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Author: [Viktor Goncharov](#)

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## The Failure of US Policy in Africa, as seen by Western Experts.

### Part Three: Washington in search of a way out of its impasse



Today, while the US government and political think-tanks are looking for ways to solve the trilemma posed by its African policy, namely, which of its three goals (the development of democracy, the fight against terrorism and its competition with other world powers, primarily China) to prioritize, terrorism is spreading like a cancer to the coastal countries on the Gulf of Guinea.

In view of the current situation, The Wall Street Journal reports, Washington has begun negotiating with the governments of Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Benin, in the hope of gaining access to their airfields to host its UAV bases. In late April General Michael Langley, head of US Africa Command traveled to Côte d'Ivoire, where he met with President Alassane Ouattara. According to the French magazine Jeune Afrique, a tentative agreement was reached.

However, the relocation of its bases to coastal countries, notes The Arab Weekly, a London-based publication, could create further challenges for counter-terrorism operations in certain other regions. For example, moving its base to Côte d'Ivoire would prevent the US from conducting reconnaissance and airstrikes in Algeria and Libya, because of the increased distance.

Today, given the growing importance of the African continent not only as a source of important strategic raw materials, but also as a major geopolitical player with one third of the votes in the UN, Africa has become a new arena for geopolitical rivalries, and Washington, it appears, views its development of a new approach to relations with the continent as a matter of paramount importance. According to many experts, the geopolitical and geo-economic stakes in Africa have never been as high as they are today.

TRT AFRICA, a Turkish publication, explains the failure of US African strategy primarily as the result of the Biden administration's failure to take into account the rapidly changing geopolitical dynamics on the continent. African countries today, for the most part, care very little about what they mean to the US. They are most interested in what they can get from Washington. However, the continuing ruthless exploitation of Africa's mineral and other resources and its barefaced interference in the continent's internal affairs by the US and its closest partners has only led to growing discontent with US policies.

J. Peter Pham, Former US Special Envoy for the Great Lakes & Sahel Regions of Africa and now a Fellow at the Atlantic Council, shares this view. In his view, the fact that the leaders of Niger and Chad (both of which countries are among the four lowest scoring countries in the Human Development Index) have, in effect, ordered the US to withdraw its troops from their countries is a striking example of the cardinal geopolitical shifts that have taken place in Africa in recent years.

### **The US and its allies have lost the confidence of African countries**

As for the Department of State, American diplomats, according to The New York Times, have begun to admit, at least in informal conversations, that a share of the blame for the failures of African policy lies with the United States itself, which, for opportunistic reasons, and despite its high-minded proclamations that the basis of its relations with these countries is the development and promotion of democracy, in reality actively supports authoritarian regimes.

This attitude of Washington to its African partners is considered by many African leaders as blatantly hypocritical and a demonstration of its policy of double standards, and, as the

Associated Press states, as a result the US and its allies have recently lost the trust of African countries.

Alexander Thurston, a specialist in Islam and US African policies at the University of Cincinnati, argues that Washington and Paris were well aware that they were working with corrupt governments in Africa, and that this was leading to growing popular discontent, but continued to cooperate with them anyway. And in this, he believes, lies one of the main reasons for the ineffectiveness of American policies on the continent.

Another reason for this, according to experts from the American website The Intercept, which they express in the article “After Training African Coup Leaders, Pentagon Blames Russia for African Coups,” lies in the fact that ironically, during its global “war on terror” 15 coup instigators, responsible for 12 military coups in Africa, had previously received training in US military academies.

However, the Pentagon is shifting the blame for its conduct onto Russia’s subversive activities in Africa. The head of US AFRICOM, General Michael Langley, argues that “It’s safe to say there’s no correlation or causation of US training to a coup happening” in their home countries.

But, as Swiss political scientist Ornella Moderan notes, the West’s habitual attempts to shift responsibility for its failures in Africa onto Russia are not having the desired effect.

At the same time, African leaders, notes South Africa’s Institute for Security Studies, are seriously viewing China’s authoritarian model of development as a successful tool for fighting poverty, arguing that under current conditions, democracy and the free market do not always contribute to Africa’s development.

In this regard, the experts of this institute even advise those responsible for US policies in Africa that if they want to maintain their influence on the continent they should look for ways of cooperation with China, since the main problem of the US in Africa, according to the American magazine The National Interest, is not the fight against terrorism but the rivalry between the great powers.

### **The US is “imposing its presence” on the Gulf of Guinea states**

Having suffered a major defeat in the Sahel region, Washington plans to intensify its cooperation with the Gulf of Guinea countries of Benin, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Togo. The fact that US AFRICOM has recently conducted three field training exercises in the region is a sign of the importance that the Pentagon attaches to the security of these states, notes the Texas National Security Review, published by the University of Texas.

And this is no coincidence, given the fact that over the past twenty years, Beijing has made huge investments in the construction and upgrading of more than 100 ports on African coasts, and, according to the Turkish Anadolu Agency, the Pentagon is seriously concerned about their potential use of these facilities for military purposes.

On this basis, US political analysts have suggested that a new African strategy should include a US naval presence to protect vital trade routes along the coast of West Africa, a particularly urgent issue today given the disruption to shipping in the Red Sea.

In furtherance of this strategy, Washington plans to expand its cooperation with Mauritania, on Africa's Atlantic coast, a country which has already proven to be a reliable ally in the fight against terrorism, as The National Interest notes.

Morocco, on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, is seen as another candidate for closer relations aimed at furthering US policies. According to magazine's experts, Washington sees Morocco as the main US ally in ensuring the security of North and West Africa.

The National Interest also points out that the governments of Gabon and Equatorial Guinea are currently negotiating with China in relation to their potential hosting of a naval base where Chinese warships would be stationed and repaired. This would pose a serious threat to US security.

But until the US develops a long-term integrated strategy for developing its relations with Africa, as The New York Times notes, any kind of engagement with Africa will be merely, in the words of the aforementioned J. Peter Pham, "building sand castles at the edge of the beach."

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***Viktor Goncharov, African expert, PhD in Economics, exclusively for the online magazine "New Eastern Outlook"***