

# Africom and the USA's Hidden Battle Front in Africa

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What is the current meaning of “war against terror” for Africa? The true intention of America’s recent military interventions in the African continent (both covert and open) is nothing other than the expansion and consolidation of Western Capital . It all started in 2001 when George W. Bush declared “war on terror” in the continent, but has developed in a way and manner that has gone beyond human imagination and indignation in the body counts on the streets of Somalia, the jungles of Uganda, and Congo and desert of Sudan.. The commander of US African Command, General E. Ward, explained this in a language more clear than any US politician:

“...Keep in mind, our national interests lie in a stable continent of Africa. This means that Africans live in the relative peace of a stable environment, are governed effectively, and enjoy a degree of economic and social advancement. An Africa, whereby African populations are able to provide for themselves, contribute to global economic development and are allowed access to markets in free, fair, and competitive ways, is good for America and the world ...”

AFRICOM (or USAFRICOM) is a Unified Combatant Command of the US Department of Defense, responsible for U.S. military operations and military relations with 53 African nations (excepting Egypt). Africa Command was established October 1, 2007 and formally activated October 1, 2008 at a public ceremony at the Pentagon attended by representatives of African nations. When George W. Bush presided over this creation it was clear that the idea was not primarily to fight against the Islamic terror, which was said to be growing in influence, but to protect and help expand American military and economic (mainly) energy interests. Bush himself said, “the new command will strengthen our security cooperation with Africa and create new opportunities to bolster the capabilities of our partners in Africa.”

## **The Search for Cheap Energy Sources**

AFRICOM is a product of a political reality. Capitalism and its unending drive for more profit is a product of a set of systems (political ,economic , social, cultural, military), the totality of which defines the thirst of American capital for African Oil. To excuse the State and/or deny its role as part of the very foundation on which capitalism derives both its energy and strength to survive is a

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free market myth that can no longer stand firm after the aggressive bailing out of private financial institutions with tax payers money. The US military is paid by the state, out of tax payers' money, collected in the name of protecting the American people and American values and not obviously to fund the search for oil with American lives for the interest of big US oil companies. But unfortunately this is what is happening.

The legislation, "The Lords Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act 2009" that among others, US Congressman Ed Royce is pushing for aims to empower AFRICOM not only to give technical support but to physically go to war with the armed groups that both Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo Forces were not able to dislodge. Royce said:

"Africa's emerging potential as a major oil producer and supplier to the United States, has been of interest to the Sub-Committee on Africa that I've chaired for some time. The sub-committee held a hearing to look at this topic in 2000. It's clearly in our national interest to diversify our energy supply, especially given the turbulent political climate in key parts of the world today. The expansion of energy production in Africa matches to that interest..." (Source AISP.Org)

This is big money talk rather than humanitarian outrage. It was for business reasons that America mobilised at full strength the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline project, estimated at \$3.7 billion. And on the 25 January 2002, the symposium held to discuss African oil came up with a document entitled 'African oil, a priority for US national security and African development', which paved the way for the rest to happen. It was attended by the Africa heavyweights of the Bush administration: people like Barry Schutz, a Bush administration specialist on Africa, Lt-Col Karen Kwiatkowski an Air Force officer seconded to the Defence Secretary, and Water Kansteiner, Bush's under-secretary of State for African Affairs.

The *Christian Science Monitor* of May 23 2003 reported on the Symposium thus:

"In January last year [2002], the IASPS [Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies] hosted a symposium in Houston, Texas, which was attended by government and oil industry representatives. An influential working group called the African Oil Policy Initiative Group (AOPIG) co-chaired by IASPS researchers Barry Schutz and Paul Michael Wihbey, which has been largely responsible for driving American governmental policy concerning west African oil, emerged from the symposium.....The document urges Congress and the Bush administration to encourage greater extraction of oil across Africa, and to declare the Gulf of Guinea 'a area of vital interest' to the US."

We have now definitely entered the aggressive birth of AFRICOM. The man who is put in charge of this task, General Ward, is not new to the battlefields of Africa. He was in Somalia in 1993 when US forces were serious bitten by small insurgent groups, forcing the US Army to withdraw from that crisis.

