invalidated existing blanket waivers, it does still allow for organizational commanders to submit new requests for waiver letters under certain circumstances; it states that military commanders can apply for waivers to the requirement to list a specific travel destination on the application based on the organization's mission and historical travel pattern, including examples of missions that would have failed for lack of a waiver. However, Department of State officials stated that there is no official process to request a waiver from the requirement for DOD personnel to submit travel orders when requested. Department of State officials told us that if the Army could provide an accurate analysis on historical data of the number of personnel with associated ranks and skill requirements that have deployed to Africa for each allocated brigade, then a waiver in accordance with the Memorandum could potentially be provided. Brigade and division officials told us that, while it may not address every emergent requirement, it would be beneficial for each brigade allocated to AFRICOM to be authorized a certain number of official passports based on their historical mission set, so that they could build a pool of personnel with passports that are likely to deploy.

Army officials said that the brigades are intended to be a flexible sourcing pool that can quickly respond to USARAF's unpredictable security cooperation requirements, but that challenges obtaining passports limit their responsiveness. Without a consistent, agreed-upon approach that allows for the brigades to obtain a sufficient number of official passports at the outset of their missions, future brigades allocated to AFRICOM will likely continue to face challenges in this area, and the flexibility of the brigades to respond to emergent requirements may be limited.

⁴⁴ GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#). (Washington, D.C.: October 21, 2005).

Brigades Have Reported Facing Some Challenges to Core Mission Readiness, but Deployments to Africa Are Perceived to Have Benefits for Soldier Development

The brigades allocated to AFRICOM have reported facing some challenges in sustaining core mission readiness while deploying in response to requirements in Africa, due in part to limitations on the training that can be conducted in deployed environments. However, Army officials have cited some benefits of deployments to Africa that are not captured in the brigades' readiness reporting, such as developing soldiers with an expeditionary mindset and increased cultural awareness.

The Brigades Have Faced Some Challenges Sustaining Decisive-Action Readiness and May Require Augmentation or Additional Time to Train if a Contingency Arises

The allocated brigades are expected to maintain decisive-action readiness for their core mission in order to be available for potential contingencies, while being responsive to the requirements of the combatant command to which they are allocated. The Army's regulation on readiness reporting states that all Army units are required to report their ability to accomplish core functions, provide designed capabilities, and execute the standardized mission-essential tasks for decisive action on a monthly basis.⁴⁵ Additionally, Army guidance for regionally aligned forces requires the brigades to maintain certain levels of decisive-action readiness throughout their employment.⁴⁶

All three of the brigades allocated to AFRICOM conducted decisive-action training and completed a Combat Training Center rotation, and they continued to train on their core skills while employed in Africa. However, the two brigades that have completed their missions in Africa reported facing some challenges in maintaining core-mission readiness while employed in Africa, and they said that they might have required additional time to train or augmentation from another unit if they had been called upon to support a contingency. Officials from the current brigade said that they were anticipating similar challenges. The brigades identified several

⁴⁵ Headquarters, Department of the Army. *Army Regulation 220-1: Army Unit Status Reporting and Force Registration – Consolidated Policies* (Apr. 15, 2010).

⁴⁶ Headquarters, Department of the Army. *Execute Order 052-13 In Support of Regionally Aligned Forces*, (Dec. 27, 2012).

factors that resulted in readiness degradation while they were employed in Africa, including

- **Uncertain Security Cooperation Requirements and Timing:** The brigades each took steps to maintain the decisive-action readiness of their homestation-based units and personnel during their periods of availability, with a particular focus on training, but officials said that factors such as uncertain security cooperation requirements, frequent deployments of key leaders, and training events that kept personnel and equipment deployed or in transit for long periods of time resulted in some degradation of readiness. For example, with key leaders and other personnel deploying frequently, the brigades' ability to conduct collective training, particularly at the higher unit echelons, is limited. Additionally, although each of the brigades developed plans to conduct decisive-action training around planned security cooperation activities, emergent activities and frequently shifting schedules for planned events sometimes made it difficult for them to adhere to their training plans. Brigade officials said that, in one such instance, the shifting dates of a planned event caused a battalion to miss its range time, which prevented it from completing all of its collective gunnery exercises. The unit utilized simulators to fulfill some training requirements, but officials said that live fire training on the range would have been preferable.
- **Battalion Task Force Deployments:** A Battalion task force from each of the three brigades was deployed for approximately six to nine months to the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa to fill a requirement for security and crisis response capabilities. These deployments presented personnel readiness challenges for the brigades because they caused some units within the brigades to be bifurcated (i.e., part of the unit was deployed and part remained at homestation). This affected the reported personnel readiness ratings of the brigades, because the bifurcated units would not be prepared to deploy elsewhere as cohesive units without time to redeploy personnel and reassemble these units. Division officials said that they believe readiness degradation caused by unit bifurcation is more of an administrative concern, as they do not view the bifurcated units as less capable simply because they have personnel who are forward deployed. Army readiness officials said that assessing the strategic readiness implications of unit bifurcation is an ongoing challenge for the Army, which is increasingly being asked to do small unit deployments.

