

TRANSCRIPT

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**Commander, US Africa Command**

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**DWG:** Good morning, everybody and thank you to our guest, General David M. Rodriguez, Commander of U.S. Africa Command. Sir, we appreciate you making the time and keeping the time to sit down with us this morning. We very much appreciate it.

Sir, there's an ongoing hostage and terrorism situation going on in Mali right now. What can you tell us about the situation there?

**General Rodriguez:** As you can imagine, all that's happening right now, so the details are as usual, sketchy. The bottom line is there's been some explosions and gunfire. It's at one of the hotels in downtown Bamako and everybody is working to resolve that situation right now. We'll keep everybody informed as the thing gets resolved.

**DWG:** So let me widen the aperture a little bit. Earlier this week John Brennan said that one of the intelligence difficulties the U.S. is dealing with is the fact that there are large numbers of people moving between Syria and Iraq and Europe. We've seen it in Mali, seen it in Libya, in other places within U.S. Africa Command. There's also turmoil and movement and refugees in Africa as well. How much of a concern is that to you, that ISIS terrorists might be able to reach Washington, DC or Stuttgart or other places unhindered, given the chaos and confusion right now?

**General Rodriguez:** As you know from the, especially from North Africa there are a lot of people, foreign fighters going back and forth across North Africa as well as over to Syria, Iraq, and back and forth, as well as the huge migration challenges that our people are being faced with in Europe right now because, mainly because of the instability in Libya. So we're working with all the nations. And it's not just the military, it's really a law enforcement and interagency effort to help control their borders better and to

ensure that the people moving back are able to, are doing that legally, which of course most of it is not.

So we help share information with all the partners that we can work with. And like I said, it's mainly being led by the law enforcement agencies which is really what is primarily the problem.

**DWG:** Are you concerned about the level of motion and uncertainty? Or is this something that --

**General Rodriguez:** Yeah, it's a huge concern. It's not only people but these, the networks, they're really mainly criminal networks and those criminal networks can move anything. They can move drugs, they can move fuel, they can move cigarettes, they can also move technology and equipment and skills as well as people, so we're concerned about that throughout the region and especially in Africa.

**DWG:** General, back in March there was a Senate Armed Services Committee, that only about 13 percent of your ISR needs were being met. Can you provide an update on that? And [inaudible] perhaps just a little bit.

**General Rodriguez:** I won't be able to tell you an exact number off the top of my head, but we're doing a little bit better. Because all the, especially the Air Force has increased their capability to do some of those things, so we're doing a little bit better in that.

We're also partnering with both the French and Italians who provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, have that capability, as well as the Brits. So that has been helpful.

Also another good news story is that many of the African nations are starting to build some indigenous capability which they're able to use which is really important. That's the long term way to the future.

**DWG:** [Inaudible]. Is that part of that --

**General Rodriguez:** Yes, that's part of that capacity building efforts for the African nations, yes.

**DWG:** Can you talk a little bit about how the increased demand on European based forces and specifically aircraft is affecting your command? And are there any discussions at all about permanently assigning forces to AFRICOM?

**General Rodriguez:** As you know, the European Command has sent some of their aircraft over to the Middle East to help out there. And that has not had a major impact on our activities in Africa right now. We don't use the high performance aircraft except in a very tiny handful of things. So that has not had a major impact on that. And there's

not been, because there's no real need for such in Africa at this point, we're not looking to get assigned air forces.

**DWG:** General, one quick follow-up on the update question.

When we help the French with airlift capabilities and some of the [inaudible] is there any likelihood that we'd get involved in supporting [inaudible] in Mali, the current Mali situation?

**General Rodriguez:** We already are helping them in the Mali situation. The French, which do a lot of work in Africa, we continue to help them in really three areas. We help them with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. We help them with aerial refueling. And we help them with air mobility and really it's the strategic and operational airlift that happens. So we help the French across Mali, Niger and Chad to do that and we'll continue to do that.

**DWG:** So if they would need some help in this operation you --

**General Rodriguez:** All that is a part of this support. Yes.

**DWG:** As the Navy/Marine Corps representative here, the Marine Corps [inaudible] MAGTAF [inaudible] has been in and out of your theater here and with EUCOM. Do you need additional assets like that? Any particular need [inaudible] recently?