### **Africom in Action**

AFRICOM justify its presence in Africa on its website as follows:

“Africa is growing in military, strategic and economic importance in global affairs. However, many nations on the African continent continue to rely on the international community for assistance with security concerns. From the U.S. perspective, it makes strategic sense to help build the capability for African partners, and organizations such as the African Standby Force, to take the lead in establishing a security environment. This security, will, in turn, set the groundwork for increased political stability and economic growth.”

This helps a lot in explaining why the AFRICOM budget rose from \$50 million in the fiscal year of 2007 to \$310 million in 2009 fiscal year – in running costs, not so-called military aid to the member countries. It also shows the significance of this program for the US government. The command gave the US military the possibility of having a physical presence in numerous African countries and assigning Defense Department personnel to U.S. Embassies and diplomatic missions to coordinate Defense Department programs. The US Africa Command is now spending billions in training and arm supplies. It is expecting to spend nothing less than \$20 billion in 2010 and this will benefit the armies of very many repressive regimes.

Take the case of Sudan. Openly, governments, including the US, have never been more critical of the regime in Khartoum, even accusing it of committing genocide in Darfur. The fact that the head of Sudan secret intelligence unit, wanted by the International War Crimes Tribunal, was secretly jetted to the US by the CIA to discuss military interests in the Horn of Africa was one of the most disgusting acts of hypocrisy by the Bush administration.

The right-wing Republican lobbyists of AFRICOM have never made their intentions secret. They have said time and again that America cannot rely on the unconquered Middle East for its oil supply; for them Africa is the answer. But the aggressive nature of this thirst for African oil and other resources has no doubt also been fuelled by the presence of China in key strategic areas. True, the brutal nature and character of Chinese state-capitalism is no longer felt by the Chinese workers alone but also the African working classes. But to believe that this is a new phenomenon in the continent is wrong and it is also wrong to think that there is a difference between Chinese and Western capital. Even though American involvement in the continent is not new, the threat of Chinese expansion and domination is challenging the basic principles on which the US state is said to have based the principles of its international engagement: good governance, democracy, free market, respect for human rights etc.

Today, the US Africa command is involved in almost 38 African countries, directly or indirectly, with the presumed agenda of training anti-terrorist forces. These include Chad, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone. The expansion of the Africom central command in Djibouti adds to the significance that the US government puts into this project.

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According to Africom, “U.S. Central Command maintains its traditional relationship with *Egypt*, but *AFRICOM* coordinates with *Egypt* on issues relating to Africa security.” In Egypt, the US State is spending billions of American tax payers’ money in military equipments and training to arm one of the most repressive military forces in the continent. All of this speaks for itself rather than the simple cheap rhetoric of bringing sanity to the continent in the name of the “war against terror”.

The invasion of Somalia by the Ethiopian forces is clearly a proxy war, with AFRICOM providing the logistics. This operation against the ”Islamic Court Union” was launched at a time when Somalia was trying to breathe again, and there was relative peace in the country. The ridiculous lies that Islamic terrorist have taken over the country (through leadership of the *Islamic Courts Union* ) and the invasive military action are the very reasons why a criminal organization like Al-Shabab can claim a legitimate reason for its war against the occupying forces and its brutal terror against the very people both sides claim to be freeing: the poor ordinary Somalis. It is not out of empty air that when the debate was held on where the headquarters of AFRICOM should be located that the Ethiopian Prime Minister declared that Ethiopia will be willing to work closely with the Command. According to a UN situation report of 5 February 2010, an estimated 3.2 million people in Somalia are in need of emergency food aid, one in six children are seriously malnourished, and the internally displaced population is in the millions and continues to rise.

