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U.S. expands secret wars in Africa

By Justin Yun

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Increased interventions on the continent threatens democracy and public accountability.
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The secret expansion of U.S. military bases and special operations in Africa has initiated a new and lightweight style of warfare and welcomes the next phase of American military imperialism. Unlike the highly publicized U.S. military “pivot to Asia,” the proliferation of drones, special ops, mercenary spies, classified bases, proxy fighters and cyber warfare constitute what the journalist Nick Turse calls a “new light-footprint Obama doctrine” that “seems to be making war an ever more attractive and seemingly easy option.”

a new style of fighting

On any day, elite U.S. forces conduct covert missions in an estimated 70 to 90 countries. According to Turse, special forces have been sent to an unprecedented 147 countries — 75 percent of the world’s nations last year alone. This is a 145 percent increase from the rate of operations conducted under the Bush administration.

Wars conventionally fought by large infantry forces and full-scale invasions of foreign countries have made way for a new style of fighting — one that has become increasingly dependent on special forces, drones and private defense contractors. Because of the confidential nature of special ops, the Pentagon can essentially keep foreign military involvement secret from the American public. The U.S. has always had troops in Africa since the Cold War but the rate of its expansion dangerously indicates a lack of public accountability.

a naive claim

The shadow wars in Africa are now fought by members of the U.S. Special Operations Command and JSOC — a clandestine organization that carries out kill/capture missions. JSOC has been called “an almost industrial-scale counterterrorism killing machine” by counterinsurgency advisor John Nagl and many have described it as the president’s “private assassination squad.” The group reports directly to the White House. It is the military’s secret military.

The notion the U.S. would someday pull its troops out of the Middle East is a rather naive claim considering the fact we have nothing short of a permanent war economy. From main operating bases that house thousands of soldiers to single airstrips used by the C.I.A. to taxi their blacked-out turboprops, the U.S. continues to maintain over 800 to 1,000 bases around the world — making us the most expansive military empire in history. Nobody really knows the exact figure — not even the military experts. The late scholar Chalmers Johnson wrote in his book, “The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic” on how the Pentagon and an uncontrollable military-industrial complex have turned the U.S. into “a new kind of military empire — a consumerist Sparta.” Chalmers declares, “Another crucial characteristic that distinguished the American empire from empires of the past is that bases are not needed to fight wars but are instead pure manifestations of militarism and imperialism.”

global instability

Military expansion does not make us safe since it cultivates global instability. The uncontrollable growth into Africa has resulted in the funding and training of proxy armies with atrocious human-rights records and has attracted mercenaries such as Erik Prince — founder of the infamous Blackwater private army hired by the D.O.D to provide security to high-level diplomats during the Iraq war.

With military presence in 53 of 54 of Africa's nations, the American empire has emerged to pick up where the former European colonial powers have left off.