

Africa Fears AFRICOM Will Create Conflicts

by Douglas DeGroot

South African Defence Minister Mosiuoa Lekota said in a press conference on Aug. 29, that more U.S. soldiers are not welcome in Africa. According to the South African daily *Business Day* Aug. 30, Lekota said the 14-nation Southern African Development Community (SADC) defense ministers had, at the 27th SADC summit in Lusaka in August, decided that no SADC member-states would host the new regional unified combatant command headquarters of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) for Africa (AFRICOM), or more U.S. soldiers. He also called on African governments outside the SADC, not to provide a base in Africa for AFRICOM.

Lekota implicitly understands that, despite what is being said publicly about the reason for the establishment of AFRICOM, the true purpose is to embroil Africa in never-ending conflicts. This is especially clear after having heard the announced intentions about the Iraq military action, made by the same clique now attempting to push AFRICOM down Africa's throat, and watching how the Iraq fiasco has played out.

As of 2001, there were no U.S. troops stationed in Africa. The United States began stationing troops in Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa, in April 2002, as part of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), and there are now about 1,800 U.S. troops there. U.S. troops from Djibouti have set up training facilities in Ethiopia, and U.S. participation with the Ethiopian military intervention into Somalia, which began in late December 2006, was conducted from Djibouti. There are also several thousand French troops there.

By 2003, the Heritage Foundation, the right-wing institution that funneled policy into the Cheney-Bush Administration, was recommending the establishment of an Africa Command. The much-anticipated public announcement of the creation of AFRICOM, to replace the previous DoD arrangement of splitting Africa among three different regional commands, was made by George W. Bush on Feb. 6, 2007, in the aftermath of the Ethiopian-U.S. invasion into Somalia.

The Bush-Cheney Administration has drastically changed how the United States views the strategic significance of Africa. Instead of the United States having no compelling interests in Africa, as had been the case before, the 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy stated that "Africa holds growing geostrategic importance and is a high priority of this Administration." That year, the decision was

made to create AFRICOM. A DoD press release reported that AFRICOM is being created because of "the increasing importance of Africa strategically, diplomatically, and economically," due to "the increasing importance of the continent to the U.S...."

A Foot in the Door

Despite the fact that AFRICOM's second in command will be from the State Department, and that it will have diplomatic, developmental, and economic personnel on its staff, the decision to create AFRICOM has justifiably worried Africans, who fear that the humanitarian goals are just a foot in the door for militarization of U.S. policy in Africa, which could easily inflame a string of regional conflicts on the continent, and lead to multiple versions of a chaotic replay of what happened in Iraq. The ongoing crisis in the Horn of Africa is an indication of how events can quickly move in this direction. U.S. counterterrorism initiatives in the Sahel could ultimately have the same consequences in North and West Africa.

African and other opponents of the policy shift, however, mistakenly view the Administration decision to shift U.S. policy in Africa to military interventionism, as being motivated by the Administration's desire to secure access to oil from Africa, to combat terrorism, and to counter China's growing influence in the continent.

The real reason is strategic: The British and allied financier oligarchical interests know that the now-collapsing monetary system cannot be saved, and they have turned once again to the Cheney apparatus which runs the Administration, to provide U.S. muscle to build a militarized, global empire, which will ensure the elimination of sovereign nation-states. The global spread of long-term and perpetual warfare has been commensurate with increasing bankruptcy of the financial system. Carrying out this militarization and warfare policy is intended to, and will destroy the United States as a sovereign nation as well, along with all the other nations that will be victimized by this British-designed policy that the United States is adopting.

A U.S. military intervention turns those working with the United States, or its proxies, into targets for the manipulated stable of radicals, with the result being irresolvable conflict and perpetual war—precisely as has happened in Iraq. The fact that the Cheney-Bush Administration is trying to repeat the same process, this time in Africa, shows that the chaos and conflict that result are actually what is desired.

Horn of Africa Crisis

The crisis in the Horn of Africa that has developed since the U.S.-assisted Ethiopian invasion, at the end of the last December, has led to the kind of crisis in Somalia, and spreading elsewhere in the Horn of Africa, that Lekota didn't want to see replicated elsewhere in Africa. The Cheney-organized military intervention to save an isolated group of warlords who

had been delegated, by neighboring countries, with the responsibility of organizing a transition—hence their name, Transitional Federal Government (TFG)—from chaos to national government, has only led to the “Iraqification” of Somalia. Earlier clandestine aid to TFG-connected warlords from the Cheney corral had also failed. The TFG did not allow anyone who opposed them to attend a recent reconciliation conference, and chaos is on the rise in Somalia, now worse than ever. Ethiopian troops and opposition forces are fighting, claiming many civilian victims, and suicide bombings have increased.