The planned assault on Mogadishu has registered its first civilian casualties (AlJazeera.net 11.03.10), forcing civilians to flee the capital . The aim of this military operation is to retake control of the capital from the Al Shabab militants. The Obama administration has been planning this assault for a while now. The *New York Times* (05.03.2010), which first reported the involvement of the US in the planning, confronted the Assistant secretary of State for Africa, Jonny Carlson, who is said to have been very instrumental in the preparation . He said ”This is not an American offensive... the US military is not on the ground in Somalia. Full stop.” In another press briefing he held with the Ertharin Cousin, Ambassador to the UN Mission in Rome on March 12,2010; “....We have provided limited military support to the Transitional Federal Government.....We do so in the firm belief that the TFG seeks to end the violence in Somalia that is caused by al-shabaab and other extremist organizations...” (Africom.net)

True, there might not be any US troops on the ground but it is an American war contracted to some Somalis, African Union forces and Ethiopians. The US has been training intelligence forces, providing surveillance, logistic support and, money to buy bullets and guns, and there are even speculations that American forces might provide aerial bombing of militant positions(*New York Times* 05.03.2010).Mr. Carlson refuted all these strongly.

This is against the recent advice given to the Obama Administration, which goes on to say that there is the need for a change of approach of the US support to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) head by Sheik Ahmed Sharif. The Report, ‘Somali: A New Approach’,

prepared by the Council on Foreign Relations ([www.cfr.org/publication/21421](http://www.cfr.org/publication/21421)) advised the Obama administration to engage more in “Constructive Disengagement” rather than spending so much in supporting an ineffective government that has very little support among the Somali population. And with the number of civilian casualties likely to rise before the defeat of the Al-Shabab militants, critics might be right to say that the Obama administration is playing into the hands of the Islamic extremist.

This was the case too with “Operation Lightning Thunder” in 2008, involving Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the liberated Southern Sudan. It was clear to all sincere analysts that the Lord’s Resistance Army was cornered and pacified, and that operation “Lightning Thunder” was no more than the clearing of the oil fields. Dr Jendayi Frazer, the then assistant Secretary of State in the George W Bush government, was said to have been the main initiator of that operation in involving the three Heads of States of Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo and the Liberated Southern Sudan. Even though she publicly denied the allegations, there are ample proofs that the US government and AFRICOM were very much involved and were arm-twisting regimes in the area to take active part in the operation. This was confirmed by Riek Machar, the vice president of Southern Sudan in a documentary aired by the Aljazeera TV.

Ugandan military commanders have openly confirmed that they have received logistics support from the Americans, including satellite phones, GPS receivers, maps and US contributions to fuel costs of the military vehicles involved in the operation. The results: over 1000 civilians dead and the internal migration of an estimated half-a-million people. The LRA were displaced, not defeated. All this followed the 2006 failed operation by a UN team of US-trained Guatemalan military to assassinate Joseph Kone, leader of LRA, in which all of them were killed by the LRA. [‘Hard Target’, Scott Jonson, *-Newsweek*, 16/05/09]. Southern Sudan refused to actively take part, only closing their borders to avoid crossing of arm groups into their territory.

### **Conclusion**

When the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project was put on the table, the oil companies made sure of IMF and World Bank involvement. This was not because of lack of capital. These two institutions are the most reliable and effective discipliners of the two nations involved should they at any time violate the contract against the interest of the big oil companies involved in the project. The arrangement was never designed for transparency, and when the initial funds of the project were embezzled in the member countries there was never a call to halt the project, even though the World Bank had put in a code of conduct as conditionality for the funding.

There is nothing new in armies conquering territories before the looting begins. For centuries states have been using their armies in foreign adventures in the interest of capital. The modern world has just surpassed the crude methods that were being used, and is now utilising sophisticated techniques consciously designed to confuse the human mind. Americans will tell you that they will support their military no matter the nature of the war they are involved in, even ones they don’t support, because they are patriots. And Africans will vote, even knowing the ones they are

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voting into office are corrupt. But it all could not have been easier for capital as it is now. With the “moral high ground “ of free market capitalism, the African bourgeoisie are content with being sub-contractors; the whole mathematics becomes easier, especially when it comes to the “ethical sharing“ of the wealth from the looting. To say that Africans are benefitting from the project through employment and the creation of the middle class are fine words that defy the lawlessness in Somalia and the suffering in Zimbabwe.

We might want to tell General Ward that he might be wrong to think he is undermining the sense of freedom of the African people. The fact of the involvement of AFRICOM in any battle ground in the continent strengthens the resolve of the African people to define their struggle on their own.

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