

US Military Training of African Forces: A Source of Influence or a National Security Risk?

Jok Madut Jok

Department of Anthropology

Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Policy

Syracuse University

jjok01@syr.edu

January 24, 2022



US Military Footprints in Africa

- The U.S. has military presence in virtually every African nation, even if it's small.
 - Most African nations have at least a handful of active-duty personnel temporarily deployed there.
 - U.S. troops have been in Djibouti for years. Camp Lemonnier is the only permanent U.S. base in Africa, serving as a key outpost for surveillance and combat operations against al Qaeda and other extremist groups in the region, Al-Shabab for instance
 - The country with the second most U.S. military personnel deployed there is Niger, with roughly 800, according to US Africa Command (AFRICOM). Next comes Somalia, Djibouti's neighbor, with roughly 400 U.S. military personnel, mainly to buffer against al-Shabab. The fourth nation in terms of U.S. military personnel is Cameroon, with more than 100, at times to confront Boko Haram.
-

US Military Footprints in Africa

A handful of African nations host the bulk of U.S. military personnel, who are generally deployed on rotations for a few months at a time. Djibouti, situated across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen, is one of the world's smallest countries but currently hosts more U.S. military personnel than any other African nation. Roughly 4,000 U.S. military personnel on the continent -- are temporarily deployed to Djibouti.





A US Serviceman loads ammunition cans for a .50 caliber machine gun mounted on the back of a Marine CH53 at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti.



Botswana Defense Force Commandos remove hostages and hijackers from an airplane during a training exercise at Thebephatshwa Air Base in Botswana on July 17, 2019.

U.S. Army
Sergeant Kevin
Fischer, Sight
Security Team 1st
Battalion 161st
Field Artillery,
signals his security
team to fill in the
security perimeter,
August 22, in the
deserts of Djibouti.
Image courtesy of
the U.S. military's
press photos.
Djibouti, 2011.



The US Military Presence in Africa has raised Numerous Questions for Africans and Others

- Why is there so much US military intervention in Africa?
- Given the situations of civil wars in Africa, do Americans feel responsible for the lives of Africans
- To what extent do Americans really care about the security of the countries that are undergoing conflicts
- Is there a link between American self-interest in Africa and their military presence in Africa?

The U.S. strategy in Africa

It mainly aims to equip African forces and help allies like France to build the security capacities and stabilize the region.

It's called foreign internal defense training, missions by, with and through US allies.

Violent extremist groups based in northern Mali and across the Sahel region in Africa, have proven to be resilient, flexible and capable of carrying out attacks across the border, according to AFRICOM. The groups there have relative freedom to move around, making attacks easier and posing a threat to Niger, other African countries and U.S. military personnel.

Enabling Africa
to solve its own
security
challenges.
AFRICOM
states

Africa is an enduring interest for the United States.

A small, but wise investments in the capability, legitimacy, and accountability of African defense institutions offer disproportionate benefits to Africa.

A United States of this kind enables African solutions to African problems.

U.S. Military in Africa: A Diplomatic Tool?

The public mostly hear about the U.S. military in Africa when drones hit terrorists in Somalia, hunt down militant fighters in the Sahel.

One view: the overwhelming focus on terrorist threats oversells the military's role undermines Washington's diplomatic agenda

Another View: The U.S. military should forge closer ties with African governments, promote U.S. values and interests, and responds to humanitarian and health crises.

Third view: Instead, as things stand, the military operations do not gain the US a positive image with the ordinary people

US Military in Africa: A View from Below

- US Marines in the hunt for the Lords Resistance Army in Central Africa – What is wrong here?
- US-French engagements in the Sahel – More local resistance
- Beyond Terrorism
- US-Africa military cooperation – vouching for autocracy and corruption
- Boots on the ground in Africa spells memories of European imperialism – local anger at US presence means anti-US sentiments growing





On patrol in DRC, South Sudan and Central African Republic with the Ugandan Army, hunting for LRA rebels and their leader, Joseph Kony



A Mission to Capture or Kill Joseph Kony Ends, Without Capturing or Killing



Time to Evaluate U.S. Military Role Beyond Counterterrorism?

- New networks of alliances and partners are needed in Africa.
 - Consider countering China and Russia in Africa and shaping decisions at international forums, including the U.N. Security Council.
 - U.S. presidents should visit more countries in Africa, interact with AFRICOM's senior leaders.
 - Interactions with U.S. military officials are the key diplomatic relationships in Africa outside of the embassy. Need to be used more effectively than is the case today.
 - It is through the U.S. military that the U.S. government promotes values such as civilian oversight of the military and rule of law.
-

Military Cooperation Can be Diplomatic

- AFRICOM should interact more with regional military and defense officials on military justice and prevention of violence and abuse
- When natural disasters strike and viruses spread, the U.S. military's presence in several African nations can provide a decisive support.
- The capabilities and partnerships created through U.S. military engagement contain future crises, emergencies etc.
- More on-counterterrorism missions are not just charity. It is important to build partnerships, promoting U.S. values, interests and leadership.