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AFRICA'S GROWING FOREIGN MILITARY BASES

A Race for Regional Superpower?

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INTRODUCTION

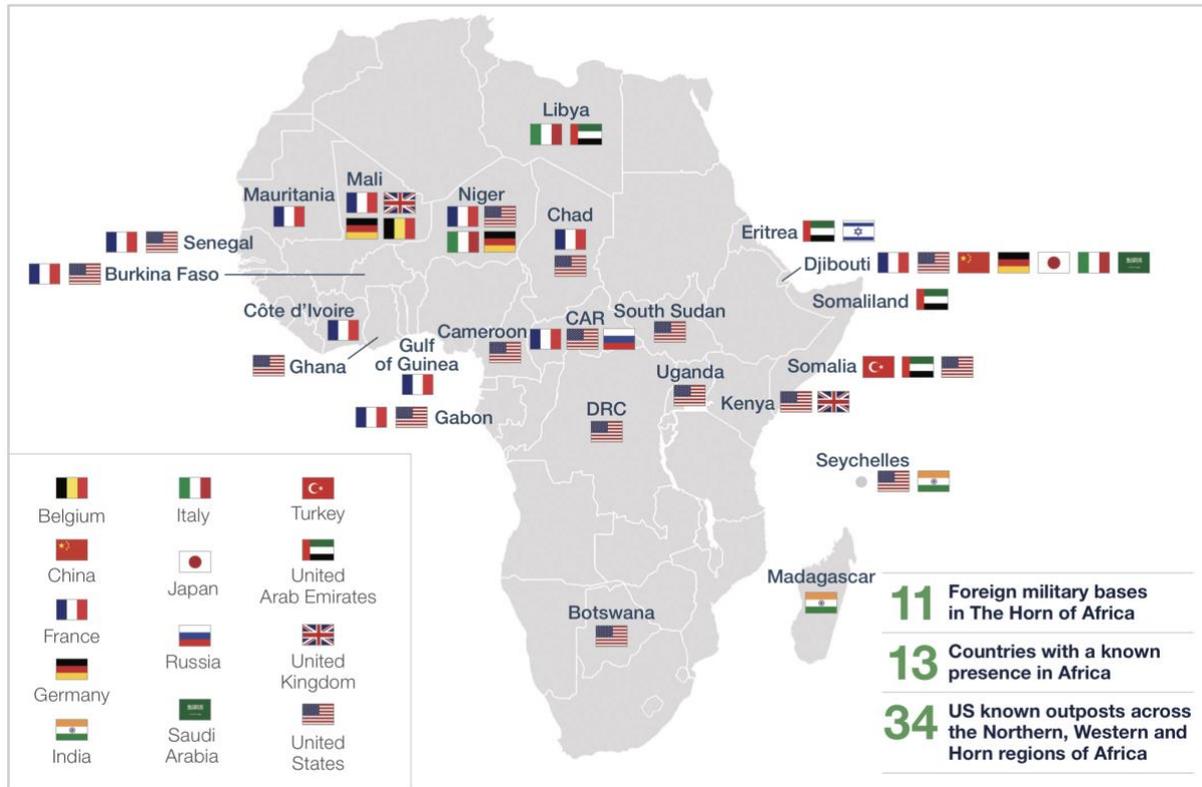
The world observed a mass race for regional power after the end of the second World War, when the two superpowers- the United States and the Soviet Union [Russia, underwent a phase of the Cold War from 1945 till 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated, and the United States became a global hegemon]. However, the race for 'regional superpower' did not come to an end in the 1990s, but a new phase was developing within the grounds of world politics. The world at the beginning of the 21st century observed a rise of regional superpowers like China, the United States, France, Russia, and other rising powers who are in a race of maintaining their hegemon regionally. The United States, France, U.K, Germany in the West, and China and Russia in the East. However, the southern continents like- Africa remained isolated from the race of regional superpowers in the initial decade of the 21st century.

Africa, the second-largest continent and second most populous continent in the world is threatened by the external security environment. The Horn of Africa has become an epicenter of 13 foreign military bases, hosting bases of the United States, China and France, and other states. The establishment of foreign military bases was the result of the region's strategic proximity to the Middle East and Asia and the emergence of regional security complexity along the Red Sea [where the threats include piracy, terrorism, cyberattacks, illegal migration, etc., which was caused by the Houthi rebels in Yemen and which further invited the intervention of UN Security Council] (why foreign countries [including India] are jostling to set up a military base in Africa, 2020). The establishment of foreign military bases in Africa possess a threat to underdeveloped or developing nations. The first foreign military base established in the African continent is that of the United States in Djibouti in 2003, followed by China in 2008, which became active in engagement when it participated in a multinational anti- Piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden. Currently, the African continent has a total of 13 countries with known bases in content, where the United States and France have the most troops on the continent. The countries with foreign military bases in Africa are the United States, France, Japan, Belgium, Italy, Turkey, China, India, United Arab Emirates, Russia, U.K, Germany, and Saudi Arabia.

