

When Empires Join Hands: Japanese Military Joins U.S. And NATO In Horn Of Africa

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Japanese navy commander Keizo Kitagawa recently spoke with Agence France-Presse and disclosed that his nation was opening its first overseas military base – at any rate since the Second World War – in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.

Kitagawa is assigned to the Plans and Policy Section of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, as his nation’s navy is called, and is in charge of the deployment.

AFP quoted the Japanese officer as stressing the unprecedented nature of the development: “This will be the only Japanese base outside our country and the first in Africa.” [1]

The military installation is to cost \$40 million and is expected to accommodate Japanese troops early next year.

Djibouti rests at the confluence of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, across from strife-torn Yemen, and borders the northwest corner of equally conflict-ridden Somalia. The narrow span of water separating it from Yemen is the gateway for all maritime traffic passing between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean via the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea.

Naval deployments to the Gulf of Aden by several major nations and alliances – the U.S., NATO, the European Union, China, Russia, India, Iran and others – are designed to insure the free passage of commercial vessels through the above route and to protect United Nations World Food Programme deliveries to Somalia. The second concern in particular led to the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1838 in 2008, which requests that nations with military vessels in the area suppress the capture of ships and their crews for ransom. An anti-piracy mission.

However, the above-mentioned Japanese naval officer was more direct in identifying his nation’s interest in establishing a military base in Africa. Kitagawa also told AFP that “We are deploying here to fight piracy and for our self-defence. Japan is a maritime nation and the increase in piracy in the Gulf of Aden through which 20,000 vessels sail every year is worrying.”

The term self-defense is not fortuitous. Article 9 of the 1947 Japanese Constitution explicitly affirms that “the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. To accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.”

As such, in the post-World War Two period the nation's armed forces have been called the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF).

The Constitution also expressly prohibits the deployment of military forces outside of Japan, stating that it is "not permissible constitutionally to dispatch armed troops to foreign territorial land, sea and airspace for the purpose of using military power, as a so-called overseas deployment of troops, since it generally exceeds the minimum level necessary for self-defense."

That notwithstanding, in the years following the Cold War all post-Second World War proscriptions against the use of military force by the former Axis nations have been disregarded, [2] and in February of 2004 Japan dispatched 600 troops, albeit in a non-combat role, to Iraq shortly after the U.S. and British invasion of the country. The nation's navy, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, supplied fuel and water in support of the U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom campaign in Afghanistan from 2001-2007 and again from January of 2008 to the beginning of this year, thereby violating another basic tenet of its constitution, the ban on engaging in what the document refers to as collective self-defense, the relevant section of which reads:

"Japan has the right of collective self-defense under international law. It is, however, not permissible to use the right, that is, to stop armed attack on another country with armed strength, although Japan is not under direct attack, since it exceeds the limit of use of armed strength as permitted under Article 9 of the Constitution."

However, a 2007 Defense White Paper left the door open to further military deployments with a provision on "international peace cooperation activities."

It is in the spirit of that elastic and evasive phrase that Japan resumed support for the war in Afghanistan in 2008 and has now secured a military base on the African continent.

The Japanese official presiding over the latter project also said that "A camp will be built to house our personnel and material. Currently we are stationed at the American base." Kitagawa added that "We sent military teams to Yemen, Oman, Kenya and Djibouti. In April 2009, we chose Djibouti."

A year earlier, the Kyodo News cited an official of the Foreign Ministry as confirming that "Japan and Djibouti reached a status of forces agreement" on April 3, 2009, "stipulating the terms of operations and legal status for the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force and related officials who will be based in the African nation during the current antipiracy mission in waters off Somalia." [3]

The agreement was signed on the same day by Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada and the foreign minister of Djibouti, Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, in Tokyo. The month before Japan sent two destroyers to the Gulf of Aden.

