

NATO's Installation Of New Libyan Regime Signals Neocolonial Scramble For Africa

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In-depth Report: [NATO'S WAR ON LIBYA](#)

The neocolonial scramble for Africa has truly begun with the installation of the National Transitional Council in Libya.



President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda at a news conference in Kampala on October 16. He said the despatch of U.S. troops to deal with the rebel outfit Lord's Resistance Army was not meant for combat but rather liaison and support in the area of intelligence.

THE installation of the National Transitional Council (NTC) government in Libya by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) could signal the beginning of an open neocolonial scramble for Africa. Suspicions about such a blueprint were first aroused when President George W. Bush set up the United States-Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2008, months before demitting office. The demand for a permanent American military footprint on the African continent had come from right-wing think tanks that enjoyed great clout in the corridors of power during the eight years of the Bush presidency.

A background paper prepared in 2002 by the influential right-wing think tank Heritage Foundation had called for the creation of a military command for the continent so that "direct military intervention", using air power and naval forces, could become possible to "protect vital U.S. interests" in Africa. Such interventions, its authors wrote, would not necessitate the deployment of U.S. forces on the ground. Such wars, the paper proposed, should be fought with the help of local allies. The U.S. Defence Department's African Contingency Operation Training and Assistance Programme is deeply involved in training the armies of many countries, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Ghana, America's close allies in the region.

The authors of the paper clearly spelt out what they meant by vital interests: "With its vast natural and mineral resources, Africa remains strategically important to the West, as it has been for hundreds of years, and its geostrategic significance is likely to rise in the 21st

century.” According to the National Intelligence Council, “the United States is likely to draw 25 per cent of its oil from West Africa by 2015, surpassing the volume imported from the Persian Gulf”, the Heritage Foundation study reported. The Bush administration’s Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Walter Kansteiner was quick to echo the views expressed by the foundation. He went on record stating that Africa’s oil had “become a national strategic interest”.

Libya is among Africa’s biggest oil producers. China was importing 11 per cent of Libyan oil for its domestic needs before the NATO-instigated civil war in the North African state started seven months ago. It could now find itself locked out of new oil contracts. Top functionaries of the NTC have said that China, Russia and Brazil would be frozen out of contracts.



Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA. A file photograph.

These countries had criticised the misuse of the United Nations Security Council resolution on Libya to bring about a regime change. China gets around one-third of its oil from Africa. The French newspaper *Liberacion* recently published documents revealing the NTC leadership’s offer of 35 per cent of Libya’s oil production to France in return for its “total and permanent support” for the new government. Gene Cretz, the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, recently blurted out that “oil is the jewel of the crown of Libyan national resources”.

President Barack Obama, who famously claimed that he was leading the war in Libya “from behind”, used precisely the tactics prescribed in the Heritage Foundation report. AFRICOM played an important behind-the-scenes role in planning the U.S./NATO bombing of Libya. U.S. Special Forces teamed up with its counterparts from France and the United Kingdom to arm and organise the ragtag rebel forces into a fighting unit. It was the coordinated air strikes, coupled with an amphibious operation led by the U.S., that finally led to the fall of Tripoli. South African President Jacob Zuma complained bitterly that it was NATO bombing that prevented the African Union (A.U.) from hammering out a negotiated settlement to the civil war in Libya. More than 200 prominent Africans wrote an open letter in August criticising the recourse to “militarised diplomacy to effect regime change in Libya”.

In early October, a few days before the fall of Sirte and the killing of Muammar Qaddafi, Obama ordered the despatch of 100 U.S. Special Forces troops to Uganda. He said the decision to send the troops was taken to help the U.S.’ ally in the region, Yoweri Museveni, defeat the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), which was engaged in a guerilla war with the central government in Kampala. Obama told Congress that the troops were deployed in order “to assist African forces in the removal of Joseph Koni [the LRA leader] and the LRA

leadership from the battlefield”. Museveni, one of Africa’s long-serving authoritarian rulers, was a one-time friend of Qaddafi. Qaddafi had extended support to the rebel army that brought Museveni to power in 1986. After coming to power, Museveni became one of the trusted allies of the West and was regularly feted at the White House.

