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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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13.06.2022

## *The rise of NATO in Africa*

The evidence of this hypocrisy serves as a warning to the benevolent language used by the West when it comes to NATO's expansion in Africa.



Anxiety about the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) towards the Russian border is one of the causes of war in Ukraine. However, this is not the first or only attempt at [expansion](#) by NATO, an organization created in 1949 by the United States to project its military and political power over Europe. In 2001, NATO carried out an "out of area" military operation in Afghanistan, which lasted 20 years, and in 2011 – at France's [request](#) – [it bombed](#) Libya and overthrew its government. NATO's military operations in Afghanistan and Libya were the prelude to [discussions](#) on a "global NATO," a project to use nato's military alliance beyond the obligations of its own charter, from the South China Sea to the Caribbean Sea.

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# SARKOZY CIBLE KADHAFI



NATO's war in Libya was its first major military operation in Africa, but not the first European military footprint on the continent. After centuries of European colonial wars in Africa, following World War II, new states emerged to assert their sovereignty. Many of these states – from Ghana to Tanzania – refused to allow European military forces to re-enter the continent, so these powers had to resort to [assassinations](#) and [military coups](#) to anoint pro-Western governments in the region. This allowed the creation of Western military bases in Africa and gave freedom to Western companies to exploit the continent's natural resources.

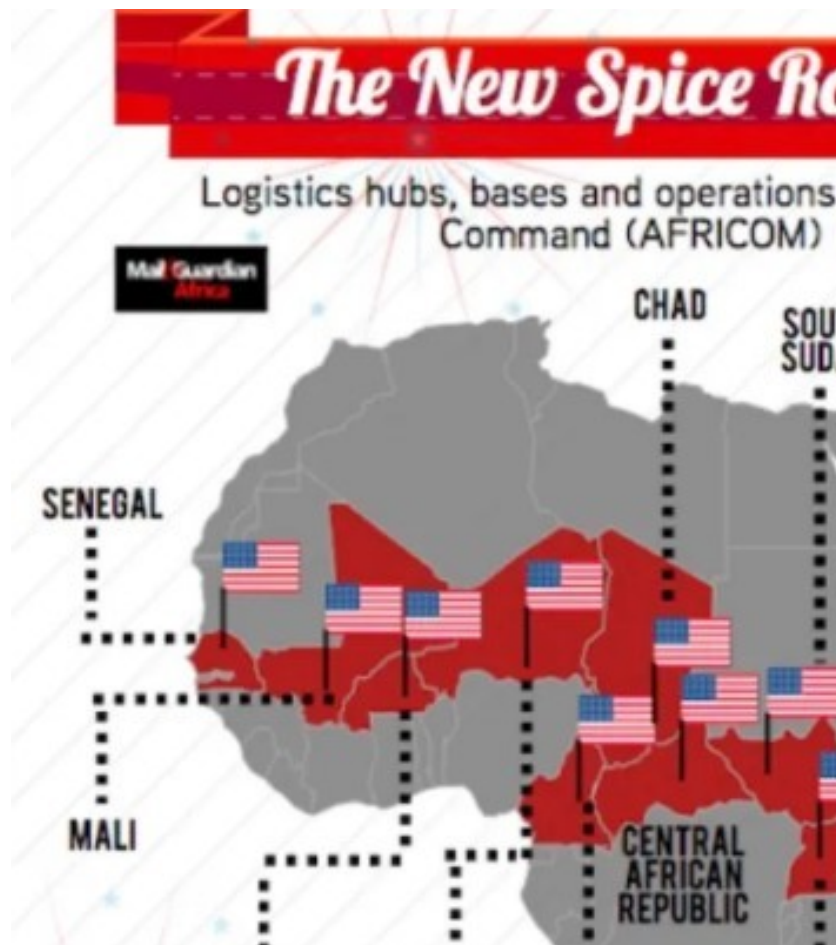


French soldiers of the 126th Infantry Regiment and Malian soldiers in Operation Barkhane, 17 March 2016. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The first NATO operations remained on the borders of Africa, with the Mediterranean Sea being the main front line. NATO created the [Allied Forces of Southern Europe](#) (AFSOUTH) in Naples in 1951, and then the [Allied Forces of the Mediterranean](#) (AFMED) in Malta in 1952. Western governments created these military formations to garrison the Mediterranean Sea against the Soviet navy and to create platforms from which to intervene militarily on the African continent. After the 1967 Six-Day War, NATO's Defense Planning Committee (dissolved in 2010) created the [Mediterranean Naval Reserve Force](#) (NOCFORMED) to pressure pro-Soviet states (such as Egypt) and to defend the North African monarchies (NATO could not prevent the anti-imperialist coup of 1969, that he overthrew the monarchy in Libya and brought Colonel Muammar Gaddafi to power; whose government [expelled](#) U.S. military bases from the country shortly thereafter.)