Two months later Japan deployed two new destroyers, the 4,550-ton Harusame and the 3,500-ton Amagiri, off the Horn of Africa. Also last July the Japanese press disclosed that "The U.S.... asked Japan to build its own facilities to carry out full-fledged operations," and that at the time "about 150 members of the Ground Self-Defense Force and MSDF [Maritime Self-Defense Force] stationed in Djibouti live in U.S. military lodgings near an airport." [4]

The Japanese military announced plans to construct a runway for Maritime Self-Defense Force P-3C surveillance planes and barracks for its troops.

Although Russian, Chinese, Indian and Iranian ships in the Horn of Africa are there to protect their own and other nations' vessels and their missions are understood to be limited to anti-piracy operations and to a prescribed duration, Japan and its American and NATO allies have established permanent land, naval and air bases in the region for use in armed conflicts on the African continent.

In early 2001 the U.S. started negotiations with the government of Djibouti for setting up its first major military base in Africa at the former French Foreign Legion base Camp Lemonnier. (Until recently spelled Lemonier by the Pentagon.)

This was several years before combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden became the rationale for U.S. and NATO deployments in the region.

Djibouti is the last territory on the African continent to achieve independence (excepting Western Sahara, seized by Morocco in 1975 with the connivance of Spain's General Franco), only being granted what independence it has by France in 1977. Its population is less than 900,000.

France still maintains its largest overseas military base in the world in the nation and has approximately 3,000 troops stationed there.

Since the Pentagon moved into and took over Camp Lemonnier in 2003, it established its Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) on the base and has an estimated 2,000 troops from all four branches of the U.S. military - Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps - stationed there.

The Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa's area of operations incorporates Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Yemen and increasingly the Indian Ocean island nations of Comoros, Madagascar and Mauritius.

As the U.S. was transferring the CJTF-HOA command from the Marine Corps to the Navy in 2005 - to free up Marines for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq - the then commander, Major Marine General Timothy Ghormley, acknowledged that "U.S. forces have been working with militaries in Yemen, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and Comoros" [5] and "operate throughout Kenya, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Yemen and Ethiopia." [6]

France has used its base in Djibouti for deadly military interventions in Cote d'Ivoire and Chad and, because of the nation's topography, Djibouti has also been used for training French troops for the war in Afghanistan, where the nation's contingent is the fourth largest serving under NATO command.

Last December the commander of the French army in the country, Commandant Etienne du Fayet, said that "French officers are going to be training a contingent in Uganda next February and we are also going to Ethiopia." [7] During deadly border clashes between Djibouti and Eritrea in June of 2008 France deployed additional troops, warships and aircraft to the region.

The U.S. base has been used for military operations in Somalia and Uganda. In 2008 the

deputy commander of U.S. forces in the country was cited as revealing that “the Djibouti base facilitates some other military activities he won’t talk about.

“There have been reports of U.S. special operations forces working from the base on counter-terrorism missions in Somalia and elsewhere...[T]hat approach is the model for the new United States Africa Command...”

At the same time Rear Admiral Philip Greene took over as commander of the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa and, speaking over nine months before the formal activation of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), said “There is, I think, great synergy between what CJTF-Horn of Africa does now and what we’re about and what AFRICOM will represent as a combatant command.”

To indicate the range of the operations he envisioned, Greene also said he would “be watching some of the region’s hot spots for potential seeds of instability,” including “the situations in Kenya, Somalia and Sudan’s Darfur region, as well as tension on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border and piracy along the Indian Ocean coastline.” [8]

In 2006 a Kenyan daily newspaper wrote that (as of four years ago) “direct US arms sales to East Africa and the Horn of Africa countries - Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia - have shot up from under one million dollars in 2003 to over \$25 million in 2006. Djibouti leads the list with nearly \$20 million in direct arms purchases in 2005 and 2006.” [9]

The same feature described broader U.S. plans for the Horn of Africa region and further afield being hatched from Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti:

“Overall, direct US weapons sales [to Africa] increased from \$39.2 million in 2005 to nearly \$60 million in 2006. In both years, East Africa and the Horn accounted for nearly 40 percent of US weapons sales to Africa, and this demonstrates the US military’s strategic shift to the region.