**General Rodriguez:** They provide response forces across the west and southern part of, and northern part of Africa, and we have another east African response force over in Djibouti as well as the crisis response force that's also stationed up in Europe. Those forces do a great job of supporting crises or really the focus of that is on protecting U.S. personnel and facilities throughout the continent. They do a great job. As a former Department of the Navy guy you'd be real happy with what they do.

They, as an example, have helped out when we pulled the embassy out of Libya, so they do all those things like that to help really, as I mentioned, focus on protection of U.S. personnel and facilities throughout Africa.

**DWG:** The Marines would like to get [inaudible] kind of ship which would be closer in, rather than operating out of Europe. You don't have any say on that, but [inaudible] and KC-130 refueling tankers [inaudible]. Is that sufficient to --

**General Rodriguez:** It's multiple things.

First of all, it's really about, you know, because of the ranges and distances we're talking in Africa, the intelligence and warnings are really important and we work across the intelligence community and the whole interagency as well as our international partners to work that very obviously in close coordination with the State Department. And while the ranges have increased incredibly because of the C-130s and the V-22s and the Ospreys there, it's also important to get closer to the thing. So that's why we've built

with our African partners the things that we call cooperative security locations, which are really just a warehouse, and has the ability to turn on water, things like that. So if we have the indication warnings we're able to move those forces closer to the area so that we can respond quicker.

**DWG:** Good morning, General. A couple of questions.

Do you see any connection between the incident in Mali today and what happened in Paris? Particularly because of the French connection there. Do you think that the Paris attacks will have any greater impact on the French to provide additional support and to continue their operations in Mali?

**General Rodriguez:** As far as the connection, nobody is sure of that at all at this point. The connections are probably pretty rough to figure out how they would happen from this type of situation. It's a different group of people who do these kind of things in Mali than did the mission, the execution of that hard attack in France, but we continue to look for those connections all the time.

As far as the French, they do a lot of work in Africa and have and continue to do that and I think that will continue.

The response to that effort is really throughout the whole region, not just in France or not just in Africa, and I think the French will continue to fight against terrorism as they have in Africa.

**DWG:** Then you don't see, what kind of influence I guess do you see the Islamic State having in Africa, in Northern Africa at this point? Are you seeing increased signs of activity or even inspiration?

**General Rodriguez:** The major effort of ISIL has been in North Africa and it's really focused around Libya where they've made most of their in-roads. And they have, as you know, seen the pledge to ISIL from Boko Haram down in Nigeria, and they continue to try to expand that down to Al Shabab in Somalia. But it's had mixed effects. Not really too much in Somalia. A little bit in Nigeria, but not the big connection of, you know, huge resources and those kind of things which is really important to all of them so that they can sustain their efforts.

**DWG:** Thank you, General.

Can you pull back a little bit, I realize you can't talk about the ongoing operation in Mali, but I was wondering if you could just talk a little bit about how concerned you are about the growing reach of the Islamic extremist groups in West and Central Africa as opposed to Northern Africa? And whether you see a difference between [inaudible]. Are they all cut from the same cloth or are we seeing [inaudible]?

**General Rodriguez:** They're all different and the challenges that enable the environment for that to happen is different things. Sometimes it's ethnic things,

sometimes it's the oppression of the government, and it's really based on the individual environments in those countries in West and Central Africa.

As I mentioned, it's really growing in the North and then you have the challenge built around Boko Haram. The rest of them are continuing to be very very small and nascent at this point in time, but that's the best time for these countries to limit the ability of them to grow and they're doing a pretty good job against that.

As you know, the long-time al-Qaida and Islamic Maghreb continues to be a challenge and that's the challenge in Mali and Southwestern Libya and Northern Niger and Algeria and those areas.

So it's growing mostly in North Africa where you have the complete chaos in Libya. That's really the big concern. The rest of them are continuing to go up and down about the same.

**DWG:** General, it's the fourth time this morning you've mentioned the trouble in Libya. It was four years ago we were hailing it as a great military victory by the U.S. and NATO.

As a military guy, how frustrated are you that kinetically you get to do your job and things go pretty well. Then after that's done everything seems to fall apart.

**General Rodriguez:** All these situations, there's no stability without a lot of things working, whether it be the government, the justice system, the economic system and those things. So everybody in all parts of our government, the international agencies and the countries themselves have to be a part of the solution. That's frustrating for everybody, especially the nations who are trying to build stability themselves, if they can't pull all those things together ahead of the disruption caused by some terrorists. So everybody's frustrated by that.

