



DESTROYING AFRICA:

*THE WAR INDUSTRY'S LATEST CASH COW
AND A PROVING GROUND FOR THE
NEW AMERICAN WAY OF WAR*

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Though it's unfolded below the American public's radar, for two decades the United States has waged a wide-ranging war on the people of Africa—destroying lives, livelihoods, and liberties along the way. That war has gradually gained momentum since the 2007 founding of the U.S. Military's Africa Command (AFRICOM), justifying its continent-wide campaign first, as a counterterror operation, then more recently as a playing field for the Pentagon's newly prioritized "Great Power Competition" (GPC) mission—an official euphemism for America's revamped Great Game global rivalry with Russia and China.

INTRODUCTION: America's African Playground

Maj. (ret.) Danny Sjursen

"Though often tactically successful, [U.S. military operations in Africa]...have neither benefited American security interests nor stabilized events in their respective regions. This failure is ascribable in part to the flawed assumptions on which the Global War on Terror (GWOT) in Africa has rested. The United States has based its counterterrorism initiatives in Africa since 9/11 on a policy of 'aggregation,' in which localized and disparate insurgencies have been amalgamated into a frightening, but artificially monolithic whole..."

—Robert Berschinski, Special Assistant to the President and National Security Council Senior Director for Democracy and Human Rights, from his 2007 article, "AFRICOM's Dilemma," U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute

As President Joe Biden withdraws American troops from Afghanistan, and—at least rhetorically—ends the "combat mission" in Iraq, the U.S. remains quietly mired in an endless, hopeless, and counterproductive series of conflicts in Africa. The problem began with the George W. Bush administration's foolish—and perceptibly neo-imperial—2007 decision to create a separate military command overseeing increased operations on the continent: U.S. AFRICOM. While American soldiers were then fighting and dying in Iraq and Afghanistan, something equally nefarious was unfolding under the public radar in Africa.

As if the Pentagon wasn't grappling with enough interminable wars, it opened a new pro-consular franchise for the continent. According to Bush's racialized 19th century-colonialist cerebral cartography, he wanted the post-9/11 U.S. military sword to be "ready to strike at a moment's notice in any dark corner of the world." AFRICOM was then charged with the counterintuitive charter of preventing war in places "where violent conflict has not yet emerged, where crises have to be prevented."



As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq began, to some extent, winding down, AFRICOM—under Bush’s more polite successor, Barack Obama—piloted a pivot toward an increasingly abstract American way of war, one that’s light on eyebrow-raising large-scale conventional troop deployments, instead emphasizing drones, mercenaries, proxies, and select U.S. special operators. The U.S. has had some 6,000 troops in Africa—on at least 29 “enduring” and “non-enduring” bases (as the Pentagon confusingly classifies them), in some 15 countries—for a while now. The outcomes have been atrocious: in the West African Sahel alone there has been a 1,105 percent increase in violent events linked to Islamist-inflected groups over the last decade.

Such obvious failure should raise more eyebrows than it does in Washington, D.C., Arlington, and Stuttgart, Germany—where AFRICOM is peculiarly, if instructively, still headquartered, since no African state was willing to host it. So much so that, in October 2007, the Pan-African Parliament—the legislative body of the African Union—voted for a motion to “prevail upon all African Governments...not to accede to the United States of America’s government request to host AFRICOM anywhere in the African continent.” Actual Africans never trusted America’s continental motives, and haven’t missed the colonial-imperial parallels.

All of this U.S. militarism and accelerated violence was partly fueled by—and fed the coffers of—the military-industrial complex’s cynical war-profiteering on the world’s poorest continent. AFRICOM’s operations have proven a low-key cash cow for corporate defense contractors. In Africa, it’s hardly hyperbolic to say that Washington quite literally kills pathetically poor foreigners in order to make obscenely rich Americans ever richer.

