

Mali and the Scramble for Africa

A New Wave of Barbarism

By [Ben Schreiner](#)

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)
Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

The French military intervention into Mali on Friday — France’s second in as many years into a former African colony — was reportedly “[seconded](#)” by the United States. This ought to come as no great surprise, given the Pentagon’s deepening penetration into Africa.

According to the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the Pentagon plans on deploying soldiers to 35 different African countries in 2013. As NPR [reports](#), upwards of 4,000 U.S. soldiers will “take part in military exercises and train African troops on everything from logistics and marksmanship to medical care.” (The Malian army officer responsible for the country’s March coup just so happened to have received U.S. military training.)

Of course, the U.S. military already has a significant on-the-ground presence in Africa. For instance, the “[busiest Predator drone base outside of the Afghan war zone](#)” — with 16 drone flights a day — is located at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti.

But as the *Army Times* [notes](#), “the region in many ways remains the Army’s last frontier.” And in order to satiate the U.S. appetite for global “power projection,” no frontiers are to be left unconquered.

Thus, as a June report in the *Washington Post* [revealed](#), the preliminary tentacles of the U.S. military already extend across Africa. As the paper reported, U.S. surveillance planes are currently operating out of clandestine bases in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya, with plans afoot to open a new base in South Sudan.

The *Post* reported further that, “the Pentagon is spending \$8.1 million to upgrade a forward operating base and airstrip in Mauritania, on the western edge of the Sahara. The base is near the border with strife-torn Mali.”

And with such assets already in place, the Pentagon was in position to not only “second” France’s intervention into Mali, but, as the *New York Times* [reported](#), to weigh a “broad range of options to support the French effort, including enhanced intelligence-sharing and logistics support.”

Illuminating what such U.S. support may come to eventually look like in Mali, J. Peter Pham, director of the Atlantic Council’s Africa Center in Washington and a senior strategy advisor to AFRICOM, [commented](#): “Drone strikes or airstrikes will not restore Mali’s territorial integrity or defeat the Islamists, but they may be the least bad option.” A rather ominous sign, given that employing such a “least bad option” has already led to the [slaying of hundreds of innocents](#) in the U.S. drone campaign.

Of course, much the same as with the drone campaign, the Pentagon’s push into Africa has

come neatly packaged as an extension of “war on terror.” As a June *Army Times* [report](#) notes, “Africa, in particular, has emerged as a greater priority for the U.S. government because terrorist groups there have become an increasing threat to U.S. and regional security.”

But what intervention hasn’t come to be justified by employing some variant of the ever handy “war on terror” refrain? As French President François Hollande declared on Friday, “The terrorists should know that France will always be there when the rights of a people, those of Mali who want to live freely and in a democracy, are at issue.”

“The ideology of our times, at least when it comes to legitimizing war” Jean Bricmont writes in his book [Humanitarian Imperialism](#), “is a certain discourse on human rights and democracy.” And, we might add, a certain cynical discourse on combating terror.

Naturally, then, the notion that the West’s renewed interest in Africa is derived from an altruistic desire to help African states combat terrorism and establish democracy is rather absurd. It was the NATO alliance, lest one forgets, that so eagerly aligned with Salifi fighters to topple Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. Moreover, it is this very same military alliance that is now simultaneously cheering Salifists in Syria, while bombing them in the AfPak region, Somalia, Yemen, and now Mali.

Clearly, only those practicing doublethink stand a chance of comprehending the ever shifting terrain of the Western “war on terror.”

Indeed, for once the veils of protecting “democracy” and combating “terror” are lifted, the imperial face is revealed.

Thus, the imperative driving the renewed Western interest in Africa, as Conn Hallinan helps [explain](#), is the race to secure the continent’s vast wealth.

“The U.S. currently receives about 18 percent of its energy supplies from Africa, a figure that is slated to rise to 25 percent by 2015,” Hallinan writes. “Africa also provides about one-third of China’s energy needs, plus copper, platinum, timber and iron ore.”

What’s more, as Maximilian Forte contends in [Slouching Towards Sirte](#), “Chinese interest are seen as competing with the West for access to resources and political influences. AFRICOM and a range of other U.S. government initiatives are meant to count this phenomenon.”

And this explains NATO’s 2011 foray into Libya, which removed a stubborn pan-Africanist leader threatening to frustrate AFRICOM’s expansion into the Army’s “last frontier.” And this explains the French-led, U.S. supported intervention into Mali, which serves to forcibly assert Western interests further into Africa.

Intervention, we see, breeds intervention. And as Nick Turse [warned](#) back in July, “Mali may only be the beginning and there’s no telling how any of it will end.”

All that appears certain is a renewed wave of barbarism, as the scramble for Africa accelerates.

Ben Schreiner is a freelance writer based in Wisconsin. He may be reached at bnschreiner@gmail.com or via his [website](#).

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