

AFRICOM: The Pentagon's First Direct Military Intervention In Africa

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The 2009 World Population Data Sheet published by the Washington, DC-based Population Reference Bureau states that the population of the African continent has surpassed one billion. Africans now account for over a seventh of the human race.

Africa's 53 nations are 28% of the 192 countries in the world.

The size and location of the continent along with its human and natural resources – oil, natural gas, gold, diamonds, uranium, cobalt, chromium, platinum, timber, cotton, food products – make it an increasingly important part of a world that is daily becoming more integrated and interdependent.

Africa is also the last continent to free itself from colonial domination. South America broke free of Spanish and Portuguese control in the beginning of the 1800s (leaving only the three Guianas – British, Dutch and French – still colonized) and the post-World War II decolonization of Asia that started with former British East India in 1947 was almost complete by the late 1950s.

Sub-Saharan Africa was not to liberate most of its territory from Belgian, British, French, Spanish and Portuguese colonial masters until the 1960s and 1970s. And the former owners were reluctant to cede newly created African nations any more than nominal independence and the ability to choose their own internal socio-economic orientation and foreign policy alignment.

In the two decades of the African independence struggle the continent was marred by Western-backed coups d'état and assassinations of liberation leaders which included those against Patrice Lumumba in the former Belgian Congo in 1961, Ben Barka in Morocco in 1965, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana in 1966, Eduardo Mondlane in Mozambique in 1969, Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau in 1973 and Marien Ngouabi in the Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville) in 1977.

In his latest Anti-Empire Report veteran political analyst William Blum wrote, "the next time you hear that Africa can't produce good leaders, people who are committed to the welfare of the masses of their people, think of Nkrumah and his fate. And think of Patrice Lumumba, overthrown in the Congo 1960-61 with the help of the United States; Agostinho Neto of Angola, against whom Washington waged war in the 1970s, making it impossible for him to institute progressive changes; Samora Machel of Mozambique against whom the CIA supported a counter-revolution in the 1970s-80s period; and Nelson Mandela of South Africa (now married to Machel's widow), who spent 28 years in prison thanks to the CIA." [1]

Some of Blum's references are to a series of proxy wars supported by the United States and its NATO allies and in some instances apartheid South Africa and the Mobutu Sese Seko regime in Zaire in the mid-1970s and the 1980s, such as arming and training the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the unspeakably brutal Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), and Eritrean and Tigrayan armed separatists in Ethiopia as well as backing the Somali invasion of the Ogaden Desert in that country in 1977.

Over the past five years French troops and bombers have waged deadly attacks inside Cote d'Ivoire, Chad and the Central African Republic either in support of or against rebels, always in furtherance of France's own geopolitical objectives. In the second application of the so-called Blair Doctrine, in 2000 Britain sent troops to its former colony of Sierra Leone and has de facto recolonized the nation, taking control of its military and internal security forces.

But in the post-World War II period there has only been one direct American military action in Africa, the deadly 1986 air strikes against Libya in April of 1986, Operation El Dorado Canyon.

While conducting wars, bombings, military interventions and invasions in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, the Middle East and recently Southeastern Europe over the past half century, the Pentagon has left the African continent comparatively unscathed. That is going to change after the establishment of the United States Africa Command on October 1 of 2007 and its activation a year later.

The U.S. has intensified military involvement in Africa over the past seven years with such projects as the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), launched by the State Department but which deployed US Army Special Forces with the Special Operations Command Europe to Mali and Mauritania among other locations. U.S. military personnel are still engaged in the counterinsurgency wars in Mali and Niger against Tuareg rebels.

The Pan Sahel Initiative was succeeded by the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) in late 2004 which has American military personnel assigned to eleven African nations: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

The Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative was formally launched in June of 2005 with the deployment of 1,000 American troops, among them Green Berets, in Operation Flintlock 05 in North and West Africa to engage with counterparts from seven nations: Algeria, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Tunisia.

