

Keynote for Tunisia

Monday July 18, 2022

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Path Toward Integration for the High-End Fight

Unity and Resilience

Greetings and Gratitude

My theme today is “Unity and Resilience.” I chose this theme because the focus of our exercise is the “Path toward Integration for the High-End Fight.” Unity equates with integration; and the “fight” implies strength, power, and resilience to fend off any challenges and transcend our trials and tribulations, *together*.

The emphasis on “together” is imperative in this context. To quote a famous American seafaring novelist Herman Melville, “We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men.”

The definition of integration from the psychoanalysis perspective is: “seeking to create or restore by countering the fragmenting effect of defense mechanisms.” This is precisely our plan: to remain united in defending ourselves individually, collectively, and regionally. We will defend our interests, people, and partners in all domains of operations. We will overcome the forces intending to fragment us and our defense mechanisms. We all have no alternative in this matter. The stakes are too high.

I believe that President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s words still ring true today. He said, “The point in history at which we stand is full of promise and danger.

The world will either move forward toward unity and widely shared prosperity - or it will move apart.”

Profound challenges are bombarding this region with grave consequences and regional and global impacts. Some of these challenges include climate change-related forces compounding environmental and ecological degradation on land and in the maritime domain. Many of these challenges also involve conflicts, violent chaos, extreme poverty, criminal behavior, trafficking, piracy, and violent ideological competition. Such devastating impacts do not respect any boundaries.

Consider the words of Ukraine’s President Zelensky. Speaking to the African Union on Monday, June 20th, Pres. Zelensky ominously emphasized that, “Africa is actually a hostage... of those who unleashed war against our state.” According to the BBC, “He said his government was engaged in ‘complex negotiations’ to unblock grain reserves trapped in Ukraine’s Black Sea ports. ‘This war may seem very distant to you and your countries,’ he told the AU. ‘But the food prices that are catastrophically rising have already brought [the war] to the homes of millions of African families’.” (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61864049>.amp)

As you know, the Mediterranean region is characterized by great interdependence between three continents and three U.S. military command structures: Eucom, Africom, and Centcom. We also see the sinister influence and activities of terrorists and criminal organizations and networks in this region. Such challenges will not deter us, as we are steadfast to collectively rise above the maritime and land-based problems we encounter. After all, we are resilient; and, to remind us, the definition of resilience is, “The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties;” it also means “toughness.”

I feel it is appropriate to mention the written words, missions, and visions of the various organizations that constitute this collective enterprise in defense and security. Let's begin with the **African Union** ...

The AU is guided by its vision of: "An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena. Promoting Africa's growth and economic development by championing citizen inclusion and increased cooperation and integration of African states."

[African Union (<https://au.int/en/overview>)]

Now, the Mission Statement of NAVAF ...

Sailors, Marines, ships, and aircraft assigned to NAVAF are postured to support counter-terrorism operations, provide maritime security, and build capacity with our African partners to achieve an enhanced security environment. Air, surface, and subsurface assets combine to deter adversaries and bolster the U.S. military's command and control capabilities to execute operations.

Naval forces have unique sea-based and maritime air capabilities to deter and defeat transnational threats. These assets provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance in order to monitor violent extremist organizations. When directed, NAVAF stands ready to provide precision strike capability to address threats to the U.S.

... NAVAF aims for cooperative solutions to security challenges in Africa and its surrounding waters. NAVAF works closely with its Europe, African, and South American partners to disrupt terrorist networks, deter illicit trafficking, and defeat piracy and maritime crime.

... NAVAF's efforts truly scale the continent. The command is dedicated to working with African partners to address shared security concerns. The

continual development of maritime skills and enhanced relationships with our African partners is crucial to defeating a range of transnational threats.” NAVAF Mission Statement (<https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/our-team/us-naval-forces-africa>)

Here are a few words from **General Tod Wolters, EUCOM Commander**, in his Posture Statement dated March 29, 2022:

“Through our strategy, we compete for long-term sustainable advantage, deter attacks from potential aggressors, and prepare with our Allies and Partners to respond decisively. Standing alongside our teammates, USEUCOM remains ready, should deterrence fail, to fight and win. We value collaboration across the Joint Force to implement U.S. and Allied strategic direction.”

