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3,000 soldiers to serve in Africa next year

By [John Ryan](#) - Staff writer
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A brigade will deploy to Africa next year in a pilot program that assigns brigades on a rotational basis to regions around the globe, the Army announced in May.

Roughly 3,000 soldiers — and likely more — are expected to serve tours across the continent in 2013, training foreign militaries and aiding locals.

As part of a “regionally aligned force concept,” soldiers will live and work among Africans in safe communities approved by the U.S. government, said Maj. Gen. David R. Hogg, head of U.S. Army Africa.

GETTING THERE

To serve on the continent, soldiers can:

- Volunteer for duty with U.S. Army Africa.
- Join an office of security cooperation for the region.
- Apply and become a foreign-area officer.

Tours could last a few weeks or months and include multiple missions at different locations, he said.

The Army has not announced which brigade would deploy or where the soldiers would come from.

As the Afghanistan war winds down, the new readiness model affords Army units more time to learn regional cultures and languages and train for specific threats and missions.

Africa, in particular, has emerged as a greater priority for the U.S. government because terrorist groups there have become an increasing threat to U.S. and regional security.

Though U.S. soldiers have operated in Africa for decades, including more than 1,200 soldiers currently stationed at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, the region in many ways remains the Army’s last frontier.

“As far as our mission goes, it’s uncharted territory,” Hogg said from his headquarters in Vicenza, Italy.

But “I’m not there to win their wars or settle their differences,” he added.

Instead, with more soldiers, U.S. Army Africa will continue to strengthen ties with regional militaries and governments by teaching military tactics, medicine and logistics, as well as combating famine, disease and terrorism in secure environments. The Army currently allows conventional soldiers to enter only 46 of the 54 African states due to security risks.

The State Department and U.S. special operations commands handle activities in the other countries, including those amid conflict.

Active-duty soldiers, guardsmen and reservists have helped quell regional violence, assist sick and injured Africans and feed the famished in East Africa.

During a recent annual training exercise, U.S. soldiers taught Ugandan forces how to deliver supplies by air to comrades in the bush chasing rebels from the Lord’s Resistance Army, a militia accused of atrocities in central Africa.

Through State Department initiatives, soldiers have also trained African troops headed for peacekeeping missions in Somalia on convoy security and countering improvised explosive devices.

On medical missions, Army doctors have replaced eye lenses of cataract patients in Malawi and Zanzibar, who danced and beamed after seeing, in some cases for the first time. Medical soldiers have also handed out mosquito nets to protect locals from malaria, the No. 1 killer in Africa, Hogg said.

Army chaplains teach Africans in classes about dealing with post-traumatic stress and running family readiness groups.

Real-world lessons

A brigade combat team has the capability to satisfy more than two-thirds of these missions in Africa. The rest will require skilled specialists — mechanics and logisticians — from the National Guard and Army Reserve, Hogg said.

Each week, U.S. Army Africa operations personally affect 300 to 400 locals, he said.

“I’ve seen some of these missions where the battalion commander down there could probably run for governor,” he said. “That’s how close of a relationship they have with some of their counterparts, both on the military side and with the local civilian community.

“It gets out the indirect approach [toward] some of these violent, extremist organizations that will talk bad about the Americans and the U.S.,” he said. “It leaves behind a lasting effect over time.”

From African forces, U.S. soldiers have picked up real-world lessons about tropical diseases, international cultures and foreign military tactics.

In the future, U.S. soldiers might also attend military courses in Africa, such as the French desert survival school in Djibouti and African jungle schools in Ghana and Gabon.

Still, the Army has no plans to construct permanent bases across the continent, and the mission does have its limits, Hogg said.

“For all the challenges that happen and sprout up across Africa, it really comes down to, it has to be an African solution. We are here to enable, where wanted, the African forces to figure out and solve their own problems,” said Hogg, who has visited more than 20 countries.

“We are not trying to reproduce the United States Army in the 54 countries in Africa,” he said.

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This is one of the very reasons this country is broke. We have no reason to be sending troops to Africa. Money wasted. We do not need troops all over the world defending the whole world. Let these people defend themselves with their lives and their money, not ours.

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