Until their transfer to the Africa Command (AFRICOM) all 53 nations on the continent except for those in the Horn of Africa (assigned to Central Command) and the island nations of Madagascar and the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean (handled by Pacific Command) were within the area of responsibility of the European Command (EUCOM), whose top commander is simultaneously the Supreme Allied Commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

As such the past two EUCOM and NATO commanders, Marine General James Jones (2003-2006) and Army General Bantz John Craddock (2006-June, 2009), were the most instrumental in setting up AFRICOM.

Jones is now U.S. National Security Adviser and at this February's Munich Security Conference opened his speech with "As the most recent National Security Advisor of the United States, I take my daily orders from Dr. [Henry]Kissinger." [2]

In 2008, while serving as State Department special envoy for Middle East security and chairman of the Atlantic Council of the United States, Jones said, "[A]s commander of NATO, I worried early in the mornings about how to protect energy facilities and supply chain routes as far away as Africa, the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea." [3]

Shortly before stepping down from his military posts with NATO and the Pentagon "NATO's top commander of operations, U.S. General James Jones, has said he sees a potential role for the alliance in protecting key shipping lanes such as those around the Black Sea and oil supply routes from Africa to Europe." [4]

Three years ago a Pentagon web site documented that "Officials at U.S. European Command spend between 65 to 70 percent of their time on African issues, [James] Jones said....Establishing such a group [military task force in West Africa] could also send a message to U.S. companies 'that investing in many parts of Africa is a good idea,' the general said." [5]

During the final months of his dual tenure as NATO's and EUCOM's top military commander, Jones transitioned Africa from EUCOM's to AFRICOM's control while also expanding the role of NATO on the continent.

In June of 2006 the Alliance launched its global Rapid Response Force with its first large-scale military exercises off the coast of the former Portuguese possession of Cape Verde, in the Atlantic Ocean west of Senegal.

U.S press reports of the time offered these details:

"Hundreds of elite North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) troops backed by fighter planes and warships will storm a tiny volcanic island off Africa's Atlantic coast this week in what the Western alliance hopes will prove a potent demonstration of its ability to project power around the world." [6]

"Seven thousand NATO troops conducted war games on the Atlantic Ocean island of Cape Verde on Thursday in the latest sign of the alliance's growing interest in playing a role in Africa.

"The land, air and sea exercises were NATO's first major deployment in Africa and designed to show the former Cold War giant can launch far-flung military operations at short notice.

"'You are seeing the new NATO, the one that has the ability to project stability,' said NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told a news conference after NATO troops stormed a beach on one of the islands on the archipelago in a mock assault on a fictitious terrorist camp.

"NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe James Jones, the alliance soldier in charge of NATO operations, said he hoped the two-week Cape Verde exercises would help break down negative images about NATO in Africa and elsewhere." [7]



Rwandan troops heading to Sudan in 2005

NATO's first operation in Africa had occurred a year earlier in May of 2005 when the bloc transported African Union troops to the Darfur region of Sudan, at the crossroads of a war-riven region comprised of the Central African Republic, Chad and Sudan.

The Alliance has since deployed warships to the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden, last year with Operation Allied Protector, and this August 17 NATO announced that it was dispatching British, Greek, Italian, Turkish and U.S. warships to the area for a new mission, Operation Ocean Shield. These operations don't consist of mere surveillance and escort roles but include regular forced boardings, sniper attacks and other uses of armed and often lethal force.

On August 22 a Netherlands contingent of the complementary European Union naval force off Somalia used an attack helicopter against a vessel in the area which subsequently was taken over by troops from a Norwegian warship.

Over three years before, now U.S. National Security Adviser and then NATO chief military commander James Jones addressing what was his major "national security" concern at the time, "raised the prospect of NATO taking a role to counter piracy off the coast of the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, especially when it threatens energy supply routes to Western nations." [8]

A month later both he and NATO's then top civilian leader, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, reiterated the above commitment.

