

America's Conquest of Africa: The Penetration of AFRICOM on the Continent

TomDispatch tracks where the Pentagon is moving in Africa

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Global Research, September 10, 2013

[Pan-African News Wire](#)

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

A recent study conducted by Nick Turse of TomDispatch.com on the increasing role of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) illustrates why this issue should become a major focus of the peace, anti-war and anti-imperialist movements in the West. With the withdrawal of Pentagon ground forces from Iraq and the scaling-down of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan, there has been very little attention paid to developments involving interventions by the imperialist states in the oppressed nations.

Although there have been significant demonstrations around the U.S. against the war threats aimed at Syria, these latest machinations by the White House and the French government of Francois Hollande should not be the sole focus of the anti-war movement. The degree to which the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency(CIA) has engaged in acts of subversion and military intrigue in Africa must at some point force the movement to break out of its myopic preoccupation with events that grab the headlines within the corporate media outlets.

If these trends in Africa are presented in an organized and cohesive fashion, there could be an upsurge in interests related to events on the continent. A panel discussion put together by the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) at the Left Forum in New York City in early June, attracted a standing-room-only audience.

Issues related to the Obama administration and its allies' interventions in Africa should have been the subject of a plenary session at the Left Forum. The panel entitled "The War on Africa" and its success illustrates that there is growing interests in these aspects of imperialism and its strategic outlook for areas outside the so-called Middle East.

Even though President Obama is of African descent, his policies toward the continent have continued and even intensified Western efforts to dominate the continent which has been subjected to nearly six centuries of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. With the People's Republic of China playing a greater role in Africa through trade relations and strategic partnerships, the ruling class within the U.S. is scrambling to edge out Beijing by increasing its military and intelligence presence.

The bombing of Libya by the Pentagon and NATO for seven straight months in 2011, demonstrated clearly the extent to which imperialism is willing to go in order to overthrow and remake states. Since the fall of the Gaddafi government and the Jamahiriya system,

Libya has been plunged into economic distress and political chaos.

Drone stations are being constructed throughout the Horn of Africa and in Niger while the U.S. subsidizes the maintenance of a 17,500-person military force in Somalia. Somalia is now the focus of oil exploration and exploitation along with other states along the coast of East Africa.

TomDispatch's Findings

Nick Turse begins his review of the Pentagon's increasing intervention in Africa saying "They're involved in Algeria and Angola, Benin and Botswana, Burkina Faso and Burundi, Cameroon and the Cape Verde Islands. And that's just the ABCs of the situation."

He goes on to stress that all you need to do is "Skip to the end of the alphabet and the story remains the same: Senegal and the Seychelles, Togo and Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia. From north to south, east to west, the Horn of Africa to the Sahel, the heart of the continent to the islands off its coasts, the U.S. military is at work."

Turse goes on to track the activities of the Pentagon through its joint military exercises with various African states, the construction of military bases within these states, the so-called training exercises carried out by the U.S. defense department involving African militaries, the construction and expansion of the Camp Lemonier base in the Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti and the utilization of drone technology to both monitor events as well as engage in offensive strikes against targeted individuals and organizations.

Another important aspect of the escalating Pentagon presence in Africa is the existence of AFRICOM-related bases of operation outside the continent. Located mainly in European countries and islands under their control, the presence of these facilities should also be of concern to Left and anti-war forces on that continent which was the forerunner of intervention prior to the birth of its offspring in North America.

Turse notes that "When considering the scope and rapid expansion of U.S. military activities in Africa, it's important to keep in mind that certain key 'African' bases are actually located off the continent. Keeping a semblance of a 'light footprint' there, AFRICOM's headquarters is located at Kelley Barracks in Stuttgart-Moehringen, Germany."

He goes on saying “In June, Süddeutsche Zeitung reported that the base in Stuttgart and the U.S. Air Force’s Air Operations Center in Ramstein were both integral to drone operations in Africa. Key logistics support hubs for AFRICOM are located in Rota, Spain; Aruba in the Lesser Antilles; and Souda Bay, Greece, as well as at Ramstein. The command also maintains a forward operating site on Britain’s Ascension Island, located about 1,000 miles off the coast of Africa in the South Atlantic, but refused requests for further information about its role in operations.”

The Need for a Response by the Anti-Imperialist Forces

These findings should provide the basis for a more concentrated effort related to the growing Pentagon as well as CIA presence in Africa. The organization of a clear anti-imperialist response to these developments would serve to encourage and motivate revolutionary organizations and movements in Africa that could lead to alliances between progressive forces in the West and those on the continent.

There should be the establishment of study groups to review the history and current events related to imperialist militarism. Task forces need to be set up where military training facilities and corporations directly involved in these events in Africa could be targeted for protests and boycotts.

Positions papers, pamphlets, books and web pages should be developed to provide concrete information about these trends. These resources can serve as the basis for reaching greater numbers of people both in the imperialist states and those in Africa and other regions of the world.

To read this report entitled “Tomgram: Nick Turse, AFRICOM’s Gigantic ‘Small Footprint’” just log on to: <http://TomDispatch.com>

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