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- **Specific Effects for Armor Brigades:** Unit officials said that the requirement to maintain decisive-action readiness presented greater challenges for the allocated armored brigades—the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division and the 4th Brigade, 1st Armored Division—than for the allocated infantry brigade. An Army official said that this is because, armored units are required to train frequently on their equipment platforms (e.g., tanks and artillery) and conduct sequenced gunnery exercises, which require significant time and resources. The armored brigades were particularly affected by the task force deployments.⁴⁷ The two armored battalions from the brigades that deployed for the mission could not fully conduct required gunnery training because they did not have adequate range space and equipment (e.g., mounted vehicles, crew-served weapons) in the deployed environment. In addition, brigade officials said that the armored battalion currently deployed will not have enough time after redeploying to reset and train before the brigade’s next Combat Training Center rotation in 2016 and thus will have to go through a rotation with a different brigade a few months later.

As a result of these challenges, brigade and Army Forces Command officials said that the brigades may have needed some time to redeploy personnel conducting security cooperation activities from Africa and to conduct training. Furthermore, to replace the battalion deployed to the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, the brigades may require augmentation from an external unit if they are called upon to support a contingency.

According to Army Forces Command officials, the Army has made changes to the types of units that it will use to fill both the allocated brigade and security forces requirements in Africa. They further said that these changes may lessen some of the negative effects on decisive-action readiness for future allocated brigades, although the extent of the potential effect is unclear. The officials said that the Army will be allocating infantry or Stryker brigades to AFRICOM in the future and that they expect infantry brigades to be utilized for the mission more frequently. The next brigade scheduled for this mission is an infantry brigade. Brigade officials said that infantry brigades, in particular, are

⁴⁷ Each of the allocated brigades have also been tasked with a security and crisis response mission under the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa, which required each brigade to deploy a battalion task force to the Horn of Africa for the duration of its allocation.

better positioned than armored brigades to balance core-mission training with requirements in Africa, and USARAF officials added that they are also better suited to the environment in Africa. The current brigade's mission is being curtailed to hasten this transition. Army Forces Command officials also said that the Army will be filling the requirements for security forces in the Horn of Africa with Reserve Component battalions in the future, although the allocated brigade in Africa is still projected to deploy a company to the Horn of Africa to provide crisis response capabilities. The next battalion scheduled for this mission is a National Guard battalion. Brigade officials generally said they believe that without the deployments of the battalion task forces, the brigades could more easily maintain adequate levels of readiness.

Furthermore, stakeholders at the December 2014 Army Regionally Aligned Forces Table Top Exercise recommended that the Army consider creating a multifunctional, battalion-sized force that could be allocated to AFRICOM to directly satisfy AFRICOM's requirements for small-scale security cooperation activities while preserving the allocated brigades for larger-scale exercises. Army Headquarters officials said that this idea is currently being studied but if implemented, it may also help to preserve unit readiness, although the extent of the potential effect is unclear.

Deployments to Africa for Security Cooperation Activities Can Have Benefits for Training and Soldier Development

Although the brigades have experienced some challenges maintaining decisive-action readiness, their frequent deployments to Africa for security cooperation activities can also have training benefits. Army, combatant command, and unit officials cited ancillary benefits of the mission in Africa for individual readiness and soldier development that are not easily captured in the brigades' readiness reporting. Examples noted by some of these officials include the development of expeditionary mindsets, increased cultural awareness and regional expertise, and adaptive leadership capabilities.

Officials said that, based on findings from the Army's December 2014 Regionally Aligned Forces Table Top Exercise, Army Headquarters is currently looking at potential options for capturing some of these benefits as part of the readiness reporting process. Officials provided the following examples of these benefits:

- Supporting exercises in Africa provides units with an opportunity to exercise operations with multiple command posts, manage joint and

command relationships, and practice deployment and staging processes.

- Managing multiple concurrent and dispersed security cooperation deployments can stretch and enhance the brigades' command and control and communications capabilities.
- Deployments to Africa to support AFRICOM require soldiers to operate in a complex, multicultural environment and to adapt quickly to ill-defined or shifting requirements. Soldiers are forced to deal with challenges in Africa with limited support, for example, equipment not arriving in time for an activity or last-minute changes to programs of instruction to accommodate foreign forces, and to step up at their homestation to manage unit training and other tasks while key leaders are deployed.

One brigade commander suggested that the long-term benefits that the Army could accrue from having continuously engaged forces through regional alignment may be worth the trade-off with individual brigade readiness.

Conclusions

The Army's regionally aligned forces policy is a key element of DOD's broader strategy to build partnerships, strengthen partner nation security forces, and shape security environments globally. The experiences and lessons learned of the brigades allocated to AFRICOM provide the Army with an opportunity to refine its approach to planning for and employing regionally aligned forces in Africa and elsewhere. By establishing a formal mechanism for key stakeholders to review, discuss, and shape upcoming activities, USARAF can better ensure that its planners, the Offices of Security Cooperation, and the brigades have a shared understanding of the objectives and details of the activity. In turn, such a mechanism would enhance the brigades' ability to address potential information gaps in advance and more effectively perform activities, resulting in a greater return on investments made in the partner nation. Moreover, the use of brigades to conduct activities beyond their typical mission sets has revealed some gaps in the systems that the Army is using to train and equip regionally aligned forces; accordingly, DOD must take steps to ensure that the brigades are consistently and effectively prepared to support security cooperation activities in Africa. An assessment of the sufficiency and effectiveness of its approach for training regionally aligned forces will position the Army to address stakeholder concerns about training and identify opportunities to enhance the brigades' ability to fulfill their mission in Africa. Further, by formalizing mission-specific equipment

