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Africa's Deadly Spy Infestation

Landing strips to service a fleet of intelligence-gathering aircraft

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The expanding U.S. spy infrastructure in Africa, including a network of landing strips to service a fleet of intelligence-gathering aircraft, is inherently hostile to African self-determination. That's because "those who dictate U.S. intelligence policy make decisions on the basis of where access to oil and valuable minerals is threatened, or where an African leader has in some way resisted the imperialist program." Washington is establishing the structures to recolonize Africa, in the guise of anti-terrorism. "There has never been, and there never will be an imperialist effort to promote true independence and self-determination in Africa."

In some ways, spies are a lot like cockroaches and rats. If you spot one, you are bound to find many more hiding in dark corners, cracks and crevices. Decades ago, revolutionaries first cast a spotlight on U.S. intelligence agents operating in Africa. Although these spies scurried back to their filthy holes, they never left the continent. They just multiplied and plotted ever greater schemes of deceit and death.

A pest control service should have been contacted during the early years of the U.S. intelligence establishment's presence in Africa. At the time, Patrice Lumumba was Congo's first prime minister, and because he was perceived to be an African nationalist subject to Soviet manipulation, he was assassinated in 1961 under circumstances that made it possible for the U.S. to have "plausible deniability" about responsibility for his death. However, the U.S. left behind

tell-tale evidence of its interest in eliminating the progressive young leader. In his book “The Assassination of Lumumba,” author Ludo De Witte wrote:

“...[T]he CIA scientist [Sidney]Gottlieb said he had been sent to the Congo with a box of poison to ‘mount an operation...to either seriously incapacitate or eliminate Lumumba.’ On 21 September, during a meeting of the National Security Council with President Eisenhower, CIA Chief Allen Dulles stressed that ‘Lumumba...remained a grave danger as long as he was not disposed of.’”

There is still other evidence that the CIA was engaged in plots to eliminate or destabilize Africa’s revolutionary movements and governments. Decades ago, former CIA agent John Stockwell blew the whistle about CIA involvement in Africa – most notably in Angola - in his book *In Search of Enemies*.

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It is this historical context that causes those with genuine concerns about Africa’s welfare to roll their eyes when there are disclosures about contemporary intelligence operations that exist purportedly to monitor and disrupt terrorist operations in Africa. The most recent – supposedly “leaked” – information about such operations concerns a number of small air bases that are home to what appear to be small private aircraft. However, these small planes are equipped with technology that makes it possible for them to track infrared heat patterns, intercept radio and cell phone signals and record full motion videos. The nerve center of this operation is in Burkina Faso. From there the planes fly north to countries like Mali and Mauritania purportedly in search of al-Qaeda and its sympathizers.

This project, called “Creek Sand” is part of a program administered by U.S. Special Operations. The Washington Post said they “have played an outside role in the Obama administration’s national security strategy...” The newspaper goes on to say: “The lightly equipped commando units train foreign security forces and perform aid missions, but they also include teams dedicated to tracking and killing terrorism suspects.”

When it comes to killing terrorism suspects in Somalia and elsewhere with drones, critics have complained that a recent CIA pronouncement seems to betray the agency’s belief that it is not strictly bound by the laws of war. Human Rights Watch has criticized a speech made in April by Stephen Preston, the CIA’s general counsel at Harvard Law School. Preston incorrectly implied that the laws that limit lethal attacks to valid military targets during situations of armed conflict are not strict legal requirements, but are instead mere principles. Human Rights Watch has identified this as an important issue because outside of the laws of war, international human rights law permits killing only when it is necessary to save human life.

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To the extent that the CIA is concerned about running afoul of the law or creating a public outcry about its unconscionable activities, it has relied on proxies to do its dirty work. This was certainly the case in Libya where CIA agents implemented a program to arm those who were attempting to dislodge the Gadhafi government. According to reports, the CIA has also operated a secret base at Mogadishu airport in Somalia where Somali assassination teams are trained to kill suspected terrorists, and where secret interrogations are conducted of suspects who have been subjected to rendition.

Finally, and in a period when it is obvious that Africa is already infested with American spies, the Pentagon is creating yet another intelligence agency. The Baltimore Sun reported that the new Defense Clandestine Service "...will work alongside CIA counterparts in places such as Africa, where al Qaeda has grown more active, and Asia, where Chinese military expansion and North Korean and Iranian weapons ambitions are drawing increasing U.S. concern."

Notwithstanding the presence of these agencies in Africa, their intelligence operations have never been about Africa or Africans. In the early years of the post-colonial period, the West made Africa a theater for Cold War maneuvers and a contest with the Soviet Union over who would claim the continent for their respective "spheres of influence." In more recent years, Africa has been a staging ground for a so-called war against terrorism.

If in years past there had been genuine U.S. concern that the Soviet Union would in some way win the loyalty, hearts and minds of Africans; or if there are now real worries that terrorist organizations will find a home in Africa, U.S. policy would always have been, and always would be to ensure that Africans themselves are able to prosper from their natural wealth and in every way determine their own destiny. That is because countries emerging from colonial domination are never anxious to become "client states" when they can go it alone. Likewise, in regions that are desperately poor and where it is obvious that the economic devastation has been caused by exploitation and plunder by western corporations, it is easy for extremists to recruit those who want to strike back at the source of their community's misery. Yet, it is nearly impossible to persuade independent, prosperous people to engage in suicide bombing missions.

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Nevertheless, there has never been, and there never will be an imperialist effort to promote true independence and self-determination in Africa. That is because regardless of the purported mission – whether it is Cold War advantage or terrorist surveillance – in all cases those who dictate U.S. intelligence policy make decisions about operational focus on the basis of where access to oil and valuable minerals is threatened, or where an African leader has in some way resisted the imperialist program. Ethics, morality and justice are not factors in the equation, and Africans tend to find themselves as either spectators or victims of bloody escapades that they did not create and which certainly are in no way beneficial to Africa.

In many cases an infestation of vermin and pests is eliminated with poisons and traps. In the case of U.S. spies in Africa, the solution begins with shining a light on all of their operations so that when the continent is united and capable of expelling imperialists once and for all, Africans will know where to find not only the spies, but also their nests.