

dacity of the the nation’s first half-white president first-hand. “The black revolution,” King wrote in a posthumously published 1969 essay titled “A testament of hope” – embracing a very different sort of hope than that purveyed by Brand Obama in 2008—

... is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws — racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction society of society itself is the real issue to be faced.”[8]

Those words – words you will not hear via “mainstream” media during the national King Day celebrations — ring as true and urgent as ever today, as it becomes undeniable that the profits system’s inner core of despotism is driving humanity over an environmental cliff and that it has become eco-“socialism or barbarism if we’re lucky.”

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AFRICOM Goes to War on the Sly

by Nick Turse

What the military will say to a reporter and what is said behind closed doors are two very different things—especially when it comes to the US military in Africa. For years, US Africa Command (AFRICOM) has maintained a veil of secrecy about much of the command’s activities and mission locations, consistently downplaying the size, scale, and scope of its efforts. At a recent Pentagon press conference, AFRICOM Commander General David Rodriguez adhered to the typical mantra, assuring the assembled reporters that the United States “has little forward presence” on that continent. Just days earlier, however, the men building the Pentagon’s presence there were telling a very different story—but they weren’t speaking with the media. They were speaking to representatives of some of the biggest military engineering firms on the planet. They were planning for the future and the talk was of war.

I recently experienced this phenomenon myself during a media roundtable with Lieutenant General Thomas Bostick, commander of the US Army Corps of Engineers. When I asked the general to tell me just what his people were building for US forces in Africa, he

paused and said in a low voice to the man next to him, “Can you help me out with that?”

They were planning for the future and the talk was of war.

Lloyd Caldwell, the Corps’s director of military programs, whispered back, “Some of that would be close hold”—in other words, information too sensitive to reveal.

The only thing Bostick seemed eager to tell me about were vague plans to someday test a prototype “structural insulated panel-hut,” a new energy-efficient type of barracks being developed by cadets at the US Military Academy at West Point. He also assured me that his people would get back to me with answers. What I got instead was an “interview” with a spokesman for the Corps who offered little of substance when it came to construction on the African continent. Not much information was available, he said; the projects were tiny, only small amounts of money had been spent so far this year, much of it funneled into humanitarian projects. In short, it seemed as if Africa was a construction backwater, a sleepy place, a

vast landmass on which little of interest was happening.

Fast forward a few weeks and Captain Rick Cook, the chief of US Africa Command's Engineer Division, was addressing an audience of more than 50 representatives of some of the largest military engineering firms on the planet—and this reporter. The contractors were interested in jobs and he wasn't pulling any punches. "The 18 months or so that I've been here, we've been at war the whole time," Cook told them. "We are trying to provide opportunities for the African people to fix their own African challenges. Now, unfortunately, operations in Libya, South Sudan, and Mali over the last two years have proven there's always something going on in Africa."

Cook was one of three US military construction officials who, earlier this month, spoke candidly about the Pentagon's efforts in Africa to men and women from URS Corporation, AECOM, CH2M Hill, and other top firms. During a paid-access web seminar, the three of them insisted that they were seeking industry "partners" because the military has "big plans" for the continent. They foretold a future marked by expansion, including the building up of a "permanent footprint" in Djibouti for the next decade or more, a possible new compound in Niger, and a string of bases devoted to surveillance activities spreading across the northern tier of Africa. They even let slip mention of a small, previously unacknowledged US compound in Mali.

The master plan

After my brush-off by General Bostick, I interviewed an Army Corps of Engineers Africa expert, Chris Gatz, about construction projects for Special Operations Command Africa in 2013. "I'll be totally frank with you," he said, "as far as the scopes of these projects go, I don't have good insights."

What about two projects in Senegal I had stumbled across? Well, yes, he did, in fact, have information about a firing range and a "shoot house" that happened to be under construction there. When pressed, he also knew about plans I had noted in previously classified documents obtained by *TomDispatch* for the Corps to build a multipurpose facility in Cameroon. And on we went. "You've got better information than I do," he said at one point, but it seemed like he had plenty of information, too. He just wasn't volunteering much of it to me.

Later, I asked if there were 2013 projects that had been funded with counter-narco-terrorism (CNT) money. "No, actually there was not," he told me. So I specifically asked about Niger.



"Don't worry. It won't get far."

"... there's always something going on in Africa."