"NATOs' [commanders] are ready to use warships to ensure the security of offshore oil and gas transportation routes from Western Africa, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO's Secretary General, reportedly said speaking at a session of the foreign committee of PACE [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe].

"On April 30 General James Jones, commander-in-chief of NATO in Europe, reportedly said NATO was going to draw up a plan for ensuring the security of oil and gas industry facilities.

"In this respect the bloc is willing to ensure security in unstable regions where oil and gas are produced and transported." [9]

Two months earlier a U.S. Defense Department news source reported this from Jones:

"U.S. Naval Forces Europe, (the command's) lead component in this initiative, has developed a robust maritime security strategy and regional 10-year campaign plan for the Gulf of Guinea region.

"Africa's vast potential makes African stability a near-term global strategic imperative." [10]

Jones "raised the prospect of NATO taking a role to counter piracy off the coast of the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, especially when it threatens energy supply routes to Western nations" in April of 2006 and the Pentagon and NATO have followed through on his pledge and exactly in those two opposite ends of Africa.

At article a few days ago by Daniel Volman, director of the African Security Research Project

in Washington, DC, called “Africa: U.S. Military Holds War Games on Nigeria, Somalia” provided details on how far plans by James Jones and the Pentagon have progressed over the past three years.

Working with what sketchy information that had been made public about Unified Quest 2008, last year’s rendition of what the U.S. Army web site described in an article of this year under the title of and as “Army war games for future conflicts” [11], conducted by the United States Army War College, Volman’s article included this information:

“In addition to U.S. military officers and intelligence officers, Unified Quest 2008 brought together participants from the State Department and other U.S. government agencies, academics, journalists, and foreign military officers (including military representatives from several NATO countries, Australia, and Israel), along with the private military contractors who helped run the war games: the Rand Corporation and Booz-Allen.

“The list of options for the Nigeria scenario ranged from diplomatic pressure to military action, with or without the aid of European and African nations. One participant, U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Mark Stanovich, drew up a plan that called for the deployment of thousands of U.S. troops within 60 days....

“Among scenarios examined during the game were the possibility of direct American military intervention involving some 20,000 U.S. troops in order to ‘secure the oil,’ and the question of how to handle possible splits between factions within the Nigerian government. The game ended without military intervention because one of the rival factions executed a successful coup and formed a new government that sought stability.



General Ward

“[W]hen General Ward [AFRICOM commander] appeared before the House Armed Services Committee on March 13, 2008, he cited America’s growing dependence on African oil as a priority issue for Africom and went on to proclaim that combating terrorism would be ‘Africom’s number one theater-wide goal.’ He barely mentioned development, humanitarian aid, peacekeeping or conflict resolution. [12]

In addition to nations already shelled, targeted and threatened like Somalia, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Eritrea, even long-time and staunch U.S. military allies like Nigeria are not beyond the reach of hostile Pentagon action. Nigeria is the main power in the fifteen-nation Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which over the past nine years has deployed troops to Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d’Ivoire on the request of the West, but that loyalty will not protect it when its own moment arrives.

The U.S. has employed other countries as regional military proxies – Ethiopia and Djibouti in Northeast Africa, Rwanda in Central Africa, Kenya in both – and has designs on South Africa, Senegal and Liberia for similar purposes.

Since its establishment in October of 2007 AFRICOM has lost little time in marking out the Pentagon’s new continent.

Even prior to its formal activation the Pentagon conducted the Africa Endeavor 2008 23-nation military exercise with forces from Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali,

Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Uganda, the U.S. and Zambia as well as representatives from ECOWAS and the African Union. [13]

The operation was held under the auspices of the U.S. European Command at the time as AFRICOM wasn't activated until October of that year but it included the participation of the then fledgling AFRICOM and U.S. Marine Forces Europe (MARFOREUR), U.S. Air Forces in Europe and the Marine Headquarters, Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa [14], but "Next year's exercise will be sponsored by U.S. Africa Command." [15]

This January the U.S. Department of Defense announced that "The U.S. Army Southern European Task Force [SETAF] officially has assumed its new role as the Army component for U.S. Africa Command."