**DWG:** But why are we so good at the military piece and so lousy at the post-military piece?

**General Rodriguez:** I think it's not just a function of being good. I think it really has a lot to do with the will and the capacity and the capabilities of the host nation to do those things and pull that together. And it takes a lot longer time to build an effective justice system in the country than it does to do a military operation. So I think there are huge differences in the time it takes to build those capacities, which we have to figure out how to synchronize those the best we can.

It's just like, you don't want to build a great and capable military force and nothing else in the country because that's not going to work out either. So I think we just have to work together as an interagency, as well as the international community. There's a lot of capacity building efforts done in Africa by other organizations too.

**DWG:** Should our inability on that second half stay our hand on the first half?

**General Rodriguez:** Yes, we have to watch that very carefully and everything. Like I said, we don't want to build a great military and everything and nothing else. That's not a good position to be in. So we definitely pace ourself according to other things and work with our interagency partners to ensure that we don't get out in front or lag behind, and that happens sometimes too in different areas.

**DWG:** My question was should we refrain from military action sometimes if that military action is only going to yield chaos?

**General Rodriguez:** That certainly could be an option, absolutely. Yes.

**DWG:** You mentioned some local capacity building up. What kind of technology or equipment are you guys pushing for the partners in Africa and what kind of stuff are they asking for?

**General Rodriguez:** Well they ask for everything that's in the news about fancy equipment that works, you know. But really the major thing that they need and want, it's really about training and everything, and understanding how to operate in the environments they're working with. And they usually need help in the same types of areas that it's pretty consistent in the command and control and the communications. They always want and need help there. They want help in intelligence, and we do a tremendous amount of intelligence training and capacity building throughout the African continent and they respond very very well. They need help in logistics and mobility, things like that that they just don't have those kind of capacities in most of the nations. Then they need help in specialty skills for against the mines or the explosive devices, some of the engineering skills, some of the special operations skills, specialty skills. Those are the things they most need.

For their militaries and for their institutions, some of the things that are most important is their ability to grow and develop leaders and select the right people and build those kind of systems that help sustain their effort for the long term.

**DWG:** Given the geopolitical situation in North Africa especially, are you guys asking for a plus-up to be able to support that come the FY17 budget? Just in terms of asking for more funds to be able to support building capacity into --

**General Rodriguez:** Yeah. We got some increases this past year and we have increases this year to do those things. Yes. And the capacity building we said is really the main effort of what we do. That's really the long term solution. And we've got some pretty good success stories.

**DWG:** So you expect to see that budget rise again for the next budget.

**General Rodriguez:** Uh uh.

**DWG:** It sounds like ISIL's influence is spreading in terms of linkages with Boko Haram and al-Shabab, spreading throughout Africa, not just Northern Africa. Would you say that's accurate? And what do you think is the best way to stop the spread of Islamic terrorism? And do we have capable partners in Africa to assist with this? What's your judgment on that?

**General Rodriguez:** On the first part, yes, it's as I mentioned really growing in the big places in Libya and North Africa that have had the challenges, and the challenges that Tunisia has had. And then the growing, the connection that's in, between there and Boko Haram that everybody is watching very carefully.

But the real, and you asked about partners. There are a lot of capable partners down there. The Africans have done a great job working together in Somalia with five different countries working hard there to help solve that problem in Mali. There's 11 African nations. So when they help each other and help themselves I think that's the way to do the best at that.

But the long term solution, of course, is improving and building the governance and the economic and the education things. Things like that so the environments are not conducive for growing the terrorism that continues to spread in certain areas.

**DWG:** Have the Paris attacks forced you to think differently about force posture across Africa for the U.S. military?

**General Rodriguez:** It's the same thing you work about every day about force posture and force protection for all our people. So we've got a pretty good system to manage that across the region and we do that pretty good, so we'll continue to do it.

**DWG:** A few months ago the U.S. was providing airstrikes through [AMASOM] and the advancement of militants. I was wondering, is the U.S. looking for ways to expand on the way that it provides support for forces there? And how critical is their intelligence gathering capability?

**General Rodriguez:** How critical is whose, when you said their –

**DWG:** [AMASOM's].

**General Rodriguez:** First as I mentioned, on the intelligence gathering capabilities that's really one of the things that they always have requested help for, and we do a tremendous amount of training. And they get better all the time. Plus, as you can imagine, they're a lot better on human intelligence than we are because it's their host nation so they know how to do that pretty well.

