

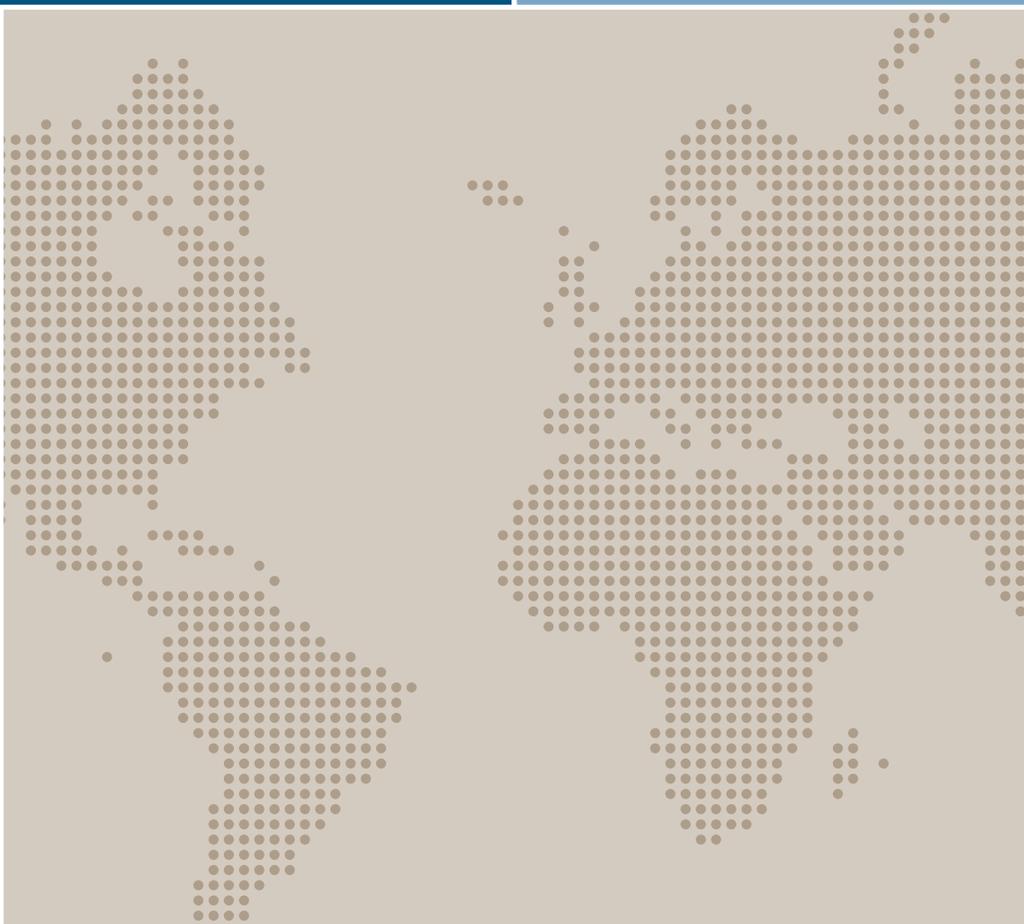
# 10th French-American Defense Symposium

Security and Stability in Africa in the  
Twenty-first Century

A Report of the CSIS Africa Program

AUTHOR  
Richard Downie

July 2010



French-American  
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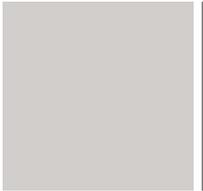
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# 10TH FRENCH-AMERICAN DEFENSE SYMPOSIUM SECURITY AND STABILITY IN AFRICA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

*Richard Downie\**

On April 8–10, 2010, a group of U.S. and French military officials and civilian policymakers and analysts gathered outside Paris for the 10th French-American Defense Symposium. The conference provided a forum for the exchange of ideas about the nature of the security challenge in Africa in the twenty-first century, an opportunity to share information on current strategies of engagement, and a chance to explore areas for more effective cooperation between the United States and France. This report lays out the main themes that emerged during the discussions.