Present at the Creation: AFRICOM—An Unnecessary Command

Col. (ret.) Lawrence Wilkerson

For all of my military career (1966–1997) and including my time at the State Department (2001–2005), the U.S. military wanted nothing to do with Africa. The continent presented no danger to America, nothing that warranted the use of military power and, frankly, was judged a pit of quagmiric quicksand to be avoided. The Africa portfolio rightfully belonged to the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and NGOs like Doctors Without Borders. In conversations with every four-star military officer and below with whom I worked, from Rear Admiral Stew Ring to General Barry McCaffrey, from Admiral Bill Crowe to General Colin Powell, none would even listen to a pitch to make Africa part of the Unified Command Plan (UCP) such that it warranted its own headquarters—the ultimate official act declaring a U.S. military fiefdom. "Sheer insanity," one of them declared. Then came the 9/11 attacks.

In the name of the ensuing Global War on Terror (GWOT), almost everything about the American global military posture changed—for the worse—and cost countless dollars and lives in the process. One such change was the creation of that separate unified command for Africa, which reversed post-WWII policies and put the continent into the hungry, post-Cold War playground of the U.S. Department of Defense. The fact is that when the US launched the security-focused—in the guise of humanitarian assistance and civil “capacity-building”—Pan Sahel Initiative (2004), Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (2005), or even the broader AFRICOM (2008) purview, there wasn’t any serious regional terror to counter. It took U.S. military adventurism to help create the threats that supposedly justify continual interventionism.

The deaths, the refugees, the coups, the crises, the exponentially exploding problem of indigenous Islamist terrorists, and the incredibly failed U.S. policy in Africa—much of it can be laid upon the doorstep of that post-9/11 policy change. And what a treasure trove for military contractors Washington created. What a bottomless pit for the U.S. military to explore, from Mali to Djibouti—ostensibly finding China, Russia, and all manner of evil terrorists, lurking in every shadow, every corner, and under every clod of dirt. In the process, the United States of America helped destroy this long tortured continent—and average Africans have been the primary victims.

AFRICOM's Coup Factory: Empowering Authoritarians as Matter of Course

Maj. (ret.) Danny Sjursen

Despite Washington's proclamations of its dedication to democracy and human rights, the U.S. provides mainly military aid to mostly autocratic, repressive African regimes—so long as these client governments reject Chinese or Russian investment and vaguely combat Islamist “terrorism.” Illustratively, since AFRICOM opened its door, U.S.-trained local military officers have conducted no less than eight coups on the continent, including two perpetrated by the same individual in the same country—Mali—in the last 10 months.

The phenomenon transcends the continent. A 2017 study in the *Journal of Peace Research* found that, from 1970 to 2009, in 165 out of 275 military-backed worldwide coups, members of that country's security forces had received some U.S. military training in the year before the coup—but Africa has been ground zero of America's coup-catalyzation. Since AFRICOM's 2008 founding, the list of coups and coup attempts undertaken by U.S.-trained military officers includes those in Burkina Faso (2014); Burundi (2015); Egypt (2013); Gambia (2014); Libya (2014); Mali (2012, 2020, 2021); and Mauritania (2008).

Which raises the question: What's the point of having the Leahy Laws—which prohibit funding and assisting foreign security forces credibly accused of gross violations of human rights or undemocratic activity—on the books, if the statutes are ignored as soon as they're inconvenient? That's only the tip of the indecency iceberg—the entire endeavor has proven utterly counterproductive. By every security-related measure, Africa has—often exponentially—worsened, with bloody and destabilizing consequences.

These U.S.-trained and supported (oft-war-criminal) putschists are now fighting local insurgencies that they themselves have worsened through their abuses. But Uncle Sam offered an enormous conflict-accelerant assist. For example, President Obama's Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and her then-favored assistant—Biden's current national security advisor, Jake Sullivan—could be said to have indirectly created the current coalition of jihadis in the West African Sahel.

