

# America's First War in Africa. US AFRICOM Launches Large-Scale Offensive In Somalia

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Over 43 people have been killed in the Somali capital of Mogadishu in two days of fighting between Shabab (al-Shabaab) insurgent forces, who on March 10 advanced to within one mile of the nation's presidential palace, and troops of the U.S.-backed Transitional Federal Government. The fighting has just begun.

The last ambassador of the United States to Somalia (1994-1995), Daniel H. Simpson, penned a column for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on March 10 in which he posed the question "why, apart from the only lightly documented charge of Islamic extremism among the Shabab, is the United States reengaging in Somalia at this time?"

He answered it in stating "Part of the reason is because the United States has its only base in Africa up the coast from Mogadishu, in Djibouti, the former French Somaliland. The U.S. Africa Command was established there in 2008, and, absent the willingness of other African countries to host it, the base in Djibouti became the headquarters for U.S. troops and fighter bombers in Africa.

"Flush with money, in spite of the expensive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Department of Defense obviously feels itself in a position to undertake military action in Africa, in Somalia." [1]

Fulfilling its appointed role, the New York Times leaked U.S. military plans for the current offensive in Somalia on March 5 in a report titled "U.S. Aiding Somalia in Its Plan to Retake Its Capital." (Note that the Transitional Federal Government is presented as Somalia itself and Mogadishu as its capital.)

The tone of the feature was of course one of approval and endorsement of the Pentagon's rationale for directly intervening in Somalia at a level not seen since 1993 and support for proxy actions last witnessed with the invasion by Ethiopia in 2006. The report began with a description of a military surveillance plane circling over the Somali capital and a quote from the new chief of staff of the nation's armed forces, General Mohamed Gelle Kahiye: "It's the Americans. They're helping us."

Afterward "An American official in Washington, who said he was not authorized to speak publicly" - a hallmark of the American free press - was, if not identified, quoted as maintaining that U.S. covert operations were planned if not already underway and "What you're likely to see is airstrikes and Special Ops moving in, hitting and getting out." [2]

The New York Times also provided background information regarding the current offensive:

“Over the past several months, American advisers have helped supervise the training of the Somali forces to be deployed in the offensive....The Americans have provided covert training to Somali intelligence officers, logistical support to the peacekeepers, fuel for the maneuvers, surveillance information about insurgent positions and money for bullets and guns.” [3]

Four days later General William (“Kip”) Ward, commander of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

In his introductory remarks the chairman of the committee, Senator Carl Levin, reinforced recent American attempts to expand the scope of the deepening Afghanistan-Pakistan war, the deadliest and lengthiest in the world, to the west and south in stating that “al Qaeda and violent extremists who share their ideology are not just located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region but in places like Somalia, Mali, Nigeria and Niger.” [4]

In his formal report Ward pursued a similar tact and expanded the Pentagon’s “counter-terrorism” (CT) area of responsibility yet further from South Asia: “U.S. Africa Command has focused the majority of its CT capacity building activities in East Africa on Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Uganda, which – aside from Somalia – are the countries directly threatened by terrorists.” [5]

He also spoke of the current offensive by “the transition government to reclaim parts of Mogadishu,” stating “I think it’s something that we would look to do and support.” [6]

Senator Levin and General Ward included eight African nations in the broader Afghan war category of Operation Enduring Freedom, countries from the far northeast of the continent (the Horn of Africa) to the far west (the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea). The U.S. military has already been involved in counterinsurgency operations in Mali and Niger against ethnic Tuareg rebels, who have no conceivable ties to al-Qaeda, not that one would know that from Levin’s comments.

In between South Asia and Africa lies Yemen on the Arabian Peninsula. The New York Times report cited earlier reminded readers that “The United States is increasingly concerned about the link between Somalia and Yemen.” Indeed as Levin’s comments quoted above establish, Washington (along with its NATO allies) is forging an expanded war front from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Yemen and into Africa. [7]

That extension of the South Asia war has not gone unobserved in world capitals, and earlier this year Russian political analyst Andrei Fedyashin commented: “Adding up all four fronts – if the United States ventured an attack on Yemen and Somalia – America would have to invade a territory equal to three-fourths of Western Europe; and it is hardly strong enough for that.” [8]

Strong enough or not, that is just what the White House and the Pentagon are doing. The only other objection that can be raised to the above author’s description is that it too severely narrows the intended battlefield.

In the past six months Somali troops have been sent to Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda for combat training and “most are now back in the capital, waiting to fight.”

In addition, “There are also about 5,000 Ugandan and Burundian peacekeepers, with 1,700 more on their way, and they are expected to play a vital role in backing up advancing

Somali forces.” [9]

Last October the U.S. led ten days of military exercises in Uganda – Natural Fire 10 – with 450 American troops and over 550 from Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The U.S. soldiers were deployed from Camp Lemonier (Lemonnier) in Djibouti, home to the Pentagon’s Joint Task Force/Horn of Africa and over 2,000 U.S. forces. The de facto headquarters of AFRICOM.

