

Morocco war games end, security fears for Africa

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A senior U.S. general warned of security fears in Africa as the large-scale U.S.-led African Lion war games with American, African and European troops in Morocco came to a close on Friday. The African Lion war games, which lasted nearly two weeks, stretched across Morocco, a key U.S. ally, with smaller parts held in Tunisia and Senegal. General Stephen J. Townsend, head of the U.S. Africa Command said he was concerned about the security situation across a band of Africa, from the Sahel region in the west to the Horn of Africa. He noted deadly attacks by al-Qaeda and Islamic State-linked jihadis and al-Shabab. African Lion saw more than 7,000 troops from seven countries and NATO carry out air, land and sea exercises together. The annual drills were skipped last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a hitch at the start of this year's war games, with Spain withdrawing from the war games citing budgetary reasons. Press reports attributed the move to Spain's poor relations with Morocco, a former key partner. The two countries have been at loggerheads since Spain took in the leader of the Polisario Front independence movement - Morocco's number one enemy - for COVID-19 treatment in a Spanish hospital earlier this year. The Polisario is fighting for independence for the Western Sahara, a vast region that Morocco claims as its own. During the exercise, Morocco held some airborne operations near the Western Sahara and not far from Polisario refugee camps in Tindouf, in neighboring Algeria. The participating countries in African Lion were the U.S., Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Italy, The Netherlands and Britain. Observers also attended from countries including Egypt, Qatar, Niger and Mali.