

Militarization Of Energy Policy: U.S. Africa Command And the Gulf Of Guinea

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At the beginning of the century, while the United States was still embroiled in military interventions in the Balkans and had launched what would become the longest war in its history in Afghanistan with the invasion of Iraq to follow, it was also laying the groundwork for subordinating the African continent to a new military command.

With 4.5 percent of the world's population, the U.S. accounts for approximately 30 percent of crude oil consumption. Although the world's third largest producer of crude, it imports over 60 percent of what it consumes (12.4 of 20.7 million barrels it uses daily). A decade ago 15 percent of those imports came from the Gulf of Guinea region on Africa's Atlantic Ocean coast, mainly from Nigeria, and it is projected that the proportion will increase to 25 percent in the next four years.

The National Energy Policy Report issued by the Office of Vice President Richard Cheney on May 16, 2001 stated: "West Africa is expected to be one of the fastest-growing sources of oil and gas for the American market. African oil tends to be of high quality and low in sulfur...giving it a growing market share for refining centers on the East Coast of the U.S."

The following year, the Washington, D.C.-based African Oil Policy Initiative Group conducted a symposium entitled "African Oil: A Priority for U. S. National Security and African Development," with the participation of American legislators, policy advisers, the private sector and representatives of the State Department and Defense Department, at which Congressman William Jefferson said:

“African oil should be treated as a priority for U.S. national security post 9-11. I think that...post 9-11 it's occurred to all of us that our traditional sources of oil are not as secure as we thought they were.”

As is customary in regards to American foreign policy objectives, the Pentagon was charged with taking responsibility. It immediately went to work on undertaking three initiatives to implement U.S. energy strategy in the Gulf of Guinea: U.S. Africa Command, the first overseas military command inaugurated since 1983. The U.S. Navy's Africa Partnership Station as what has developed into the major component of the Global Fleet Station, linked with worldwide maritime operations like the 1,000-ship navy and the Proliferation Security Initiative and piloted in the area of responsibility of U.S. Southern Command and the U.S. Fourth Fleet reactivated in 2008: The Caribbean Sea and Central and South America. The NATO Response Force designed for rapid multi-service (army, air force, navy and marine) deployments outside of the bloc's North American-European area of responsibility.

In recent weeks Ghana joined the ranks of African oil producers, pumping crude oil for the first time from an offshore field in the Gulf of Guinea.

“The Jubilee oil field, discovered three years ago, holds an estimated 1.8 billion barrels of oil, and will begin producing around 55,000 barrels per day in the coming weeks. Oil production is expected, however, to rise to about 120,000 barrels over the next six months, making the country Africa's seventh largest oil producer.” [1]

The Ghanaian oil exploitation is run by a consortium led by Tullow Oil plc, which is based in London and has 85 contracts in 22 countries.

The same source quoted above added:

“The Gulf of Guinea increasingly represents an important source of oil, with the US estimating that it will supply over a quarter of American oil by 2015. It has already sent US military trainers to the region to help local navies to secure shipping.

“Nearby Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Congo Republic are already exporting oil from the Gulf, while Liberia and Sierra Leone remain hopeful of joining the club.”

In March of 2010 95 U.S. Marines led by General Paul Brier, commander of U.S. Marine Forces Africa, deployed to the Bundase Training Camp in the Ghanaian capital of Accra for a three-week exercise with the armed forces of the host country, “part of the Africa Partnership Station,” which also included the participation of the USS Gunston Hall dock landing ship and “embarked international staff” in the Gulf of Guinea.

According to the government of Ghana, “The US and Ghana [are] at the highest level, work together and at the military level inter-operate, train together, share ideas and skills and...it is important for the two countries' militaries to come together so that Ghana can be at par with the US Army.” [2]

Washington's energy strategy in regards to West Africa is a reflection of its international policy of not only gaining access to but control over hydrocarbon supplies and delivery to other nations, in particular to those countries importing the largest amount of oil and natural gas next to the U.S. itself: China, Japan, India, South Korea and the nations of the European Union.

