

AFTER THE PULLOUT, WHAT IS NEXT IN AFRICA?

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 Analysis

AFRICOM (The United States Africa Command) has recently announced that it already started withdrawing its troops from Africa following the accepted proposal in November 2018. The Command is going to reduce 10 % of its personnel throughout the continent as planned by the Pentagon.

Based in Stuttgart, AFRICOM has several permanent military bases and nearly 7.200 troops in various African countries such as Somalia, Libya, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon. Some actually believe that these numbers are actually more than stated. It seems that the American military activities in the continent give its priority to North Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel regions. So far, with more than 4.000 troops and

the largest drone complex, Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti serves as the largest American military base in Africa. All military operations covering Yemen, Somalia, the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa have been commanded from this camp. Since 2013, the US military operations and the number of personnel in Niger are also on the rise. AFRICOM has a drone base and 800 troops in the country alone.

As it can be remembered, after 9/11, the US expanded its military existence in Africa with counter-terrorism operations. The “War on Terror” discourse has been widely used to legalize the expansion. In 2002 the US government first established a small military unit in Djibouti and later this unit was developed and became



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known as Camp Lemonnier. In 2007, AFRICOM was established in Germany. Recently, Niger, a landlocked African country with rich uranium reserve, has become one of the strongholds of the US military.

AFRICOM commander General Thomas Waldhauser mentioned that armed groups like al-Shabbab and Boko Haram who are operating in the continent have no capacity to attack the US homeland. Nowadays, it seems that addressing a potential conflict with China and Russia is a higher priority than combating terrorism for the US government. However, these two global actors are also increasing their area of influence in Africa through trade, military cooperation and investment. While China has established a major military base in Djibouti last year, Russia has sent considerable military personnel to Central Africa and Libya. So it would not seem reasonable for the US to compete with China and Russia with fewer personnel.

The Pentagon's decision for downsizing its troops in Africa was taken after four American soldiers were killed in Niger in 2017. The incident has also drawn many questions and criticism for the US military strategy in Africa. It is understood that the American people were not even aware that their soldiers were operating in Niger. The case reminds us to the US military intervention

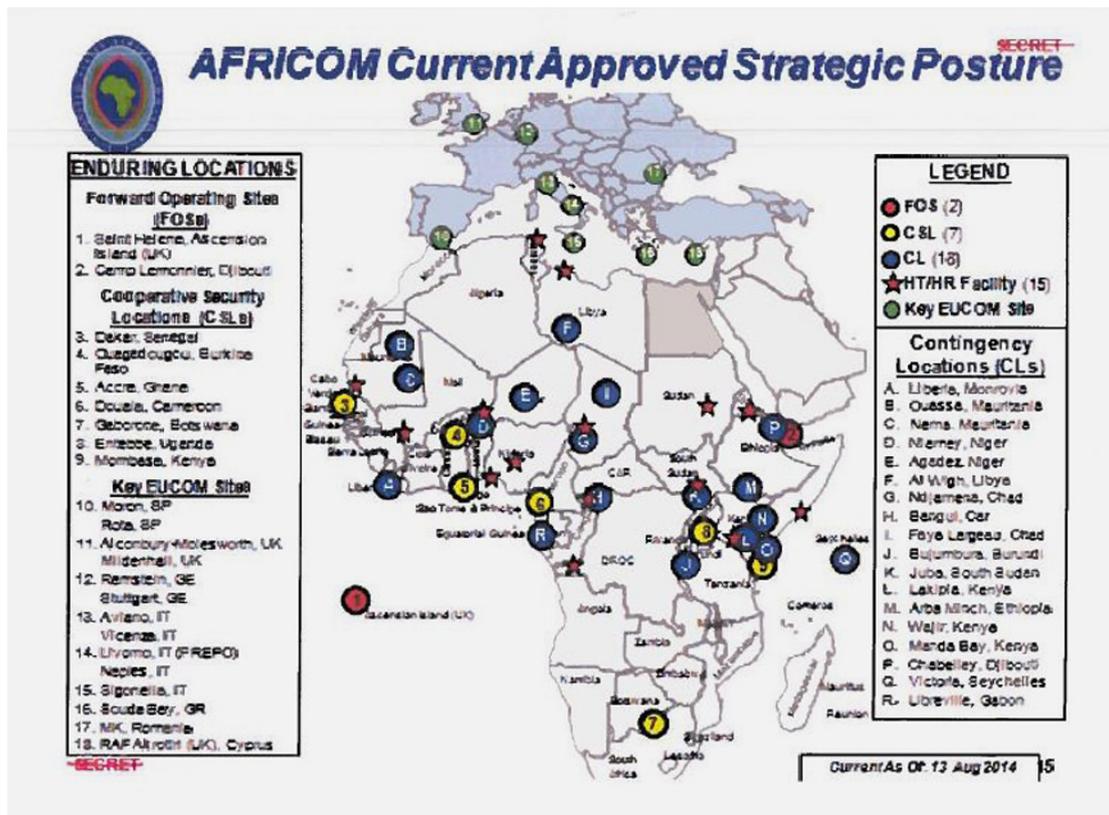
in Somalia in the early 90's; when 19 US Marine Corps were killed in Mogadishu, driving the US government to end its Somalia mission to ease the American public anger.

What is happening now also appears to show that the move is just America's tactic to satisfy public opinion and adjust Africa's image in the continent. Actually, there has not been any radical shift of the counterterrorism approach that has been effectively imposed by the US after 9/11 to increase its influence across the world. The pullout is merely covering 10 % of its 7,200 troops in West Africa, where French military has bases and operations. Moreover, the American pullout will only be completed by 2022.

There are also serious signs of the US military expansion in the continent; for instance, AFRICOM is now building another permanent drone base in Niger's Agadez region worth 280 million dollars; and Camp Lemonnier's leasing contract had already been extended for another 20 years during Obama's administration with a 70 million dollar annual payment. Furthermore, the US has a long-waiting mega upgrading plan for the camp that costs the country 1.4 billion dollars. For that, there is no reason to think that American military influence in Africa will shrink after the pullout.

Appendix:

A secret map of U.S. military bases in Africa



Across the African continent from declassified Fiscal Year 2015 U.S. Africa Command planning documents.

Forward operating sites, cooperative security locations, and contingency locations.
Image: U.S. Africa Command