
Remarks at Ceremony for U.S. Air Forces Africa

By

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[The following is an excerpt from remarks delivered in a ceremony at Ramstein Air Base, Germany to honor the activation of U.S. Air Forces Africa, which will be designated 17th Air Force. The date of the ceremony, September 18, coincided with the official birthday of the U.S. Air Force. Ramstein Air Base in Germany is also home to U.S. Air Forces Europe.]

I welcome you to this very important and historic occasion, and it is my greatest pleasure to be able to do that. One of the best parts of my job is that I get to take part in history-making endeavors. And today is historic in more ways than one.

I'm happy to pass along my congratulations and "Happy Birthday" to my United States Air Force teammates. Sixty-one years ago today, Mr. W. Stuart Symington was sworn in as the first Secretary of the Air Force tasked to establish a Service that would become the "first line of defense" in the post-World War II world. Throughout America's history, we have been fortunate that great leaders and committed citizens have shouldered momentous responsibilities and have led us forward through an ever-changing global landscape toward a stronger, safer and more secure future. Today, we mark another such occasion.

Not only is it an honor, but it is my privilege to welcome the United States Air Forces Africa to the United States Africa Command team. This is a major undertaking by the 17th Air Force. This transformation involved a lot of hard work to establish a new Air Force Service Component Command from the ground up. Doing this is exciting work! It's hard and sometimes frustrating, but it is not often you get to create something new that will make a real difference, that will add value for our nation. To Major General Ron Ladnier and the professionals of the 17th Air Force, I commend you all for a truly remarkable job.

Let me talk now about the unified Command that you are now a part of. The United States Africa Command's mission is: "In concert with other U.S. Government agencies and international partners, conduct **sustained security engagement** through military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities, and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and more secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy."

That is a big mission, but what does it mean? We have committed ourselves to the **delivery and sustainment of effective security cooperation programs**. We recognize the importance of following through on a program. And we will be a reliable partner, building trust and confidence with all those we work with on the continent—whether they are African partners, fellow U.S. Government agencies, or international partners. You, as our Air Component Command, will do the same.

Our primary focus is building partner security capacity on the continent. We are doing this through a variety of programs including various operations, military-to-military events, exercises, and humanitarian assistance missions. Many of you may already have been involved with our partners in Africa in various military-to-military activities, such as "Safe Skies for Africa"—and you know about the need for assistance in the development of professional militaries.

I recently visited Liberia to participate in their commemoration of the activation of the first battalion of the new Armed Forces of Liberia. Since halting the hostilities in Liberia in 2003, U.S. Security Sector Reform efforts in Liberia have made a world of difference. I cannot begin to explain to you the amount of pride resonating from these new soldiers, their civilian leadership, and the Liberian citizens themselves.

This accomplishment will ultimately enable the Armed Forces of Liberia to defend the freedoms of its people and secure a better future for all Liberians. This is the kind of thing that U.S. Africa Command was meant to do.

This is what you were formed to do as well. Our partners in Africa want to build professional militaries that respect the rule of law and serve their people. U.S. Air Forces Africa will be a major enabler of this effort. As the air component to U.S. Africa Command, you will be responsible for the effort in helping bring about ever-increasing levels of air domain safety and security in Africa. You will be responsible for satisfying the mobility requirements within the Command and for our partners who we will support in reaching our mutual objectives.

As ever, your role in coming to the aid of our teammates in distressing situations is paramount, along with the control of all air operations associated with that effort as well as other standard air component command steady state and contingency operations. You will participate in current and future operations on the continent, broaden involvement in multinational exercises, and take on contingency operations as necessary. You will be ambassadors for the United States in everything you do.

I am confident that you will do remarkable things as you go forward to help the Africans build and maintain their own security, which in turn, maintains greater security for the American homeland. I am confident that you are up to the challenge. Happy Birthday to the United States Air Force. Congratulations, and 17th Air Force, welcome to the United States Africa Command.