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By Vijay Prashad

In 'Lobster' 53 Robin Ramsay notes that the US 'military-industrial complex', in its perpetual need to generate enemies, "has just landed a big one: Africa". While the Bush administration has created the long-lobbied for Unified Command for Africa, it's the NGOs, Hollywood liberals, Clinton functionaries and other sundry 'multilateralists' of the Save Darfur Coalition who are leading the charge.

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Ongoing coverage of military moralism on Darfur can also be found at Spiked Online, most recently: <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php?site/article/3723/>**

Destination Darfur

A New Cold War Over Oil

By VIJAY PRASHAD

In February, George W. Bush announced the creation of a new unified combatant command for Africa. After several years of deliberation, the Pentagon finally agreed to create the African Command (AFRICOM), which will relieve the European Command (EUCOM) and the Central Command (CENTCOM), which earlier shared responsibility for Africa.

In July, Bush appointed General William "Kip" Ward to run AFRICOM, which will be based in Germany until it finds an African home (Liberia, home to an Omega surveillance system from 1976 to 1997, is openly lobbying to play host). Sensitive to criticism that AFRICOM seeks military solutions to African problems, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, Theresa Whelan, said, "Africa Command is not going to reflect a U.S. intent to engage kinetically in Africa. This is about prevention. This isn't about fighting wars."

Navy Rear Admiral Robert Moeller, who led the Africa Command Implementation Planning Team, pointed out that "the increasing importance of the continent to the U.S.," particularly on strategic and economic grounds, makes this development necessary. The proximate issues used to push for AFRICOM were the ongoing crisis in Darfur and the failure of the U.S. to act in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

And the less-talked-about issue is the importance of African resources for the U.S. economy and for multinational corporations. Oil is, of course, a central character in this story.

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In September 2002, The New York Times ran an article with a telling headline, "In Courting Africa, U.S. likes the Dowry: Oil". The article quoted then Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham, who said, "Energy from Africa plays an increasingly important role in our energy security." The following year, a senior Pentagon official told The Wall Street Journal, "A key mission for U.S. forces [in Africa] would be to ensure that Nigeria's oilfields, which in the future could account for as much as 25 per cent of all U.S. oil imports, are secure." This figure comes from the National Intelligence Council's report of 2000 (when the U.S. imported 16 per cent of its oil needs from sub-Saharan Africa).

Since 9/11, the urgency of a stable source of oil has increased. Historian John Ghazvinian's new book, *Untapped: The Scramble for Africa's Oil*, points out that not only is African oil of high quality, but it bears other significant political advantages: most African countries are not Organizations of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members, their oil is not owned by powerful state oil companies, and the oil is largely offshore, which means "that even if a civil war or violent insurrection breaks out onshore [always a concern in Africa], the oil companies can continue to pump out oil with little likelihood of sabotage, banditry or nationalist fervor getting in the way."

Eighty per cent of the oil reserves discovered between 2001 and 2004 come from West Africa, where the U.S. currently procures only 12 per cent of its total supply. West Africa is a crucial site for U.S. interests, so much so that the U.S. is willing to be openly hypocritical about its promotion of democracy and human rights when it comes to the region.

In April 2006, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice warmly welcomed her "special friend", Equatorial Guinea's man of all seasons and many decades, Teodoro Obiang. Her own department annually chastises Obiang's regime for corruption, human rights violations and electoral fraud. Despite being home to some of the poorest people in Africa, Equatorial Guinea is the third largest oil producer in the continent, whose oil the U.S. government hopes will flow across the Atlantic to power the U.S. The U.S. has been loath to put pressure on Nigeria for the very same reasons.

For decades, the oil regions in West Africa have been "swamps of insurgency" (as the International Crisis Group put it in a 2006 report). Wars in the Niger Delta, for instance, claim lives and communities, as well as barrels of oil. Both the Nigerian and U.S. governments are concerned about "resource control", and it has been the task of the Nigerian military to clamp down on dissent. Resource wars in the Congo (over diamonds and coltan) and in West Africa (over oil) have set the continent on fire. The U.S. has thus far engaged with these conflicts through Africa's national armies, who have increasingly become the praetorian guards of large corporations. None of this can be justified directly as protection of the extraction of resources, so it has increasingly been couched in the language of the War on Terror.

