

AFRICOM spearheads escalation of US “scramble for Africa”

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16 March 2017

The chief of the US African Command (AFRICOM), General Thomas Waldhauser, warned last week in an annual report to Congress that resource constraints on his forces are threatening to undermine Washington’s influence over Africa.

Headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, AFRICOM was created with the mission of exerting greater military influence over Africa in order to maintain and facilitate Western capitalism’s exploitation of the continent’s vast economic resources and its working masses.

In his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, General Waldhauser warned that AFRICOM’s “inadequate surveillance, poor supply chain networks, and lack of personnel” are putting US interests at increased risk. “These constraints risk our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, Coast Guardsmen, and civilians executing activities on the African continent,” General Waldhauser stated.

Waldhauser testified further that AFRICOM’s capability restraints are most grave in relation to its support for the Department of State-led mission to protect US personnel and facilities.

Waldhauser also stated that only 20-30 percent of the command’s intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance requirements are being met, due to a lack of resources. To offset this shortfall, AFRICOM has relied primarily on private security contractors (mercenaries).

Further highlighting AFRICOM’s resource constraints, the US maintains one military base overseeing the entire continent, Camp Lemonnier, a base shared jointly with France in the tiny nation of Djibouti on the Horn of Africa. Washington is keen to upscale its military presence on the continent.

Waldhauser outlined before the Senate committee

potential problems for the United States exertion of power in Africa, specifically in relation to Washington’s military debacles in Somalia and Libya.

In Somalia, Washington is carrying out a bloody campaign for control of the Horn of Africa, which fronts the waterway for the flow of the world’s oil traffic through the Gulf of Aden originating in the Middle East. Somalia is currently experiencing the worst famine in its history, which is largely the result of Washington’s imperialist violence against the nation over several years.

In Libya, Washington in 2011 carried out a US-NATO campaign for regime change that left the country an apocalyptic wasteland with no central government, resulting in the rise of various rival tribal factions vying for control over the country’s vast oil reserves.

Waldhauser underscored the necessity for AFRICOM’s continuing role in perpetuating these crimes by appealing to the Senate committee for more resources and an escalation of militarism.

In a reflection of the crisis and divisions within the US ruling class over the direction of US foreign policy, Waldhauser invoked the threat of Russia’s influence in Libya: “Russia is trying to exert influence on the ultimate decision of who becomes, and what entity becomes, in charge of the government inside Libya.”

Addressing the committee’s Republican chairman Senator John McCain, Waldhauser stated that General Khalifa Haftar, head of the Libyan National Army, has been engaged in talks with various representatives from Moscow. “General Haftar has visited, as you said, on the carrier with the Russians. He’s also visited in the country of Russia. Also, this week it’s reported in the open press, Serraj from the Government of National Accord has also visited Russia,” Waldhauser said.

The statement expresses the fear of growing Russian involvement in Libya. Last week, there were reports that Moscow deployed special forces troops to Egypt near the Libyan border. Russian Ministry of Defense spokesman Igor Konashenkov denied the deployment, telling the *RIA Novosti* news agency, “Certain Western mass media have been stirring up the public for years with such false information from anonymous sources.”

When Senator Lindsey Graham asked General Waldhauser his thoughts on the importance of the involvement of Secretary of State and former Exxon-Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson in influencing the outcome of the AFRICOM’s mission, Waldhauser stressed, “Very important.”

Waldhauser’s testimony before the US Senate underscored the desire to escalate Washington’s military role in Africa under the new Trump administration. Washington’s aim is to neutralize China’s and Russia’s influence on the continent. Fueling the mounting concern within the US ruling class over Beijing’s influence on the continent, China is set to complete later this year the construction of a naval base in Djibouti, a mere four miles from the US/French base.

In recent years, China has massively increased its economic influence in Africa, with Beijing investing heavily in mining, infrastructure, oil and agriculture. Alongside this, European imperialism is also asserting itself on the continent, with Germany and France desperate to not be left behind in the “resource grab” in Africa.

The crisis of world capitalism has directly resulted in the explosive growth of militarism on the continent. Germany has constructed a military base in Niger, and has its troops deployed across the sub-Saharan region.

France not only maintains several military bases in Africa, but has an ongoing deployment of several thousand troops in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania, where French forces are engaged in bloody conflicts. In 2015 in Burkina Faso, France played an influential role in the removal of President Blaise Compaoré. Underlying these developments, the two European nations are attempting to assert a greater imperial role on behalf of their national capitalist interests at the expense of their rivals.

The “Scramble for Africa” coincides with a resurgence of working class struggles across the

continent.

In South Africa, strikes by the working class have increased exponentially, with 6,000 social workers going on strike against the government this week and both the National Union of Metalworkers and National Union of Mineworkers threatening to follow suit to oppose the shutting down of six power plants and the wiping out of 6,000 jobs. The mining sector has remained roiled by conflict since the 2012 Marikana massacre, which resulted in government forces killing dozens of striking miners.

In Kenya, doctors and medical personnel have been on a nearly four-month strike protesting low pay and deplorable working conditions; Kenyan university lecturers have also struck over similar conditions.

In February, five people were killed in Guinea’s capital of Conakry following a teachers’ strike against the government’s decision to cut salaries for educators.

In Egypt last week, hundreds took to the streets in protests over the military regime’s threat to end bread subsidies, upon which the mass of the poorest Egyptians rely.

Additionally, an historic famine is ravaging several African countries, including Somalia and South Sudan, areas that are most deeply affected by decades of US imperialist intervention.

For the African masses, already ravaged by war, poverty, and disease—intolerable social ills that are themselves the malodorous by-product of capitalism—the plans of US imperialism to escalate military intervention on the continent pose a grave new threat.



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