At America’s bidding, Uganda has sent peacekeepers to Somalia under the A.U. umbrella to keep the Islamist Al Shabab militia out of the capital, Mogadishu. Two years ago, Ethiopia despatched its troops to Somalia to drive away the Islamic Courts Union government from Mogadishu after it had managed to unite most of the country. In the face of immense resistance, the Ethiopian troops were withdrawn, but the country was left in chaos again. Al Shabab exploited this and now poses a potent threat to U.S. interests in the region.

In the middle of October, Kenya replicated what Ethiopia did. Encouraged by the U.S., it sent its troops deep into Somalia to fight Al Shabab. The U.S. is providing air support to the Kenyan military. The Kenyan invasion has already led to terror attacks in Kenyan cities. Only a handful of African states have bothered to send peacekeepers to the war-ravaged country, viewing the conflict there as one mainly instigated by the West.



Observers of the African scene are suspicious of the Obama administration’s sudden decision to send Special Forces to Uganda. Obama has also indicated that the U.S. forces will be sent to the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, ostensibly to help the governments there to crush rebel groups. AFRICOM provides billions of dollars worth of equipment to the armies of countries that are friendly to the U.S. The U.S. military is already helping counter-insurgency operations in Mali and Niger, where the marginalised Tuareg ethnic group has raised the banner of revolt. “With Libya secure, an American invasion of Africa is under way,” observed John Pilger in a recent article.

The LRA, which operates along Uganda’s borders with Southern Sudan and the Central African Republic, was never considered a serious threat in the 24 years that it has been active. It is said to have around 500 fighters, many of them child soldiers. Many African commentators suspect that the real goal of the Obama administration is to start preparing the ground for a permanent military base for AFRICOM on the continent. AFRICOM is currently headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, but it has a major military facility in Camp Lemonier in Djibouti, a small state located in the Horn of Africa. In all, 1,800 American

troops are permanently based there.

In the island state of Seychelles, the U.S. has secretly deployed MQ-9 Reaper drones. These “hunter-killers” have been deployed extensively over Somalia. African civil society is very much opposed to U.S. military involvement in Africa. No African country has until now openly offered permanent basing facilities, although there were reports in the media that Liberia and Morocco were among the countries that were being short-listed by Washington. The regional grouping, Southern African Development Community (SADC), has refused to give any kind of support or access to AFRICOM.

Military analysts say that from the strategic point of view, land-locked Uganda provides the ideal location for a permanent U.S. military base on the African continent. With Libya already under NATO stewardship, the U.S. can regain control over the military bases it was ousted from following the removal of the pro-Western King Idris. It has been a long-term U.S. goal to occupy the strategic crossroads between the Mediterranean and the Arab world. The death of Qaddafi has made this goal an achievable reality. The next step is to ensure the U.S. military’s stranglehold on Central Africa to control the region’s hydrocarbon and other mineral resources. Uganda’s neighbours, such as Congo and Southern Sudan, are rich in mineral resources, which include diamonds and precious metals such as gold, platinum, lithium and cobalt.

According to oil industry experts, Uganda has huge untapped oil resources. A UPI report in March said: “East Africa is emerging as the next oil boom following a big strike in Uganda’s Lake Albert Basin. Other oil and gas reserves have been found in Tanzania and Mozambique and exploration is under way in Ethiopia and war-torn Somalia.” The region is rich in rare earths, which remain largely unexploited. Currently, China has a monopoly over rare-earth production located within its borders.

The Economist had noted that “several jealous western governments and companies want to stall China’s advance into the Congo basin, with its vast reserves of minerals and timber”. The big economic and diplomatic stride made by China on the African continent has caused a lot of heartburn in Western capitals. China has been focussing on Africa since the 1960s. China started investing heavily there ever since it began to emerge as a big economic power. Its investments in 2010 were estimated at \$47 billion. Beijing’s policy of giving liberal “no-strings-attached” loans to African nations has won it a lot of goodwill. But with Chinese labour and capital moving into the continent in a big way, the resentment that has been building up in some countries has come in handy for the West.

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