General Stephen Townsend, AFRICOM Commander, has this to say in the Africom Posture Statement dated March 15th:

“Africa’s geostrategic importance has gained increasing global recognition, driving our strategic rivals to successfully leverage both soft and hard investments into political influence, sometimes malign, and hard military advantage.

... Africa sits astride six strategic chokepoints and sea lines of communication, enables a third of the world’s shipping, and holds vast mineral resources. When access through these strategic chokepoints is blocked, global markets suffer.”

And, finally, **CENTCOM Commander General Kenneth McKenzie** says the following in his Posture Statement of March 15th:

“Spanning more than 4.6 million square miles and, with last year’s addition of Israel, encompassing twenty-one countries, the CENTCOM AOR of today has for

millennia been a geographic and geopolitical crossroads and site of cooperation, competition, and conflict. In the modern age, the sea lines of communication that pass through the Strait of Hormuz (SOH), Bab al Mandeb (BAM), and Suez Canal are more essential than ever for enabling global commerce, facilitating transportation of more than 20 percent of the world's and over 40 percent of China's energy supply.

... CENTCOM will continue to play an important role in commanding and directing a multitude of operations, activities, and investments across the region that maintain freedom of navigation, bolster our allies and partners against coercion, share in the region's common defense, and strive for regional stability. Maintaining a sufficient and sustainable level of presence in the Central Region will enable us to deter Iranian aggression, while providing the capability to compete with the PRC and Russia and disrupt VEOs. It also will provide us the ability to influence and help secure three of the world's five most vital transit choke points, ensuring free flow of navigation, resources, and commerce.

... A tailored presence supported by an over-the-horizon capability will enable flexibility, responsiveness, and act as a strategic shock absorber and backstop to our allies and partners in times of crisis.”

Before closing, I am compelled to emphasize the preponderance of the problem of human trafficking and what I call “desperation migration” in this region.

According to the European Council, “Migrants and refugees trying to reach Europe embark on life-threatening journeys as smugglers use increasingly dangerous tactics to cross the Mediterranean.

More than 20,000 people have died or are missing in the Mediterranean and Atlantic since 2015 in their attempt to reach Europe. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) currently deploys three operations in the Mediterranean to rescue those migrants at risk and fight migrant smuggling. More than 566,000 lives have been saved since 2015 thanks to these efforts.

The EU set up the European migrants smuggling centre in 2016 to help member states crack down on migrant smuggling.”

[<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/saving-lives-at-sea/>]

In addition, we must remain mindful of the causes of insecurity and instability in the region and work together on alleviating them. The Center of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) offers insight on the factors of instability in the Mediterranean region and parts of Africa, citing three main contexts: Security, Political, and Economic

- **Security:** ongoing conflict, displaced/refugee population, migration, terrorist activity
- **Political:** unrest threatening regime stability or legitimacy, governance indicators (e.g., political stability, government effectiveness), civil liberties assessments
- **Economic:** GDP growth, poverty ratio, unemployment (total and youth), corruption levels

The CSIS report also mentions Chinese Influence, which, “exists primarily in the economic sphere through Belt and Road investments in transportation and energy infrastructure; notable mergers and acquisitions; and the technology sector. The importance of such investments is heightened when they are located near major access points (e.g., Suez Canal) or along major trade routes.”

Of course, there is also the Russian influence, which is “multifaceted,” including: “(1) political ties (2) military presence (e.g., troops, basing, arms sales); (3)

trade indicators (e.g., FDI, energy, tourism); (4) diplomatic ties (e.g., visits and agreements); and (5) cultural and religious ties (e.g., sizeable Russian diaspora, Orthodox Christian minority).” [<https://www.csis.org/features/securing-us-interests-across-greater-mediterranean>]

With these challenges we see some significant opportunities that are enjoined with your partnerships and cooperation. Unity enables strength and resilience. We recognize the need to enhance interoperability, intelligence sharing, ISR capabilities, and countering bad actors with combined soft and hard power. Regardless of the challenges, our mutual cooperation validates and assures collective security and long-term resilience.

I would like to close with a quote by Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

“The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.”

Thank you very much