“Access to strategic airfields and ports has also increased for the US military. Beyond Camp Lemonier in 2003, the US had an agreement with Kenya that allowed it access to the port of Mombasa and airfields at Embakasi and Nanyuki.

“Zambia and Uganda have joined Kenya in this unique arrangement. At Entebbe, the US has constructed two K-Span steel buildings to house troops and equipment. The so called ‘Lily Pad’ arrangement will allow the US military to use the base when needed in times of conflict or as a staging area for a conflict within the region.”

The article also stated, “Strategically, the US military has developed a regional operations plan that centres on Djibouti to support the Horn countries. It anchors the southern flank with bases in Kenya, Zambia and Uganda to the west...[L]ike in Nigeria, it can be used to ensure an uninterrupted flow of oil from the newly discovered fields of Uganda and Kenya, and it opens the door to the construction of a well-protected oil pipeline carrying oil from the interior of Central Africa to the port of Mombasa. It also provides a strategically located airbase to support future military operations to the north in Sudan or to the west.” [10]

In 2006 the Pentagon expanded Camp Lemonnier by almost five times its original size, from

88 to 500 acres. Late last year it completed an airfield project in the country to provide parking spaces for C-130 Hercules and CV-22 Osprey aircraft and to support C-17 Globemaster III and C-5 Galaxy military transport planes.

Four years ago the Reuters news agency reported “the United States is already providing Ethiopia and Kenya with logistical support and U.S. special forces had been observed on the Kenya-Somalia border,” [11] and shortly afterward the U.S. Air Force divulged that U.S. airmen were operating out of Contingency Operating Location Bilate (also known as Camp Bilate) in Ethiopia in conjunction with the the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa headquarters at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. [12]

The U.S. military headquarters in Djibouti is in charge of three smaller downrange bases, known as Contingency Operating Locations, at Bilate and Hurso in Ethiopia and Manda Bay in Kenya.

An Ethiopian newspaper revealed at the time that “The United States would continue providing training and other assistance to the Ethiopian Defence Forces as per the Ethio-US bilateral cooperation” [13] during the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006.

Ethiopian troops were being trained in infantry tactics by soldiers with the U.S. Army’s 1st Infantry Division’s 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment at the Training Academy in Hurso as jets from the country bombed the Somali capital and ground forces invaded their eastern neighbor. The U.S. Army conducted training at the base starting no later than 2003. “U.S. military personnel with the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa... have spent the last four years training the Ethiopian National Defense Forces in basic military tactics.” [14] The effects of that preparation were seen in the 2006 invasion of Somalia.

The Pentagon’s role in Somalia was not limited to training and arming Ethiopian invasion forces, as in early 2007 it was reported that “recent military operations in Somalia have been carried out by the Pentagon’s Joint Special Operations Command, which directs the military’s most secretive and elite units, like the Army’s Delta Force.

“The Pentagon established a desolate outpost in the Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti in 2002 in part to serve as a hub for special missions...” [15]

As U.S. special forces were operating in Somalia and Washington’s military client was launching air and ground attacks there, the U.S. deployed the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier, which “has an air wing of about 75 aircraft, including F/A-18 Hornet and SuperHornet strike fighters, E-2C Hawkeyes, EA-6B Prowlers, and SH-60 Seahawks,” [16] to join the the guided-missile cruisers USS Bunker Hill and USS Anzio and the amphibious landing ship USS Ashland off the coast of Somalia.