The Pan-Sahel Initiative (created in 2002) draws U.S. Special Operations Forces to Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. In 2004, the U.S. extended this to the major oil-producing countries of Algeria, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia and renamed it the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI). After 9/11, the U.S. moved a Special Operations Force into a former French Foreign Legion base, Camp Lemonnier, in Djibouti. In July 2003, the U.S. earned the right to deploy P-3 Orion aerial surveillance aircraft in Tamanrasset, Algeria. Under the guise of the War on Terror, the U.S. government moved forces into various parts of Africa, where they trained African armies and have been able to intervene in the increasingly dangerous resource wars.

If the U.S. government is quieter in its approach, right-wing think tanks in the U.S. feel no such compunction. The Heritage Foundation lobbied for the creation of AFRICOM for several years, and arguably its work moved Donald Rumsfeld to consider an African Command. In a 2003 study entitled "U.S. Military Assistance for Africa: A Better Solution", the Heritage Foundation argued: "Creating an African Command would go a long way towards turning the Bush Administration's well-aimed strategic priorities for Africa into a reality." Rather than engage Africa diplomatically, it is better to be diplomatic through the barrel of a gun. "America must not be afraid to employ its forces decisively when vital national interests are threatened," the study said. Nevertheless, the U.S. will not need always to send its own soldiers. "A sub-unified command for Africa would give the U.S. military an instrument with which to engage effectively in the continent and reduce the potential that America might have to intervene directly." AFRICOM would analyze intelligence, work "closely with civil-military leaders", coordinate training and conduct joint exercises. In other words, the U.S. would

make the friendly African military forces “inter-operatable” not only with U.S. hardware but also with U.S. interests. When AFRICOM became a reality, Heritage’s Brett Schaefer welcomed the “long overdue” move.

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At a May gathering of African leaders in Shanghai, the Chinese government promised \$20 billion for the continent’s development. Madagascar’s President Marc Ravalomanana enthusiastically said, “We in Africa must learn from your success.” In January, the Chinese Foreign Ministry released a White Paper that pointed out that unlike U.S. and European investment, Chinese finance for Africa would be driven by equity and sustainable development. Technology transfer, the entry of African goods into the Chinese market without barriers, and the entry of Chinese finance for development projects are the main elements of the Chinese strategy (also the main features of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Addis Ababa Action Plan of 2004-06). With the U.S. and European aid at a low point and with resistance from the U.S. and Europe to compromise on the debt burden of African states, the Chinese proposal was welcomed in many parts of Africa.

But in Washington, among the U.S. establishment’s strategic planners (such as those in the Heritage Foundation), China’s entry into Africa has provoked concern. For people in the Heritage Foundation and in the White House, AFRICOM is as much a response to China as it is to the increased anti-terrorist efforts in the continent.

China is not in Africa for altruistic reasons. A quarter of China’s crude oil imports already come from Africa. African governments are well aware of the competition between the US and China, and they have used that standoff to their partial advantage (when the U.S. would not act fast enough to get Nigeria’s armed forces 200 patrol boats and funds, the Nigerian government turned to China).

A new Cold War over oil has begun in Africa, but the new players are the U.S. (as the face of global oil corporations) and China. The U.S. government’s response has not been able to match the Chinese initiative dollar for dollar, partly because it cannot. Instead, the U.S. government has gone after China for its dealings with the government of Sudan. China promised to invest \$10 billion in Sudan, and it currently purchases 70 per cent of Sudanese oil (U.S.-based oil firms cannot trade with Sudan as a result of an embargo in force since 1997). The price for this oil is greater, however, than money.

China blocked votes in the United Nations Security Council on the ongoing violence in Darfur, although global pressure has now forced Beijing to appoint a special envoy to Darfur and put some modest pressure on Khartoum. The close relationship between the US and the leaders of Equatorial Guinea or Nigeria is repellent but not half as dubious as that between the Chinese and Sudanese governments. The U.S. government has, therefore, a potent weapon to wield against Beijing’s claim to be in favor of African development.