requirements for the brigades and utilizing existing policy and procedures to establish a timely and consistent mechanism for the provision of such equipment, USARAF and the Army can ensure that the brigades will have the capabilities to safely and effectively carry out distributed activities throughout Africa, and limit potential inefficiencies that may result from each successive brigade obtaining mission-specific equipment on an individual basis. Finally, the flexibility of the brigades to respond to Combatant Commander requirements has been cited as an important benefit of regionally aligned forces; for this benefit to be fully realized, coordinated actions by the Army and the Department of State are needed to ensure that allocated brigades have sufficient numbers of official passports in accordance with their mission set.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense take the following four actions to enhance the efforts of the allocated brigades in Africa:

1. To help ensure that the allocated brigades have timely and complete information to enable them to prepare for and execute security cooperation activities, direct the Commander of AFRICOM in conjunction with the Commander of USARAF, to develop a formal mechanism—such as regularly scheduled, country-specific meetings that include USARAF desk officers, the Offices of Security Cooperation, and the brigades—to review and discuss upcoming security cooperation activities to ensure that key stakeholders are aware of critical information, have an opportunity to shape the activity, and can gather additional information if necessary.
2. To identify opportunities to enhance brigade mission-specific training, direct the Secretary of the Army, in coordination with the Commander of Army Forces Command and the Commander of Army Training and Doctrine Command, to conduct an assessment of the Army's approach to providing mission-specific training to regionally aligned forces, including the brigades allocated to AFRICOM, and determine whether any adjustments are needed. In addition to the assessment questions already identified by the Army in the Regionally Aligned Forces Execute Order, this assessment could consider
 - The degree to which the brigades' training—to include the curricula, resources, and execution—should be managed or coordinated at the institutional level.
 - How unit training programs should be resourced and the degree to which dedicated funding may be needed.

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3. To facilitate consistent, and predictable planning for mission-specific equipment requirements and efficient provision of such equipment, direct the Secretary of the Army, in coordination with the Commander of Army Forces Command and the Commander of USARAF, to:
 - Identify the mission-specific equipment requirements on an appropriate requirements document for the brigades allocated to AFRICOM for security cooperation and other missions in Africa.
 - To the extent practicable, establish a consistent mechanism (e.g., a rotating equipment set, mission-essential equipment list) to ensure that the brigades allocated to AFRICOM are equipped with all known mission-essential equipment at the outset of their missions.
 4. To facilitate the timely and efficient provision of official passports to the brigades allocated to AFRICOM, direct the Secretary of the Army, Commander of Army Forces Command, and the Commander of USARAF to:
 - Conduct an analysis of the brigades' personnel deployment trends for security cooperation activities to identify the number of official passports typically required for each allocated brigade to support its mission.
 - Based on this analysis and building upon the 2012 Memorandum of Understanding between DOD and the Department of State, as appropriate, coordinate with the Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs to develop, agree upon, and execute a waiver process authorizing an allotment of official passports to brigades allocated to AFRICOM at the outset of their rotations.

We also recommend that the Secretary of State take the following action to facilitate the timely and efficient provision of official passports to the brigades allocated to AFRICOM. Building upon the process in the 2012 Memorandum of Understanding between DOD and the Department of State as appropriate, the Secretary of State should direct the Bureau of Consular Affairs to coordinate with the Department of the Army to mutually develop, agree upon, and execute a waiver process authorizing an allotment of official passports to brigades allocated to AFRICOM at the outset of their rotations, based on the brigades' personnel deployment trends.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with each of the four recommendations we directed to the Secretary of Defense, and the Department of State concurred with the one recommendation we directed to the Secretary of State. DOD's and the Department of State's comments are summarized below and reprinted in appendixes III and IV, respectively. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate.

DOD concurred with our first recommendation, that AFRICOM and USARAF develop a formal mechanism to review and discuss upcoming security cooperation activities to ensure that key stakeholders are aware of critical information, have an opportunity to shape those activities, and can gather additional information if necessary. In its comments, DOD stated that USARAF has implemented several changes to its business practices since the end of GAO's audit to improve planning, support, and information exchanges with regionally aligned forces for Africa, including improving the utilization of existing brigade liaison officers by integrating them into working groups, relocating liaison officers' workspace to improve brigade situational awareness, increasing the number of liaison officers embedded at USARAF, conducting multi-day planning and synchronization meetings with brigades to be aligned to AFRICOM in fiscal year 2016, and publishing a base operations order with a more comprehensive projection of security cooperation requirements for fiscal year 2016. While these actions are positive steps that may help to ensure that the brigades are more aware of critical information, we continue to believe that USARAF can further enhance its efforts by establishing a consistent mechanism by which all of the key stakeholders, including Offices of Security Cooperation, can consistently coordinate upcoming activities and share information.

