What is Washington Up to in Africa?

Africa remains the fastest growing continent on the planet, with its high birth rates, booming economies and an abundance of natural resources. With some 1.2 billion living all across Africa it’s predicted that this number will double in just two decades. Moreover, with a number of other regions of the world depleting their natural resources, Africa will become a pivotal exporter for them. That’s where the significance of this continent lies on top of the fact that its sheer vastness allows local players to control most trade routes, neighboring countries and entire regions of the world. Of course, it goes without saying that most of those are in no position to control anything, as they lie in ruins, completely devastated by the so-called superpowers. For centuries, colonial powers have waged wars both for these territories and against their indigenous population. And this struggle continues to this day.

For instance, Washington has recently learned the hard way there’s no easy way to plunder strong countries, as their population seem to be reluctant to live in misery and poverty for the sake of Western special interests enjoying super-profits, that’s why it prefers to plunge nations less capable of defending themselves into a state of perpetual chaos and bloodshed, as it remains a highly profitable venture.

According to data revealed by VICE News, there’s well over a hundred military operations being conducted by the Pentagon across Africa, with some of those being conducted in such regions that Washington itself refuses to recognize as war zones. According to retired US Army General Donald C. Bolduc, who served for a period of four years from 2013 to 2017 at AFRICOM, he witnessed US troops being deployed in a total of 13 African nations, namely Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mauritius, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, and Tunisia. He also noted in one of his statements that in at least six of these states he witnessed US servicemen being wounded or killed.

In fact, we’re witnessing an unprecedented increase in America’s military presence on the continent, with the number of US servicemen deployed across Africa surpassed only by the number of soldiers the Pentagon has stationed across the Middle East. However, the general public knows very little about this build up, as the MSM prefers to keep quiet about such things.

For instance, no more than 1% of all US special forces units stationed abroad were deployed to Africa back in 2006. By 2010, this number increased to 3%, and by 2016 it reached 17%, nearing the ratio of one in five units. As it’s been revealed by the Intercept:

Documents obtained from AFRICOM by The Intercept, via the Freedom of Information Act, however, offer a unique window onto the sprawling network of U.S. military outposts in Africa, including previously undisclosed or unconfirmed sites in hotspots like Libya, Niger, and Somalia.

According to a 2018 briefing by AFRICOM science adviser Peter E. Teil, the military’s constellation of bases includes 34 sites scattered across the continent, with high concentrations in the north and west as well as the Horn of Africa.

It’s clear that with US President Donald Trump taking office, a number of restrictions previously imposed on the US military by the Obama administration in Africa were lifted, like the number of allowed air strikes conducted by the US Air Force or the scale of military operations they are allowed to conduct.
Even though Washington tries to excuse itself by citing terrorist activities across Africa as a pretext for its massive military presence, arguing that such activities are “among the deadliest on the planet”, it’s quite possible that it wants to re-colonize Africa while it still has a chance to do so.

At the same time, the US would try to argue that it’s China and Russia who are expanding their influence across Africa, saying that Russia is exerting influence in as many as 10 different African nations and China likely to open more bases across the continent. According to the Intercept, the new AFRICOM commander, Stephen J. Townsend:

*Badmouthed China’s efforts on multiple fronts, including arms sales, and explained that the U.S. needed to emphasize the shoddy nature of Chinese military technology to African countries.*

Not a day goes by without the United States National Security Advisor John Bolton bashing Russia and China for their attempts to increase their influence in Africa. During an address he made last year at the Heritage Foundation, Bolton stressed the fact that China and Russia would try to increase the scale of their financial and political influence in Africa, trying with their aggressive investments in the region to get a competitive advantage over the US. According to this senior US official, combating Russia and China in Africa is the new geopolitical focus of Washington.

However, Bolton had to recognize that back in 2016-2017 Washington provided some 17 billion dollars in assistance to African countries, while Beijing only committed just one third of this sum in direct investments over the same period of time. American companies invested some 50 billion dollars in various joint projects in Africa over the course of 2017. This and the sheer scale of the US military presence there tells us the tale of who is engaged in “aggressive expansion” in Africa these days.

Some two decades ago there was virtually no state that could challenge the influence that the US, UK and France enjoyed across Africa. However, in recent years both China and Russia have managed to renew the traditional ties they used to enjoy with a number of African countries in the past, while taking the initiative by working with individual African states directly. The foundation of China’s influence in Africa is the direct investments Beijing makes into massive infrastructure projects, including those that are going to become a part of its global One Belt - One Road initiative, while Russia improves its relations with local players by directly assisting them in addressing the most pressing challenges they face.

As for the US, it’s clear that it is far more interested in the natural resources that Africa has than in building ties with local players, as the trade war with China that Trump started has put the US in a situation where it may face an acute shortage of rare-earth metals. The US economy needs them badly, but in a situation where China produces more than 90% of the world’s supply of rare earth materials, Washington has found itself in a difficult situation. But then Africa, on top of its vast oil and gas deposits has an abundance of rare-earth metal deposits. For instance, South Africa alone ranks six in the list of discovered rare earth deposits.

However, Russia and China are not alone in approaching African players, as India too tries to establish good ties with certain African states. There are also such states like Japan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey and Israel who are trying to replace the traditional influence that the former colonial masters of Africa, namely France and the UK used to enjoy.

All this is the direct consequence of the waning economic power of the United States, as Washington is reluctant to let go of the concept that it is at the center of the world economy and is bound to dominate the world one way or another. That is why it’s trying to present the growing economic potential of Russia, China and a number of other states as a threat to individual countries in different regions of the world, including those in Africa.

However, US analysts are fully aware of the fact that there’s no way for Washington to prevent the deepening ties between Moscow, Beijing and a growing number of African states, just as they are unable to stop India and Brazil, as all four states participate in one third of all the deals taking place on the continent, and that’s just the beginning.

*Jean Périer is an independent researcher and analyst and a renowned expert on the Near and Middle East, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook.”*