

# SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND AFRICA

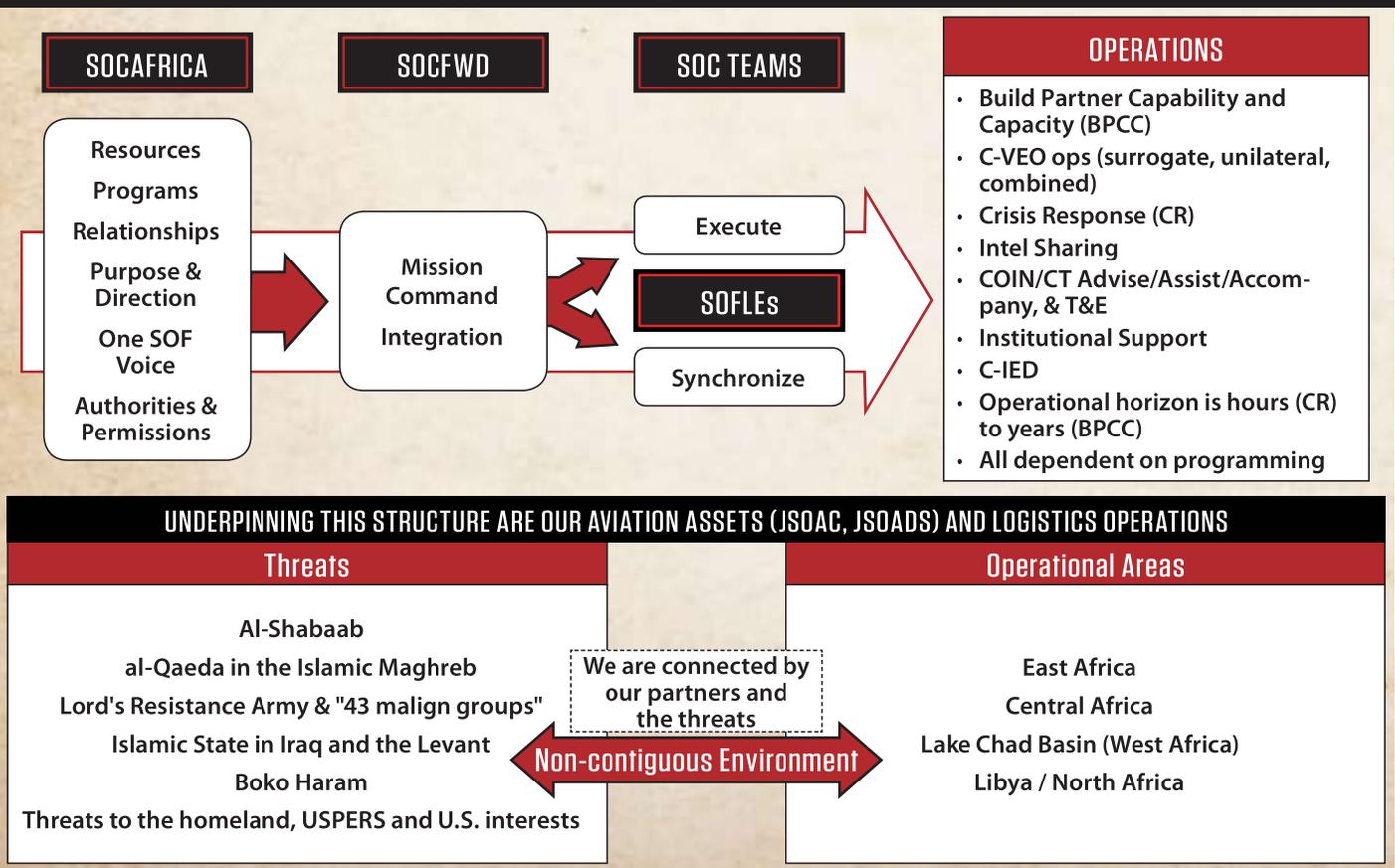


**MISSION** SOCAFRICA, as part of a global team of national and international partners, conducts persistent, networked and distributed special operations in direct support of the United States Africa Command to promote stability and prosperity in Africa.