As far as the airstrikes, those were conducted, a couple of those during a period to protect our African partners who we fire those in defense to protect some of them when they get in trouble. That's what those were. Again, that's all based on the situation. It's happened very infrequently over time.

**DWG:** You don't see this as kind of a sign of things to come --

**General Rodriguez:** No. Like I said, it's a collective self-defense when we're supporting partners and everything, and like I said, it's based on the situation. So no, you don't manage those things as they happen.

**DWG:** Today we see the attack on that hotel in Mali. There was an attack on Westgate in Nairobi and the university there.

**General Rodriguez:** Yes.

**DWG:** What do you, how would you describe the will and the ability of those groups to carry out these major attacks on soft targets. What's their major motivation, I guess? What kind of attention are they trying to get? What are they trying to drum up through these attacks? And --

**General Rodriguez:** I think the objective is for the sensationalism of it, the fear that it strikes in the people throughout the region. It's also a way for them to garner resources so when they do things they'll ask for resources from other people in the region. It also is part of their unfortunate ideology and story line and why they use that to bring recruits in and things like that. It's just a horrific kind of ideology and life that they want, that they draw these people with.

The ability to conduct attacks on soft targets is going to continue to be a challenge because it's very tough to stop every single one of these when these things happen. But they have, these nations are working very very hard to work together. The difference when you talk about the two attacks in Kenya, from the time the mall happened, from the time the [Garissa] attacks, they were much improved capacity on the Kenyan side to handle those things and to work through them. But it's going to continue to be a challenge for everybody.

**DWG:** If I could just ask one related question, it's been a year and a half now since these school girls were kidnapped from Chibok. You know it's happening every day to school girls. This one happened to mobilize people around them. But specifically these Chibok school girls. Is there any chance of actually getting these more than 200 girls and, I mean if you could just speak more widely about the efforts that are being made to try and free other kidnapped women and children?

**General Rodriguez:** There's a lot of kidnapped people, and as you can see, saw on the news reports here recently, Boko Haram has really just taken over the number one spot in the number of people that they've killed and terrorized over the last year and they run neck and neck with ISIL and everything with the horrific attacks that they continue to do.

The Nigerians have a renewed effort to do all those things since the election and do a better job protecting their people and trying to get the kidnapped people, they're more

than just the Chibok girls, as you know. And it's still going to be a tough situation because of the terrain and the protection, the mines and all that, where the most likely location that they are, and they of course use them as human shields and things like that. So it's going to be very tough for the Nigerians to do that.

**DWG:** General, the Army brigades that are deployed to build partner capacity in Africa, is that the same job that typically we associate with the Special Forces? What is the difference in what they do in terms of training partners? Are they doing the same thing that Special Forces do?

**General Rodriguez:** The Special Forces' capacity building efforts are focused on battalion level organizations. And then the depth and breadth of what the capacity building efforts are going on are both in the Special Operations arena as well as in the conventional forces. So you just get the best tool for the best requirement and do it. So it's not exactly the same thing, but like I said, what they really need is just help growing their capacity and any of our forces could do that basically, whether it be conventional forces, Special Forces, or Marines for the ground forces. And they all do it.

**DWG:** The Army, the things that they're doing now on a temporary basis, the regionally [inaudible], do you believe they will make that permanent? How do you assess [inaudible]?

**General Rodriguez:** I think it's working very very well. We've had the third one is on now and they've done a great job at first of all preparing themselves and understand the environment before they head over there. And they've done a great job. And it's not just the theater security cooperation piece. They also conduct exercises and things like that which have been hugely successful. And I think that they'll continue to do that, the Army will, because it's been a good program.

**DWG:** A question on the poaching. I know it's a law enforcement issue to a point, but Cecil the Lion and the National Geographic have accused the warlords of Ivorie in a recent issue, so [inaudible]. It's a law enforcement issue to a point, but what assistance is Africa providing to those forces? Night vision, interdiction, interception on poachers.

**General Rodriguez:** A great question. And in our counter-narcotics and counter-illicit trafficking authorities we actually have the ability to help out on that, to help our law enforcement partners do that.

The main thing that we do is help train them on intelligence gathering and pattern analysis and those type of things, and we have some good relationships with many of them in and around the counter-[lurdes] resistance Army effort and they have been very very effective in everything. But it's really mainly what we do is we do teach some of them the basic skills of protecting themselves and protecting the trafficking piece, but most of it is about the intelligence collection and that piece which really helps them a lot.