The rise in foreign military bases in Africa has resulted in the rise of the external security threat for nation-states, such threat was also identified by various organizations like African Union

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[AU] (Neethling, 2020). The paper shall initially focus on U.S. military activities in Africa, later it discusses China’s emerging strategy in the African continent. The paper will also look into Russia’s rediscovery in Africa and later involves the strategies of other participating countries who have established the overseas military base in the Horn of Africa and finally the paper focuses on U.S. counterstrategy in maintaining its influence in the continent.



Source: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/proceed-with-caution-africas-growing-foreign-military-presence>

U.S MILITARISM IN AFRICA

Historically, U.S. military interests in Africa during World War II, as the position of the continent gained strategic importance for Allied forces in 1942. However, the first phase of U.S. military bases in Africa ended in the 1970s, largely due to change in government and public pressure, which resulted in mass opposition as the continent was undergoing the process of decolonization (mangi, 1987). Since the September 11th, 2001 attack on the United States, U.S. military and security agencies have claimed an unlimited mandate to what they deem terrorist threats. After the 2001 attack, the George W. Bush administration opened a major military base in Djibouti, at the strategic crossroad at the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden became a global concern in mid 2000s as geographically it connects the African and Asian continents, but the Gulf is prone to terrorist attacks, human trafficking, cyberattacks, etc., therefore the US along with a resolution passed by the UN Security Council, established its base with negotiations of respective African nations

(Aluwaisheg, 2019). The African continent is affected by large-scale terrorist activities by weak tribal populations across the continent. Therefore, U.S. established several other bases in *Mozambique, Tanzania, Burundi, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Seychelles, South Sudan, CAR, Chad, Niger, Ghana, Senegal, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Egypt, and Morocco*, intending to maintain peace and stability in Africa. This expanding network across the region was a key reason the military organized its world's spanning unified combatant command system in 2008 to place responsibility for the continent of Africa under a single United States Africa command, or AFRICOM (Schewe, 2018). The U.S. forces were largely successful in controlling the militant attack across the continent. However, the incident of Tongo Tongo in the Southwest of Niger, which killed four U.S. military personnel in an attack on U.S. forces revealed to the world that the U.S. had deployed more than 800 U.S. personnel as a part of joint U.S. and Nigerian to train, advise and assist mission to conduct reconnaissance with Nigerien counterparts, several of whom were also killed and injured. This incident of Niger exposed the ignorance of the U.S. Congress as to the objectives of the U.S. military in Africa (Campbell, 2020).

This incident further questions the strategies and necessities for the presence of U.S. forces in Nigeria and shows the lack of transparency and security establishment on what was the goal of U.S. military presence in Niger? This depicts the decline of U.S. military management in the international system and reality to the rest of the world that massive military expenditure of U.S cannot define the clear objective of U.S forces in the international system. Although, the rise of China's military presence and rediscovery of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the African continent have yet again shown a race for regional superpower in the African continent. The Horn of Africa also involved many multilateral military missions such as combined maritime forces, led by the United States, which was established with an objective of counterterrorism, preventing piracy, encouraging regional cooperation, and promoting a safe maritime environment, with 33 naval forces led by the United States and was commanded by a U.S. Navy vice admiral (International counter-piracy operation blow through the Gulf of Aden, 2020). The United States also launched operation Ocean shield in the Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean, and Arabian sea led by NATO forces, the mission operated from August 2009 till December 2016 (Operation ocean shield, 2013).

CHINA'S EMERGING SECURITY STRATEGIES IN AFRICA

In the early 2000s, China initially focused on building a strong economy and political influence in the Asian subcontinent. The sudden increase in China's political influence over the South China Sea, is an example of a rise in the aggressive military strategy of China over the Asian continent. However, China's policy observed a tangent shift in 2017, when it announced its first overseas military base in Djibouti, signifying a diplomatic shift in Beijing's foreign and security policy. China continues to be a strong economy after the United States, a more sophisticated generation of the Chinese leader in the national politics, a better scholarship for the students of Africa in China, and a domestic population more confidence in China as a global actor have encouraged Beijing to take a more proactive approach to foreign affairs. The need of China's policy towards Africa is on a high- demand due to the growing demand of new

energy and raw material suppliers by the industrial sector; its exporters want markets; its diplomat requires support in an international organization; and its propaganda still seeks support from allies to advance Chinese interest and where necessary, to counter the United States (Eisenman, 2006).