DOD concurred with our second recommendation, that the Army conduct an assessment of its approach to providing mission-specific training to regionally aligned forces, including brigades allocated to AFRICOM, and determine whether any adjustments are needed. In its comments, DOD said that updates to training guidance are based on lessons learned and after-action reviews submitted by regionally aligned force elements returning from missions. In addition, the Army is preparing an update to existing regionally aligned forces guidance, to be issued in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2015, that will require commands to assess regionally aligned forces implementation and submit lessons learned and suggested improvements to the Army, which the Army will review and make adjustments as necessary to enhance regionally aligned forces implementation. Guidance requiring commands to assess regionally

aligned forces implementation, if fully implemented, should provide the Army valuable information about the sufficiency of its training approach for regionally aligned forces and where adjustments may be needed and thus would meet the intent of our recommendation.

DOD concurred with our third recommendation, that the Army identify the mission-specific equipment requirements for the brigades allocated to AFRICOM and, to the extent practicable, establish a consistent mechanism to ensure that the brigades allocated to AFRICOM are equipped with all known mission-essential equipment at the outset of their missions. In its comments, DOD said that the Army issued guidance for USARAF to establish a prepositioned equipment set specifically designed to support regionally aligned forces units operating in Africa, called the Africa Activity Set. The concept for the Africa Activity Set is still under development, but DOD stated that, once it is complete, this activity set will consist of mission-specific, prepositioned equipment sets to be used by regionally aligned force units conducting security cooperation, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and other missions across Africa. Prepositioned equipment sets that can be used by the brigades for security cooperation and other activities will be very beneficial, but without knowing the details of how the Africa Activity Set will be implemented and how brigades will be able to access this equipment, it is difficult to know the degree to which it will fully address the brigades' gaps in mission-essential equipment. Specifically, as we noted in our report, the brigades said that they need homestation access to this mission-essential equipment. We therefore believe that USARAF, as it develops the concept for the activity set, should consider how mission-essential equipment can be made available to the brigades at the outset of their missions, in accordance with our recommendation.

DOD concurred with our fourth recommendation, that the Army conduct an analysis of the brigades' personnel deployment trends for security cooperation activities to identify the number of official passports typically required for each allocated brigade to support its mission and, based on this analysis, coordinate with the Department of State to develop, agree upon, and execute a waiver process authorizing an allotment of official passports to these brigades at the outset of their rotations. In its comments, DOD stated that the Army is preparing an update to existing regionally aligned forces guidance that will clarify existing passport procurement policies to ensure that regionally aligned force units are aware of processes and procedures to improve individual and unit-level acquisition efforts. While clarifying guidance on passport policies may be beneficial, we continue to believe that an analysis of the brigades'

personnel deployment trends and development of a process authorizing an allotment of official passports to the brigades at the outset of their rotations are essential to ensure that allocated brigades have sufficient numbers of official passports, in accordance with their mission sets.

The Department of State also concurred with a parallel recommendation, that the Bureau of Consular Affairs coordinate with the Army to mutually develop, agree upon, and execute a waiver process authorizing an allotment of official passports to brigades allocated to AFRICOM at the outset of their rotations. In its comments, the Department of State indicated that the Bureau of Consular Affairs has been coordinating with AFRICOM to find a reliable way to verify passport requirements prior to the creation of deployment or travel orders and understands that AFRICOM will closely scrutinize the number of personnel being deployed to countries requiring the use of special issuance passport, and will vet this information through the Special Issuance Agency and Army Logistics Services Washington on a quarterly basis. The Department of State further stated that the Special Issuance Agency has provided comments on a fragmentary order that details internal DOD coordination and accountability for the passport application process, which it believes establishes a mutually acceptable framework for identifying the positions and individuals requiring passports within each brigade. While these steps do not constitute a “waiver” as the Special Issuance Agency has historically used the term, the Department of State indicated that these steps should allow the Special Issuance Agency to issue required passports to the brigades earlier in the process than it has been and should assist the agency with resource management in the production of the passports. To the extent that these steps enable brigades to receive allotments of passports at the outset of their rotations, these actions would meet the intent of our recommendation.

We are providing copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of the Army. In addition, this report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff members who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix V.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cary Russell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cary" and the last name "Russell" clearly distinguishable.

Cary B. Russell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To determine the extent to which U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) has clearly identified and synchronized security cooperation activities for the brigades in Africa, we reviewed key security cooperation activity planning documentation such as theater- and country-level plans, briefings and information on AFRICOM's and U.S. Army Africa's (USARAF) planning processes, and operations orders. We observed conference sessions during AFRICOM's Theater Synchronization Conference and the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa Theater Security Cooperation Conference to see how AFRICOM and its components, including USARAF, coordinate as part of the planning process to synchronize efforts across Africa and identify security cooperation activities to meet theater and country objectives. We additionally reviewed brigade data on the number and types of security cooperation activities the brigades conducted in Africa and, based on information provided by unit officials, determined that it was sufficiently reliable to use as one of the bases for our findings. We also reviewed task orders provided to the brigades and analyzed brigade after-action reports provided by 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division for activities that were conducted between June 2014 and December 2014 to identify the types of information provided to the brigades in advance of tasked security cooperation activities and any gaps in this information. Finally, we interviewed officials from AFRICOM, USARAF, the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, Marine Forces Africa, Special Operations Command Africa, Army Forces Command, 1st Infantry Division, 1st Armored Division, the three brigades allocated to AFRICOM to date, and Department of State Headquarters. We also visited and interviewed Embassy Country Team officials in Djibouti, Niger, and Uganda, including Ambassadors, Office of Security Cooperation Chiefs, and Defense Attaches, and interviewed the Office of Security Cooperation Chiefs from Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Burundi that were onsite during our visit to the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa.