Talks at NATO headquarters about "out of area" operations came with increasing frequency after NATO joined the U.S. war in Afghanistan. A senior NATO official told me, in 2003, that the United States had "developed an appetite for using NATO" in its attempt to project its power against potential adversaries. Two years later, in 2005, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, NATO began [to cooperate](#) closely with the African Union (AU). The AU, which was formed in 2002 and was the "[successor](#)" to the Organization of African Unity, struggled to build an independent security structure. The lack of a sustainable military force caused the AU to often turn to the West for help, and to ask NATO for logistical and air [support](#) for its peacekeeping mission in Sudan.

Together with NATO, the United States operated its military capability through the U.S. European Command (EUCOM), which [oversaw](#), from 1952 to 2007, the country's operations in Africa. Subsequently, General James Jones, head of EUCOM from 2003 to 2006, [created](#), in 2008, the United States Command in Africa (AFRICOM), whose [headquarters were](#) in Stuttgart (Germany), because none of the 54 African nations was willing to give it a home. NATO began operating on the African continent through AFRICOM.



### *Libya and the NATO framework for Africa*

NATO's war against Libya changed the way African countries and the West interacted. The African Union was wary of Western military intervention in the region. On 10 March 2011, the AU Peace and Security Council established the [High-Level Ad Hoc Committee](#) on Libya. Among the members of this committee were the then president of the AU, Dr. Jean Ping, and the heads of state of five African nations (former President of Mauritania Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, President of the Republic of Congo Denis Sassou Nguesso, former President of Mali Amadou Toumani Touré, former President of

South Africa Jacob Zuma and President of Uganda Yoweri Museveni), who were to fly to Tripoli (Libya) shortly after the creation of the committee and negotiate between the two sides of the civil war. However, the United Nations Security Council [prevented](#) this mission from entering the country.

In June 2011, at a meeting between the High-Level *Ad Hoc* Committee on Libya and the United Nations, the then Permanent Representative of Uganda to the UN, Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda, [said](#): "It is unwise for certain actors to become intoxicated with technological superiority and begin to think that they alone can alter the course of human history, towards freedom for all humanity. Certainly, no constellation of states should think that it can recreate hegemony over Africa." But this is precisely what NATO states began to imagine.



Behind the scenes, it was clear that the formation of the G5 Sahel was encouraged by the French government, and that, despite all the talks on trade, the group's real focus was going to be security.

The chaos in Libya set in motion a series of catastrophic [conflicts](#) in Mali, southern Algeria and parts of Niger. The French military intervention in Mali in 2013 was followed by the [creation](#) of the G5 Sahel, a political platform of the five Sahel states (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) and a military alliance between them. In May 2014, NATO [opened](#) a liaison office at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa. In September of that same year, during the NATO Wales Summit, the alliance's partners took into account the problems of the Sahel, which were included in the [alliance's Preparedness Action Plan](#), which became "[the] engine of NATO's military adaptation to the changing and evolving

security environment". In December 2014, NATO foreign ministers reviewed the implementation of the plan and [focused on](#) the "threats emanating from our southern neighbourhood, the Middle East and North Africa" and established a framework to address the threats and challenges facing the south, according to a [report](#) by former President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Michael R. Turner. Two years later, at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO leaders decided to increase their cooperation with the African Union. "[[Satisfied](#) with] the strong military commitment of the allies in the Sahel-Sahara region." To deepen this [commitment](#), NATO created an African Standby Force and began the process of training officers in African military forces.

Meanwhile, the recent decision to [expel](#) the French military stems from a growing sensitivity on the continent, which runs counter to Western military aggression. No wonder then that many of the largest African countries refused to follow Washington's stance on the Ukraine war, with half of the countries [abstaining](#) or voting against the UN resolution to condemn Russia (this includes countries such as Algeria, South Africa, Angola and Ethiopia). It is telling that South African President Cyril Ramaphosa [said](#) that his country "is committed to the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms not only of our own people, but of the peoples of Palestine, Western Sahara, Afghanistan, Syria and all of Africa and the world."



Human rights organizations denounce the conditions of apartheid in Israel (Photo: Ingmar Zahorsky)

The ignominy of the Western (and NATO)'s maneuvers, including [arms deals](#) with Morocco to hand over Western Sahara to the kingdom and diplomatic support for Israel

as [apartheid](#) against the Palestinians continues, stand in stark contrast to the West's outrage at the events taking place in Ukraine. The evidence of this hypocrisy serves as a warning to the benevolent language used by the West when it comes to NATO's expansion in Africa.



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*Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)*

*Source: [Globetrotter / Alternate Course](#) June 12, 2022*

**La Pluma. Net 12.06.2022**