Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to beautiful Madrid. I am honoured to speak here at the Real Instituto Elcano.

The novelist Alexander Dumas said that Africa begins in the Pyrenees. Spain’s geographical proximity to Africa has given it a unique perspective and relationship with Africa. This closeness has allowed Spain to serve as a bridge between cultures. When I visited Fez I felt as if I were in Havana. The impact of Spain on both Moroccan and Cuban cultures has enriched them and Spain as well. Thus Spain has become the link that unites Africa and the Western Hemisphere.

In today’s world of rapid communications Spain touches all the world. The United States is especially grateful for Spain’s partnership in Africa and around the globe. Spain and the United States share similar commitments and concerns. We are both members of NATO; we are democracies; we believe in the rule of law and human rights; and we are concerned about transnational threats from climate change, terrorism and criminal activities. Our countries are dedicated to helping Africa and other developing countries improve their economies and their institutions so that they can provide better lives to their citizens. In that regard I would like to acknowledge the leadership and vision of Ambassador Carmen de la Peña, Spain’s Director for Africa at the Foreign Ministry. She believes in Africa and the importance of continuing our good cooperation.

Spain and the United States are committed to helping Africa become democratic, stable and prosperous. In order to realise these objectives, we must help African nations and the African Union to find solutions that will end the conflicts in the Horn, where al-Shabab and al-Qaeda have turned Somalia into a land of violence; in the Great Lakes, where militias prey on innocent civilians; in West Africa, where illicit trade and terrorism are undermining legitimate governments; and in Sudan, to find a lasting peace.

Africa presents complex challenges for Spain and the United States; challenges that if not resolved successfully have the potential to harm not just one or a few states in Africa, but to displace populations throughout vast regions and to threaten the interests of Europe and the United States in Africa and at home.

Yet there is one important difference between Spain and the United States when it comes to Africa. Spain is on the front lines. There are 6,600 kilometres of ocean between Miami and Mauritania, but there are only 15 kilometres of sea between Spain and Africa.

*Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.*
Today, Africa is a prologue to a still uncertain future. A future that has been shaped by great empires and kingdoms, by colonialism and the legacy of disputed borders and Western institutions, and now by the struggle of each African state to preserve its rich traditions and culture, while building a modern nation that provides food, health, security and prosperity to its citizens.

The Egyptian word **af-rui-ka** means ‘to turn towards the opening of the ka’. The **ka** refers to the womb or birthplace. Africa is our common heritage: the earliest homo sapiens were found in the Awash valley of the Afar Depression in today’s Ethiopia. And then these men and women walked out of Africa to populate the earth.

Yet they also created great civilisations within Africa. Ancient Egypt lasted over 3,000 years and is the home to the great monotheistic religions –Christianity, Judaism and Islam–. King Menalik, son of the Queen Sheba of Aksum, Ethiopia, and King Solomon of Yemen, created a Judeo-Christian dynasty in Ethiopia that lasted into the 20th century. In the African Sahara, the Malian and Solinka empires were centres of Islamic scholarship. Today, Imans in Timbuktu and Gao trace their ancestors back to the 13th and 14th centuries, and scholars and scribes produced manuscripts on religion, astronomy, music and mathematics. In today’s Nigeria the Yoruba city-states became centres of culture and religion. In southern Africa, the kingdom of Zimbabwe that flourished from 1200 to 1500 still guards the mystery of its great enclosures built without mortar.

Today, Africa’s opening to the world –the **ka**– lies in Africa’s culture, in its artists, musicians and filmmakers who are recognised for their talent and innovation around the globe. And in its men and women –like Nelson Mandela, whose vision created a new nation based on tolerance and compromise–. And, the example of service set by Ghana’s Kofi Annan, the former United Nations Secretary General, and our own President, Barack Obama, whose African heritage reflects the fact that the United States is a country built by Africans as well as by Spaniards and people from around the world.

Yet Africa’s late arrival on the world stage means that it has both opportunities –land and people with exceptional potential– and great challenges. African governments –unlike Europe or Asia, or even the United States– have had little time to mature their institutions or to perfect their governance before being confronted by the 21st century’s transnational threats.

The major hot spots in Africa –alas, this means that we are talking about a good portion of the continent when we consider that neighbouring countries are impacted by refugee flows, illicit trafficking and increased violence– are the Horn of Africa, West Africa, Sudan and the Great Lakes.

Today there are no local wars; they are all regional –displacing, damaging and destroying millions of lives–. It was not long after the peace agreement between North and South Sudan that the conflict in Darfur began and spread to Chad. The war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, that at one point involved 11 countries, arose out of the genocide in Rwanda. In Somalia, clan warfare has been exploited by extremists, claiming allegiance to al-Qaida. Al-Shabaab and its allies are now training foreign fighters to carry out terrorist attacks within and outside Somalia.