That's because when the two of them championed a heavy-handed regime-change intervention against Libyan autocrat Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, thousands of his Tuareg fighters blew back into that region in a big way, with more than just the clothes on their backs. They streamed from post-Gaddafi Libya into their Sahel homelands loaded with arms and anger. It's no accident, in other words that Mali's latest round of insurgency kicked off in 2012. This amounts to nothing less than American criminal complicity.

Qui Bono?: The War Industry and a New Scramble for Africa's Resources

Christian Sorensen, former U.S. Air Force linguist

The establishment of AFRICOM has given the U.S. war industry greater opportunity to sell goods and services to “partnered” governments across the African continent. Through foreign military sales (FMS), the U.S. government procures and transfers industry goods and services to vaguely allied governments and international organizations. Sales from the U.S. war industry to African allies typically overlap with U.S. military deployments.

Reporting from Nick Turse and Sean Naylor indicates that the bulk of U.S. military operations stretch from Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia, and the Seychelles. Military forces in all of these countries have received goods and services from the U.S. war industry since AFRICOM's 2007 inception. Popular goods and services include vehicles, rifles, reconnaissance aircraft, communications gear, and construction equipment.

Militarization of the African continent profits the U.S. war industry in three distinct ways:

1. Sales to African governments—from attack helicopters for Morocco to vehicles for Somalia.
2. Sales to the U.S. government for use in Africa—from Erickson helicopter transport to Jacobs logistics and support services.
3. Sales to former-colonizer European countries for operations in Africa, including General Atomics drones (1, 2) for France.

Bulk sales provide steady, regular business, which war corporations push as facilitating economies of scale. In December 2018, a contract was issued to the corporation PAE for sundry surveillance systems. The customers were Benin, Congo, Djibouti, Kenya, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Togo, and Tunisia. U.S. military operations in these nations have included, but are not limited to, such cheeky code names as Odyssey Resolve, Observant Compass, Paladin Hunter, Kodiak Hunter, Jupiter Nimbus, and Jupiter Shield. In September 2014, a contract was issued for land vehicles, with recipient nations spanning the breadth of the continent: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Tunisia, and Uganda. Unsurprisingly, U.S. military operations have focused on these nations in recent years.

Consider the case of Niger, an area rich in uranium and long under the yoke of French colonialism. The French first discovered uranium deposits in 1958 in the country's Agadez region. (The French corporation Orano, once known as Areva, dominates the uranium extraction business there.) U.S. troops have since deployed to Niger under AFRICOM's auspices. The U.S. government even built an expensive drone base in Agadez—one of at least three in the country, including one that's run by the CIA rather than the Pentagon.

Niger is now a fairly steady customer of the U.S. war industry, obtaining a variety of goods and services, including L3Harris fuzes for ordnance, Textron reconnaissance aircraft and training, L3Harris reconnaissance products for aircraft (1, 2), North American Surveillance Systems upgrades and product training, Bukkehave vehicles, L3Harris communications gear and maintenance, and “nonstandard weapons parts and accessories” from a variety of U.S. corporations.

A conservative tally of these contracts amounts to \$202.8 million worth of war-ready gear. As the war industry hogs government coffers here at home, it also drains government coffers abroad. Through it all, Niger—like its neighbors in the Sahel, and much of the rest of the African space America meddles in—has actually become less stable, more dangerous for its ever-tortured citizens, all of which the U.S. opportunistically uses to justify further intervention. That, of course, means ample forever-profits fueling a veritable forever-war vicious cycle.

Russian and Chinese Canards: “Great Power Competition” in Africa

Maj. (ret.) Danny Sjursen

In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, retired Air Force Major General Marcus Hicks and U.S. Army Majors Kyle Atwell and Dan Collini off-handedly asserted that, “Like it or not, a twenty-first century ‘scramble for Africa’ is underway.” According to these authors, America must take action because—per the piece’s title— “Great-Power Competition Is Coming to Africa.” Few—and certainly not these purportedly panicked officers—have bothered to explain precisely what horrible things shall happen if the supposedly strident Russian and Chinese invaders (who actually have far less continental military presence than the United States, France, or Britain) “win” this imperial encore “scramble” for Africa.

