

US retools terror war in scramble for Africa

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The US military has announced that it is dedicating a US Army brigade to carry out continuous operations on the African continent. According to the Associated Press report on the decision, it is “part of an intensifying Pentagon effort to train countries to battle extremists and give the United States a ready and trained force to dispatch to Africa if crises requiring the US military emerge.”

Tapped to serve as Washington’s version of the Afrika Corps is the 2nd Brigade, First Infantry Division, known as the “Dagger Brigade,” which includes approximately 3,500 troops. According to the Pentagon, it has already scheduled 104 separate missions beginning next March, deploying units ranging from small training teams to 800-member battalions to as many as 35 countries across Africa.

The re-assignment of this brigade is only part of an effort to beef up the Pentagon’s Africa Command, or AFRICOM, which was created in 2007 but remains headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, with, until now, no African government willing to provide it with a base of operations on the continent.

Since then, AFRICOM has drawn blood in Libya, where it coordinated the US-NATO war for regime-change that toppled the government of Col. Muammar Gaddafi in October of last year. It has deployed over 100 troops in central Africa, supposedly to track down the guerrillas of the Lord’s Resistance Army, and provided training to a number of countries’ armies, which Washington hopes to use as proxy forces, or cannon fodder, in pursuit of US interests.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond Odierno told the right-wing daily *Washington Times* this week that the buildup of AFRICOM was part of a new global military strategy known as “Regionally Aligned Forces,” which the Pentagon is attempting to implement as it continues drawing down occupation forces from Afghanistan, after being compelled to pull out of Iraq.

“It’s about us moving toward a scalable, tailorable capability that helps them to shape the environment they’re working in, doing a variety of tasks from building partner capability to engagement, to multilateral training to bilateral training to actual deployment of forces, if necessary,” said Odierno.

In other words, any number of US military operations, ranging from disaster relief to so-called humanitarian assistance, as well as training African troops, all serve as a means of “shaping the environment,” i.e., preparing the ground for direct US armed intervention.

In 2007, J. Peter Pham, a State Department advisor who has been a permanent member of the advisory board of AFRICOM since its creation, testified as to the core mission of the new Pentagon command, which he spelled out in fairly blunt terms. It involved, he said, “protecting access to hydrocarbons and other strategic resources which Africa has in abundance, a task which includes ensuring against the vulnerability of those natural riches and ensuring that no other interested third parties, such as China, India, Japan, or Russia, obtain monopolies or preferential treatment.” This last consideration has become increasingly decisive. In a real sense, the buildup of AFRICOM is a corollary of the Obama administration’s strategic “pivot” to the Pacific. Just as it is seeking to employ military encirclement as a means of offsetting China’s growing economic domination of that crucial region and its rising challenge to US capitalism’s global position, so in Africa, Washington is attempting to use US military strength to counter China’s increasing influence on the continent.

China has outstripped both the US and the European Union as Africa’s leading trade partner. Bilateral trade, which amounted to barely \$11 billion in 2000, topped \$160 billion in 2011 and is expected to reach \$200 billion this year.

Under conditions where the US is expected soon to count on West Africa for 25 percent of its petroleum imports, not to mention a variety of strategic minerals and other raw materials, the competition with China as well as economic rivals in Europe amounts to a new scramble for Africa, every bit as violent and exploitative as the original colonial conquest.

The preparations for predatory acts of militarism in Africa, however, are being made under the pretext of combating “terrorism” and the threat of “extremism” on the continent.

AFRICOM’s commander, Gen. Carter Ham, has made a series of speeches in both the US and Africa on this theme, claiming that widely disparate groups ranging from the Islamist Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in Mali and Libya to al-Shabab in Somalia and the Boko Haram group in Nigeria are threatening to link up and coordinate their activities, posing a serious threat to the US “homeland.” Neither he nor anyone else has presented any evidence of such collaboration between movements that have shown no ambitions outside of their own national spheres.

The *Wall Street Journal* earlier this month put forward the same thesis in a front-page article entitled “Terror Fight shifts to Africa.” According to the *Journal*, the Obama administration “is considering asking Congress to approve expanded authority” to carry out military actions against alleged terrorists in Africa. Such an authorization of the use of military force was the basis for the more than decade-long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This new authorization “would be aimed at allowing US military operations in Mali, Nigeria, Libya and possibly other countries where militants have loose or nonexistent ties to al Qaeda’s Pakistan headquarters,” administration officials told the *Journal*.

In reality, while exploiting Al Qaeda—and organizations with “loose or nonexistent ties” to it—as a pretext for US militarist intervention, Washington has armed and directly supported Al Qaeda-linked elements, first in Libya and now in Syria, as proxy forces in its wars for regime-change.

Following last week’s UN Security Council vote authorizing intervention, Mali appears to be the most immediate target for US action, with AFRICOM openly preparing to support an intervention that is to be conducted with troops drawn from the Economic

Community of West African States.

While Washington poses as Mali’s savior, the situation in that impoverished, landlocked West African country is overwhelmingly a creation of US imperialism itself. It was its intervention in Libya which sent heavily armed forces spilling over the border, and it was the US military that trained Capt. Amadou Haya Sanogo, the leader of the coup that overthrew the country’s government last March. The Pentagon put him through courses at US military bases in Georgia, Virginia and Texas.

The buildup of AFRICOM and the preparation of new wars on the continent make clear that the interventions in Libya and Syria are only the beginning of what amounts to a global offensive aimed at re-dividing and re-colonizing much of the world. This eruption of American militarism, the byproduct of the historic crisis of US and world capitalism, goes hand in hand with ever more savage attacks on the social conditions and democratic rights of the working class at home.



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