Today, Africa’s conflicts are made more deadly by transnational threats, such as religious extremism, trafficking in drugs, arms and people, illicit financial flows and climate change.
Terrorism and extremism feed on ethnic and religious divisions. Extremism makes conflicts more rigid and uncompromising and much more difficult to resolve. Havens in ungoverned and isolated regions feed on ethnic and religious difference and undermine legitimate governments. Today, 23 of Africa’s 53 countries have Islamic majorities, a number that will rise to 30 in the near future. How these countries deal with extremist beliefs will have a major impact on the continent and on Europe and the United States.

Criminal cartels undermine governance with illicit trade in minerals and drugs. Piracy and oil bunkering thrive where governance is absent, whether in the Kivus, Guinea Bissau, northern Mali, Puntland or Somalia. Climate change contributes to conflict in Sudan and West Africa as populations migrate, seeking to replace lost grazing and agricultural lands. De-forestation in Africa is twice the world rate. Ninety per cent of West Africa’s original forests have been destroyed and 65% of agricultural lands suffer from soil degradation.

These transnational threats did not originate in Africa. They have migrated from Europe, the Middle East and the United States. They are beyond the capacity of African states – many of which are celebrating only a half-century of independence– to confront successfully. Africa will need our assistance to succeed –and its success will make us all more secure–.

President Obama defined United States policy towards Africa when he visited Ghana last year. He reiterated our commitment to sustainable development, promotion of good governance, rule of law, strong and transparent institutions and ending destructive conflicts that are a millstone around Africa’s neck. But first and foremost he said, ‘Africa’s future is up to the Africans’.

The President’s admonition to help governments improve their abilities to end destructive conflicts is the responsibility of the Departments of State and Defense.

The United States African Command –AFRICOM– is charged with assisting defence establishments of individual countries as well as regional and sub-regional defence organisations to build capacity in order to help Africans provide secure and safe environments where democracy and development can flourish. Its mission is to promote peace and stability by working with African partners to build the capacity of professional militaries led by civilian ministries of defence. AFRICOM strives to deliver sustained, effective and coherent security cooperation programmes that will allow African nations and regional organisations to have professional forces that can prevent and stop conflicts whether from national rivalries or from transnational threats.

The United States Africa Command, AFRICOM, is the newest US command. Established in October 2008, it was created by merging the African geographical responsibilities that formerly were allocated to three of the six United States military commands: the Central Command (CENTCOM), the European Command (EUCOM) and the Pacific Command (PACOM). AFRICOM also assumed responsibility for the management of Camp Lemonier and for the operations of the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) located in Djibouti.

The Secretary of Defense’s decision to create one command for all of Africa is in keeping with our military practice of assigning responsibility for a geographic region or a continent to one command. Thus SOUTHCOM is responsible for South America, PACOM for the Pacific region, CENTCOM for the Middle East and EUCOM for Europe. By putting Africa
under the responsibility of one command, security assistance to the continent is becoming more effective as AFRICOM grows its African expertise and experience.

AFRICOM is also an experiment in civilian and military cooperation with an ambassador as one of the two deputy commanders and civilian personnel from State, USAID and the FBI working throughout the command. AFRICOM’s headquarters is in Stuttgart and AFRICOM’s component commands from the Army, Marines, Air Force, Special Forces and National Guard provide it with expertise and resources to carry out training, mentoring and military exercises throughout the continent.

My office –the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Africa– is responsible for the United States’ relations with ministries of defence and militaries in Africa. We coordinate closely with the National Security Council and the Department of State to ensure that AFRICOM’s activities contribute to the achievement of the President’s foreign policy priorities and strategic vision.

The principal security objectives of the United States are to assist African defence and security establishments to counter terrorism and extremism, mitigate humanitarian disasters and deter criminal activities. Allow me to elaborate:

- Countering-terrorism: this is the Department of Defense’s top security priority in Africa and around the world. Securing the safely of its citizens and its interests is a fundamental responsibility of the United States and indeed all governments. The principal means of achieving this objective is by assisting African militaries to improve their capacity to protect their citizens and confront terrorists and extremists that prey on vulnerable populations and weaken the state’s ability to govern.

- Mitigate humanitarian disasters: our objective in Africa is to contribute to reducing human suffering, whether as a result of man-made conflict or natural disasters. This is not only because we owe it to our fellow human beings in distress but also because massive refuge flows destabilise African countries, create political problems throughout the region and drain Africa of its invaluable human resources. By reducing conflict in Africa we also help to contain the impact of refugee flows on the region and into Europe and the United States.

- Degrading criminal activities: piracy, smuggling and illicit trafficking all undermine African governments and divert scarce resources. Piracy in the Horn of Africa slows the arrival of food aid and makes trade more expensive. Criminal cartels and illicit financial flows divert needed resources, corrupt institutions and harm civil society. Africa can neither build its institutions nor fully benefit from its wealth as long as its human, mineral and financial resources are diverted into to illegal uses.