An “AC-130 gunship, operated by the Special Operations Command, flew from its base in Djibouti to the southern tip of Somalia” [17] where it “rained gunfire on the desolate village of Hayo” on January 8. A local official was quoted as saying “There are so many dead bodies and animals in the village.” [18]

“Officials with CJTF-HOA, based in Djibouti, declined... to comment on the reported AC-130 attacks; media reports said the plane was based at Camp Lemonnier.” [19]

Also in early January of 2007 a major Kenyan newspaper reported “The US counter-terrorism task force based in Djibouti acknowledges that American troops are on the ground in northern Kenya and in Lamu,” the latter on the Indian Ocean. [20]

In March of the same year two U.S. soldiers were killed in Ethiopia in what was attributed to an accident. They were assigned to a unit that was “part of the U.S.-led Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, headquartered at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti.” [21]

Late last year U.S. Africa Command deployed lethal Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), 133 military personnel and three P-3 Orion anti-submarine and maritime surveillance aircraft to Seychelles in the Indian Ocean east of Kenya. The Pentagon now has its second major African military base.

In addition to the 5,000 U.S. and French troops stationed there, Djibouti also has been home to what in 2005 Agence France-Presse disclosed were “several hundred German, Dutch and Spanish soldiers.” [22]

That is, the diminutive state is for all practical purposes not only the headquarters for U.S. Africa Command but also for NATO in Africa.

In late 2005 Britain announced that it was also deploying troops to Djibouti.

Starting in March of 2009 NATO started rotating its Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG 1) and Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG 2) warship fleets off the coast of Somalia, first with Operation Allied Provider until August of last year and since with Operation Ocean Shield, which continues to the present day and which in March was extended until the end of 2012. The current fleet consists of warships from the U.S., Britain, Greece, Italy and Turkey. Its area of operations includes one million square kilometers in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin. (The current name of the naval groups are NATO Response Force Maritime Groups 1 and 2.)

NATO does not intend to leave the area soon if at all.

Even before the NATO Allied Provider and Ocean Shield operations began, the Italian destroyer MM Luigi Durand De La Penne, “a 5,000-ton multi-role warship capable of air defence, anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare operations,” [23] part of the Standing NATO Maritime Group 2, at the time comprised of warships from the U.S., Britain, Germany, Greece and Turkey, visited the Kenyan port city of Mombasa in October of 2008.

Of the current NATO deployment, last December then German Defense Minister Franz Josef Jung said that it was “the most robust mandate we have ever had,” adding, “There may be combat situations, and in this respect it would of course be a combat deployment.” [24]

The NATO flotillas joined warships of the U.S.-led Combined Task Force 150 (CTF-150) with logistics facilities in Djibouti. Formerly the U.S. Navy’s Task Force 150, starting in 2001 it became a multinational operation with the inclusion of NATO allies and those from an emerging Asian NATO. Full participating nations are the U.S., Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany and Pakistan, and others who have been involved are Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, Spain and Turkey. CTF-150 has 14-15 warships near Somalia at any given time and is coordinated with the U.S. Navy’s Fifth Fleet, under the Combined Forces Maritime Component Commander/Commander US Naval Forces Central Command in Bahrain.

In January of 2009 the U.S. Navy inaugurated Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151), which will include warships from 20 nations, NATO and Asian NATO states.

European NATO nations are also “double-duty” participants in the European Union Naval Force Somalia - Operation Atalanta, the first naval operation conducted by the EU and run under the auspices of the European Security and Defence Policy. It was launched in December of 2008 and is based at the Northwood Operation Headquarters in Britain, which also houses NATO’s Allied Maritime Component Command Northwood. Current participants in Operation Atalanta are Britain, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain, and “a number of Cypriot, Irish, Finnish, Maltese and Sweden military personnel supplement the team at the Northwood Operation Headquarters.” [25]

Starting no later than September of 2009 NATO commanders have visited and in essence established a headquarters in Somalia’s autonomous Puntland state. Last autumn British Commodore Steve Chick, commander of Standing NATO Maritime Group 2, met with Puntland authorities on board the HMS Cornwall. “The talks ended successfully with NATO and Puntland officials agreeing to cooperate in combating pirates operating along the Somali coast.” [26]

This January Admiral Pereira da Cunha, commander of Standing NATO Maritime Group 1, hosted Puntland officials on the Portuguese flagship Alvares Cabral, and the meeting “focused on human intelligence gathering, capacity building and counter piracy cooperation between NATO and Puntland authorities.”

