



# AFRICOM 101: The United States-Led Neocolonial Project Across Africa

**10 MINUTE READ**

## Key Terms

Fearmongering- Intentionally invoking fear or paranoia in the public and/or a specific demographic of people to advance a goal or interest. Fearmongering is typically carried out through mass media or political figures.

Imperialism- The strategic and targeted practice of dominating a group of people and/or land through violent occupation and resource extraction. Imperialists force economic, political, and cultural control usually through the violent loss of life. (Ex: Britain, France, Spain, etc. are the OG imperialists. The United States has emerged as an imperialist force over the last 300 years.)

Militarism- The belief that military values and the threat of war should shape all sectors of society. Militarism believes the government should maintain a strong military and overwhelmingly fund a nation's military capacity. Additionally, militarism helps shape narratives about the government's imperialist interests and goals.

Neocolonial(ism)- The current form of colonialism, executed through financial and political domination. After African countries won their liberation starting in the 1950s, colonial powers had to find creative ways to maintain control. As a result, neocolonial projects don't always take the form of boots on the ground or ships on the shore. (Ex: controlling commerce through trade organizations or debt to former colonial powers)

Occupation- Carried out by a country's military, occupation is when one government invades and settles on another people's land. Their presence extends into daily life by restricting access to food, water, healthcare, electricity, and other basic needs.

War on Terror- Implemented under President Bush (2000-2008) following the 9/11 attacks, the War on Terror is an ongoing strategic campaign against terrorism that started with the war in

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Afghanistan. Carried out through economic, political, and military force, the War on Terror is a racist and xenophobic campaign to isolate and persecute non-white and Muslim people.

### What is AFRICOM and When Did it Start?

AFRICOM (Africa Command) is a U.S.-led military institution that spans 53 countries in Africa. Established in 2007 by President George W. Bush, AFRICOM creates pathways for the West's neocolonial domination in Africa. According to the U.S. military, Africa is of strategic importance in the War on Terror and in combating global "extremism." The real goal of AFRICOM is to protect U.S. military and imperial interests through economic and political control across the African continent. Bush launched AFRICOM under Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who continued under the Obama Administration.

AFRICOM is an American project to ensure the continued oppression and stunted liberation of the African people all while advancing U.S. and European imperialist goals.

### Behind the Curtain of AFRICOM

Before the Bush administration began AFRICOM, Africa was a focal point of humanitarian interest by corporate philanthropists. However, once the War on Terror began, the U.S. created an opportunity to advance the imperial extraction of Africa's natural resources by placing military bases across the continent. In 2007, the U.S. put military bases in:

- Gabon
- Morocco
- Tunisia
- Namibia
- Sao Tome
- Senegal
- Uganda
- Zambia

Don't be confused, the establishment of AFRICOM was not the beginning of the United States' imperialism in Africa. Before AFRICOM, Africa was divided between three imperial commands: the European Command (EUCOM), the Central Command (CENTCOM), and the Pacific Command (PACOM).

- EUCOM claimed control over most of central Africa
- CENTCOM claimed control over Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, and Kenya
- PACOM claimed control over Madagascar, the Seychelles, and the Indian Ocean region of the African coast.
- Egypt is its own operation under CENTCOM because of its proximity to the Middle East

AFRICOM carries out a broad range of militarist interventions across the African continent. Operations differ in their character, ranging from "counterterrorism" to "military education."

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However, regardless of their specific objectives, the U.S. and the West are endangering the lives of millions to advance their interests and increase their profit margins.

### Follow the money

Weapons manufacturers benefit the most from the \$886B U.S. military budget. Through AFRICOM's Foreign Military Sales Programme, corporations like Lockheed Martin and Raytheon (RTX) sell U.S. military partners bombs and other weapons to continue U.S.-backed war and militarism on the continent.

For example, Lockheed Martin sold F-16 fighter jets in Botswana, Egypt, and Morocco to AFRICOM's military partners in those countries. Raytheon also sold missiles in Morocco, built on American soil by Raytheon in Tuscon, Arizona.

Weapons manufacturers aren't the only corporate behemoths investing in imperialism. Tech companies have deep pockets as well, which they use for resource extraction from Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, and the Congo. Companies like Apple\*, Dell\*, Tesla\*, Meta, Google\*, IBM, Oracle, Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft\* and Amazon are complicit in the imperialist devastation across Africa.

\*Named in a [lawsuit](#) over Congolese cobalt child mining deaths.

### **How America Justifies Its Imperialism**

After 9/11, Bush began to lean heavily into "development" politics. This meant U.S. officials increasingly portrayed Africa as war-torn, undemocratic, and uncivilized places desperate for Western "aid." But this was not the case.