While, for example, Chinese companies are expanding oil exploration in the African nation of Chad and are embarked on a program to build the country's first refinery and a 300-kilometer pipeline, a U.S.-led consortium has been extracting oil in the south of Chad and sending it by pipeline through Cameroon to the Gulf of Guinea, paralleling U.S. strategy in the Caspian Sea Basin vis-a-vis Russia and Iran.

Late last year the Atlantic Council, the preeminent pro-NATO think tank on either side of the Atlantic [3], co-released a report entitled "Advancing U.S., African, and Global Interests: Security and Stability in the West African Maritime Domain." It proceeds from the fact that "The Gulf of Guinea is at the brink of becoming a greater supplier of energy to the United States than the Persian Gulf and is therefore of far higher strategic importance than has historically been the case."

The report recommends enhanced U.S. government concentration on "a vital region to maintaining U.S. energy security, prosperity, and homeland security."

It also calls for a higher level of integration between U.S. and European nations – that is, NATO and European Union member states – in respect to Africa, and promotes the following programmatic goals:

The establishment of "an interagency coordinating body to conduct strategic planning, oversee implementation and track progress in West African maritime security assistance and performance."

Working with local security organizations like the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) and its affiliated African Standby Force brigade on "a comprehensive proof of concept pilot project...to develop the capabilities and conditions necessary for securing the maritime domain as a model for the region."

Setting up a Gulf of Guinea coastal naval operation, "including the sharing of assets, establishment of joint operations centers, and assignment of key functions and centers of excellence."

And to expand and deepen the work of the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission established by the U.S. State Department last April "as a vehicle for security cooperation, including maritime security." [4]

Three months after Secretary of State Hillary Clinton inaugurated a strategic dialogue with Nigeria, she met with Foreign Minister Ansuncao Afonso dos Anjos of Angola (on the southern end of the Gulf of Guinea) in Washington to sign the U.S.-Angola Strategic Partnership Dialogue, "which formalizes increased bilateral partnerships in energy, security, trade and democracy promotion."

On the occasion, Clinton recounted that after her visit to Angola in August of the preceding year "a bilateral group on energy cooperation met in November 2009 to outline shared U.S. and Angolan objectives in developing Angola's oil and gas reserves, promoting greater transparency in its oil sector and developing renewable energy sources." [5]

The security and defense agreements with Nigeria and Angola, and demands by the Atlantic Council and like-minded parties that they be qualitatively and comprehensively expanded to the entire region, are the inevitable culmination of efforts by the Pentagon over the past nine years.

During that period U.S. naval vessels, troops and major military officials have been in Gulf of Guinea littoral states continuously, solidifying relations with Liberia (where the Pentagon has built a military from scratch), Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Angola, and Sao Tome and Principe. [6] All except for Ivory Coast, which is currently in turmoil and facing the prospect of armed intervention by ECOWAS African Standby Force troops and the armed forces of assorted NATO states.

Until AFRICOM achieved full operational capability on October 1, 2008, Africa was assigned to U.S. European Command (EUCOM) except for Egypt, the nations of the Horn of Africa and four Indian Ocean island states that were under Central Command and Pacific Command.

The top commander of EUCOM is jointly NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe. AFRICOM, then, was created as the Pentagon's first post-Cold War foreign military command under the tutelage of Marine General James Jones from 2003 to 2006 and Army General Bantz John Craddock from 2006 to 2009.

AFRICOM and the Africa Partnership Station (APS) have been envisioned since their inception as U.S. military operations that included the involvement of NATO, especially its member states that are the former colonial masters in the Gulf of Guinea area: Britain, France, Portugal and Spain. [7] In 2005 the U.S. submarine tender Emory S. Land led naval exercises in the Gulf of Guinea with naval officers from Benin, Gabon, Ghana, and Sao Tome and Principe along with counterparts from Britain, France, Portugal and Spain.

APS deployments include military officers from other NATO states and the African Standby Force is modeled after the NATO Response Force.