## Key Takeaways

- Conference participants contended that the United States and France are natural allies in Africa. Their history of contentious involvement in Africa and pursuit of mutually incompatible goals has been laid aside. Instead, they have a solid friendship, common objectives, complementary skills, and a shared vision of Africa's security challenges and strategies for dealing with them. Both countries appear to be moving toward more pragmatic, less ideological engagement in Africa, and both are seeking to put African actors more firmly in the lead. In the military arena, engagement is evolving as well: France seeks a more streamlined, low-profile presence on the continent and will increasingly work with and through the European Union; and the United States, with the stand-up of AFRICOM, seeks to build African capacities in a more sustained, consistent, and integrated way. A traditional emphasis on stability as a priority is giving way to greater appreciation of human development and security as a prerequisite for sustained peace and long-term prosperity.
- Efforts to put African actors in the lead will be challenged by weak institutions and partners not fully committed to democratic norms or to human security. Participants pointed to the risk of strengthening military and security establishments without concomitant efforts to build civilian oversight, institutions, and capacity—a complex and long-term task.
- Africa's security landscape is changing. In addition to the traditional threats of violence and conflict, a range of transnational threats has emerged, including terrorism, drug trafficking, and human smuggling. Hybrid threats caused by population growth, climate change, and

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urbanization are poorly understood and pose particular dangers for the future. Poor governance and weak state capacity increase the potency of these threats. In the political arena, development has been uneven, with a number of high-profile setbacks in recent years on democratization.

- The United States and France have to adapt their security strategies to meet these challenges, which demand “whole-of-government” approaches that strike an appropriate balance among defense, diplomacy, and development.
- As they engage with Africa, the United States and France must avoid being diverted from long-term, sustainable goals by a desire for short-term “quick wins.” This will require resisting domestic political demands for immediate results and making the security case for longer-term investments whose results may be more difficult to measure.
- Successful approaches will prioritize engagement with Africa’s regional and subregional organizations and will focus on improving state capacity and promoting good governance and human rights. Africans themselves must take the lead.
- Although good examples exist of coordination between the U.S. and French militaries, active cooperation is less common and should be scaled up.

## Africa’s Changing Security Environment

As the United States and France assess their security relationships with partners on the African continent, they are confronted with a complex and rapidly shifting picture. It is clear that, as the world becomes more globalized and interconnected, what happens in Africa is increasingly important. While Africa’s vast economic potential remains largely untapped outside the energy and natural resource sectors, opportunities are slowly opening up, with a number of African economies making significant progress in the past decade. At the same time, the gap has widened between the minority of citizens who have benefited from economic globalization and the vast majority who have not. These divisions have created tensions that their leaders, many of whom continue to use undemocratic and corrupt methods to stay in power, are ill-equipped to manage.

Global power shifts are also playing out in Africa. The multipolar, G-20 world is already a reality in Africa, a continent where the United States has never had the sole power status it enjoyed in other parts of the world, and where France’s elevated status is also on the wane. Strategic calculations are complicated by the growing importance of other international players on the continent, including China, India, Brazil, and Russia, which offer African governments a greater choice of economic, diplomatic, and security partners. For the United States and France, the increasingly multipolar nature of the African arena has created new relationships to manage, as well as opportunities for collaboration.

On the security front, it is important to resist falling into “Afro-pessimism” and, instead, acknowledge that the continent as a whole is more peaceful than it was a decade ago. Conflicts between states have largely ended. Ethiopia and Eritrea’s violent border war has subsided into an

uneasy standoff, while the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which at one point involved eight nations, has become a more localized conflict in which civilian populations are victimized alternatively by government forces and nongovernmental militias. Civil wars in Angola, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have ended, as well as the conflict between north and south Sudan. African states are showing more willingness to cooperate with each other. In the Great Lakes region, for example, the DRC, Uganda, and Rwanda are working together to tackle the persistent menace posed by armed groups on their common borders, and Sudan and Chad in the last year have taken steps to ease tensions and end proxy conflicts between the two.

Africans have also begun to develop the capacity to deal with their own security problems. The African Union (AU) has emerged as a strong voice on the continent, taking a firm stand against military coups d'état and other illegal transfers of power. Regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are beginning to take on more responsibility. Africa's nascent peace and security institutions demonstrate a willingness to take greater responsibility in meeting the continent's security challenges, although these efforts, including peacekeeping operations in Darfur and Somalia, will remain heavily dependent on external support.

Significant challenges remain. While interstate conflicts have largely been resolved or contained, intrastate conflicts persist. Groups like the Lord's Resistance Army and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), as well as undisciplined, predatory government forces, continue to wreak havoc on a national or regional level, exacting a terrible toll on civilians.