“NATO... has established a close working relationship with the Puntland Coastguard... This is just a start. With 60 years of experience and coalition building, NATO is well placed to make things happen.” [27]

In March ministers of the Puntland government met with Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 commander Commodore Steve Chick on board the HMS Chatham, current flagship of the NATO naval group in the region. The talks “covered ways in which further cooperation between NATO and the Puntland authorities could be developed in the future.” [28]

According to a Puntland news source, NATO’s activities aren’t limited to operations in the waters off Somalia: “NATO has a working relationship with Puntland authorities in a bid to enhance its fight against the piracy scourge along the lawless waters of the Horn of Africa. Puntland has offered its help in terms of dealing with the gangs in the mainland.” [29]

The European Union will soon begin training 2,000 Ugandan troops for deployment to Somalia to aid the Transitional Federal Government, which is fighting for its life even in the nation’s capital.

Last October a Kenyan newspaper announced that Kenyan troops sailed to Djibouti to receive military training along with the armed forces of other regional nations. At the same time military officers from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden were in Kenya to “assist the region in the ongoing establishment of a united military force to deal with conflicts on the continent.”

“The experts from the European countries, which are part of the Nordic Bloc,

are based at the EASBRIG headquarters, at the Defence Staff College in Karen, Nairobi.” [30]

EASBRIG, the East African Standby Brigade, “will be deployed to trouble spots within 14 days after chaos erupts, to restore order... The brigade will have troops from 14 countries...The military unit will comprise 35,000 soldiers and 1,000 police officers plus 1,000 civilian staff. Kenya is already training 2,000 soldiers to be seconded to the force once it is in place.” [31]

...

Japan’s destroyers off the coast of Somalia and the nation’s first foreign military base in the post-World War Two era in Djibouti are in line with the geostrategic plans of Tokyo’s allies in North America and Europe.

Plans which are embodied most fully in the creation of the first U.S. regional military command outside North America in a quarter of a century, Africa Command. Long after pirates, al-Qaeda affiliates and other threats have ceased to serve as their justification, the Pentagon, NATO and Japan will retain their military footholds in Africa.

Notes

- 1) Agence France-Presse, April 23, 2010
- 2) Former Axis Nations Abandon Post-World War II Military Restrictions
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<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2009/09/02/former-axis-nations-abandon-post-world-war-ii-military-restrictions>
- 3) Kyodo News, April 3, 2009
- 4) Kyodo News, July 31, 2009
- 5) Stars And Stripes, September 23, 2005
- 6) US Department of Defense, September 22, 2005
- 7) Radio France Internationale, December 11, 2009
- 8) Voice of America News, January 25, 2008
- 9) The East African, November 6, 2006
- 10) Ibid
- 11) Reuters, November 21, 2006
- 12) Air Force Link, January 7, 2007
- 13) Ethiopian Herald, January 5, 2007
- 14) Stars and Stripes, January 10, 2007
- 15) Xinhua News Agency, January 13, 2007
- 16) Stars and Stripes, January 10, 2007
- 17) Voice of Russia, January 9, 2007
- 18) Reuters, January 10, 2007
- 19) Stars and Stripes, January 10, 2007
- 20) The Nation, January 3, 2007
- 21) Stars and Stripes, March 8, 2007
- 22) Agence France-Presse, December 22, 2005
- 23) The Standard (Kenya), October 29, 2008
- 24) Associated Press, December 23, 2009
- 25) European Union Naval Force Somalia
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- 26) North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Maritime Component Command Headquarters Northwood
September 11, 2009
27) North Atlantic Treaty Organization
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28) Royal Navy, March 30, 2010
29) Garowe Online, April 8, 2010
30) The Nation, October 29, 2009
31) Ibid

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