

207th Military Intelligence Brigade- Theater Support to African Lion 2021

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A Royal Moroccan Air Force C-130 Hercules aircraft taxis down the runway during exercise African Lion 21 at the 3rd Royal Moroccan Air Force Base in Kenitra, Morocco, June 14, 2021. (U.S. Air Force photo by TSgt Devin Nothstine, 86th Airlift Wing/Public Affairs)

Introduction

African Lion is U.S. Africa Command's (USAFRICOM) foremost multinational joint readiness exercise in USAFRICOM's area of responsibility. The purpose of the exercise is to build the readiness of Combined Joint Task Force-Lion (CJTF-Lion), a joint multinational command with the mission to defeat a near-peer adversary in large-scale combat operations on the African continent. The U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF) was responsible for manning and executing command of CJTF-Lion in Agadir, Morocco, from 7 to 18 June 2021. The 207th Military Intelligence Brigade-Theater (MIB-T), in coordination with the CJTF-Lion J-2, was responsible for bringing the intelligence enterprise to African Lion 21. From May through June 2021, the 207th MIB-T partnered with the Moroccan Royal Gendarmerie, sister services, government and nongovernment agencies, and other foreign partners to conduct full-spectrum intelligence activities to support and enable CJTF-Lion operations.

History of African Lion

The exercise was first conducted in 2002—with the participation of the U.S. Marines and Royal Moroccan Armed Forces. U.S. Africa Command increased its involvement in the exercise with the inclusion of the U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa, based in Vicenza, Italy....SETAF-AF assumed lead responsibility of exercise African Lion in 2019 from the U.S. Marine Corps.¹

A Big Exercise for a Big Continent

African Lion 2021 incorporated units and equipment from a variety of countries and services. Africa is a huge continent with a population that is expected to exceed two billion in three more decades. In this new era of "great power competition," Africa has emerged as a zone of competition for the United States, Russia, and China. In addition, violent extremist groups...have been making headway in solidifying their hold on parts of Africa.²

The Role of the Deployable Intelligence Support Element

The 207th MIB-T deployable intelligence support element (DISE) provided a rapidly deployable and tailorable intelligence package designed to augment SETAF-AF's early entry command post with unique single-source, all-source/fusion, and communications capabilities not otherwise available upon initial deployment anywhere within USAFRICOM's area of responsibility. In accordance with one primary goal of SETAF-AF, the DISE demonstrated unique interoperability with partner nations throughout African Lion 21. In May 2021, before the exercise began, two noncommissioned officers from the DISE served as assistant instructors, improving the intelligence fundamentals of more than 100 African Lion 21 participants from U.S. military units and foreign partner nations. The DISE also deployed most of its personnel and equipment from Vicenza, Italy, to Morocco on Royal Moroccan Air Force C-130s, yet again demonstrating interoperability with a key foreign partner.

Once established in Agadir, the DISE provided the only top secret voice, data, and video teleconferencing capability to CJTF-Lion, both for the African Lion 21 scenario and for real-world intelligence updates to the SETAF-AF G-2 and command. The DISE served as the primary fusion element for the CJTF-Lion J-2. The DISE also facilitated and enabled multidiscipline intelligence analysis and support and battle-tracked through the Distributed Common Ground System-Army (DCGS-A). The DISE maintained a digital and analog common intelligence picture using the DCGS-A Tactical Entity Database, visualized through the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command Cloud Initiative, also known as ICI, in the J-2 and from the 207th MIB-T analysis and control element (ACE) through reachback to Wiesbaden, Germany. Signals intelligence (SIGINT) and human intelligence (HUMINT) reporting was coordinated for releasability to partner nations through

the foreign disclosure official, while DISE analysts conducted detailed network development to illuminate hybrid threat networks and enable operational solutions or partner nation law enforcement action. The DISE also produced the graphic intelligence summary and generated analytic assessments of the current situation and current operations that were briefed to the CJTF-Lion commander twice daily.

Participation of the 337th Military Intelligence Battalion

The 337th Military Intelligence Battalion, a reserve battalion from Fort Sheridan, Illinois, that is regionally aligned to the 207th MIB-T, manned and operated its own ACE to provide reachback capabilities to African Lion 21. Personnel from the 337th also traveled from the United States to the ACE in Wiesbaden, Germany, to provide in-person analytical support for African Lion 21. The ACE tasks included analysis, indications and warning, assessments, and intelligence coordination support to the joint area of operations during this exercise via open-source intelligence (OSINT), SIGINT, and geospatial intelligence (GEOINT) platforms. The 337th successfully integrated with the 207th DISE, provided analysis of more than 200 OSINT injects to the DISE, and pushed more than 90 injects through the multifunction workstation system, which helped the DISE build the common intelligence picture. The 337th also coordinated and assisted with oversight of the GEOINT mission. The 337th's integration and participation were critical because not only did they provide CJTF-Lion active duty personnel with much needed support, but they also enabled Army Reserve Soldiers to train and build readiness to mobilize whenever needed.