The emergence of a terrorism threat in parts of the African continent is a relatively recent phenomenon, which highlights the dangers of neglecting "ungoverned spaces." Al Shabaab in Somalia and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), have shown that underdeveloped and marginalized regions can become hubs of instability, capable of exporting chaos across borders and mushrooming into regional, and ultimately international security threats. One French speaker noted that AQIM had been successfully neutralized in Algeria because the state's capacity to deal with the threat is fairly advanced and the group has failed to build a truly regional movement in the Maghreb. As a consequence, however, affiliates of the group have migrated southward to countries where the reach of the state is weak and the control and authority of traditional leaders are eroding as well: northern Mali is a safe haven; Mauritania is a major recruiting ground (half of AQIM's Sahelian fighters are Mauritanian); Niger is a zone of anti-West and antimilitary operations; Senegal is a potential logistic support base; and northern Nigeria, with its local sects, is a source of possible expansion. Ideological motivations may be less compelling for these affiliates than for AQIM's Algeria-based leadership, but a growing criminal industry that sustains itself through ransoms and linkages with smuggling networks and drug traffickers threatens security and undermines international engagement in tourism, investment, and development assistance.

In addition, a new category of threats has emerged, which transcend borders and pose challenges that African states, hamstrung by weak, corrupt, or absent institutions, simply do not have the

capacity to meet. The threats posed by climate change, terrorism, as well as the trafficking of drugs, arms, and people, demand international cooperation and coordinated “all-of-government” responses.

A series of structural weaknesses within African societies interact with and magnify the emerging security threats mentioned above. Africa remains in the grip of a demographic explosion that far outstrips the continent’s modest economic growth and places unsustainable pressure on resources, jobs, and urban services. The population of sub-Saharan Africa is now 860 million, and the birth rate stands at 5.5 children per mother. The effects of this demographic growth are profound and wide ranging; they include a rapidly expanding youth population, rampant urbanization, rising unemployment, and an increased threat of social unrest.

Poor governance and weak state capacity fail to mitigate these social risks and provide an enabling environment for security threats to emerge. Cocaine trafficking has thrived in Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, and other countries in West Africa, and heroin trafficking has expanded in East Africa, because government institutions are weak and incentives for corruption are rife. Coups d’état in Mauritania and Niger have interrupted efforts to combat terrorism. The response of the Nigerian government to a terrorist bomb plot involving one of its citizens was undermined by the political power struggle triggered by President Umaru Yar’Adua’s illness.

Weak institutions and poor governance also impede economic and political development, which can have serious security implications for a country in the long run. Many African governments are either unable or unwilling to meet the basic human needs of their populations by providing clean water, shelter, healthcare, education, and security. Political elites consume state resources and create popular grievances, which left untended, eventually erupt in direct challenges to the state. The coup d’état has staged a comeback in Africa. The new model is often euphemistically called a “democratic coup” by its backers, who justify their actions as a principled stand against autocratic rule carried out in the best interests of the people. In the Maghreb, governments have been relatively successful in reducing the threat and reach of AQIM within their borders and forestalling political conflict. But as one participant noted, the region is “comfortably but dangerously stable”: with clear political lines that cannot be crossed and at the same time troubling trends in demographic growth, economic stagnation, unemployment, and a growing gap between rich and poor.

The conclusion is clear: Africa, faced with a raft of complex security threats yet equipped with limited means to deal with them, cannot meet the challenges alone.

## French and American Responses

Participants agreed that France and the United States are among the countries best placed to help Africans meet their security challenges. France brings a wealth of experience and depth of knowledge, gained from its long history of involvement in Africa. The United States has an unrivaled ability to shape events, which comes from being the world’s leading power, even if that power is no longer preeminent.

Furthermore, the two countries enjoy excellent diplomatic relations. One U.S. speaker said that since the end of the Cold War, France had become the significant partner for the United States in Africa. Speakers from both countries referred to the spirit of amity between the two nations. To a large extent, this friendship stems from the fact that the United States and France share common policy assumptions and priorities in Africa. They broadly agree on the nature of the security challenges in Africa and exchange ideas on how best to meet them. In some ways, this cooperative spirit is born of necessity. Both countries realize that the enormity of Africa's problems defies attempts to "go it alone." Neither the United States nor France have the resources, the funding, or the diplomatic reach needed to carry out the kinds of long-term development work capable of adequately addressing the underlying causes of security threats like terrorism and international drug trafficking. Partnerships are necessary. There is also a sense that both countries are learning from policy mistakes of the past and have resolved to work more closely in the future.