The Pentagon web site from which the above quote is taken also provided this background information and portents of the future:

"Since the 1990s, SETAF has worked with African nations to conduct military training and provide humanitarian relief in countries such as Liberia, Rwanda, Uganda, Congo and the former Zaire. [Congo is the former Zaire, as Zaire was the former Belgian Congo]

"In the coming years, SETAF, operating as U.S. Army Africa, will continue to grow and build capacity to meet the requirements needed to coordinate all U.S. Army activities in Africa.

"[U.S. Army Africa] is not an episodic, flash in the pan, noncombative evacuation operation." [16]

In the same month, demonstrating another new AFRICOM component and the continent-wide reach of the American military and its recently acquired client states, it was reported that "Air Force C-17s will soon begin airlifting special equipment for Rwandan Peacekeepers in the Darfur region of Sudan, marking the kickoff of the first major operation engineered by U.S. Africa Command's air component, Seventeenth Air Force, also known as U.S. Air Forces Africa." [17]

This May the newspaper of the American Armed Forces, Stars and Stripes, carried a feature on joint U.S.-British training of the Rwandan army, one which bears a large part of the blame for the deaths of over five million Congolese since 1998: The biggest loss of life in a nation related to armed conflict since tens of millions of Chinese and Soviets were killed during World War II.

Rwandan and Ugandan troops invaded Congo in 1998 and triggered ongoing cross-border fighting which persists to this day. Rwanda and Uganda are both U.S. and British military client states.

The Stars and Stripes feature detailed that American instructors "are currently working with a team from the British army to train instructors with the Rwandan army. Those instructors will then train their own troops — many of whom will serve as peacekeepers in places such as Sudan." [18]

It quoted a British officer, Maj. Charles Malet, who "leads a contingent of British forces based in Kenya," as saying "We've been producing short-term training in this part of the world for a long, long time. [U.S. Africa Command] has stood [up]. It's great to link up and provide a sort of introduction." [19]

The training of the Rwandan armed forces by the United States and its NATO allies has less to do with Darfur than it does with devastated Congo.

In November of 2008 the United Nations reported that “Rwandan forces fired tank shells and other heavy artillery across the border at Congolese troops during fighting” [20] which began when former Congolese general Laurent Nkunda staged an armed rebellion in the east of the country which led to the displacement of 200,000 civilians.

The BBC revealed at the time that “journalists report that some of Laurent Nkunda’s rebel fighters are in the pay of the Rwandan army.

“This has renewed fears that the fighting will see a re-run of the five-year Congolese war, which involved nine nations, before it ended in 2003.” [21]

The British Financial Times conducted interviews with “former rebels and observers on the ground” who said that “the uprising – led by Laurent Nkunda, the renegade former Congolese general – relies heavily on recruitment in Rwanda and former or even active Rwandan soldiers.”

Referring to Rwandan President Paul Kagame, the report added, “Mr Nkunda and Rwanda’s government, military and business elite share a history....Mr Nkunda, a Congolese Tutsi, was an intelligence officer in the guerrilla army that Mr Kagame, a Rwandan Tutsi, used to...seize power.

“Mr Kagame launched invasions of Congo in 1996 and 1998 and supported uprisings....” [22]

The following month a U.S. congressional delegation “traveled to Rwanda and Ethiopia to meet with U.S. ambassadors, AFRICOM officials and various ministers of each country, including Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Rwanda Foreign Minister Charles Murigande.” [23]

Ethiopia invaded Somalia on America’s behest three years ago and Rwanda’s repeated incursions into Congo could not have occurred without a green light from Washington.