Ultimately, U.S. AFRICOM is about a lot of things—but not the well-being of Africans. Not really, anyway. Instead, listening to official and unofficial rhetoric from the Pentagon and various presidential administrations, it becomes clear that Africa matters to Washington only to the extent that it can be contested with, and contained against, Chinese competition. Show me even a minor infusion of Chinese economic presence, and within a year (or less) I’ll show you an African country with a fresh or escalated American military intervention. Washington’s and Beijing’s approaches to the continent couldn’t be more diametrically opposed—though Moscow largely plays a lighter version of Uncle Sam’s game—and America’s militarized approach has, predictably, backfired.

When Washington, and its preferred Paris proxy, ignores that, or makes everything on the continent about—per that politely penned piece by those three respected U.S. military men—“Great Power Competition” (GPC), well, they do so at their own (and much more so, African) peril. Conflicts are catalyzed, authoritarianism is accelerated, human rights are routinely violated, and the cycle runs on repeat like a skipping a-strategic record.

After the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) officially shifted the focus of U.S. strategy from counterterrorism to threats purportedly posed by Russia and China, AFRICOM had to adapt its *raison d’être* or die. So this past year, the command undertook reviews of its resources and activities to “align with the objectives articulated” in the NDS. And sure enough, AFRICOM’s new proposed campaign plan listed the first of its five functional lines of effort: as “Enable War Plans and GPC.” Incidentally, there are no real Russian, and only one Chinese base—in hyper-internationally-militarized Djibouti—in Africa. Still, if a major U.S. military combatant command wants to maintain funding and focus, then “relevance”—even pretended relevance—becomes the name of the game.

Often, the GPC gambit is as much about money and resources as geopolitics—even if these rarely benefit average Americans. For example, in late March, insurgents seized—though Mozambican security forces later retook—the coastal town of Palma, which happens to be a mere six miles from a multi-billion-dollar liquid natural gas (LNG) plant, the largest and richest in all of Africa. That plant is run by the French energy corporation, Total. Sure enough, (so far) 12 American Green Berets have been sent off to “advise and assist” the Mozambican security forces. On this particular continent, natural resources under the earth or coastal waters tends to translate to local insurgencies, repeated foreign military interventions, and loads of dead Africans.

It seems the real motives, and why Mozambique suddenly matters, involve access to and securing of natural resources—liquefied natural gas, to be exact—and, inextricably linked to that, great power competition with Russia and, especially, China. The heart of the vaguely ISIS-branded insurgency is in the Cabo Delgado province, which boasts one of the planet’s richest LNG deposits, and thus hosts a cornucopia of major foreign energy companies: Total (France), Exxon, Mobil, Chevron (U.S.A.), BP (Britain), ENI (Italy), Mitsui (Japan), Petronas (Malaysia) and—not incidentally—China’s CNPC.

The whole notion that the U.S., its European allies, or supposedly dogged Russian or Chinese foes have no choice but to battle for resources and influence in Africa, may be uncritically accepted in Washington and media establishment circles—but it’s a bald-faced lie.

CONCLUSION



The fighting that U.S. troops do themselves, advise and assist its proxies to carry out, and that Washington's war industry fuels, has nothing to do with American security. After all, AFRICOM itself admits it is unlikely that any of Africa's "violent extremist organizations" (VEOs) currently have the capability to directly threaten the homeland.

Naturally, the U.S. government didn't exactly ask We the People before helping to create, then catalyze the continent's conflict, and few Americans know or care where Mali or Mozambique fall on the map. But in the ethical court of criminal complicity, ignorance and apathy are no defense for aiding and abetting mass murder. This indecency is done in our names—African blood is on all of our hands.