China's growing military interest in Africa is also focused on the adaptation to regional threats like Piracy, Terrorism, and Civil war. In 2009, the first expeditionary deployment of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy [PLAN] took place to counter piracy off the coast of Somalia in the Gulf of Aden. Chinese involvement in Africa and the Indian Ocean region developed further through its role in the United Nations peacekeeping missions and humanitarian assistance as well as its growing economic presence in this region (pronk & Graaf, 2020). Since 2009, China has successfully maintained a continuous naval anti- Piracy presence in the horn of Africa region, dispatching its 32nd mission to the Gulf of Aden in April 2019. During 2008- 2018, the Chinese navy deployed 26,000 personnel to the region and undertook a variety of maritime security operations. Djibouti plays an important role in the protection of Chinese citizen's abroad in 2015, when the Chinese navy evacuated around 800 Chinese and other foreign nationals from Yemen, taking them on naval frigate to board flights home. China has also actively participated in the United Nations mission in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Liberia, and Sudan (Melvin, 2019). PLAN base in Djibouti enables China to oversee counterterrorism operations and intelligence gathering operations in Africa. The base of Djibouti is seen as a means of China's economic interest and a ground for conducting naval diplomacy by the Chinese government. The establishment of a military base in Djibouti took place to strengthen the diplomatic relations between Djibouti, China, and Ethiopia, intending to construct Ethiopia- Djibouti Railway, the Ethiopia- Djibouti water pipeline, and Chinese investment in Doarleh Multipurpose port. The establishment of China's naval base in Djibouti serves as a military and commercial interest in the region. The establishment of a permanent military base in Djibouti by China can be observed as a part of one of the policies that are promoting a gradual rise of China's maritime power in the Indian Ocean region and could also be seen as the first gateway of China to Africa's diplomatic relations.

RUSSIA'S RE- DISCOVERY IN AFRICA

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia faced a downfall in its economy and was unsuccessful in establishing a naval base abroad. However, Russia redeveloped its interest in the African continent in the recent decade under the rule of Vladimir Putin. Russia launched an anti-piracy operation off the Horn of Africa in September 2008 by deploying a frigate, and since then, it had maintained a regular and non-permanent regional presence. Russia has also sent individual warships to counter piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea as a part of a wider deployment. Russia's security strategy towards Africa is observing a shift from Armed forces to Naval forces. Russia is expanding its Military influence across Africa by increasing Arm sales, Security Agreements, Training programs for unsustainable countries, or autocratic leaders. Russia recently deployed 200 mercenaries in recent months to Mozambique to combat the growing state offshoot there, even as Moscow is taking initial steps towards building a

military port in the Horn of Africa that could become Russia's first military base in the continent (Schmitt & Neff, 2020).

However, Russia recently announced its first naval base in Sudan's Red Sea coast to resupply its fleet. The base has a capacity of 300 Military and civilian personnel and four ships, including a nuclear-powered vessel. According to the draft agreement between the Russian agreement and Sudan government, the facility 'meets the goal of maintaining peace and stability in the region, is defensive and is not aimed against other countries.' (Russia plans naval base in Sudan, 2020). Russia was barred from building a base in Djibouti as Djibouti did not want to become 'a terrain of proxy war' due to the high presence of U.S. forces in Djibouti and the African subcontinent. In comparison to China, Russia still languishes to become a major trading partner and investment partner in Africa. No African state is featured among Russia's top 15 international trading partners. Therefore, a change in Russia's foreign and military policy towards Africa remains a set of strategic questions for its goal towards Africa. A former U.S. Security advisor, John Bolton, regards Russia as a 'Foreign policy problem in Africa'. He called Russia's military engagement with Africa 'predatory practice', building 'Cold- War era alliances... selling arms and energy in exchange of votes in the UN, helps to keep strongmen in power, and undermine peace and security and running counter to best interests of the people (Oliver, 2020). Russia's recent engagement in the first-ever Russia- Africa summit in Sochi, Russia, has given a signal to participating nations like China, India, and the West as a new participant in the race of investments in the continent. The rediscovery of Russia in Africa has raised a threat of proxy war in the African subcontinent. however, the goals and the objectives of Russia cannot be defined based on the current steps taken by the Russian government.