To determine the extent to which the brigades have been prepared to meet mission requirements in Africa, we reviewed documents that provide guidance and information related to the implementation of the regionally aligned forces concept, such as execute, fragmentary, and mission alignment orders as well as briefings from the Regionally Aligned Forces Table Top Exercise and issue-area working groups. We also reviewed mission-specific training documentation, including training requirements for regionally aligned forces, briefings on brigade training, and brigade after-action reports and lessons learned documents. In addition, we examined operational needs statements, which units use to request mission-essential equipment to fill identified gaps, and related

memorandums validating such requests, brigade and division proposals for mission-essential equipment sets, and guidance on equipping aligned units. Furthermore, we reviewed documents pertaining to the passport application process, for example a 2012 Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of State and the Department of Defense, data provided by the Department of State and the Army related to unused passports and the number of passport applications that are processed, respectively, and Army guidance on obtaining official passports. We also interviewed relevant officials from AFRICOM, USARAF, Army Headquarters, Army Forces Command, Army Training and Doctrine Command, the 162nd Infantry Training Brigade, the 3rd Battalion, 353rd Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, 1st Armored Division, the three brigades allocated to AFRICOM to date, Army Logistics Services Washington, and the Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs.

To determine the extent to which the brigades have been able to sustain core mission readiness while deploying for missions in Africa, we reviewed Army readiness regulations and readiness guidance applicable to allocated brigades. We also analyzed readiness data reported by the three brigades during their periods of allocation to AFRICOM as reported in the Defense Readiness Reporting System through April 2015. We spoke with brigade and division officials about this data and obtained survey responses from Army Readiness Division officials in order to assess its reliability. Based on these efforts, we determined that the data is sufficiently reliable to use as one of the bases for our findings in conjunction with corroborating evidence obtained during interviews. We also interviewed officials from AFRICOM, USARAF, Army Headquarters, Army Forces Command, 1st Infantry Division, 1st Armor Division, and the three brigades allocated to AFRICOM.

We visited or contacted officials from the following DOD and Department of State organizations during our review:

DOD Organizations

- Office of the Secretary of Defense, Arlington, Virginia
- Joint Staff, Arlington, Virginia
- U.S. Africa Command, Stuttgart, Germany
 - U.S. Army Africa, Vicenza, Italy
 - U.S. Marine Corps Africa, Stuttgart, Germany
 - Special Operations Command Africa, Stuttgart, Germany

- Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, Djibouti
 - Task Force 2-16, 4th Brigade/1st Infantry Division, Djibouti,
- U.S. Army
 - Department of the Army Headquarters, Arlington, Virginia
 - U.S. Army Forces Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
 - U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command and subordinate organizations, Fort Eustis, Virginia
 - 162nd Infantry Training Brigade, Fort Polk, Louisiana
 - 3rd Battalion/353rd Regiment Advise and Assist Battalion, Fort Polk, Louisiana
 - 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas
 - 1st Infantry Division Headquarters
 - 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team/1st Infantry Division
 - 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team/1st Infantry Division
 - 1st Armored Division, Fort Bliss, Texas
 - 1st Armored Division Headquarters
 - 4th Armored Brigade Combat Team/1st Armored Division
 - Fort Bliss Passport Office
 - Logistics Services Washington, Office of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army, Arlington, Virginia