In the discussions about how best to tackle Africa's emerging security challenges, several areas of consensus emerged:

- *Africans themselves must take the lead.* President Barack Obama's statement that "Africans' future is up to Africans," made in his Ghana speech in July 2009, was echoed by many conference participants. The task of the United States and France in Africa is to play the part of supporting actor, with Africans themselves taking the leading role in addressing their security challenges. In tackling the threat of AQIM, for example, it is vital that the nations on the frontline take ownership of the issue. Programs such as the State Department's Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) cannot succeed without willing participation and leadership from the host countries. Indeed, in dealing with a problem like AQIM, the United States and France risk inflaming the situation by taking on too prominent a role. Local initiatives are therefore important. Algeria was applauded for its robust efforts to tackle AQIM; Libya was credited for launching some innovative programs to rehabilitate former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG); and Senegal's introduction of a Counter Terror Finance Law was also welcomed as a step in the right direction.
- *Narrowly based security approaches will not work.* A second recurring theme was that Africa's security threats cannot be met by security responses alone. The military is "just one card in the deck," and when dealing with a problem as complex as terrorism, a strictly security-focused response is doomed to fail. During the decades of the Cold War, the United States fell into the trap of defining its interests in Africa in purely security terms. U.S. security allies were rewarded with money and military support, irrespective of their failings in governance or human rights. This approach helped sustain autocrats and institutionalized destructive systems of governance that sowed the seeds for future insecurity. By ruining their countries and oppressing their populations, these leaders created the conditions for eventual state collapse and catastrophic violence. Conference participants warned of the possibility today of security partnerships that reward governments for cooperation in meeting French and U.S. security goals but fail to meet the aspirations and security needs of their citizens.

- *“Whole-of-government” approaches are required to implement objectives.* Partly because of this record of involvement in the continent, France and the United States now aspire to a “whole-of-government” approach to dealing with African security challenges. The “3 Ds” of defense, diplomacy, and development are given an equal footing, and military engagement is just one aspect of a coherent strategy that encompasses efforts to tackle the underlying social, economic, and political causes of threats like terrorism. The establishment of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) seeks to operationalize this way of thinking. Described by U.S. speakers as a combatant command “plus,” it acknowledges the fact that the security threats that emanate from Africa are not strictly military in nature. Rather, most of those security challenges are intertwined with wider issues of political and economic underdevelopment and weak institutional capacity. Therefore, the Africa Command includes civilian experts, as well as military personnel. In addition to its core task of building the military capacity of its partner nations, it seeks to cooperate more closely in civilian affairs activities such as well digging, school building, and public information campaigns aimed at countering terrorist propaganda. There is still considerable debate, it was noted, about the appropriate role for the command as it expands beyond traditional military-to-military engagement. France is adopting a similarly expanded approach at its 14 regional military training schools. These schools, spread across nine countries, offer a diverse curriculum that includes administration and health in addition to military tactics.
- *Promoting good governance and strong institutions in Africa is vital.* The “3 Ds” approach identifies weak institutions and poor governance as major conditions of conflict in Africa. Capacity building is therefore priority number one. By boosting African capability to contain and neutralize emerging security threats, U.S. and French engagement is geared toward conflict prevention rather than crisis response. Delegates agreed that capacity-building efforts should not be confined to military-to-military engagement, although these were important. Neither should they be limited to train-and-equip activities, which run the risk of arming the next generation of coup makers if they are not integrated into a more sustainable strategy that incorporates follow-up engagement and mentoring.

Some promising examples of capacity building were offered. In dealing with the threat posed by AQIM, it was noted that countries like Mali are hamstrung by scarce resources and the state’s inability to penetrate remote areas where terrorists take refuge. One speaker remarked that Mali’s annual government revenue was less than the public school budget of a single county in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. France is therefore proposing to build “development clusters” in the remote northern part of Mali, enabling the state to establish a presence in the region for the first time. Institutions such as courts and health care facilities will be set up, with the aim of attracting economic development to a region where young people may be drawn to groups like AQIM in part because of a lack of other viable opportunities. These kinds of activities, combined with robust military responses against AQIM members and efforts to train and advise African militaries, boost regional cooperation,

and encourage intelligence sharing, stand a better chance of reducing the terrorism threat in the long term.