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Since 1984-85, the western Sudanese province of Darfur has been in a prolonged crisis. The drought of those years made it hard for pastoralists to find grazing ground for their camel herds. Battles over land went on for two decades before an embattled and split Islamist government in Khartoum armed the most impoverished of the tribes (who had begun to regain their self-respect through a virulently supremacist ideology promoted by a group called Tajamu al Arabi, or the Arab Gathering).

These tribes began an onslaught against their settled neighbors, with Khartoum’s support. In a few years over a million people were driven out of their homes to neighboring Chad (the U.N. estimates that around 70,000 have been killed). (These numbers, incidentally, are dwarfed by the death toll and

the population displacement forced by the U.S. occupation of Iraq.) The U.N. called the Sudan situation a “crime against humanity”, while the U.S., uncharacteristically, labeled it genocide. For a while the African Union was able to stabilize the situation, although it did not succeed in crafting a political solution to the problem. The African Union, created in 1999, has neither the financial ability to pay its troops nor the logistical capacity to do the job. The European Union, which paid the troops’ salaries, began to withhold funds on grounds of accountability, and this gradually killed off the peacekeeping operations.

Professor Mahmood Mamdani of Columbia University (one of the world’s leading experts on contemporary Africa), says of this: “There is a concerted attempt being made to shift the political control of any intervention force inside Darfur from inside Africa to outside Africa”. In other words, the U.S. and Europe are eager to control the dynamics of what happens in Africa and not allow an indigenous, inter-state agency to gain either the experience this would provide or the respect it would gain if it succeeds. The African Union has been undermined so that only the U.S. can appear as the savior of the beleaguered people of Darfur, and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, it suits the U.S. that the campaigns to save the people of Darfur concentrate on the role of China and on what is often framed as an “Arab” assault on “Africans.” The Save Darfur Coalition in the U.S., for instance, has a report on the “Deadly Partnership” between Sudan and China but says nothing of the role of the U.S. in undermining the African Union’s attempts. The Coalition is more sophisticated than can fit into the Arab-African stereotypes, but its members include groups that are less careful (the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, for instance, is an organizational member; it has not yet tried to distance itself from its parent organization’s role in the Gujarat pogroms).

The Save Darfur Coalition, which is the largest U.S. umbrella organization, was formed in 2004 through the work of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the American Jewish World Service. People who have been motivated by the efforts of the group are aware of what is happening in Darfur. This is a worthwhile goal, particularly if it is able to bring a ceasefire and an eventual peace settlement in Darfur. But, the movement seems to have no viable strategy to do this beyond putting pressure on China and pleading with the U.S. government to take “tough” stands against Khartoum. The complexity on the ground is irrelevant.

The heads of the Save Darfur Coalition and the Genocide Intervention Network (set up by the Center for American Progress) are all liberal Democrats who played some kind of a role in the Bill Clinton administration. The Darfur campaign enables them to distance themselves from the excesses of the Bush regime and yet preserve an essential element of the Clinton foreign policy arsenal, “humanitarian intervention” (as in the Kosovo war of 1999). For that reason, these groups have begun to offer the slogan, “Out of Iraq and Into Darfur”. At a forum in New York City on July 15, a young woman asked why the U.S. could not use its superior firepower to defeat the Janjaweed in Sudan. At the same event, the documentary film *The Devil Came on Horseback* shows the former U.S. Marine Brian Steidle photograph a band of Janjaweed militia leave a village and wish he could exchange his telephoto lens for a gun-scope to “end it now”. Private mercenary armies such as the International Peace Operations Association and DynCorp International clamor to cross the Chad border and conduct operations against the Janjaweed.

The language of “no-fly zones” and sanctions is not only in the air, but it is close to becoming a reality. The New York Times’ Nicholas D. Kristof, on July 16, called for the creation of a U.S.-run “no-fly zone” over Darfur, which would be an entry point into the militarization of the response to what is, by the authority of the African Union and Human Rights Watch, a messy political situation (the rebel groups have split up and are themselves attacking humanitarian workers).

In May, Bush unilaterally implemented tighter economic sanctions, and promised to move another Security Council resolution. That the first head of AFRICOM is the former commander of the battalion that led Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1993 is an ominous sign. Would a cruise missile strike on Khartoum (a replay of 1998) and an invasion of Darfur create a solution to the current crisis, or would it only create an Iraq in Africa?

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