**DWG:** Is the IC, the U.S. intelligence, the DNI, are they helping AFRICOM with intelligence on some of these trans-country --

**General Rodriguez:** Oh yes, yes. The whole intelligence community, the national intelligence all the way down helps out with that, yes.

**DWG:** And is there a strong link between Boko Haram and financing they get from illicit ivory, skins, animals?

**General Rodriguez:** The Boko Haram piece is not as, it does not come mostly from that at all. It's a very small part of how Boko Haram generates its resources. Most of the generation of Boko Haram's resources have been locally, whether it be stealing from banks or stealing from military depots and that that has been decreased now because of the better efforts of the Nigerians, but that was mostly done by local people pulling stuff.

**DWG:** There is a certain, they do get a set income from poaching.

**General Rodriguez:** Yes, but it's a very small part, yes.

**DWG:** Thank you.

**DWG:** In a lot of your answers you've talked about the coalitions have been working in Africa. And when you first took over at Africa Command you talked about that being one of your main goals to facilitate getting the African nations to work together to solve the African problems. I guess you're talking about Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, all of the folks around the [area].

What's the next step? And related to that, the whole Ebola crisis, how did that, did that help foster a sense of cooperation and partnership through West Africa? Is that --

**General Rodriguez:** On the first part, the Africans working together, that continues to grow whether it's in -- Many of the African nations who have the capacity are also helping to train some of their partners in addition to operating with them together, and all that's important. So there have been some great efforts in that arena. Several of the countries in Africa train African leaders so rather than come back to the United States or Europe to do a year abroad to do the study and they do that internally to Africa now, so that's a good news story.

So I think that that's the next step that as they build their ability to generate their own forces and train their own forces and everything that they'll train each other, and I think that's the next step as they move forward. Like I said, it's all about growing the capacity of their militaries as an institution so that they can do those things.

And the second part of the question was what?

**DWG:** Ebola.

**General Rodriguez:** Ebola. All those things buy a huge amount of goodwill and everything. As you know when the Ebola crisis hit the three countries in West Africa I mean it sent a shock through the system and their health care system was so shocked it was just unable to really operate there for a short period of time. So the Ebola effort and the speed with which we were able to get in there and help them do it, which was, you know, the speed was really generated at the end of the day by the Africans themselves because the most important thing that stopped that was the local leadership engagement with the local people on how to take care of themselves.

Now to get to that point, again, we were a big help, a shot in the arm, you know, gave them the courage and confidence that one, they could whip this thing; and two, the more active they became at it, getting it to the grassroots level, that they'd be able to solve this. So that's been a huge, positive impact on West Africa, and as I mentioned the capacity building, since those efforts, a huge amount of capacity is built in laboratories to be able to discover it properly and understand what's going on because the symptoms are very similar to malaria so it's not a simple thing to really understand without some technical skills that have been added there.

About 11 countries have gone through a huge training program in all of West Africa to better understand how to discover and how to shut it down very quickly. So those nations have been greatly appreciative of that capacity, and that's done with a huge effort between the State Department and USAID as well as the U.S. military because what we're doing is training people, and we can do that pretty good. So huge goodwill and huge capacity built that hopefully will limit the challenges of anything like that in the future of West Africa.

**DWG:** General Ward was the first African Command commander. He faced a lot of resistance on the content. You don't seem to be facing that. Have the African nations accepted Africa Command?

**General Rodriguez:** Yes, I think --

**DWG:** What has really changed in that?

**General Rodriguez:** I think that over time what they've been faced with and what the challenges they've been faced with, and I think that the Africa Command over many years since its inception has been able to first listen to the Africans and then really help them where they need the help. Like I said, there's areas they don't need help. And so as long as we're supporting and working with them where they need it they're happy about that. And there's, I don't detect too many places that have a negative perception of what we're doing on the African continent. They welcome us down there and they would want our help.

**DWG:** General, thank you. Sidney Friedburg from Breaking Defense.

You've answered a lot of questions about what is this, what do the French want from us, what do the Africans want from us. I'd like to turn that around because obviously you

have very capable forces, but not many of them are in a very big place. And other people will do most of the work in all the mission areas you have. So what do regional powers like the French bring that we will not be able to bring. What do the more well-developed African nations, say Nigeria, bring? Their unique value-added if we can't replicate, what can some of the more ramshackle countries they're just trying to hold together bring? If only they know their own territories. In those tiers, you know, everybody has a contribution to make.