In terms of strengthening and professionalizing African security institutions, several speakers identified the importance of taking a broad approach toward military capacity building. This should include reforming African defense ministries and overhauling their budgeting and procurement processes, in order to root out corruption and ensure they provide the necessary support to their militaries. This kind of sustained technical assistance is neither easy nor glamorous, but in countries like the DRC, making sure that soldiers are paid on time is crucial. Efforts to build the capacity of the DRC military (the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* or FARDC) will be fatally undermined if soldiers in the field are forced to “live off the population.”

The hybrid nature of Africa’s security threats, which are not strictly military in scope, highlights the importance of building up civilian law enforcement capacity. Activities like the U.S.-led African Maritime Law Enforcement Program (AMLEP) seek to develop coastguard functions in West Africa so that Africans are able to tackle the security threats that have the most impact on their daily lives, such as illegal fishing, oil theft, and arms smuggling. The French military has more leeway in working with African law enforcement agencies, working through its gendarmerie. The United States military is constrained by legislative prohibitions that limit military involvement in police training, but it is recognizing this area as a crucial missing piece in African security sector reform.

- *The emphasis should be on long-term goals rather than “quick wins.”* Both American and French participants agreed that long-term, sustained engagement with African nations offers the best hope of addressing security threats. There may be a temptation to turn away from long-term, development-driven objectives because they are difficult to achieve or measure, in favor of pursuing short-term goals. But this temptation should be avoided. In the past, terrorism has been tackled from the “supply side” rather than the “demand side.” Hence, kinetic operations have tended to drive policy, rather than attempts to get at the root of the problem. Engagement has been intermittent and inconsistent in the past. The United States closed down foreign assistance programs in Chad, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mauritania in the 1990s, countries that have now become the epicenter of AQIM activities. In terms of aid, a modest amount of money, given consistently over the long term, is more useful than a larger amount, applied unevenly. Weak states are unable to absorb large inflows of aid. It is important, therefore, that donors like the United States and France coordinate their efforts and make sure they are not flooding countries with money, which risks being squandered or used corruptly.
- *Regional as well as bilateral approaches offer the best chance of success.* Participants noted that while bilateral relationships are important, an equally important form of engagement with Africa is through its regional and subregional organizations. Bodies like the AU and ECOWAS provide an opportunity to engage on a collective basis and promote coordinated

approaches to common security threats that transcend borders. The AU's cornerstone security mechanism, the African Standby Force, is seen as a potentially important partner in achieving the long-term objective of enabling Africans to meet their own security threats. However, its capacity is limited at the moment. While the ECOWAS brigade, ECOBRIG, is fairly advanced operationally, the other four regional brigades lag behind. In North Africa, the Northern Brigade has great potential but has failed to get off the ground because of the antipathy its various members hold for each other, as well as a certain reticence toward the concept of African unity.

## Barriers to Be Overcome

Given that there is considerable agreement between the United States and France on the best way of tackling Africa's varied security threats, it is fair to say that current engagement on these issues could be more effective than it is at present. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. There are domestic constraints on effective policymaking and funding, particularly in the United States. The shortcomings of African partners and their reluctance to work together is a serious problem. In addition, force of habit and an inability to spot opportunities for collaboration have limited U.S.-French cooperation. None of these barriers are insurmountable, but overcoming them requires effort, dedication, and a shift in mindset.

- *Domestic constraints.* The pursuit of effective policy toward Africa is limited by the domestic political landscape in both France and the United States. France's long history of involvement in Africa can be a burden. It can sometimes lead to complacency and ossified thinking—a dangerous belief, said one participant, that the French know all there is to know about Africa and the Maghreb in particular. As a result, policymakers have largely failed to exploit the talents of the North African diaspora, an important constituency within France, which represents an important source of new thinking and ideas. In addition, clashes over the future direction of French policy have yet to be resolved. The term *Françafrique* came to describe the old approach favored by an influential constituency of policymakers who wish to control African affairs from the shadows. President Nicolas Sarkozy's public policy statements suggest he wishes to move relations to more a transparent and equal footing, although how this ambition plays out has yet to be fully determined.

In the United States, an array of institutional impediments place limits on effective engagement in Africa. The tight election cycle leads to a bias in favor of funding short-term development projects and a demand for quick results. For all the talk of embracing a whole-of-government approach, the civilian element remains weak. The development arm of the U.S. government is particularly weak, having been hollowed out during the 1990s and placed under State Department authority. Congressional earmarks, targeting funds for specific programs (for example on HIV/AIDS or child health) leave the U.S. Agency for International Development little flexibility to respond quickly to priorities articulated by Africans or to integrate with whole-of-government efforts. Development funds have been pumped into

initiatives that focus on service delivery, such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), rather than on democracy and good governance programs, which are a prerequisite for managing these projects effectively. Vested interests and congressional earmarks have limited investment in African agriculture—generally considered critical for employment, food security, and economic growth. Overcoming these challenges will require determination and administration leadership and, at the same time, greater coordination among African and donor partners to avoid duplication of effort and to target assistance most effectively.