As an Ugandan commentary at the time of the latest attack on Congo from Rwanda stated, “London, New York and Paris are among the top consumers of minerals from Congo. They lecture humanity on the need to uphold human rights and the sanctity of property rights whilst their thirst for strategic minerals unleashes terror on innocent women and children in Eastern Congo.” [24]

Last week an AFRICOM spokesman announced that “The United States military will be sending experts to the war-torn eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo this week.” The initial deployment will be small, he added, but “more may follow....” [25] AFRICOM would be better advised to monitor the activities of the Rwandan military it trains and arms.

Also last week the Pentagon stated it was deploying “unmanned reconnaissance aircraft in the skies above the Seychelles archipelago” in the Indian Ocean near Madagascar and AFRICOM commander General William Ward said, “We have the recent arrival of our P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft that will aid in conducting the surveillance of Seychelles territorial waters and as we look into the future, (we will) bring unmanned surveillance

vehicles.” [26]

Two days later Ward said “that the rise of radical Islamist militant group al-Shabab in Somalia makes East Africa a central focus of the U.S. military on the continent.”

Voice of America added:

“General William Ward has pledged continued support to Somalia’s transitional federal government....He made his remarks during a visit to Nairobi, Kenya, which is a key U.S. ally in region.” [27]

Until last October Africa was the only continent other than Australia and Antarctica without a U.S. military command. The fact that one has now been established indicates that Africa has achieved heightened importance for the Pentagon and its Western military allies.

An analysis of why Africa is a major focus of attention and why now rather than earlier was provided by U.S.-based writer Paul I. Adujie in the New Liberian on August 21:

“America’s Africa Command, in conceptual terms and actual implementation, is not intended to serve Africa’s best interests. It just happens that Africa has grown in geopolitical and geo-economic importance to America and her allies. Africa has been there all along.

“There were, for instance, reports of how the American military, acting supposedly in partnership or cooperation with the Nigerian military, literally took over Nigerian Defense Headquarters....

“It is probably important to mention that the United States already operates at least three other commands, namely, the European Command (EUCOM), Central Command (CENTCOM) and Pacific Command (PACOM), therefore the Africa Command or (AFRICOM) will be the fourth leg of US military global spread.

“America’s Africa Command is...machinery for Western governments to pursue their vaunted economic, political and hegemonic hemispheric influence at the expense of Africans as well as a backdoor through which Westerners can outmaneuver rivals such as China and perhaps Russia in addition.” [28]

Notes

- 1) The Anti-Empire Report, August 4th, 2009
<http://killinghope.org/bblum6/aer72.html>
- 2) Real Clear Politics, February 8, 2009
- 3) Agence France-Presse, November 30, 2008
- 4) Reuters, November 27, 2006
- 5) U.S. Department of Defense, August 18, 2006
- 6) Associated Press, June 21, 2006
- 7) Reuters, June 22, 2006
- 8) Associated Press, April 24, 2006
- 9) Trend News Agency, May 3, 2006
- 10) U.S. Department of Defense, March 8, 2006
- 11) www.army.mil, May 6, 2009
- 12) AllAfrica.com, August 14, 2009
- 13) United States European Command, July 29, 2008

- 14) United States European Command, July 16, 2008
- 15) United States European Command, July 29, 2008
- 16) U.S. Department of Defense, American Forces Press Service, January 28, 2009
- 17) U.S. Air Forces in Europe, January 9, 2009
- 18) Stars And Stripes, May 24, 2009
- 19) Ibid
- 20) Associated Press, November 3, 2008
- 21) BBC News, November 13, 2008
- 22) Financial Times, November 11, 2008
- 23) Times-Journal, December 8, 2008
- 24) Sunday Monitor (Uganda), November 9, 2008
- 25) Daily Nation (Kenya), August 18, 2009
- 26) Reuters, August 19, 2009
- 27) Voice of America News, August 21, 2009
- 28) New Liberian, August 21, 2009

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