**General Rodriguez:** First of all for the French, you know, they have a long history in Africa, so they bring that huge understanding to the African continent with long-term historical linkages and relationships. And the others that we work with, of course the United Nations does a great job at the peacekeeping piece of it and have for a long time, and have also helped to build the capacity of some of the African nations who have participated in those.

The European Union does a tremendous effort down in Africa. They do a lot of capacity building not only in the military arena but also in the civilian arena. So they bring a lot to the table.

And the African nations, as I said, there are many of them that train each other and help. I think the biggest thing that everybody wants is how to help solve their problems of counter-terrorism and intelligence training and the forces to be able to handle those issues.

It's a tremendous amount of effort from the whole international community to help that effort out, and all of them bring different things. I don't think anybody has all the skills or all the understanding to do any of this themselves, nor do they have the resources. So I think that the better that we can coordinate our efforts with the African nations, with the African partners, with the African Union and regional economic councils as well as the international partners who do so much work there the better it is.

**DWG:** Can you give me an example of an African nation that's particularly capable in a particular area? Sort of [inaudible], one of the things they can bring.

**General Rodriguez:** Botswana and [Ambia], you know, they do the counter-illicit trafficking very effectively. The Moroccans have a great training capacity. Many of the nations have built capacity that our partners borrow now. I mean we helped build, for example, an indigenous capacity for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance in Mauritania and the Malians asked to use that. So I think those are all good news stories.

**DWG:** General, following up on that, the Russians are also in the region now. I'm wondering about the extent to which that affects your life. I mean do you see them as potentially valuable partners in any way?

**General Rodriguez:** The Russians in Africa are mainly do a lot of arms sales based on long term relationships that they've had for many many years. And that helps the capacity building efforts.

There's not a lot of direct Russian involvement besides that. So for us, we don't, we're not really concerned so much about that right now.

**DWG:** [Inaudible] intelligence in your region has been a big concern. How would you asses that over, you know, the time that you've been there? Do you see that improving?

**General Rodriguez:** It's improving, but that's not something you can build quickly. That's a great example of working with our partners and sharing information and everything. So not only our law enforcement interagency partners who have the capacity to do some of that also, but also the French and the Brits who have been better networks that they've developed over a long time. But ours is gradually growing. We're moving in the right direction. But like I said, you don't instantaneously build that.

**DWG:** Good morning, General.

Going back to Mali for a second, [inaudible] step back. What do you know about Islamist extremists [inaudible] in the region? Is the Islamic State group the most likely culprit in terms of either being directly involved or having inspired the attackers? Or is there just as likely a chance that perhaps a competing Jihadist organization wanted to get their name in the headlines too?

**General Rodriguez:** Just based on the region and the effort and what's happened in the past, it's probably somebody that's associated with al-Qaida and the Islamic Maghreb because, again, that's where they have the reach. The Islamic State does not have that impact down in that area.

As far as the inspiration piece, I think that all of them use and try to expand that inspiration piece about you know, when these things happen they've got the copycats, they have the lone wolves that just, you know, they want to try to influence. But this was probably based on the area, something to do with al-Qaida and the Islamic Maghreb organization.

**DWG:** With that in mind, looking at the bombings in Nigeria about two or three weeks ago, do you see that as again most likely something that was either inspired by or coordinated by the Islamic State group? Or is it just a coincidence that those happened leading up to other IS activities and --

**General Rodriguez:** Boko Haram, like I said, has been the most violent group for a couple of years here. I don't think that has anything to do directly to the ISIS piece.

**DWG:** So is this a coincidence that happened to happen for these other IS activities?

**General Rodriguez:** Yes.

**DWG:** Thank you. General, I don't want to get out ahead of events, but since we've been sitting here there have been several reports about U.S. Special Forces operating at the hotel in Mali. Can you tell us anything about that cooperation with the French?

**General Rodriguez:** We have a long term effort in Mali and Niger and Chad supporting the French. So we are working closely with them in all those areas and we have relationships built. We have, as we said, helping them with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. And just like every other activity in that region, we're working together with them.