- CORE TASKS** Deter and defeat transnational threats by:
- Countering violent extremism
  - Strengthening the defense capabilities and regional organizations
  - Protecting U.S. interests in Africa

**THE GOAL** To disable enemy networks by enabling partner-nation effectiveness and interoperability, to conduct operations within a larger partner-nation security structure. Providing training and equipment to partner nations helps improve their ability to organize, sustain and employ a counterterrorism force against mutual threats.

## SOCAFRICA - SHARED UNDERSTANDING IN THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



# SOCAFRICA AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY



## THE CONTINENT

Africa is the second largest continent in the world, with 11.7 million square miles. The United States, China, India, Europe and Japan can all fit inside the continent of Africa. Its population is estimated at 1,032,532,974 or 16 percent of the world's population.

# IN DEPTH



## Q&A WITH THE SOCAFRICA COMMANDER BRIGADIER GENERAL DONALD C. BOLDUC



**Q:** The African proverb: “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together,” is often repeated in your command. How does this passage impact the way your command operates?

**A:** This proverb has been in use for some time at U.S. Africa Command and Special Operations Command Africa — and we’ve certainly adopted this mantra because it perfectly describes our approach to operations in Africa. There’s nothing we do that doesn’t involve our African partners, interagency partners, non-governmental organizations or the local population.

We simply cannot operate unilaterally; SOF require the support of a variety of enablers to accomplish our mission, but more importantly, our entire mission depends on the relationships we’ve built with African partner forces, the State Department and the interagency team. That’s why if you want to go far, you have to involve a whole team of people to be successful. Presence is key, working shoulder to shoulder and being “coffee breath close” with our partners assists in maintaining and sustaining relationships. We use this proverb to help remind our staff how we’ve got a long way to go to solve the complex problems in Africa, but together we’ll continue to make progress.

**Q:** What are your core tasks and top priorities?

**A:** Our core tasks and priorities are nested in the USAFRICOM Theater Campaign Plan. These tasks naturally flow from the Combatant Commander’s objectives to achieve the goals outlined in the overall plan. It’s also important to understand our priorities aren’t only shaped by how we see the problem, but by our African counterparts. You may have heard me remind audiences — we are



connected with our partners by the transnational threat of violent extremism. They are closest to the problem and are best able to assess the needs of their forces.

Our top priorities won’t come as any surprise to you. We’re working to provide the USAFRICOM commander with optimal special operations solutions to neutralize Al-Shabaab, degrade violent extremist organizations in the Sahel-Maghreb, counter Boko Haram, interdict illicit activity in Central Africa and support humanitarian assistance/disaster response across the Continent...all while building the capacity of African partner nations to address these issues using a regional approach.

The focus in everything we do is to: counter violent extremism by training and equipping our partners to organize, sustain and employ a special operations capability against mutual threats to enhance African regional defense capabilities and protect U.S. interests in Africa. Our operational approach is executed through program that train and equip, advise, assist, accompany, enable and support our partners. These are easy phrases to say, but I can tell you these are complex problems requiring a comprehensive approach to solve. It’s a massive undertaking, and one that keeps our SOF teams and their African counterparts busy year-round.

**Q:** There has been a lot of talk about SOF operating “in the Gray Zone.” In your opinion, what is the biggest threat to maintaining that middle ground between war and peace in Africa?

**A:** There’s a Latin principle called “Obsta Principiis” that guides our way of thinking about this issue. In essence, Obsta Principiis means to take care of problems while they’re small — before they become big issues. We have to approach understanding the Gray Zone as a continuum of risk. Our African partners are dealing with the growth of violent extremism, natural disasters, threats to public health, resource scarcity and other issues. There’s no one issue that is the biggest threat to the Gray Zone. I certainly believe the growth of violent, armed groups is a major concern, but there are a number of other threats our African partners are confronting. Individually, each of these issues is a threat...taken together they’re a crisis.