At the time of the maneuvers a major Ugandan newspaper wrote that they were “geared towards the formation of the first Joint East African Military Force.” [10]

In addition to using such a multinational regional force in Somalia, the U.S. can also deploy it against Uganda’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebels in Uganda, Congo and Sudan, and could even employ it against Eritrea, Zimbabwe and Sudan, the only nations on the African continent not to some degree enmeshed in military partnerships with Washington and NATO. (Libya has participated in NATO naval exercises and South Africa has hosted the bloc’s warships.) [11]

Earlier this month the Kenyan newspaper The East African divulged that “American legislators are pushing for a law that will see another phase of military action to apprehend Lord’s Resistance Army rebels.”

The news source added that the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Bill adopted by the U.S. Congress last year “requires the US government to develop a new multifaceted strategy” and as such the new bill under consideration “will not be the first time the US government is providing support to the Uganda army in fighting the LRA.

“The US has been backing the UPDF [Uganda People’s Defence Force] with logistics and training to fight the rebel group.” [12]

Last month it was announced that the U.S. Africa Command has dispatched special forces to train 1,000 Congolese troops in the north and east of their nation, where Congo borders Uganda.

Former U.S. diplomat Daniel Simpson was quoted above as to what in part is Washington’s motive in pursuing a new war in and around Somalia: To test out AFRICOM ground and air forces in Djibouti for direct military action on the continent.

A United Press International report of March 10, placed under energy news, offered another explanation. In a feature titled “East Africa is next hot oil zone,” the news agency disclosed that “East Africa is emerging as the next oil boom following a big strike in Uganda’s Lake Albert Basin. Other oil and natural gas reserves have been found in Tanzania and Mozambique and exploration is under way in Ethiopia and even war-torn Somalia.”

The region is, in the words of the Western chief executive officer of an oil prospecting firm, “the last real high-potential area in the world that hasn’t been fully explored.” [13]

The article added: “The discovery at Lake Albert, in the center of Africa between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, is estimated to contain the equivalent of several billion barrels of oil. It is likely to be the biggest onshore field found south of the Sahara

Desert in two decades.”

It also spoke of “a vast 135,000-square-mile territory in landlocked Ethiopia that is believed to contain sizable reserves of oil. It is estimated to hold 4 trillion cubic feet of natural gas as well.”

And, more pertinent to the Horn of Africa:

“A 1993 study by Petroconsultants of Geneva concluded that Somalia has two of the most potentially interesting hydrocarbon-yielding basins in the entire region – one in the central Mudugh region, the other in the Gulf of Aden. More recent analyses indicate that Somalia could have reserves of up to 10 billion barrels.” [14]

Washington’s North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies are also deeply involved in the militarization of East Africa.

On March 10 NATO extended its naval operation in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia, Ocean Shield, to the end of 2012, an unprecedentedly long 33-month extension. On March 12 “Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 will take over missions from Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 for the four-month assignment. The change will increase NATO’s contribution from four ships to five ships....” [15]

At the same hearings of the Senate Armed Services Committee that AFRICOM commander William Ward addressed, NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, America’s Admiral James Stavridis, “noted that 100,000 NATO troops are involved in expeditionary operations on three continents, including operations in Afghanistan, off the coast of Africa, and in Bosnia.” (Evidently Kosovo was meant for Bosnia.)

Stavridis, who is concurrently top military chief of U.S. European Command, said “The nature of threats in this 21st century [is] going to demand more than just sitting behind our borders.” [16]

He also said he finds “Iran alarming in any number of dimensions,” specifically mentioning alleged “state-sponsored terrorism, nuclear proliferation and political outreach into Latin America.” [17]

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen recently returned from Jordan and the Persian Gulf state of Bahrain where he pressured both nations to support the war in Afghanistan and Alliance naval operations.

“NATO’s top official said [on March 9] that he has asked Jordan and Bahrain to contribute to alliance naval operations fighting terrorism and piracy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf of Aden, as he ended a visit to the two countries. NATO is keen to improve cooperation with Arab and Muslim states, seeing them as important allies for a number of missions, including the all-important deployment in Afghanistan.” [18]

Regarding the Western military bloc’s almost nine-year Operation Active Endeavor in the entire Mediterranean Sea and its Operation Ocean Shield in the Gulf of Aden, Rasmussen said, “We would very much like to strengthen cooperation (with Bahrain and Jordan) within

these operations.” [19]

While in Jordan he was strengthening military ties with NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue partnership – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia – and in Bahrain firming up the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative aimed at the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates have military personnel serving under NATO in Afghanistan.

In late February a delegation of the 53-nation African Union (AU) visited NATO’s Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Mons, Belgium.

“NATO continues to support the AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM) through the provision of strategic sea- and air-lift for AMISOM Troop Contributing Nations on request. The last airlift support occurred in June 2008 when NATO transported a battalion of Burundian peacekeepers to Mogadishu.” [20]

On March 10 AMISON deployed tanks to prevent the capture of the Somali presidential palace by rebels.

The North Atlantic military bloc, which in recent years has conducted large-scale exercises in West Africa and inaugurated its international Response Force in Cape Verde in 2006, also supports “the operationalisation of the African Standby Force – the African Union’s vision for a continental, on-call security apparatus similar to the NATO Response Force.” [21]

In May the European Union, whose membership largely overlaps with that of NATO and which is engaged in intense integration with the military bloc on a global scale [22], will begin training 2,000 Somali troops in Uganda.