**DWG:** Just an additional question if I may.

With the series of attacks that we've seen across the continent in the last couple of years, I'm wondering if that's changed the risk calculus at all for you as far as putting U.S. troops in harm's way? Being that some of these international groups have been increasingly successful in engaging in attacks, did that change what you think is necessary as far as the risks to take to potentially strike against these groups with U.S. forces?

**General Rodriguez:** The only places that we have done anything unilaterally has been in really the two most ungoverned places in Africa, which is in Libya and Somalia, and I think that that's the only area that will continue to do those types of things until it gets better.

But I think the most important part of how we can help them. And again, when you have capable partners, you have people that want to do it which in most cases is there. We just have to help enable them and everything. Much of that help is with intelligence and like I said, they've done a pretty good job in most cases where they had the capacity to follow up and execute.

**DWG:** I wonder if you could speak a little more directly to how you see the fight against Boko Haram going. I was embedded in September for a few days in [Depo] with a small Special Forces unit, and the feeling was we have a great partner in Niger but it's like a really resilient enemy that feeds off historical grievances. And the Nigerians may be improving somewhat, except they have a long way to go in terms of capability. As you've mentioned, they've killed more people than ISIL this year.

**General Rodriguez:** As you know, we have long term relationships and capacity building efforts in both Chad and Cameroon and really with, I think what you have to look at is really four nations really working hard, and there's a fifth one that's helping out with Benin, but the location where Benin has the efforts is not directly involved just because of the geographics and where that problem is in Northeastern Nigeria. But I think all four nations, five nations now to include Benin are working much closer together to try to limit the negative impact of Boko Haram on the populations. So from the East, Cameroon is working hard to limit the impact of Boko Haram in their area which has continued to increase over the last year here. And we have worked and

helped train and prepare that unit for a long time, and they've done pretty well. But it's a challenge in the border region for them.

We have a long-term relationship with the Rapid Intervention Brigade in Cameroon and they're doing a lot of the fighting over there and they've done very very well. Up in Chad we've had a long term capacity building effort with a Special Anti-Terrorism Task Group and they've done well. I like to tell everybody that the two commanders of those organizations met up at in Germany at a training activity for leaders, for the leaders up in Germany, and that's kind of important when you have to coordinate face to face down there in the [struggle]. The Chadians, of course, are challenged by the region right around Lake Chad itself and in [N'Djamena], then over in [Defet], I probably don't need to tell you anything about that but you know we have relationships down there. We're building, you probably were there when the commander down there is a brand new graduate of the War College back here in the United States and everything, trying to pull all those pieces --

**DWG:** You mean the commander from Niger?

**General Rodriguez:** Yeah, that's pulling all those people together between the police, the gendarmerie and the military there. So again, some of the benefits of so N'Djamena me of the training that they've received from us over the years.

Then there's, up in [N'Djamena] there's an information sharing cell, intelligence coordination cell in [N'Djamena] that has French, British, U.S. in there as well as now the African partners so we can share intelligence around the board. As well as the one that has been there since the Chibok girls in Abuja that has continued to help share intelligence with them there. So we'll continue those capacity building efforts, and we just began one in really supporting the French who were doing the piece with the Benin soldiers who will be there.

The Multinational Joint Task Force which is the African Union solution to bring those countries together is standing up at [N'Djamena] right now and we are training them on command and control and communications. Again, one of the things that they always need there to help coordinate the efforts because as you can imagine without the close coordination, they've had some challenges between all nations as they've done that.

We have worked with the Nigerians to help improve the capacity of their soldiers, so we're doing some training and equipping efforts down there, as well as the Brits. And the French with their Operation [Farcane] are really working with Chad, the Nigerians and the Cameroonians from that direction, and the Brits are helping from the Nigerians from that direction. But the Nigerians, as you said, have a lot of challenges that they've got to overcome, but they're on the right trajectory and moving in the right direction. But it's still going to be tough because of the terrain. The reach and at the location these guys are at up there.

**DWG:** General, kind of a two-part question.

The discussion lately about ISIS in the wake of Paris is regional versus threat to the homeland. Obviously there's been debate on the extent to which ISIS is a regional threat versus how much it might be a broader threat as it's growing or at least has adherence in other countries beyond Iraq and Syria.

Can you unpack for us the primary Islamic terror groups that you see in your region? Which ones are regional threats, which ones are broader threats that possibly could pose a threat to the homeland? And as part of that, can you talk about the ISIS elements in Libya or elsewhere in the region that you're seeing them? To what extent are they truly connected to the ISIS of Syria and Iraq? In other words, combatants who have come back from the battlefields of Iraq and Syria and are then creating their own little ISIS fiefdoms?