Resources are also critical to operating in the Gray Zone. These include people, relationships, intelligence, logistics, personnel recovery, dedicated SOF teams and the authorities required to conduct decentralized, distributed operations across the continent. Without all of these resources working in concert, our African partners will move along the continuum of risk to more large-scale conflicts. We must approach Africa with *Obsta Principiis* in mind; that's where SOCAFRICA and our partners can have a meaningful impact on the direction of the Continent.

**Q: In Central Africa, the hunt for Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army has been ongoing. What is the progress on this mission and is it still a priority?**

**A:** We've had a lot of progress in the hunt for Kony...progress I believe has been widely under-reported. For example, four of the top five International Criminal Court indictees have been removed from the battlefield, hundreds of fighters have voluntarily left the battlefield and the LRA's area of influence has been reduced from an area the size of California to small, remote areas with little population or governance. The LRA is clearly on the run from a determined and well-supported African task force. This is still a priority for our team; at any given moment, there are approximately 100 U.S. SOF working at SOCFWD-Central Africa to assist the African Union Regional Task Force in the pursuit for Joseph Kony. They're keeping the pressure on what remains of this armed group and we continue to see progress in the right direction.

The Counter-LRA mission has been so effective, we're now contemplating the "what's next?" for SOCFWD-Central Africa. The capability of the African partner nations in the region has continued to increase as they participate in this mission, so we don't want to lose that momentum. Our cooperation and liaison efforts with each of the respective U.S. Embassies has become stronger as a result of the counter LRA mission. MIST efforts in these areas are also robust and very effective. These are all positive strides SOCAFRICA and USAFRICOM are looking to continue in the future as we work towards enhancing cross-border cooperation in the region.

But it's important to understand, once Kony is captured, there are still a number of other violent armed groups, poachers and criminal syndicates operating in these undergoverned areas. What our mission in Central Africa will look like years from now is still coming into focus, but I'm confident it will be centered on continuing to enhance the capabilities of our African partners to address these sorts of issues and maintain stability and less about a one particular group such as the LRA.

**Q: How has Boko Haram's affiliation with Daesh/ISIL changed the way they operate? How has this affiliation changed the way your SOF team seeks to counter these groups?**

**A:** This is a trend we're seeing across Africa — violent extremist organizations are increasingly interconnected and using social media to spread their message. Boko Haram has started to refer to itself as the "Islamic State of West Africa" and has improved its social media outreach. These are clear indicators of ISIS influence. But that affiliation doesn't change how we approach the problem. Our mission in North and West Africa is to enhance our African partner nation's ability to counter the spread of violent extremism. Our approach to the problem hasn't changed; it doesn't matter what moniker these groups choose, their actions are what makes them a threat to the people of these affected countries and U.S. interests.

We've recently increased our ability to share intelligence, imagery and information to the Lake Chad Basin countries and are working to put more information-sharing capabilities in place to assist the African-led Multi National Joint Task Force. We've also stood up an ISR capability in Cameroon to provide more intelligence to African partners in the counter Boko Haram effort. The Nigerian military is also working on requirements for increased cooperation with USSOF. There are a lot of cooperative, cross-border efforts underway to stop the spread of Boko Haram, but there is also a lot of work still to be done.

**Q: Your African partners appear committed. What is their biggest need and how can you meet it?**

**A:** I agree! The African partner militaries I talk to on the Continent are committed. These forces are seeing the results from their cooperation with U.S. and international SOF and are asking for more — more training, more opportunities to develop their staff and more exercises to test their capabilities. The time they spend with our SOF teams is adding value to their operations and preparing them for the future. That's why at any given time, we've got more than 1,700 SOCAFRICA personnel working on the continent alongside their African counterparts.

The biggest need we've identified is the development of a professional NCO corps. As you know, in the U.S. military the NCO ranks are the backbone of the force, the technical experts and the people we trust to execute the most critical tasks. In Africa, many of these military units are dependent on top-down guidance where every decision and every task is managed by a senior person. This leads to inefficient operations and a long lead time to move out on an objective. We're working with our African partners to develop a professional, trusted and capable cadre of African NCOs who are able to manage their teams and train their own staff in the vital skills they'll need for today's fight.