OTHER PARTICIPATING STAKEHOLDERS IN AFRICA

The Horn of Africa also involves other participating actors like *India, Egypt, France, Germany, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, The U.A.E, and United Kingdom*. However, the most active participating actors *are Turkey, France, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates*, who have been playing an effective role in establishing military bases in the African continent. Along with the United States, France has the greatest number of troops on the continent. France deployed bases in over 20 African countries, and the host nations represented 40 percent of the territory of the continent so that France remained the most influential external power amongst the youngest countries (SUN & Zoubir, 2011). Other active participating actors in Africa is Japan. Since 2009, Japan has been committed to navy ships and aircraft to anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. In 2011, Japan established its first permanent overseas military base in Djibouti. The goal of Japan's military presence in Africa is limited to providing instructions in disaster responses, engineering, and humanitarian reliefs and combating the anti-piracy operations in the Gulf.

The United Kingdom has also played an effective role in establishing its military presence in Africa. The UK has several military sites in Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, and the Gulf, the presence of UK forces is largely limited to defence agreements and training sessions in the continent. Turkey is also considered as one of the fastest and growing foreign military presence in Africa. Turkey has established its foreign military bases in Somalia, Sudan, and the Gulf

region, however, the establishment of Turkey forces in Africa are largely limited to defence agreement among the nations like Somalia, Sudan, Qatar and the neighbours like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to counter anti-piracy operations in the continent. The United Arab Emirates has been developing its commercial relations with the Horn of Africa in the recent decade. The reason for the U.A.E 's interest in the Horn of Africa is due to increasing economic opportunities created by China's Belt and Road initiative. The U.A.E. has established its base in Eritrea, Somalia, Somaliland, Puntland, and Socotra. However, the objective of establishing a military port in Africa is not only limited to improvement in commercial relations but also to improve the military presence in the region. The other rising stakeholders in foreign military bases in Africa are India, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Iran, Israel, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Spain, who are recently observing a change in foreign and military policies from the regional to the African continent (Melvin, 2019)

ANALYSIS

The active participation of foreign military bases in Africa has been categorized as an external security threat by the African Union. African Union's peace and security council [PSC], has represented its concern over the establishment of foreign military bases in Africa. On 14th August 2019, the peace and security council adopted a 'communique' on the state of foreign military presence in Africa, where the council condemned the external interference, by whomsoever, in African peace and security issues, and warned that it will proceed to naming and shaming of those involved to address this problem (communique of the 868th of the PSC on the state of foreign military presence, 2019). The rise of foreign military bases in Africa can be perceived as an external environment threat. The Horn of Africa became the epicenter of such presence, with about 11 foreign military bases. The rise of foreign military bases could be observed due to the region's strategic proximity to the Middle East and Asia and the subsequent threat along the Red Sea. Foreign military bases in Africa are driven by African states leasing their territory for a foreign power for military bases, mainly for domestic economic gain. For example, Djibouti generates more than USD 300 million annually from the foreign military presence on its soil. Djibouti and other African states are highly affected by the problem of piracy, cyberattacks, maritime issues, etc., and another factor that has driven what attracts foreign military bases in Djibouti is a weaker economy and weak military. Therefore, Djibouti needed external support to strengthen the grip of its nation. However, longstanding military bases in Djibouti and other African states are resulting in interference of the external environment in the internal politics of African states.

Rising tensions between the US and China and the recent establishment of the first overseas military base of China in Djibouti are threatening the regional peace of Africa and the Middle East. The escalating economic race of the U.S. and China globally is focusing on the African states. The recent reduction of foreign aid by the Trump Administration in 2020, will result in a huge loss to the continent. Currently, Sub-Saharan Africa is grappling with a record level of displacement due to conflict and drought and the sudden reduction of foreign aid by the Trump administration would result in a huge loss to the United States on both diplomatic and economic front (MCCORMICK, 2017). The establishment of China's military base and the recent

reduction of Budget by the Trump administration would result in higher investment opportunities for China and rising challenges for the United States. Therefore, the backfall of U.S. foreign aid and the rise of China would result in regional stability of the African continent. The U.S. should increase the foreign aid budget rather than reducing it. The U.S. in collaboration with NATO should increase its funding for development and disaster relief in the horn of Africa and should focus more on building economic relations rather than defense agreements.

The African states should establish a legal agreement in collaboration with the African Union and foreign military bases in the region to avoid external interference in domestic politics. The African states should focus on establishing their defense system and a trained military to counter internal conflicts and should focus on increasing commercial ties and reducing defense agreements or cooperation.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the build-up of military bases in the Horn of Africa, and in particular the opening of a Chinese military base in Djibouti in 2017, has attracted considerable attention. These foreign forces are a part of a global network of military facilities and naval deployment in the Middle East, the Gulf, the Indian Ocean, and Asia- Pacific as well as in other parts of Africa. Nevertheless, the focus on joint efforts to promote regional stability is currently supplanted by external military deployment in the region, which is driven by geopolitical, commercial, and military competition, largely with negative effects on regional stability.

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