AFRICOM contributes to the United States Government’s efforts to achieve these objectives –counter-terrorism, mitigate humanitarian disasters and degrading criminal activities– through the following five essential undertakings:

1. AFRICOM mentors, trains and equips African militaries through military to military programmes, joint combined exchange training and regional exercises, including FLINTLOCK, NATURAL FIRE and GOLDEN EAGLE to name a few. In addition, AFRICOM works with the African Union and sub-regional security organisations
and ministries of defence to improve their capacity and attention to human rights and the rule of law.

(2) AFRICOM builds countries’ military capabilities to carry out peacekeeping programmes. The African Contingency Operations and Training Assistance training programme led by the Department of State deploys AFRICOM troops to assist in mentoring and training. ACOTA is a major success as over half of all Africa’s peacekeepers are from African nations.

(3) AFRICOM provides direct assistance to African governments and regional organisations. This assistance often takes the form of intelligence sharing, airlifts for peacekeepers and equipment. In addition, humanitarian projects provide medical and veterinarian assistance, emergency relief and technical and financial help for small community-based projects.

(4) AFRICOM provides opportunities for cooperative law enforcement activities with African coast guards and navies under the African Partnership Station (APS) and provides non-lethal equipment and training.

(5) AFRICOM is also prepared to use its forces to counter direct threats to US security interests or the safety of citizens of the United States.

The areas of greatest concern to the United States and thus to the Department of Defense are regional conflicts. The following is a quick overview of AFRICOM’s security concerns.

In the Maghreb and West Africa, AFRICOM inherited from EUCOM Operation Enduring Freedom Trans-Sahara, that deploys AFRICOM’s Special Forces to train and equip regional militaries – principally, Malian and Mauritanian – in order for these national forces to improve security and counter the threat from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

The United States Government believes that the region must take the lead in countering the AQIM threat. Our over-arching strategy is to work with the region, our allies (France, Spain and the UK), the African Union and the United Nations to improve governance and provide development projects as well as improve military capacity. Yet we are concerned that the AQIM threat is growing. The Sahara is more dangerous than five years ago – especially to Europeans who have been kidnapped –. Ransom money and narcotics allow AQIM to recruit and buy weapons. AQIM not only undermine the ability of governments to govern but uses isolated areas to plan attacks against targets in Africa and Europe.

In the Horn of Africa, extremism in Somalia threatens the survival of the Somali nation and has demonstrated its ability to carry out attacks against innocent people in neighbouring states. The United States is concerned about the foreign fighters training in al-Shabab camps as well as al-Shabab’s connection with Yemen and with al-Qaeda.

AFRICOM’s role here has been the traditional military one as we seek to ensure that terrorists in Somalia do not attack our citizens or properties in the region or outside. AFRICOM is working with the State Department to identify ways in which it can assist African peacekeepers from Uganda and Burundi who are serving in Somalia. AFRICOM is also providing military-to-military support to national militaries throughout the Horn. We appreciate Spain’s leadership and the European Union’s training of the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The United States considers the TFG as the legitimate government and remains committed to the Djibouti peace process.
The Great Lakes do not pose a terrorist threat but the level of violence against civilian populations is unacceptable. This man-made humanitarian disaster is best addressed through the United Nations, given the number of countries involved and the complexities of the conflict. AFRICOM is training a battalion as a means of providing a professional component of the DRC’s armed forces that protect civilians and defeat insurgents.

Sudan is potentially the most complex emergency on the continent. Africa’s largest state has been unable to provide sustained peace or security to its citizens. The ability of the United Nations and African Union combined peacekeeping effort in Darfur is ultimately linked to the resolution of the North-South conflict. An open and fair vote on the referendum is essential to its settlement. The South’s decision to be part of a unitary Sudan or a separate nation must be respected by all parties. This is why it is critical that Europe, as well as the African Union and United Nations, continue to be involved in the process as well as in providing assistance to Southern Sudan so that it can be a viable and democratic entity whether part of—or separate from—Sudan.

Currently, the United States is training a riverine battalion and providing a variety of training courses for non-commissioned and commissioned officers of the SPLA in order to help the South respond to internal conflict and protect its borders. There activities are in accordance with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and are complimentary to activities of the UN, African Union and European Union.

When I speak about Africa I find myself too often talking about its challenges rather than opportunities. However, Africa’s opportunities are Africa’s future. Those of us who are engaged on the continent can be instrumental in helping Africa and Africans seize the future. We can do so by respecting African traditions and culture, by allowing Africa to lead and by giving them the tools they need to confront challenges and seize opportunities.

If we are successful, then Africans will be able to enjoy the freedoms that Franklin D. Roosevelt wished for them and the world.

‘The freedom of speech and assembly everywhere in the world; the freedom of religion everywhere in the world; the freedom from hunger everywhere in the world; and the freedom from fear anywhere in the world’.

In closing, allow me to share with you an African proverb:

‘May the gods, the masks and the statues keep us together; may our children grow up proud, self-sufficient and generous’.

Vicki Huddleston
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa in the Office of the Secretary of Defense