

US Military Intervention in Africa: The East African Response Force, A Creation of the Pentagon

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Growing instability in East and Central Africa will be the focus of Washington's intervention

Over the last two months developments in Central and East Africa has dominated the news coverage of the continent. The split within the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLA), a close ally of Washington, and the deployment of French and African troops in the Central African Republic, has brought the escalation of Pentagon troops in these states.

Recently the Department of Defense announced the formation of an East African Response Force. This new unit is part of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) which has been strengthened and enhanced under the administration of President Barack Obama.

A recent drone attack in southern Somalia is representative of the growing aggression of Washington in Africa. The government of Djibouti, a former French colony where the U.S. has a military base with over 4,000 soldiers at Camp Lemonnier, released a statement saying that such strikes are "vital" in the so-called war on terrorism.

The drone strike was launched from the Pentagon military installations in Djibouti. Prior to the creation of the East African Response Force Washington operated in the region under the framework of the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA).

U.S. Brigadier-General Wayne Grigsby, who is the commander of CJTF-HOA, says that his forces are in East Africa only to assist governments in their military campaigns to defeat the so-called terrorist threat posed by Al-Shabaab, a Somalia-based guerrilla organization which has fought the Washington-backed regime in Mogadishu for the last six years.

"Our mission here is to enable our East African partners to actually neutralize violent extremists throughout eastern Africa," Grigsby said. Yet if this was the case then why would it be necessary to have such a formidable military force in the Horn of Africa region that conducts periodic bombings and commando raids in Somalia. (Shabelle Media Network, Feb. 7)

However, Brigadier-General Grigsby does say that "It also enables strategic access and freedom of movement. The purpose is to protect the United States and its interests abroad."

Consequently, even the military leaders themselves must acknowledge that the underlying reasons for the build-up in Africa are clearly related to the economic and class interests of Washington and Wall Street. East and Central Africa is a vast repository of oil, natural gas and strategic minerals.

The U.S. Role in South Sudan and the Central African Republic

The East Africa Response Force has been utilized in the current conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. A contingent of the unit was deployed to the country to evacuate U.S. embassy personnel and to guard their economic interests.

One of the most significant factors in the present outcome of the conflict inside South Sudan has been the intervention of the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) which sided with the government of President Salva Kiir. The Ugandan government is a very close ally of the U.S. and its military has benefited for years from Pentagon training programs and direct assistance in the purchase of weapons.

On January 23 with the signing of a cessation of hostilities agreement between the SPLM/A and the SPLM/A in Opposition, the faction represented by ousted Vice-President Riek Machar, this document called for the withdrawal of Ugandan troops from South Sudan. However, according to the dissident SPLM/A in Opposition, the UPDF is carrying out aerial bombings and ground operations in contested areas in Unity, Jonglei and Lakes states.

A helicopter gunner was reportedly shot down by the opposition forces in Lakes state on February 7. In an article published by the Sudan Tribune it states that "The military spokesperson for the rebels, Brig. Gen. Lul Ruai Koang, said on Friday (Feb. 7) that the gunner was shot dead and fell off the helicopter after serious damage was inflicted on one of the three helicopter gunships that carried out the bombings."

This same article continued noting that "'Our air defense artillery opened fire on the three warplanes seriously wounding one and killing the gunner,' Koang said. The collected passport and ID of the dead gunner identified him as Jona Abuduku Alfred, a Ugandan national with military ID No. 21883, passport No. 11180 and a Lance Corporal in military rank. His hometown is Mbale in Uganda and joined the Ugandan Air Force in 1997, the documents obtained show."

With respect to events in the Central African Republic (CAR), the U.S. has been assisting with the transport of French and African troops into the country where the recent forced resignation of interim President Michel Djotodia and the Seleka Coalition and his replacement by Catherine Samba-Panza has not stabilized the political and security situation. At present anti-Muslim mobs both within the CAR military and among Christian militias known as the Anti-Balaka, have engaged in attacks on Islamic communities where numerous people have been seriously injured and killed.

A spokesman for U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel was quoted by a military publication as saying "Minister Le Drian requested ... airlift support to enable African forces to deploy promptly to prevent the further spread of sectarian violence in the Central African Republic," Pentagon Assistant Press Secretary Carl Woog announced Dec. 9.

"The United States is joining the international community in this effort because of our belief that immediate action is required to avert a humanitarian and human rights catastrophe in the Central African Republic, and because of our interest in peace and security in the region." (Stars and Stripes, Jan. 22)

Yet the intervention of both France and the U.S. has only worsened the conditions for people

in the CAR. With the dislocation of tens of thousands of Muslims who are fleeing out of the country to neighboring Chad, divisions are becoming more pronounced based upon religious differences and perceptions of political power.

The only solution being advocated as a next step in the process is the deployment of more troops from the European Union (EU). The United Nations Security Council has authorized the deployment of EU troops but there is no evidence to suggest that this will stabilize the situation.

Military Build-up Designed to Secure Influence and Resources

The growing French, U.S. and EU military involvement in Africa is designed to secure western imperialist dominance over the oil, diamonds, gold and uranium that exist in abundance in both the CAR and South Sudan. These western states are creating the conditions for the deterioration of the societies involved, and consequently through their false propaganda about humanitarian assistance, will only provide a further rationale for an even heavier military occupation.

By framing the discussion about their intervention as being “humanitarian”, the imperialists are attempting as well to remove these issues from public debate and scrutiny. During the State of the Union address in January, President Obama only spoke about the impact of military policy from the standpoint of supposedly honoring the sacrifices made by seriously injured and disabled veterans.

No discussion or analysis of the impact and effectiveness of U.S. interventions in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia is conducted. Nonetheless, these military invasions and occupations are not only destroying the lives of people on the ground in these various geopolitical regions but are killing and maiming its own soldiers which the Veterans Administration is incapable of adequately addressing.

Anti-War and anti-imperialist organizations in the U.S. must oppose these so-called “humanitarian interventions” because they are acts of war and military occupation. Resources utilized for these imperialist operations would be better served in putting people in the U.S. back to work with jobs that pay a decent wage and make significant contributions to the society.

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