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Brig. Gen. Amadou Kane,  
Senegal Army Chief of  
Staff and SOCAFRICA  
Commander, Brig. Gen.  
Donald C. Bolduc talk  
prior to viewing a  
Flintlock 2016  
capabilities showcase.  
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY  
JENNIFER G. ANGELO

# IN DEPTH



## Q&A WITH THE SOCAFRICA COMMANDER BRIGADIER GENERAL DONALD C. BOLDUC

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**Q: What is your assessment of the last Flintlock exercise and what impact do you think it had on your partners?**

**A:** Flintlock 2016 was full of “firsts” — it was the first time we incorporated riverine training into the event, the first time we incorporated law enforcement directly into Flintlock and the first time we trained African military forces on mountaineering skills. We had more than 2,220 participants from a variety of career fields, not only SOF, but also SOF enablers, planners and support staff. My assessment isn’t the most important; the assessment of the 29 participating nations is what I’m most concerned with...and they’ve let us know how valuable Flintlock training is for them because they’ve continued to increase their participation and send units back year after year. The most important impact I see from Flintlock is the relationships built between participants.

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Brig. Gen. Donald C. Bolduc talks to a Dutch Army Soldier during Flintlock 2016.  
U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY  
JENNIFER G. ANGELO



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African military and law enforcement units work together for three weeks during a challenging scenario, but the long-term relationship they’ve built lasts throughout the year.

We’re finding Flintlock is the type of event that creates connections between African, European and U.S. units we’re able to leverage when there’s a crisis — you’re able to pick up the phone and talk to someone you know and trust, someone who shares the same business practices and ways of operating as you do... that’s invaluable when there’s an event where you need to work together. Cross-border cooperation is key to solving many of the complex problems we see in Africa and Flintlock is an event fostering this sort of engagement. The impacts of Flintlock can’t be overstated and I only see it growing in the next iterations as more nations ask to be involved and sign up to train together.

**Q: SOF is known for its ability to work in the Human Domain. It appears American forces are doing that well here. How is the switch from 10th SFG(A) to 3rd SFG(A) going to affect the relationships that have been established over the past 10 years?**

**A:** Anytime there is a transition, there’s going to be a bit of anxiety as relationships and processes are re-established. But the handover between 10th SFG(A) and 3rd SFG(A) has been relatively seamless for our African partners and SOCAFRICA. Leadership at these units had a deliberate and measured transition, so for most people there was really no change except for some new patches on people’s shoulders. Our community is used to adapting and changing environments, so this transition simply means a new AoR and a new language to learn. For many in the SOF community, the future of their mission isn’t in Iraq or Afghanistan but in areas where we’re seeing violent extremist organizations spreading, like Africa, Europe and Central Asia. So there’s necessarily going to be some realignment of forces and adjustments to mission sets. The focus of all involved in this realignment has been to ensure the relationships we’ve built with our African partners endures and develops — and that’s exactly what I’ve seen throughout my command here at SOCAFRICA.

**Q: It has been said that distance is the tyranny of Africa. How do you tackle that seemingly impossible problem in order to get personnel and supplies where they need to be when they need to be there?**

**A:** We overcome many of the tyranny of distance challenges by employing a mission command construct that is flat, decentralized and distributed. We utilize a SOCFWD subordinate headquarters construct that integrates all SOF operations, actions, and activities through our SOF teams (the executors) and our SOFLEs (the synchronizers) to support our African partners and the country team. We underpin this structure with expeditionary logistics, SOF aviation, and a robust communications capability. Logistics is incredibly challenging in Africa. Our AoR is more than three times the size of the continental United States, with large expanses of open territory, hundreds of unimproved airstrips and teams operating in hard-to-reach areas.