The U.S. Administration could have supported an African Union peacekeeping force instead, but resolution of the long-standing conflict was not on its agenda, which is what Lekota and others in Africa understand. Thus, in Somalia, Cheney and his neo-con acolytes have done a good job of extending the British-designed geostrategic Arc of Crisis from the Middle East into the Horn of Africa. According to Somalia expert Ken Menkhaus, chaos and fighting are on the rise, and people in the region are blaming the United States for the worsening conditions.

Speaking at a U.S. policy forum in Washington, D.C. sponsored by the congressionally funded United States Institute for Peace (USIP)—which sponsored the Iraq Study Group—and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, on Sept. 5, Menkhaus said he saw no improvement, in the short term, in Somalia, as long as the present policies are maintained. He compared the situation to the chaotic period after the UN force was driven out of Somalia in the early 1990s. Since an April offensive against opponents of the TFG in Somalia by the Ethiopian military, 300,000 out of a population of 1.3 million have been driven out of Mogadishu. He noted that the TFG would collapse immediately if Ethiopian troops pulled out, and that fiefdoms and warlordism, some of it protected by Ethiopia, is on the rise. Meant to be a transitional government, the TFG grouping just wants to hold on to power for themselves.

Menkhaus pointed out, and other experts confirm, that if the United States were to declare Eritrea to be a state sponsor of terror, the situation would worsen dramatically. The fall-back position for the Administration, is to let Somalia be ruled by militias and warlords. The solution advanced by Menkhaus, is to send in a large AU peacekeeping force, so that the Ethiopian troops can be gotten out. But, as another panelist noted, the Darfur initiative by the AU, is absorbing such a large number of troops—his phrase was, “Darfur is sucking the air out of everything”—that no other peacekeeping operations can be undertaken in the region.

Counterterrorism in the Sahara

The GWOT crowd has also been focussing its attention on North and West Africa, where the biggest population concentration in Africa is. These two regions also have the largest Islamic populations, and thus are being targeted first.

On the Saharan front, the United States launched the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) in 2002 to train at least one rapid-reaction company of 150 soldiers, in each of the Sahel states, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad. In 2005, the PSI was upgraded and expanded to become the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI), a program led by the U.S. State Department to make the area inhospitable to terrorist groups, such as the Algerian al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which was previously known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat. When TSCTI was set up, critics pointed out that this was not a terrorist zone, and that a campaign to defend existing regimes in the area could fuel radicalism where it had not existed before. The expansion added Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria.

Since then, there have been several bombings in Morocco and Algeria, including two suicide bombings in Algeria the first week in September. The British have had extensive experience creating the type of radical forces which are now called terrorists. The British and Americans worked closely with such forces (when they were called “freedom fighters”) during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The Western managers of these forces, which they would have people believe are indigenous radicals that have spontaneously sprung up, find suicide bombers the ideal capability: After the event, there is no one for law enforcement to interrogate, so the support network won’t be compromised.

Young people faced with high unemployment and no future, are more open to recruitment. They are sent to the ideal center for training and indoctrination: Iraq. This has been the case for many AQIM members.

AFRICOM Leader Named

The appointment of a distinguished leader for AFRICOM did not placate those who had seen through Cheney’s willingness to extend the Arc of Crisis into Africa. On July 10, George W. Bush nominated Army Gen. William E. Ward, the deputy commander of the U.S. European Command, to be the first commander of AFRICOM. Ward, an African American, has had a distinguished career, with 36 years of military experience.

Thus, when Ward was in South Africa in July, and Lekota did not answer requests from the U.S. Embassy for Lekota to meet with Ward, the South African Defence Minister was signalling his dislike for the chaos and conflict that would result from the U.S. militarization policy. Lekota was reacting to the policy, not to the man.

When the *Sunday Independent* in South Africa reported on July 15, the complaints of the U.S. ambassador to Johannesburg about Lekota’s refusal to meet Ward, the same article reported that, “Some analysts believe that South Africa is leading moves to prevent an AFRICOM presence in Southern Africa and others believe wider moves are afoot to keep it out of the whole continent.”