In 2002 U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld demanded the creation of a new NATO rapid reaction force, a 21,000-troop strike group that could "deal swiftly with crises outside its traditional area of operation." [8] He won support for the concept at a meeting of Alliance defense chiefs in September and two months later what became the NATO Response Force was endorsed at the NATO summit in Prague.

At the next summit of the U.S.-controlled military bloc in Istanbul, Turkey in 2004, Rumsfeld stated, "The reality is that NATO is a military alliance that has no real relevance unless it has the ability to fairly rapidly deploy military capabilities." [9]

In 2005 the Washington, D.C.- based Center for Strategic and International Studies' Task Force on Gulf of Guinea Security released a report reiterating and updating U.S. strategy in West Africa which stated that "The Gulf of Guinea is a nexus of vital US foreign policy priorities."

The Task Force consisted of "oil executives, academics, diplomats and retired naval officers under the chairmanship of Nebraska's Senator Chuck Hagel and received briefings from serving US ambassadors, oil companies, the CIA and US military commanders." [10]

In the same year U.S. Naval Forces Europe announced that it had embarked on "a 10-year push to help 10 West African nations either develop or improve maritime security." The nations are Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo, Sao Tome and Principe, and Togo, all on the Gulf of Guinea.

When the above report appeared, in July, U.S. European Command had already “conducted 18 military-to-military exercises in Africa so far in 2005.” [11]

The following month a U.S. Coast Guard cutter visited the waters off petroleum-rich Sao Tome and Principe, travelling “through the seas of West Africa’s Gulf of Guinea, where an oil boom could outpace Persian Gulf exports to America in a decade.” [12]

In 2002 the president of Sao Tome and Principe, Fradique De Menezes, reportedly agreed to host a U.S. naval base, disclosing that “Last week I received a call from the Pentagon to tell me that the issue is being studied.” [13]

In 2006 the Ghanaian press wrote that “Marine General James L. Jones, Head of the US European Command, said the Pentagon was seeking to acquire access to two kinds of bases in Senegal, Ghana, Mali and Kenya and other African countries.” [14]

Later in the year Jones was cited confirming that “Officials at U.S. European Command spend between 65 to 70 percent of their time on African issues...Establishing [a military task force in West Africa] could also send a message to U.S. companies ‘that investing in many parts of Africa is a good idea.’” [15]

In his other capacity, that of top NATO military commander, Jones asserted that “NATO was going to draw up [a] plan for ensuring security of oil and gas industry facilities” [16] and “raised the prospect of NATO taking a role to counter piracy off the coast of the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, especially when it threatens energy supply routes to Western nations.” [17]

Also in 2006, while still Supreme Allied Commander Europe, he announced that “NATO is developing a special plan to safeguard oil and gas fields in the region,” adding that “a training session will be held in the Atlantic oceanic area and the Cabo Verde island in June to outline activities to protect the routes transporting oil to Western Europe” and “the alliance is ready to ensure the security of oil-producing and transporting regions.” [18]

As Jones had alluded to, in June the NATO Response Force (NRF) was first tested in Exercise Steadfast Jaguar war games on and off the coast of the African Atlantic Ocean island of Cape Verde with 7,100 Alliance military personnel, including French and German infantry, American fighter pilots and Spanish sailors, along with warplanes and warships. “The exercise [was] the first to bring together the land, sea and air components of the NRF. Once operational, it will give the Alliance the ability to deploy up to 25,000 troops within five days anywhere in the world.” [19]

A Western news agency at the time described the exercise in these terms: “The land, air and sea exercises were NATO’s first major deployment in Africa and designed to show the former Cold War giant can launch far-flung military operations at short notice.”

It also quoted then-NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer boasting that “You are seeing the new NATO, the one that has the ability to project stability.” [20]

In September of 2007, Captain John Nowell, commodore of the Africa Partnership Station, travelled from Sao Tome and Principe to Ghana “to lay the groundwork for upcoming Africa Partnership Stations with local government and military officials from both countries.” [21]

Late in the following month the U.S. activated the Africa Partnership Station by deploying

the USS Fort McHenry amphibious dock landing ship and the embarked Commander Task Group 60.4 (later joined by High Speed Vessel Swift) to the Gulf of Guinea. The APS deployment included stops in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal and Togo. USS Fort McHenry had staff from other NATO nations on board.