We have to rely on our Joint Special Operations Air Component to bridge these distances and our joint logistics team to find innovative ways to supply our teams. They make the seemingly impossible



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task of getting personnel, equipment and supplies to our SOCAFRICA team a relatively routine part of our planning. We're able to stand up a JCET or an exercise in a few months because of the solutions they provide. In a crisis or disaster response situation, the Airmen at the JSOAC are already devising a plan to get personnel and equipment in place as SOF are preparing their plan of action. We've got an incredible team of professionals who anticipate our needs, identify problems early and devise creative solutions to achieve the mission. The J4 directorate, contracting officers and JSOAC at SOCAFRICA are all working in concert to make the tyranny of distance a planning consideration, but not an obstacle to our operations.

**Q: The United States Military is limited in what it can do in Africa. We can train partner forces, but we can't impact governance or poverty — how do you work with other government agencies and NGOs to build a full-spectrum approach to problems in the continent?**

**A:** I don't necessarily agree with the premise — we can impact governance and poverty in Africa. Civil Affairs teams play a huge role helping to alleviate the conditions which lead to systemic poverty.

These teams are constantly working to bring government resources to under supported populations by enabling African doctors to treat people in remote areas, building clean, sustainable water sources and conducting assisting local governments to engage with target communities. Many of these activities involve partnerships with existing NGOs who have an amazing ability to multiply our efforts and provide resources the military simply can't access. All of the actions of our Civil Affairs teams seek to extend the legitimacy of the host-nation government to areas in need...these programs have a direct impact on local governance.

Also, our SOF teams integrate rule-of-law training into many of their JCETs and other training events to ensure professional military forces understand the importance of civilian control of the military and respect the human rights of citizens. We've also integrated law enforcement into our exercise programs to link military forces to first responders. This cooperation is critical during a crisis as police are typically first on the scene and will lead post-event investigations and crime scene analysis. Military and police forces are often the most direct

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Senegalese Commandos show off hand-to-hand combat skills during Flintlock 2016.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY  
JENNIFER G. ANGELO

03  
Senegalese Commandos conduct riverine training during Flintlock 2016, marking the first year this type of training was conducted during the exercise.

U.S. ARMY PHOTO BY  
SPC. DAVID M. SHEFCHUK



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representation of the state in the community; it's critical these organizations are professional and lawful as they represent legitimate, sound governance on many levels. So there are a lot of ways our team can help to improve governance and address poverty in the region.

That said, we absolutely must work in concert with interagency partners such as USAID, State Department and law enforcement (FBI, DEA, etc.) to address these challenges. They're the lead U.S. government agency throughout the region and we work closely with them to ensure our activities are value-added to their efforts. In fact, SOF has embedded liaisons in many Embassies to ensure we're properly coordinating our activities and providing Ambassadors and their staff with direct access to SOCAFRICA leaders. No single organization has all the time, resources and energy to accomplish this complex mission alone. I can't stress enough how important this relationship is to our combined success — SOF has an important role, but we are not the solution. We consistently learn as much as we share. **SW**

# THREAT OVERVIEW —

The African continent encompasses roughly 11 million square miles of terrain, roughly the size of the U.S., China and Western Europe combined, and is inhabited by approximately one billion people, or 1/6 of the earth's population. Fifty-four sovereign nations comprise the continent, 14 of which feature in the Top 20 of Transparency International's Fragile States Index. These massive swathes of ungoverned and under-governed space have enabled violent extremist organizations and other non-state actors and criminal organizations to proliferate their influence. From a Special Operations Command-Africa perspective, the primary threats on the continent emanate from Daesh (the most dominant global Violent Extremist Organizations), al-Shabaab (al-Qaeda's foremost African franchise), Boko Haram (the most lethal VEO in the world), and the Lord's Resistance Army (a persistent destabilizing presence in Central Africa for more than 20 years). SO-CAFRICA engagement with regional partners and involvement in security sector reform and capacity building, consistent with the four pillars of the U.S. Strategy in Sub-Saharan Africa, the National Strategy for Counterterrorism, Presidential Policy Directive 23 (Security Sector Assistance) and U.S. Africa Command's Theater Campaign Plan will only serve to mitigate these threats across Africa and help bring stability to the continent.