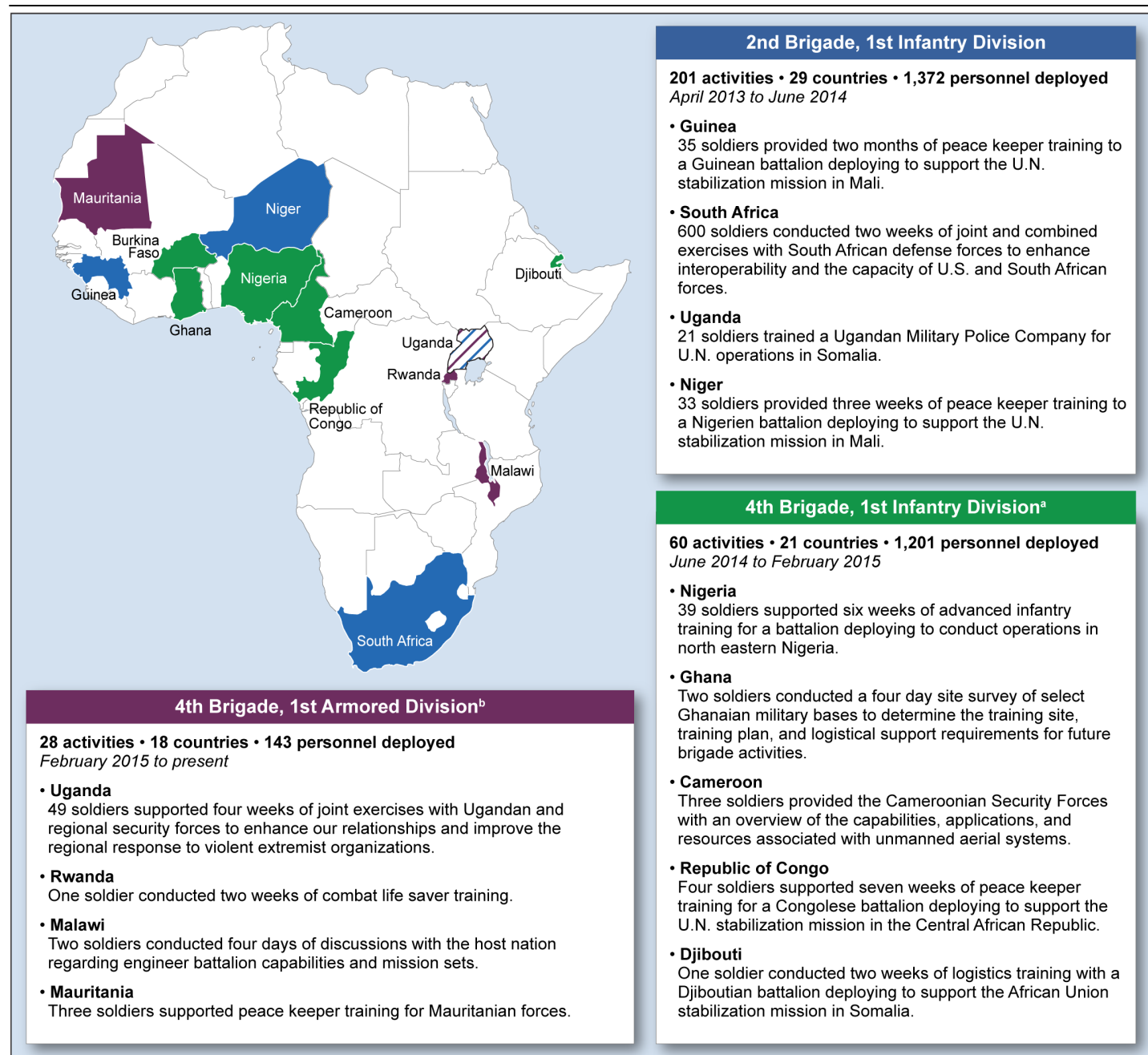
Department of State Organizations

- Department of State Headquarters, Washington, DC
 - Bureau of Africa Affairs, Washington, DC
 - Bureau of Consular Affairs, Washington, DC
 - Global Peace Operations Initiative Program Office, Washington, DC
 - Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program Office, Washington, DC
- U.S. Embassy Djibouti City, Djibouti
- U.S. Embassy Kampala, Uganda
- U.S. Embassy Niamey, Niger

-
- Office of Security Cooperation Chiefs from three additional U.S. embassies in Africa

We conducted this performance audit from June 2014 to August 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Examples of Security Cooperation Activities Conducted by the Allocated Brigades in Africa



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Army information. | GAO-15-568

Note: The countries highlighted represent the examples cited in the figure and do not include all countries in which the brigades have conducted activities.

^aAs of February 6, 2015.

^bAs of May 18, 2015.

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Defense

GAO received
DOD's comments
on August 12, 2015.



INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-2400

Mr. Cary Russell
Director, Defense Capabilities Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Russell:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-15-568, "REGIONALLY ALIGNED FORCES: DoD Could Enhance Army Brigades' Efforts in Africa by Improving Activity Coordination and Mission-Specific Preparation," dated June 17, 2015 (GAO Code 351934). We concur with the report and offer the enclosed comments for consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Coker", is written over a horizontal line.

Todd Coker
Principal Director, African Affairs

Enclosure

**U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE DRAFT REPORT
DATED JULY 2015
GAO-15-568**

**“REGIONALLY ALIGNED FORCES: DoD Could Enhance Army Brigades’ Efforts in Africa
by Improving Activity Coordination and Mission-Specific Preparation”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
ON THE U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The U.S. Government Accountability Office recommends the following four actions to enhance the efforts of the allocated brigades in Africa:

GAO RECOMMENDATION 1: To help ensure that the allocated brigades have timely and complete information to enable them to prepare for and execute security cooperation activities, direct the Commander of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) in conjunction with the Commander of U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) to develop a formal mechanism – such as regularly scheduled, country-specific meetings that include USARAF desk officers, the Offices of Security Cooperation, and the brigades – to review and discuss upcoming security cooperation activities to ensure that key stakeholders are aware of critical information, have an opportunity to shape the activity, and can gather additional information if necessary.

DoD RESPONSE: The Department of Defense concurs. U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) has continuously worked to improve planning, support, and information exchanges with regionally aligned forces for Africa beginning in March 2013. Several changes have been implemented since the end of GAO’s audit to improve USARAF business practices. Key developments include:

(1) Improved utilization of existing liaison officers. Beginning fiscal year 2015, representatives for brigades regionally aligned to U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) area of responsibility have been integrated into the USARAF weekly Security Cooperation Working Groups, the Future Operations Working Group, and the Current Operations Working Group. Deeper integration of liaisons allows USARAF to keep regionally aligned forces abreast of current, emerging, and future developments.