This characterization created the opportunity for U.S. banks, government agencies, and private organizations to distort African countries' political and economic landscape. Nonprofits and humanitarian organizations also benefited from wars and violence caused by U.S.-backed coups and government officials.

The U.S. uses many justifications for its militarist influence across Africa, including 1) Protecting Resource Interests, 2) Counterterrorism, and 3) Competing with China. In reality, because African countries are rich in natural resources and subjected to U.S. military intervention, Western corporations can create profits by extracting valuable metals and minerals.

For example, Nigeria and Angola are the top oil producers in the continent, ranking 15th + 16th in the world. The top three shareholders of Nigeria's primary oil production company, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, are Shell Gas (Britain), TotalEnergies (France), and Eni International (Italy). They own a combined 51% stock.

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The fake threat of terrorism is one of the many justifications the West uses to carry out imperial and militarist interests. After 9/11, the U.S. Government engaged in xenophobic fearmongering which claimed that the existence of groups like al-Qaeda demanded military expansion. Agents of AFRICOM viewed citizens of African countries who had been ravaged by Western powers as potential “extremists.” They used this idea to justify the mass deployment of U.S. troops across the continent.

In addition to fearmongering about terrorism, the U.S. advances militarism to compete with China’s imperialism in Africa. While not the largest imperial presence in Africa— the European Union holds that title— China has funneled millions into the African textile, light manufacturing, construction, and agriculture industries. Chinese investors use their wealth to dominate African industries and influence the politics of African countries.

The U.S. and China are both capitalist powers aiming to expand their empire. While “protecting” African countries and extracting resources across the continent, their investments fund atrocities in the name of colonial violence. Three years after AFRICOM began, China took 30% of its oil from Sudan, Angola, and the Congo. The U.S. took 10.3% of its oil from the continent, with 5.2% from Nigeria.

Make no mistake— China’s activity on the continent influences the U.S.’s strategies for maintaining AFRICOM. American government and military officials see this dynamic as a threat to the West’s strategic position and its overall presence in Africa.

### **African Resistance to AFRICOM**

Eurocentric history would have us believe that African countries did not resist violent colonization. In every manifestation of imperialism, Black people resist. The same is true for AFRICOM.

In 2007 AFRICOM commander General William E. Ward, the highest-ranking Black military official, traveled to the African Union to win African support for U.S. command in the continent. This was a failed attempt. Two weeks later, Kenyan scholar Samuel Makinda published an article addressing the U.S. military’s imperial assumptions about the African people.

Makinda dissented against the U.S.’s assertion of control across Africa, exposing “the failure of U.S. officials to provide a rationale for AFRICOM.” He details how the U.S. government was unclear about its intentions behind the project, arguing that the U.S.’s true desire was to advance American militarism across the continent. The recent history of colonial rule in African countries made way for the U.S. military’s presence in daily life.

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Though it is presented as a collaborative effort between African governments and the U.S. military, not a single African legislature was allowed to influence or vote on the neocolonial implementation of AFRICOM. This is true even for the countries that AFRICOM lists as partners.

Africa is capable of self-determination. It is no one's "security asset". Africa is the most diverse continent on the planet. It is massive with 54 countries and over 1,000 languages + dialects. Only principles of imperialism would have us believe that the many peoples of Africa are doomed to fail without Western guidance.

Before Makinda, Patrice Lumumba resisted Euro-American imperialism. In 1960 Lumumba became the first democratically elected prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). He was a key figure in the DRC's liberation from Belgium. Because he advocated against the West's imperialism in the country, he was assassinated (1961) by the U.S. government in a CIA-assisted plot. He believed African liberation was not possible without uprooting colonialism and imperialism.

*"If the colonialist governments promptly understand our aspirations, we will negotiate with them, but if they stubbornly insist on considering Africa their possession, we will be obliged to consider the colonizers the enemies of our emancipation."*

- Patrice Lumumba, "African Unity and National Independence" (1959)

### Learn more here!

[AFRICOM from the eyes of the U.S. military](#)

[American tech corporations invested in African countries](#)

[Basics of AFRICOM](#)

[Congoese child mining death lawsuit](#)

[Competing with China for Oil](#)

[Lockheed Martin weapons sales to Botswana, Morocco, and Egypt](#)

[Nigerian National Petroleum Company Shareholders](#)

[Patrice Lumumba](#)

[Raytheon weapons sales to Morocco](#)

[Samuel Makinda](#)

[U.S. contractors in Africa](#)

[U.S. oil imports in 2012](#)

BKC contributors: Peyton W. (author), Jaylee D. (editor), Jovanna W. (editor), Darius C. (editor)