In November of 2007 Associated Press reported that with ships assigned to the U.S. Sixth Fleet patrolling the Gulf of Guinea, "U.S. naval presence rose from just a handful of days in 2004 to daily beginning this year." [22]

On October 1 U.S. Africa Command was launched as (in Pentagon lingo) a temporary sub-unified command under U.S. European Command.

Voices of concern were raised throughout Africa, typified by these excerpts from commentaries in the Nigerian press:

"The issue of Africa Command is...because of the oil interest on the Gulf of Guinea, going out to the coast of Liberia and so on. Americans are finding an easy place where they can extract oil, and you know is a much shorter route than going around from the Middle East." [23]

"From the current data on production capacities and proven oil reserves, only two regions appear to exist where, in addition to the Middle East, oil production will grow and where a strategy of diversification may easily work: The Caspian Sea and the Gulf of Guinea.

"Some of the problems linked to Caspian oil give the Gulf of Guinea a competitive edge. Much of its oil is conveniently located off shore.

"[T]he region enjoys several advantages, including its strategic location just opposite the refineries of the US East Coast. It is ahead of all other regions in proven deep water oil reserves, which will lead to significant savings in security provisions. And it requires a drilling technology easily available from the Gulf of Mexico.

"Curiously, the newly formed NRF [NATO Response Force] carried out its first exercise code named STEADFAST JAGUAR in Cape Verde, here in West Africa, from 14-28 June 2006." [24]

"I am normally a fan of the United States of America....But over this matter of plans by the United States to establish what it calls the Africa Command or Africom in the Gulf of Guinea, it is time to call for deep caution and to agree with Nigerian officials that we should take the American initiative with a pinch of salt.

"The Gulf of Guinea has emerged as the second largest pool of commercial petroleum resources in the world, next only to the Persian Gulf and its territorial environs.

"In fact, it has recently surpassed the Persian Gulf as America's highest supplier of crude oil.

"Not satisfied with only a small piece of the new oil destination of the world, America stepped up its formation of Africom, making open moves to extend the kind of cohabitation it enjoys with Sao Tome and Principe to Nigeria." [25]

"The whole thing about this Africa Command by the US is all borne out of their interests in the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea, which they have...been angling to take over. The Nigerian

government should not fold its arms to allow the US government re-colonise it.

“[T]he US had concluded plans to establish a military base in Africa with the intent of protecting the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea and also to forestall the economic incursion of China into Africa, especially Nigeria.

“The US has completed all the groundwork and has moved into the offshore of Sao Tome and Principe, Angola and Guinea to secure positions for their submarines and other security facilities.” [26]

“The gulf’s oil and gas deposits are put in the region of 10 billion barrels. Statistics show that as of 2004 Africa as a whole produced nearly 9 million barrels of oil a day, with approximately 4.7 million barrels a day coming from West Africa.

“Also, African oil production accounted for approximately 11 percent of the world’s oil supply, while the continent supplied approximately 18 percent of US net oil imports. Both Nigeria and Angola were among the top 10 suppliers of oil to the US.” [27]

The apprehensions were not without foundation. On October 3 U.S. ambassador-designate to Gabon and to Sao Tome and Principe, Eunice Reddick, issued the following statements:

“Mismanaged, an oil boom could threaten Sao Tome and Principe’s young democracy, security and stability.”

“The United States has trained Gabonese forces under the African Contingency Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA) program....To promote the security of the strategic Gulf of Guinea region, origin of a growing share of U.S. oil imports, U.S. military engagement with Gabon has developed in several areas....If confirmed, I will work closely with the Gabonese civilian and military leadership, our European Command and the new Africa Command....” [28]

As noted above, the month after AFRICOM’s preliminary activation the U.S. Navy dispatched its first Africa Partnership Station mission to the Gulf of Guinea, described by the Pentagon as a multinational maritime security initiative.