(2) Relocating regionally aligned forces liaisons’ workspace to USARAF’s Current Operations Integration Cell. Liaisons were relocated to improve their parent brigade’s situational awareness. Additional benefits include the ability to rapidly field questions or concerns and de-conflict emerging issues.

(3) Increasing the number regionally aligned forces (RAF) liaisons to USARAF. Beginning fiscal year 2015, a second RAF liaison was embedded with the USARAF Security Cooperation Directorate to facilitate continuous communication with security cooperation planners and program managers at all levels.

(4) Inclusive planning efforts. In May 2015, USARAF began conducting multi-day planning and synchronization meetings with U.S. Army brigades that are programmed to be regionally aligned to Africa in FY16. These meetings ensured that all stakeholders were aware of the pertinent details of planned missions, such as: theater entry requirements, authorities, funding, and business processes.

(5) Accelerated and improved planning process. USARAF published its FY16 base operations order (OPORD) in June 2015. The OPORD incorporated several lessons learned from previous years, including a comprehensive projection of security cooperation requirements for FY16. The OPORD was personally presented to the commanders and staffs of units slated to be regionally aligned to Africa in FY16. This effort was the most comprehensive coordination conducted by USARAF since the pilot of the regional alignment of forces in 2013.

GAO RECOMMENDATION 2: To identify opportunities to enhance brigade mission-specific training, direct the Secretary of the Army, in coordination with the Commander of Army Forces Command and the Commander of Army Training and Doctrine Command, to conduct an assessment of the Army's approach to providing mission-specific training to regionally aligned forces, including the brigades allocated to U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), and determine whether any adjustments are needed. In addition to the assessment questions already identified by the Army in the Regionally Aligned Forces Execution Order, this assessment could consider:

(1) The degree to which the brigades' training – to include the curricula, resources, and execution – should be managed or coordinated at the institutional level.

(2) How unit training programs should be resourced and the degree to which dedicated funding may be needed.

DoD RESPONSE: The Department of Defense concurs. U.S. Army Africa submits quarterly training guidance for regionally aligned forces (RAF) to U.S. Army Forces Command to ensure that soldiers are adequately prepared for their assigned missions. Updates to training guidance are based on lessons learned and after action reviews submitted by RAF elements returning from missions. Additionally, the U.S. Army is preparing an update to existing RAF guidance that will be issued in the fourth quarter of FY15. The update will require commands to assess RAF implementation and submit lessons learned and suggested improvements to the Army. The Army will review and assess input for subordinate elements and make adjustments as necessary to enhance RAF implementation.

GAO RECOMMENDATION 3: To facilitate consistent and predictable planning for mission-specific equipment requirements and efficient provision of such equipment, direct the Secretary of the Army in coordination with the Commander of U.S. Army Forces Command and the Commander of U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) to:

(1) Identify the mission-specific equipment requirements on an appropriate requirements document for the brigades allocated to U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) for security cooperation and other missions in Africa.

(2) To the extent practicable, establish a consistent mechanism (e.g. a rotating equipment set, mission essential equipment list) to ensure that the brigades allocated to U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) are equipped with all known mission essential equipment at the outset of their missions.

DoD RESPONSE: The Department of Defense concurs. There is currently one mission essential equipment list (MEEL) established for the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) located at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti. This enduring document identifies mission essential equipment that is transferred from one unit to its replacement as unit rotations occur. The MEEL and associated equipment regularly support RAF units conducting security force missions for CJTF-HOA. This standardized equipment set remains in theater, producing a cost effective solution for the Army. Due to the nature and variety of security cooperation missions, a standardized equipment set is currently not available for U.S. Army units conducting security cooperation activities. Recognizing the unique challenges experienced by RAF units in Africa, the U.S. Army published guidance to develop a prepositioned equipment set specially designed to support RAF units operating in Africa. Headquarters, Department of the Army issued guidance in 2014 for U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) to establish the Africa Activity Set (AFAS) by 2017. USARAF is still in the concept development stage; however, once complete, AFAS will consist of mission specific, prepositioned equipment sets to be used by RAF units conducting security cooperation, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and other missions across Africa.

GAO RECOMMENDATION 4: To facilitate the timely and efficient provision of official passports to the brigades allocated to U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), direct the Secretary of the Army, Commander of the U.S. Army Forces Command, and the Commander of U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) to:

(1) Conduct an analysis of the brigades' personnel deployment trends for security cooperation activities to identify the number of official passports typically required for each allocated brigade to support its mission.

(2) Based on this analysis and building upon the 2012 Memorandum of Understanding between DOD and the Department of State as appropriate, coordinate with the Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs to develop, agree upon, and execute a waiver process authorizing an allotment of official passports to brigades allocated to U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) at the outset of their rotations.

DoD RESPONSE: The Department of Defense concurs. As the DoD executive agent for passports and passport agent services, the U.S. Army is preparing an update to existing RAF guidance that will be issued in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2015. The update clarifies

existing passport procurement policies to ensure that RAF units are aware of processes and procedures to improve individual and unit-level acquisition efforts.

Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of State



United States Department of State

Washington D.C. 20520

JUL 24 2015

Dr. Loren Yager
Managing Director
International Affairs and Trade
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

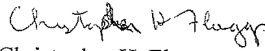
Dear Dr. Yager:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "REGIONALLY ALIGNED FORCES: DoD Could Enhance Army Brigades' Efforts in Africa by Improving Activity Coordination and Mission-Specific Preparation." GAO Job Code 351934.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

If you have any questions concerning this response, please contact Noelle Rush, Management Analyst, Office of the Comptroller, Bureau of Consular Affairs at (202) 485-6697.