In 2013, AFRICOM spokesman Benjamin Benson confirmed to *TomDispatch* that the US was conducting intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, or ISR, drone operations from Base Aérienne 101 at Diori Hamani International Airport in Niamey, the capital of Niger. In the months since, air operations there have only increased. In addition, documents recently obtained by *TomDispatch* indicated that the Army Corps of Engineers has been working on two counter-narco-terrorism projects in Arlit and Tahoua, Niger. So I told Gatz what I had uncovered. Only then did he locate the right paperwork. "Oh, okay, I'm sorry," he replied. "You're right, we have two of them... Both were actually awarded to construction."

Those two CNT construction projects have been undertaken on behalf of Niger's security forces, but in his talk to construction industry representatives, AFRICOM's Rick Cook spoke about another project there: a possible US facility still to be built. "Lately, one of our biggest focus areas is in the country of Niger. We have gotten indications from the country of Niger that they are willing to be a partner of ours," he said. The country, he added, "is

...the US was conducting drone operations from Niamey, the capital of Niger.

in a nice strategic location that allows us to get to many other places reasonably quickly, so we are working very hard with the Nigeriens to come up with, I wouldn't necessarily call it a base, but a place we can operate out of on a frequent basis."

Cook offered no information on the possible location of that facility, but recent contracting documents examined by *TomDispatch* indicate that the US Air Force is seeking to purchase large quantities

of jet fuel to be delivered to Niger's Mano Dayak International Airport.

Multiple requests for further information sent to AFRICOM's media chief Benjamin Benson went unanswered, as had prior queries about activities at

... a "base-like facility" would be "semi-permanent" and "capable of air operations."

Base Aérienne 101. But Colonel Aaron Benson, Chief of the Readiness Division at Air Forces Africa, did offer further details about the Nigerien mini-base. "There is the potential to construct MILCON aircraft parking aprons at the proposed future site in Niger," he wrote, mentioning a specific type of military construction funding dedicated to use for "enduring" bases rather than transitory facilities. In response to further questions, Cook referred to the possible site as a "base-like facility" that would be "semi-permanent" and "capable of air operations."

Pay to play

It turns out that, if you want to know what the US military is doing in Africa, it's advantageous to be connected to a large engineering or construction firm looking for business. Then you're privy to quite a different type of insider assessment of the future of the US presence there, one far more detailed than the modest official pronouncements that US Africa Command offers to journalists. Asked at a recent Pentagon press briefing if there were plans for a West African analog to Djibouti's Camp Lemonnier, the only "official" US base on the continent, AFRICOM Commander General David Rodriguez was typically guarded. Such a "forward-operating site" was just "one of the options" the command was mulling over, he said before launching into the sort of fuzzy language typical of official answers. "What we're really looking at doing is putting contingency locating sites, which really have some just expeditionary infrastructure that can be expanded with tents," was the way he put it. He never once mentioned Niger or airfield improvements or the possibility of a semi-permanent "presence."

Here, however, is the reality as we know it today. Over the last several years, the US has been building a constellation of drone bases across Africa, flying intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions out of not only Niger but also Djibouti, Ethiopia, and the island nation of the Seychelles. Meanwhile, an airbase in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, serves as the home of a Joint Special Operations Air Detachment, as well as of the Trans-Sahara Short Take-Off and Landing Airlift Support initiative. According to military documents, that "initiative" supports "high-risk activities" carried out by elite forces from Joint Special Operations Task Force-Trans Sahara. US Army Africa docu-

ments obtained by *TomDispatch* also mention the deployment to Chad of an ISR liaison team. And according to Sam Cooks, a liaison officer with the Defense Logistics Agency, the US military has 29 agreements to use international airports in Africa as refueling centers.

As part of the webinar for industry representatives, Wayne Uhl, chief of the International Engineering Center for the Europe District of the Army Corps of Engineers, shed light on shadowy US operations in Mali before (and possibly after) the elected government there was overthrown in a 2012 coup led by a US-trained officer. Documents prepared by Uhl reveal that an American compound was constructed near Gao, a major city in the north of Mali. Gao is the site of multiple Malian military bases and a "strategic" airport captured by Islamist militants in 2012 and retaken by French and Malian troops early last year.

AFRICOM's Benjamin Benson failed to respond to multiple requests for comment about the Gao compound, but Uhl offered additional details. The project was completed before the 2012 uprising and "included a vehicle maintenance facility, a small admin building, toilet facilities with water tank, a diesel generator with a fuel storage tank, and a perimeter fence," he told me in a written response to my questions. "I imagine the site was overrun during the coup and is no longer used by US forces."