The guided missile destroyer USS Forrest Sherman visited Cape Verde for three days in early November “to consolidate a growing sense of partnership between the U.S. Navy and the Caboverdian armed forces” [29] at the same time USS Fort McHenry began the Africa Partnership Station’s maiden mission with a visit to Senegal en route to the Gulf of Guinea.

In 2008 the NATO secretary general at the time, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, visited Ghana, meeting with the country’s president and defense minister “on deepening the cooperation between NATO and Africa,” and delivered a speech on the topic at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center in Accra. [30]

In July of that year U.S. European Command conducted the Operation Africa Endeavor 2008 multinational interoperability and information exchange exercise in Nigeria with the participation of the armed forces of Nigeria, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda. General William Ward, commander of AFRICOM, attended the closing ceremonies at Nigerian Air Force Base, Abuja.

The following year's Africa Endeavor exercises were held in Gabon, with "more than 25 nations participating...the second largest communications exercise in the world." For the first time run under the command of AFRICOM, it focused on "interoperability and information sharing among African nations via communication networks and collaborative communications links with the United States, NATO and other nations with common stability, security and sustainment goals/objectives for the African continent." [31] Participants included the Economic Community of West African States and Gulf of Guinea nations Benin, Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sao Tome and Principe.

At the time Associated Press reported:

"Just a few years ago, the U.S. military was all but absent from the oil-rich waters of West Africa's Gulf of Guinea.

"This year, it plans to be there every day.

"Africa — including Algeria and Libya in the north — supplies the U.S. with more than 24 percent of its oil, surpassing the Persian Gulf at 20 percent, according to statistics from the U.S. government's Energy Information Administration. Of that amount, 17 percent comes from the Gulf of Guinea and Chad, which runs a pipeline to the Atlantic Ocean through Cameroon." [32]

A spokesman for the U.S. Sixth Fleet said that in terms of "ship days" in the Gulf of Guinea, U.S. naval presence had increased 50 percent from 2006 to 2007 and the U.S. Navy was expected to have a daily presence in 2008.

The Pentagon and its NATO allies are firmly ensconced in the Gulf of Guinea, in part to realize one of the decisions agreed upon at last November's NATO summit in Portugal: To "develop the capacity to contribute to energy security," as the summit declaration stated.

The Pentagon has forged both bilateral and regional military partnerships with every African nation except for Eritrea, Ivory Coast, Libya, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

What began in the Gulf of Guinea has now absorbed an entire continent.

Notes

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- 2) Ghana Government, March 18, 2010
- 3) Atlantic Council: Securing The 21st Century For NATO
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- 4) Advancing U.S., African, and Global Interests: Security and Stability
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- 5) U.S. Africa Command, July 12, 2010
6) AFRICOM Year Two: Seizing The Helm Of The Entire World
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- 7) NATO: AFRICOM's Partner In Military Penetration Of Africa
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- 8) Agence France-Presse, September 24, 2002
9) U.S. Department of Defense, June 27, 2004
10) Agence France-Presse, July 22, 2005
11) Stars And Stripes, July 31, 2005
12) Associated Press, August 7, 2005
13) BBC News, August 22, 2002
14) Ghana Web, February 23, 2006
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18) Associated Press, May 2, 2006
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22) Associated Press, November 6, 2007
23) Malu Suleiman Mohammed and Olumide Bajulaye
Why US Wants to Establish Military Base in the Country
Daily Trust, November 24, 2007

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200711240118.html>

- 24) Abba Mahmood, Country, Gulf of Guinea And Africom
Leadership, November 22, 2007

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27) Horatius Eguu, Nigeria too late to stop US military on base in Africa
Business Day, September 27, 2007

<http://businessdayonline.com/National/208.html>

- 28) United States Department of State, October 3, 2007
- 29) United States European Command, November 13, 2007
- 30) North Atlantic treaty Organization, November 25, 2008
- 31) U.S. Africa Command, January 14, 2009
- 32) Associated Press, November 5, 2007

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