## DAESH

In early 2015, Daesh established a stronghold in the Libyan city of Surt and its surroundings, which functioned as its regional headquarters from where it sought to expand its territorial control. Amid pressure in Iraq and Syria, Libya was becoming a burgeoning preferred destination for DAESH-aligned foreign fighters, following several social media campaigns and public calls for aspiring fighters to go to Libya rather than the Levant. Daesh intended to turn Libya into a strategic beachhead to expand terrorism into the rest of North Africa, the Sahel region and possibly southern Europe. The firm territorial base the group occupied in Libya is its most expansive outside Iraq and Syria. In addition, stalled progress in forming a functioning Government of National Agreement and lack of capabilities and cohesion of the Libyan National Army only set the conditions for Daesh's expansion in Libya.

## AL-SHABAAB

Al-Shabaab continues to focus its efforts on garnering support from the local populace in an attempt to fill its ranks with new recruits and discredit the Somali government and its international supporters. Al-Shabaab also aspires to conduct attacks in neighboring countries Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti due to their involvement in the conflict in Somalia. Additionally, AS will most certainly continue to capitalize on its extensive freedom of movement and easy access to large urban areas to stage small-scale yet high impact asymmetric attacks against targets of opportunity. Although the group has likely been pressured by key territorial and leadership losses since mid-2015, its operational tempo has been mostly unhindered, evident in the group successfully overrunning a Kenya forward operating base in January 2016, in addition to its ongoing attacks on prominent hotels and restaurants in Mogadishu and Mogadishu International Airport. The nascent Somali National Army continues to lack the will and capacity to combat the group unilaterally and the Somali government continues to have little influence outside the capital.

# — AFRICA

## BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram, rebranded under the name Islamic State-West Africa after the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015, remains the most lethal VEO on the continent. Despite its new name, its primary goal remains consistent. The group intends to establish a caliphate across northern Nigeria that adheres to strict Sharia law. IS-WA also clearly prioritizes self-preservation, sustainment of operations through weapons procurement and revenue generation, maintenance of its cross-border logistics and safe-haven accesses. Although the Nigerian military eroded the group's paramilitary strength in northeast Nigeria, IS-WA most likely still intends to defeat the Nigerian government militarily and carve out a safe haven for itself within Nigerian territory. Finally IS-WA's continued attacks against civilians — including markets, mosques and large gatherings — indicates the group wants to ensure that civilian populations in northern Nigeria do not collaborate with government authorities. Given the group's preference for asymmetric attacks over the past year — such as the widespread use of female suicide bombers — IS-WA in a weakened state has proven just as lethal as when it controlled vast areas of Borno State in early 2015.

## LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY

Lord's Resistance Army: Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army have terrorized parts of Central Africa for years, carrying out brutal killings and kidnappings and engaging in ivory poaching operations. Kony and his top lieutenants were indicted by the International Criminal Court in 2005, but it was not until 2012 that the group rose to international notoriety after the advocacy group Invisible Children highlighted his crimes in the "KONY 2012" video seen by millions online. This put the group squarely in the spotlight and led to the U.S.'s implementation of Operation Observant Compass. LRA fighters have proven themselves highly mobile over the years, exploiting ungoverned spaces in a volatile region to stage abductions and regroup. The insurgency started in Uganda in the 1980s and after the Ugandan military stepped up pressure in 2006 the rebels moved first to South Sudanese territory and then shifted westward to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic. Fewer than 200 LRA rebels are still active in parts of Central Africa, where they operate in jungle terrain that covers the size of France. 

## SYMBOLOLOGY



### DAESH

Commonly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL. Their flag features a line that reads "La 'ilaha 'illa-Allah," meaning "There is no god but God," and the white seal reads "God's Messenger Mohammed."



### AL-SHABAAB

The official seal of AS. Their war flag is the same as the one used by ISIS, though their "administration" flag uses the opposite colors—black inscriptions with a white background.



### BOKO HARAM

The former symbol used by BH. After rebranding under the Islamic State in 2015 the group primarily uses the Daesh flag or variations of it.



### LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY

This flag is commonly used as the symbol of the LRA. However, some sources say the LRA flag is likely a bicolor horizontal red over yellow or yellow over red, similar in color to the Ugandan Flag, their country of origin.