Because there's some concern in this town that the more we talk about ISIS growing but don't have a full understanding of what that means in terms of a regional threat versus a more broad international threat, that we run the risk of sort of ISIS creep where everybody who claims to be a group of part of ISIS then becomes enemy number one and then we're back to sort of finding groups everywhere. Can you sort of take that on?

**General Rodriguez:** We'll start in the East. The al-Shabab terrorist group which has been a long term East African challenge in Somalia and the region there, I mentioned the Kenyan attacks and those pieces were all al-Shabab work. It continues to be an al-Qaida inspired linked terrorist group that has threatened, you know, the attacks, but don't, with all the activities going on right now I don't think have the capacity to do that. But again, with one individual thing, things change. So it's not a perfect solution to anything. But the pressure that they're under with the Amazon forces from the African Union has continued to disrupt their efforts.

Then as you head around, and the other thing, some people from Yemen and stuff, they left Yemen because it was less secure, and went to Somalia. So that's a pretty interesting change in things that's happened over the years. Okay?

Then as you head up around the Western part, while not my area, you know the ISIS piece in Egypt and the Sinai is where they're creeping, in that area. Then as you head around the north part it's really Libya has continued to do it. And there have been six or so groups that have pledged allegiance to ISIS and part of it, of course, is the branding piece and then the shifting of who you're working with and who is going to support you. But that's where the biggest connection has been, has been in Libya because of the chaos there. And the government challenges. That has included people coming back from Iraq and Syria, it's included some leadership that way as well as some resourcing. So that's really where the strongest link is.

That has tried to move across North Africa. They've had a tough time getting anywhere past Libya because the countries have done a pretty good job working that, although obviously not a perfect job. You've seen the challenges that Tunisia has had, but that's where the strongest connection is to the ISIS brand as you head around toward Mali and the Mali-Niger-Southwestern Libya piece. That's mainly al-Qaida, Islamic Maghreb,

and they've got a couple of offshoots. You know, whether the [al-Morbatine] and there's a couple of other ones, the [Ansr al-Din] but they're all kind of related right now to the al-Qaida inspired thing and the al-Qaida and Islamic Maghreb that stretches from Algeria and Mali, Northern Mali and Niger and Southwestern Libya.

Then the Boko Haram piece that is, has pledged their allegiance. And there has been some connections but not a huge amount of resourcing yet, so they're really much more of a regionalized or localized thing. So I think the biggest threat is probably in Libya just because of their ability to operate much more freely than anything else. They've of course also professed their intent to use that as a staging base to get into Europe and then beyond, and that's probably the biggest worry right now.

**DWG:** Sort of following that, in the schedule of the larger fight against ISIS, obviously in Iraq and Syria our goal is to dismantle, destroy, disrupt. We're using airstrikes in support of local ground forces.

Is Africa seen as sort of a side feed? Or how does your combatant command fit into the larger fight?

Then a secondary question, just to change gears, there's a huge Chinese presence in Africa. Infrastructure building and the like. Economic investment. What's your view of their strategic goal in Africa? To what degree are they offering any help to these nations with these problems? Or are these nations leaning toward [inaudible]?

**General Rodriguez:** I'll take the last part first. On the Chinese effort, as you mentioned it's mainly focused on economic development, infrastructure building, and the trade towards China to help them with their support and their economy. And they have, they also participate in a couple of UN missions in Africa. They are going to build a base in Djibouti so that will be their first military location in Africa. And they also do some training back in China of some of the leadership. You know, just like we do the training of leaders back there. I think that that will continue to be their focus for the foreseeable future, and we, the nations work with them, the African nations work with them quite a bit on that. There's mixed reviews, just like everybody else about how good that is or how much help that is. So that's what, on the second part.

On the first part, ISIS has already declared that what they want is an alternative or a base and stuff in Libya, to be a part of their whole solution in Caliphate. As you know, they've declared that part of the Caliphate as well as part of Nigeria with a pledge from Boko Haram. So I think that long term that has to be a part of the solution of the eventual defeat of ISIS.

**DWG:** We are at just under 60 minutes. I know you have a plane to catch that's not going to wait for you, so we'll call it a break here. I appreciate you coming in and we'd love to have you back.

**General Rodriguez:** Thank you very much.

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