

'Tomorrow's Battlefield: U.S. Proxy Wars and Secret Ops in Africa'

Forthcoming book by Nick Turse explores Washington's escalating war on the continent

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Author Nick Turse is continuing his research on the increasing role of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) over the last seven years. These military operations have impacted most countries on the continent through the utilization of military bases, waterways and airspace.

Although the founding of AFRICOM was ostensibly designed to enhance the national security capabilities of African nation-states coupled with addressing supposed threats to U.S. interests on the continent, just the opposite has taken place.

Instead of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) term "blowback", in which the late Chalmers Johnson wrote on extensively, Turse uses the phrase "blowforward", examining how repeated failed counter-terrorism operations throughout Africa, the Middle East and Asia has led to broader interventions and the promotion of the military and intelligence theorists who concoct these operations.

Since the launching of AFRICOM, instability has increased in Africa. From the ongoing war in Somalia, to the break-up of the Republic of Sudan and the subsequent civil war in the newly-created Republic of South Sudan, to the war against so-called Islamic extremists in Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Cameroon and Chad, these developments has fueled Washington's militarism on the continent.

The defense budget allocations for AFRICOM have increased substantially since the advent of the Obama administration. In many respects this U.S. war in Africa has remained hidden from both domestic and international news coverage often being depicted as targeted Special Forces commando and drone strikes against individual operatives of designated terrorist organizations.

The Hidden U.S. Imperialist War in Africa

Turse writes of this expanding imperialist militarism saying "For years, the U.S. military has publicly insisted that its efforts in Africa are negligible, intentionally leaving the American people, not to mention most Africans, in the dark about the true size, scale, and scope of its operations there. AFRICOM public affairs personnel and commanders have repeatedly claimed no more than a 'light footprint' on the continent."

He goes to note how:

“They (Pentagon) shrink from talk of camps and outposts, claiming to have just one base anywhere in Africa: Camp Lemonnier in the tiny nation of Djibouti. They don’t like to talk about military operations. They offer detailed information about only a tiny fraction of their training exercises. They refuse to disclose the locations where personnel have been stationed or even counts of the countries involved.”

For example earlier this year in January an operation dubbed “Silent Quest 15-1” took place at the MacDill Air force base in Tampa, Florida. Pentagon forces led by the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) in conjunction with 12 other states including Canada, Denmark, Germany, Norway and France, carried out exercises which planned for military operations against what was labelled as a war against the fictional “Islamic State of Africa.”

Turse recounts a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing where AFRICOM Commander David Rodriguez was the principal speaker, where the Pentagon presented an open-ended strategy for military interventions in Africa. The spending for such operations seem limitless since there is no real public debate surrounding these imperialist aims.

The author quotes Rodriguez when he says “Transregional terrorists and criminal networks continue to adapt and expand aggressively. Al-Shabab has broadened its operations to conduct, or attempt to conduct, asymmetric attacks against Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and especially Kenya. Libya-based threats are growing rapidly, including an expanding ISIL presence... Boko Haram threatens the ability of the Nigerian government to provide security and basic services in large portions of the northeast.”

Nonetheless, Turse stresses that “Despite the grim outcomes since the American military began ‘pivoting’ to Africa after 9/11, the U.S. recently signed an agreement designed to keep its troops based on the continent until almost midcentury.”

Some of the statistics related to these expanding U.S. military operations indicate that “In 2013, the combined total of all U.S. activities on the continent reached 546, an average of more than one mission per day. Last year, that number leapt to 674. In other words, U.S. troops were carrying out almost two operations, exercises, or activities — from drone strikes to counterinsurgency instruction, intelligence gathering to marksmanship training — somewhere in Africa every day. This represents an enormous increase from the 172 missions, activities, programs, and exercises that AFRICOM inherited from other geographic commands when it began operations in 2008.”

Horn of Africa Base Expands Operations

AFRICOM’s main camp in Djibouti at Lemonnier is being expanded to enhance its operations in neighboring Somalia and to prepare for other potential missions in Libya, Sudan, Kenya and Egypt. Also across the Red Sea in Yemen, the Saudi Arabian and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) led war on the Ansurallah Movement is being supported and coordinated through intelligence by Washington.

The book illustrates the contrasts in U.S. policy with that of China’s which emphasizes infrastructural and scientific developments as opposed to militarism. Africa needs genuine partnership with the international community based on mutual interests as opposed to neo-colonial schemes to extend western domination.

Only a revolutionary movement emanating from the continent in alliance with anti-imperialist forces in the West can reverse the current trajectory of destabilization which has characterized the situation in Africa. This book provides a useful tool for those who recognize that this burgeoning war must be stopped for the benefit of Africa as well as oppressed and working people around the world.

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