HUMINT Training

HUMINT collectors from the 207th MIB-T integrated with Moroccan Royal Gendarmerie and United States Army Military Police in Tifnit, Morocco, a 45-minute drive from the CJTF-Lion headquarters. The purpose was to simulate operations in austere conditions to secure, process, screen, and interview approximately 2,000 notional displaced or captured personnel. The 207th MIB-T coordinated with the SETAF-AF Joint Theater Forensic Analysis Center to deploy individuals to train and familiarize United States and Moroccan personnel with biometric enrollment and processing of displaced and captured persons. The 207th MIB-T coordinated with the HUMINT Training-Joint Center of Excellence (HT-JCOE) to provide additional HUMINT collection and integration into the 207th MIB-T training effort.

Communications Training

The S-6 team of the 307th Forward Collection Battalion, 207th MIB-T, successfully executed a communications package for the Tifnit training event. The 307th Forward Collection Battalion team, most of which had little to no deployment experience, greatly benefited from the planning, deployment,

mission execution, and redeployment process. Furthermore, every day yielded a problem related to information technology or communications that the team had to troubleshoot and solve, providing additional "boots on the ground" experience for these young Soldiers.

Recommendations for Future Training Events

The following are observations and recommendations for future African Lion exercises.

Location. Future training events should take place close to the physical location of the main effort (CJTF-Lion headquarters) rather than at a remote secondary location. The overall training benefit of this small event did not justify the coordination, logistics, and support requirements for operations in Tifnit. Life support, transportation of personnel and communications equipment, and setup and maintenance of a protected temporary classified information facility required too many man-hours for an isolated event that had limited relevance to the overall African Lion 21 effort. The 207th MIB-T S-4 successfully executed all 207th efforts from Agadir and was capable of providing the same level of excellent support to the HUMINT portion of the exercise. Additionally, the 307th S-6 team was capable of supporting a broader training audience with fewer personnel requirements if also located in Agadir. The reduction in travel and equipment transportation requirements would yield 2 to 3 days of time that would add value to the training objectives of CJTF-Lion, SETAF-AF, and the 207th.

Communications. The Transportable Tactical Command Communications system package was not needed for the Tifnit iteration. The 307th teams used these communications systems, but because of the security environment, they were required to remove all hard drives, break down the equipment, and set up everything again the following morning, which caused wear and tear on the equipment over a 15-day period. For nonsecure (Non-classified Internet Protocol Router Network) communications, a Wi-Fi hotspot would meet the requirement. For secure communications, the Global Rapid Response Information Package or a Commercial Solutions for Classified platform would meet the teams' needs (unsecured when powered down and fully secured when powered on, logged in, and with a virtual private network in use). None of these systems requires a dedicated S-6 effort, which would have allowed the S-6 to support the main effort in Agadir. A best practice would be for the individual teams to use systems organic to them and systems they would typically deploy with, providing realism to the "train as you fight" mantra.


HUMINT Training. If the HUMINT training were to take place in Agadir, or otherwise near the CJTF-Lion headquarters, the HUMINT collectors would greatly benefit if integrated into the exercise in support of CJTF-Lion. The SETAF-AF G-2X and joint partners from the Navy and Air Force manned the

J-2X forward element, and the 207th established an operational management team and analytical support element for counterintelligence and HUMINT operations. Integrating the operational management team into the HUMINT team operations, and in turn connecting the operational management team into J-2X operations, would enable the 207th MIB–T to successfully exercise its counterintelligence and HUMINT personnel at every echelon.

The HT–JCOE instructors provided excellent training to the HUMINT collectors during African Lion 21. However, future HUMINT training should be done near the rest of the 207th MIB–T support team to streamline their involvement, save money on transportation and logistics costs, and more efficiently use these valuable HT–JCOE resources to the benefit of a larger audience. Prior coordination with the African Lion planners would enable HUMINT collectors to practice collection, glean information directly tied to the scenario, and enable injects to feed the exercise in real time. This would simulate the real-world interoperability required to take place between the 207th MIB–T, CJTF-Lion CJ-2 and staff, and our foreign partners.

Conclusion

African Lion 21 met expectations as USAFRICOM’s premier annual exercise. It was an excellent example of the long-term commitment the United States has to our African partners, as it strengthened shared capabilities and fortified interoperability and readiness.

Planning for African Lion 22 began in October 2021. The exercise took place again in Agadir, Morocco, as well as in Ghana, Senegal, and Tunisia, from 6 to 30 June. Militaries from multiple countries joined U.S. and host nations troops to exercise our capabilities for the common good, demonstrating that we are stronger together. The 207th MIB–T is proud of our Soldiers’ accomplishments, and we look forward to participating in future African Lion exercises. 

Endnotes

1. John Friberg, “Exercise African Lion 2021,” SOF News, 29 June 2021, <https://sof.news/exercises/african-lion-2021/>.
2. Ibid.

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