America's lone official base on the African continent, Camp Lemonnier, a former French Foreign Legion post in Djibouti, has been on a decade-

The US has taken an active role in wars from Libya to the Central African Republic...

plus growth spurt and serves a key role for the US mission. "Camp Lemonnier is the only permanent footprint that we have on the continent and until such time as AFRICOM may establish a headquarters location in Africa, Camp Lemonnier will be the center of their activities here," Greg Wilderman, the Military Construction Program Manager for Naval Facilities Engineering Command, explained.

"In 2013, we had a big jump in the amount of program projects," he noted, specifically mentioning a large "task force" construction effort, an oblique reference to a \$220 million Special Operations compound at the base that *TomDispatch* first reported on in 2013.

According to documents provided by Wilderman, five contracts worth more than \$322 million (to be paid via MILCON funds) were awarded for Camp Lemonnier in late 2013. These included deals for a \$25.5 million fitness center and a \$41 million Joint Headquarters Facility in addition to the Special Operations Compound. This year, Wilderman noted, there are two contracts—valued at \$35 million—already slated to be awarded, and Captain Rick Cook specifically mentioned deals for an armory and new barracks in 2014.

Cook's presentation also indicated that a number of long-running construction projects at Camp Lemonnier were set to be completed this year, including roads, a "fuel farm," an aircraft logistics apron, and "taxiway enhancements," while construction of a new aircraft maintenance hangar, a telecommunications facility, and a "combat aircraft loading area" are slated to be finished in 2015.

"There's a tremendous amount of work going on," Cook said, noting that there were 22 current projects underway there, more than at any other Navy base anywhere in the world.

And this, it turns out, is only the beginning.

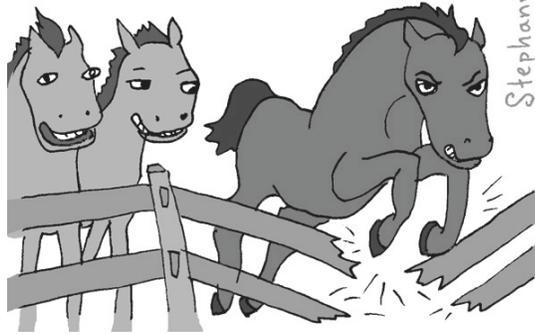
"In the master plan," Cook said, "there is close to three quarters of a billion dollars worth of construction projects that we still would like to do at Camp Lemonnier over the next 10 to 15 years." That base, in turn, would be just one of a constellation of camps and compounds used by the US in Africa. "Many of the places that we are trying to stand up or trying to get into are air missions. A lot of ISR... is going on in different parts of the continent. Generally speaking, the Air Force is probably going to be assigned to do much of that," he told the contractors. "The Air Force is going to be doing a great deal of work on these bases... that are going to be built across the northern tier of Africa."

Hearts and minds

When I spoke with Chris Gatz of the Army Corps of Engineers, the first projects he mentioned and the only ones he seemed eager to talk about were those for African nations. This year, \$6.5 million in projects had been funded when we spoke and of that, the majority were for "humanitarian assis-

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Uhl wasn't the only official to touch on the importance of public perception in Africa or the need to curry favor with military "partners" on the continent. Cook spoke to the contractors, for instance, about the challenges of work in austere locations, about how bureaucratic shakedowns by members of African governments could cause consternation and construction delays, about learning to work with the locals, and about how important such efforts were for "winning hearts and minds of folks in the area."

The Naval Facilities Engineering Command's Wilderman talked up the challenges of working in an

environment in which the availability of resources was limited, the dangers of terrorism were real, and there was "competition for cooperation with [African] countries from some other world powers." This was no doubt a reference to increasing Chinese trade, aid, investment, and economic ties across the continent.

He also left no doubt about US plans. "We will be in Africa for some time to come," he told the contractors. "There's lots more to do there."

Cook expanded on this theme. "It's a big, big place," he said. "We know we can't do it alone. So we're going to need partners in industry, we're going to need... local nationals and even third country nationals."

AFRICOM at war

For years, senior AFRICOM officers and spokesmen have downplayed the scope of US operations on the continent, stressing that the command has only a single base and a very light footprint there. At the same time, they have limited access to journalists and refused to disclose the number and tempo of the command's operations, as well as the locations of its deployments and of bases that go by other names. AFRICOM'S public persona remains one of humanitarian missions and benign-sounding support for local partners.