Brigadier General Thierry Caspar-Fille-Lambie, commanding officer of French armed forces in Djibouti, said “the Somali troops will be trained with the necessary military skills to help pacify and stabilize the volatile country.”

He issued that statement “at the closing ceremony of four-week French operational training of 1,700 Ugandan troops to be deployed” to Somalia in May. The French ambassador to Uganda said “The EU troops shall work in close collaboration with UPDF to train Somali troops.” [23]

The 2,000 soldiers to be trained by the EU will represent a full third of a projected 6,000-troop Somali army.

The U.S.-NATO-EU global triad plans an even larger collective military role in the new scramble for Africa. On March 4 and 5 a delegation from AFRICOM met with European Union officials in Brussels “seeking EU cooperation in Africa,” specifically in “areas where cooperation could be possible, notably with the soon-to-be-launched EU mission to train Somali troops.” [24]

Tony Holmes, AFRICOM’s deputy to the commander for civil-military activities, said “Somalia, that’s an area where we’re going to be doing a lot more, the European Union is

already doing a lot and will be doing more....

“Somalia is very important for us. The European Union is involved in training Somalis in Uganda and that’s something we might be able to work closely with to support.”

The AFRICOM delegation, including Major-General Richard Sherlock, director of strategy, plans and programs, also discussed “counter-terrorism cooperation with the EU in the Sahel region, notably in Mauritania, Mali and Niger....” [25]

In late January the chairman of NATO’s Military Committee, Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola, said “that the Alliance is in discussion with a Gulf state to deploy AWACS planes for a reconnaissance mission over Afghanistan in support of its ISAF mission and also for anti-piracy off Somalia.” [24]

To demonstrate that NATO’s anti-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia has other designs than the one acknowledged, early this year a NATO spokesman announced that the bloc’s naval contingent in the Gulf of Aden “now has an additional task” to intervene against a fictional deployment of Somali fighters across the Gulf to Yemen.

The spokesman, Jacqui Sheriff, said “NATO warships will be on the lookout for anything suspicious.” [25]

As though Somali al-Shabaab fighters have nothing else to do as the U.S. is engineering an all-out assault on them in their homeland.

Five days after the New York Times feature detailed American war plans in Somalia, the Washington Times followed up on and added to that report.

U.S. operations are “likely to be the most overt demonstration of U.S. military backing since the ill-fated Operation Restore Hope of 1992....”

“Unmanned U.S. surveillance aircraft have been seen circling over Mogadishu in recent days, apparently pinpointing insurgent positions as the TFG [Transitional Federal Government] marshals its forces. U.S. Army advisers have been helping train the TFG’s forces, which have been largely equipped with millions of dollars’ worth of U.S. arms airlifted into Mogadishu over the last few weeks.”

The newspaper report further stated: “It’s not clear when the offensive will start. The word on the street is sometime in the next few weeks....”

The campaign has already begun.

“After securing Mogadishu, the offensive, supported by militias allied with the government, for now, at least, is likely to continue against al-Shebab in the countryside west and south toward the border with Kenya.” [26]

After the capital, the entire country. After Somalia, the region.

The war has just begun.

## Notes

- 1) Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 10, 2010
- 2) New York Times, March 5, 2010
- 3) Ibid
- 4) Senate Armed Forces Committee, March 9, 2010
- 5) United States Africa Command, March 9, 2010
- 6) Senate Armed Forces Committee, March 9, 2010
- 7) U.S., NATO Expand Afghan War To Horn Of Africa And Indian Ocean  
Stop NATO, January 8, 2010

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/01/08/u-s-nato-expand-afghan-war-to-horn-of-africa-and-indian-ocean-2>

Yemen: Pentagon's War On The Arabian Peninsula  
Stop NATO, December 15, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/12/15/yemen-pentagons-war-on-the-arabian-peninsula>

- 8) Russian Information Agency Novosti, January 11, 2010
- 9) New York Times, March 5, 2010
- 10) The Monitor, October 14, 2009
- 11) AFRICOM Year Two: Seizing The Helm Of The Entire World  
Stop NATO, October 22, 2009

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/10/22/africom-year-two-taking-the-helm-of-the-entire-world>

- 12) The East African, March 1, 2010
- 13) United Press International, March 10, 2010
- 14) Ibid
- 15) Stars and Stripes, March 11, 2010
- 16) United States Department of Defense, March 9, 2010
- 17) Ibid
- 18) Deutsche Presse-Agentur, March 9, 2010
- 19) Ibid
- 20) North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe  
February 24, 2010
- 21) Ibid
- 22) EU, NATO, US: 21st Century Alliance For Global Domination  
Stop NATO, February 19, 2009

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- 23) Xinhua News Agency, February 13, 2010
- 24) Europolitics, March 5, 2010
- 25) Ibid

- 26) Kuwait News Agency, January 28, 2010
- 27) Canwest News Service, January 1, 2010
- 28) Washington Times, March 10, 2010

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