# U.S. Strengthens Maritime Security Cooperation with Kenya During NAVAF Commander's Visit




Adm. George Wikoff, commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa, and Major General Paul Otieno, commander, Kenya Navy, take part in the Close Quarters Battle (CQB) Facility Inauguration ceremony, on Kenya Navy Base Mtongwe in Mombasa. (U.S. Navy Photo by MC1Robert J. Baldock)
From By U.S. Naval Force Europe, U.S. Naval Forces Africa, March 31, 2026

U.S. Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF) strengthened its longstanding security partnership with Kenya during Adm. George Wikoff's visit to Nairobi and Mombasa, March 24–25.

The visit, Wikoff's first to Africa as the NAVAF commander, highlighted the United States Navy's ongoing support to Kenya's maritime operations, counterterrorism efforts, and regional security leadership along the Western Indian Ocean and the Somali border.

Throughout his engagements, Wikoff underscored the shared U.S.–Kenya commitment to enhancing interoperability, expanding partner capacity, and investing in infrastructure and training that enable Kenyan forces to deter and respond to emerging threats.

"Kenya is a critical maritime and security partner in East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean," said Wikoff. "Our cooperation is built on shared interests and shared sacrifices, and together we are working to promote stability, protect vital sea lanes, and counter those who threaten regional security."

In Nairobi, Wikoff met with the Chief of the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), General Charles Muriu Kahariri, to discuss ongoing collaboration in counterterrorism, maritime security, regional stability, and long-term defense modernization and innovation.

The discussion focused on aligning defense cooperation with broader U.S. diplomatic and economic goals, reinforcing strategic coordination at the senior level, and advancing Kenya's role as a security anchor in the region.

"General Kahariri and I reaffirmed that our defense cooperation is not just a one-time effort – it is strategic, ongoing, and aligned with our broader diplomatic and economic partnerships," Wikoff said. "Together, we are focused on countering terrorism, strengthening maritime security, and modernizing our forces so we are ready for current and future challenges."

In Mombasa, Wikoff met with Major General Paul Owuor Otieno,

commander of the Kenya Navy, to review ongoing maritime initiatives, including joint training, information sharing, and efforts to improve maritime domain awareness across the Western Indian Ocean. The leaders discussed ways to bolster Kenya's ability to secure its maritime approaches, counter illicit maritime activities, and further integrate Kenyan naval forces into regional and international security efforts.

Wikoff and Otieno then attended the after-action review for Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) 2026, a series of naval exercises with African partners, including Kenya, to bolster maritime security, improve interoperability, and address regional security challenges in the Western Indian Ocean. The review assessed operational effectiveness and interoperability gains and identified lessons to guide future joint exercises and operations.

"CARAT 2026 shows what we can achieve when we train and operate together," Wikoff said. "By integrating our capabilities and sharing information, we are better prepared to secure the maritime domain, disrupt illicit networks, and respond swiftly when threats emerge."

Wikoff and Otieno concluded their visit by commissioning the Kenya Navy Marine Range and Close Quarters Battle (CQB) Complex at Kenya Navy Base Mtongwe in Mombasa County. The new facility will provide a modern, specialized training environment to significantly enhance the operational readiness of the Kenya Navy Marine Commandos, supporting advanced training in close-quarters combat, marksmanship, tactical movement, and integrated maritime operations.

"The Marine Range and CQB Complex is a tangible demonstration of our commitment to Kenya's security and regional leadership," said Wikoff. "By investing in infrastructure and training, we are empowering Kenyan forces with the tools and skills they need to lead in securing their coastlines and

maritime approaches.”

The KNAV Marine CQB Complex is a $750,000 Section 333 Building Partnership Capacity (BPC) design-build contract managed by Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC) Europe, Africa, Central (EURAFCENT). This specialized facility is designed to enhance the maritime and coastal interdiction capabilities of the newly established KNAV Marine Commandos, who are playing an increasingly prominent role in regional counterinsurgency operations along the coast and littorals. The scope includes a 100-meter small-arms range, a live-fire shoot house, and a dry-run rehearsal facility.

Wikoff’s visit reaffirmed NAVAF’s role as a trusted, long-term partner to Kenya amid increasing competition from external actors.

Through senior leader engagements, joint exercises, and targeted investments in training and infrastructure, the United States and Kenya are working together to strengthen counterterrorism cooperation, enhance maritime security, and promote stability across East Africa and the Western Indian Ocean.

“Our partnership with Kenya is enduring and future-focused,” Wikoff said. “Together, we are building the capabilities, relationships, and trust that underpin regional security and create the conditions for lasting peace and prosperity.”

For more than 80 years, NAVEUR-NAVAF has forged strategic relationships with Allies and partners, leveraging a foundation of shared values to preserve security and stability. Headquartered in Naples, Italy, NAVEUR-NAVAF operates U.S. naval forces in the U.S. European Command and U.S. Africa Command areas of responsibility.