"Our core mission of assisting African states and regional organizations to strengthen their defense capabilities better enables Africans to address their security threats and reduces threats to US interests," says the command. "We concentrate our efforts on contributing to the development of capable and professional militaries that respect human rights, adhere to the rule of law, and more effectively contribute to stability in Africa." Efforts like sniper training for proxy forces and black ops missions hardly come up. Bases are mostly ignored. The word "war" is rarely mentioned.

"We have shifted from a congenial combatant command to an actual war-fighting combatant command."

tance" or HA construction projects, mostly in Togo and Tunisia, and "peacekeeping" operations in Ghana and Djibouti.

Uhl talked about humanitarian projects, too. "HA projects are small, difficult, challenging for the Corps of Engineers to accomplish at a low, in-house cost... but despite all this, HA projects are extremely rewarding," he said. "The appreciation expressed by the locals is fantastic." He then drew attention to another added benefit: "Each successful project is a photo opportunity."

TomDispatch's recent investigations have, however, revealed that the US military is indeed pivoting to Africa. It now averages far more than a mission a day on the continent, conducting operations with almost every African military force in almost every African country, while building or building up camps, compounds, and "contingency security locations." The US has taken an active role in wars from Libya to the Central African Republic, sent special ops forces into countries from Somalia to South Sudan, conducted airstrikes and abduction missions, even put boots on the ground in countries where it pledged it would not.

"We have shifted from our original intent of being a more congenial combatant command to an actual war-fighting combatant command," AFRI-

COM's Rick Cook explained to the audience of big-money defense contractors. He was unequivocal: the US has been "at war" on the continent for the last two and half years. It remains to be seen when AFRICOM will pass this news on to the American public.

Nick Turse is the managing editor of *TomDispatch.com* and the winner of a 2009 Ridenhour Prize for Reportorial Distinction as well as a James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism. A paperback edition of his book *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (Metropolitan Books) was published earlier this year. His website is NickTurse.com.

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"Right to Farm" Scam

Third Wave Corporatocracy

by Don Fitz

When Monsanto's home state of Missouri passed the "Right to Farm" on August 5, 2014 the third noose of corporate control tightened around the neck of the US. Unlike the first two steps of corporate domination of public life, this was a constitutional amendment that would block the state legislature or voters from passing future laws for environmental protection, animal welfare or labeling of contaminated food. This third wave corporatocracy could well spread across the US and globally as it becomes a new form of mass disenfranchisement.

First wave: Corporate "personhood"

State constitutional amendments are the most recent phase in a long march of corporations to extend their direct control of government. Efforts of corporations to grab the legal rights of persons date to the post-Civil War era. In 1886 the US Supreme Court first applied the rights of the 14th Amendment to corporations. That amendment had been ratified in 1868 in order to grant former slaves "equal protection under the law." As Jane Anne Morris documents in *Gaveling Down the Rabble* (2008), the court became far more interested in applying it to "corporate persons," granting them the rights to "privileges and immunities, equal protection, and due process."

This flew in the face of the fact that corporations are created by legislative bodies and must incorporate in order to receive their powers and privileges. After the initial rulings, legislative and judicial bodies in the US expanded laws and rulings that

enhanced corporate power. In 1938, Justice Hugo Black wrote of court decisions that "Less than 1/2 of 1% invoked it in protection of the Negro race, and more than 50% asked that its benefits be extended to corporations."

Second wave: Free trade

During the decades following World War II, corporations sought to expand their powers internationally via trade agreements. By the end of the 1980s, they conceptualized the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a prototype for granting panels of corporate bureaucrats the power to trump national laws. Designed as an agreement between the US, Canada and Mexico, it would basically tell a poor country, "If you want to increase trade, you must give corporations from rich countries the right to sue you for failing to change your laws to benefit them." But Americans balked at the idea that other countries might do the same to them, and George Bush could not get NAFTA through Congress.

Bill Clinton persuaded financial backers that a liberal could accomplish what a right winger could not, and their money put him in the White House. "Slick Willy" had a couple of tricks to get NAFTA approved. One was authorization of "Fast Track," whereby Congress agreed not to amend the trade deal but only vote it up or down. The other tool was Speaker of the House Dick Gephardt from St. Louis, who pretended to be a "friend of labor," opposing NAFTA in the US at the same time that he made trips to Mexico promising he would get it passed.

Sharp differences emerged between environmental organizations. Virtually all small local

... it becomes a new form of mass disenfranchisement.