- *Shortcomings of African partners.* The reluctance of African nations to work with each other and to engage in a constructive way with the international community is another barrier to successfully tackling their security threats. The fight against AQIM, a transnational threat requiring regional cooperation, is undermined by the long-running feud between the two main powers in the region, Algeria and Morocco, over the Western Sahara. Although 10 countries in the Maghreb and Sahel regions have joined the TSCTP and there are “5+5” meetings to coordinate European and African counterterrorism efforts, there is a persistent and troubling lack of trust within the region. Other important African countries are unwilling to engage international partners on security issues. Nigeria faces multiple security challenges, including a long-running insurgency in the Niger Delta and violent Islamic extremism in the north, dangerously close to AQIM's area of operations. Yet it has been reluctant, partly for reasons of national pride, to accept or follow through on offers of military cooperation, assistance, and training from the international community. A memorandum of understanding between the French and Nigerian navies has never been implemented. Building partnerships and greater regional cooperation will require patience and persistence, as well as diplomatic outreach and dialogue to build trust and a shared understanding of security threats. Here again, working through African regional and subregional organizations may lend greater legitimacy and appeal to security engagement.
- *Limits on French-U.S. cooperation.* Even though the United States and France share a common set of objectives in Africa, cooperation on the ground remains largely ad hoc. Outdated preconceptions of each others' motives may play a part. The United States may view France's desire to influence affairs in Africa as an anachronism, while the French may see the Americans as competitors, pursuing narrow foreign policy objectives based on counterterrorism and energy security. Some coordination does take place on the ground, where both countries try to avoid duplication of effort. Yet this coordination does not extend much further than each country telling the other what it is doing; it has yet to translate into active cooperation. There are some positive signs, however. Monthly video conferences have been set up between senior Africa officials in Paris and Washington, raising hopes that cooperation will become institutionalized in the future.

## Conclusions: Hope for the Future

Africa's security challenges are profound but there is room for cautious optimism that they can be contained through a combination of improved domestic capacity and coordinated international engagement. Relations between the United States and France in Africa are stronger than ever. There is agreement on the nature of the security threats that emanate from Africa and a general consensus on what must be done to meet them. However, organizing effective responses to these threats and putting them into operation will be difficult. Effective interventions will depend on balanced, broad-based policies that tackle the underlying causes of insecurity by promoting good governance and building up the capacity of African institutions so that they can respond effectively to the multitude of complex security challenges they face. Patience and long-term vision are a prerequisite. Furthermore, partnerships are essential, both at the international level and among African nations themselves. The United States and France can play a supporting role, but ultimately Africans themselves must take the lead. Africa's embryonic regional organizations offer the best hope of achieving long-term security objectives, and their development should be encouraged.

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The Foundation established the French-American Defense Symposia in 1996 as the French armed forces underwent their transition to a professionalized military. The symposia are a unique forum for senior military officers and defense experts from France and the United States to interact outside their official capacities and to share lessons learned.

To date, the Foundation has organized 10 of these symposia with the *Etat-major des armées*—the French Defense Staff—and other partners. The symposia have considered the ways in which the roles of the French and American military are changing and adapting; how these changes affect cooperation between the two militaries; and how both militaries can learn from each other and work together more efficiently.

The 10th French-American Defense Symposium was organized by the French-American Foundation, the *Etat-major des armées*, the Institute for International and Strategic Relations, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

The French-American Foundation would like to recognize the generous support of **Raytheon Company** and **EADS North-America** that helped make this symposium possible.

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The Africa Center for Strategic Studies, located at the National Defense University, is one of five Department of Defense regional centers with the mission to build and engage a community of current and future security leaders. Through a comprehensive program of seminars, symposia, conferences, research, and other academic and outreach initiatives in Africa and in the United States, ACSS promotes good governance and democratic values in the defense and security sectors in Africa and strengthens the strategic capacity of African states to identify and resolve security challenges in ways that encourage civil military cooperation and safeguard human rights.

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