

Under the Disguise of Counterterrorism: Obama Expands U.S. Military Ops in Africa

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NAIROBI. Amid a surge in big oil strikes in Africa and the threat of growing [al-Qaida](#) penetration in the north and east, President [Barack Obama](#) is expanding U.S. military involvement across the continent.

This has given weight to the U.S. Africa Command inaugurated Oct. 1, 2008, which is viewed with growing suspicion by many in Africa who consider its primary mission is to secure oil supplies that America considers vital as it cuts its reliance on the [Middle East](#).

As of 2008, Africa reportedly surpassed the Middle East as the main oil supplier to the United States. By 2020, Washington expects one-quarter of its oil imports will be from Africa.

“When President Obama took office in January 2009, it was widely expected that he would dramatically change, or even reverse, the militarized and unilateral society policy that had been pursued by the George W. Bush administration toward Africa and other parts of the world,” Africom critic Daniel Volman noted in an April 2 report for Inter Press Service.

“After one year in office, however, it is clear that the Obama administration is following essentially the same policy that has guided the U.S. military toward Africa for more than a decade.

“Indeed, the Obama administration is seeking to expand U.S. military activities on the continent even further,” wrote Volman, director of the African Security Research Project.

Many in Africa note that U.S. concern about Africa more or less coincided with major oil discoveries in [West Africa](#).

They fear what one commentator described as “creeping U.S. militarism” as has taken place in the Middle East and Asia and America’s history of supporting African tyrants to bolster Western influence during the Cold War.

The expansion of U.S. military activity has spawned fears that Africa was in line to become the next battleground in the conflict with al-Qaida and its jihadists.

The Obama administration’s fiscal 2011 budget request for security assistance programs in Africa includes \$38 million for arms sales to African states under the Foreign Military Financing program.

It also wants \$21 million for training African officers in the United States plus \$24 million for anti-terrorism programs.

In June 2009 Obama approved the delivery of 40 tons of arms and ammunition to the Western-backed Transitional Federal Government in war-torn Somalia to fight Islamist militants linked to al-Qaida.

The United States is also providing military aid to Ethiopia, which helped install the TFG by invading Somalia in December 2006 and defeating the Islamists.

The spread of African groups linked to al-Qaida, such as al-Shebab of Somalia and the Algeria-based al-Qaida of the Islamic Maghreb, is viewed with growing concern by the Americans, particularly as the oil factor assumed great importance.

In this regard, Africom has taken over U.S. security assistance programs with states grappling with jihadists in North Africa and the Sahara region, such as Mali, Niger, Chad and Senegal, where military forces are ill-equipped and led and hard put to counter Islamist encroachment in their vast, ungoverned spaces.

These are only some of the military projects opening up in Africa.

Africom has stressed that its mission is not combat-oriented. But there is concern that this will inevitably develop.

Last December U.S. military officials confirmed that the Defense Department was considering the formation of a 1,000-strong Marine rapid deployment force for the continent.

One of those could well be Nigeria, which is grappling with a 5-year-old insurgency in its southern oil-producing zone, the country's economic backbone, Christian-Muslim bloodletting in the north and a deepening political crisis over the presidency.

The religious fighting has raised fears that al-Qaida will find Nigeria, one of Africa's main oil producers and an important supplier to the United States, fertile ground for infiltration.

The collapse of Africa's most populous nation would threaten U.S. oil imports and could, according to some analysts, bring down much of oil-rich West Africa with it.

A 2005 Central Intelligence Agency assessment of Africa's long-term prospects predicted that "most of Africa will become increasingly marginalized as many states struggle to overcome sub-par economic performance, weak state structures and poor governance."

China's growing encroachment on the continent in Beijing's ever-growing drive for oil, gas and raw materials for its expanding economy is also seen as a potential threat since the West also wants them. This could lead to power struggles in a score of African states.

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