Sincerely,


Christopher H. Flaggs

Enclosure:
As stated.

cc: GAO – Cary Russell
CA – Michele T. Bond, Acting
State/OIG – Norman Brown

Department of State Comments on GAO Draft Report

**REGIONALLY ALIGNED FORCES: DoD Could Enhance Army
Brigades' Efforts in Africa by Improving Activity Coordination
and Mission-Specific Preparation**
(GAO-15-568, GAO Code 351934)

The Department of State appreciates the opportunity to comment on the GAO Draft report entitled "*Regionally Aligned Forces: DoD Could Enhance Army Brigades' Efforts in Africa by Improving Activity Coordination and Mission-Specific Preparation.*"

Recommendation: GAO recommends that the Secretary of State should direct the Bureau of Consular Affairs to coordinate with the Department of the Army to mutually develop, agree upon, and execute a waiver process authorizing an allotment of official passports to brigades allocated to AFRICOM at the outset of their rotations based on the brigades' personnel deployment trends.

CA Response: The Department agrees with this recommendation. The Special Issuance Agency (SIA) in the Bureau of Consular Affairs continues its close, ongoing coordination with the Department of Defense (DoD) on issues regarding the provision of passport services. Under the existing Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Implementation of the DoD Passport Application Acceptance Program (October 2012), SIA works directly with the Directorate of Logistics Services Washington (LSW) in the Office of the Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Army. LSW remains SIA's primary point of contact for DoD passport matters.

In order to meet the goal of limiting the number of special issuance passports that are issued and then not later used, SIA has also been in contact with AFRICOM through LSW to find a reliable way to verify passport requirements prior to the actual creation of deployment or travel orders. Towards this end, the command has also provided SIA for comment, a version of their fragmentary order (FRAGORD) regarding official passports and visas that details internal DoD coordination and accountability for the passport application process. Additionally, we understand the command will closely scrutinize the number of personnel being deployed to countries requiring the use of special issuance passports, including consideration of historical trends, and will vet this information for approval through LSW and SIA on a quarterly basis. The command's effort to identify the number of personnel earlier in the planning process and limit to necessary personnel should allow SIA

-2-

to proceed with issuance of the required passports earlier than before. While this arrangement does not constitute a “waiver” as SIA has historically used the term, we believe the FRAGORD establishes a mutually acceptable framework for identifying the positions and individuals requiring passports within each brigade. The smaller number of individuals requesting passports, and the fact that they are clearly identified earlier in the process, will also assist with SIA resource management in the production of the passports. SIA will only adjudicate applications if they are actually needed, and the adjudication will be spread over a longer timeframe during the deployment cycle.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs is committed to its ongoing coordination with DoD to continue to look for ways to improve the process while ensuring that overall passport production capacity and resources are conserved. A DoD announcement on June 23, 2015 made it clear that LSW will be reorganized and possibly disbanded as of October 1, 2015. While this change may actually produce a more efficient structure, it is too soon to know how the change will impact the existing procedures and agreements between SIA and LSW, including the processing of regionally aligned forces’ passport and visa requests.

Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Cary Russell, (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, James Reynolds, Assistant Director; David Adams; Tracy Barnes; Kasea Hamar; Joanne Landesman; Michael Silver; and Amie Steele made key contributions to this report.

Related GAO Products

Afghanistan Transition: U.S. Force Reductions Impact DOD's Advising Mission in Afghanistan. [GAO-14-475C](#). Washington, D.C.: May 16, 2014

Security Force Assistance: The Army and Marine Corps Have Ongoing Efforts to Identify and Track Advisors, but the Army Needs a Plan to Capture Advising Experience. [GAO-14-482](#). Washington, D.C.: July 11, 2014.

Security Force Assistance: More Detailed Planning and Improved Access to Information Needed to Guide Efforts of Advisor Teams in Afghanistan. [GAO-13-381](#). Washington, D.C.: April 30, 2013.

Building Partner Capacity: Key Practices to Effectively Manage Department of Defense Efforts to Promote Security Cooperation. [GAO-13-335T](#). Washington, D.C.: February 14, 2013.

Afghanistan Security: Long-standing Challenges May Affect Progress and Sustainment of Afghan National Security Forces. [GAO-12-951T](#). Washington, D.C.: July 24, 2012.

State Partnership Program: Improved Oversight, Guidance, and Training Needed for National Guard's Efforts with Foreign Partners. [GAO-12-548](#). Washington, D.C.: May 15, 2012.

Security Force Assistance: Additional Actions Needed to Guide Geographic Combatant Command and Service Efforts. [GAO-12-556](#). Washington, D.C.: May 10, 2012.

Iraq and Afghanistan: Actions Needed to Enhance the Ability of Army Brigades to Support the Advising Mission. [GAO-11-760](#). Washington, D.C.: August 2, 2011.

Defense Management: Improved Planning, Training, and Interagency Collaboration Could Strengthen DOD's Efforts in Africa. [GAO-10-794](#). Washington, D.C.: July 28, 2010.

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