

Vast Network of U.S. Bases in Africa Exposed



A U.S. Army instructor is seen alongside Malian soldiers in this picture taken on April 12, 2018 at a military camp in southwestern Mali.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) — A United States military briefing shows Washington runs 34 bases across Africa, contrary to the Pentagon's insistence that it maintains a modest presence across the continent.

The 2018 briefing by the U.S. African Command (AFRICOM)'s science adviser Peter E. Teil, titled Strategic Posture, was exposed by The Intercept in early December. The news website obtained the documents via the Freedom of Information Act.

The documents, the report said, offer "a unique window onto the sprawling network of U.S. military outposts in Africa, including previously undisclosed or unconfirmed sites in hotspots like Libya, Niger, and Somalia."

In the briefing, Teil presented a map of the U.S. military's constellation of the bases, which names 14 forward operating sites (FOSes) and cooperative security locations (CSLs) besides providing country-specific locales for 20 contingency locations.

The website quoted Adam Moore, an assistant professor of geography at the University of California, as saying that the positioning of the bases suggested that the US military presence had been organized around three theaters throughout the continent.

"The Horn of Africa — Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya; Libya; and the Sahel — Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso," said Moore, adding that the US only maintained one base in the south.

Djibouti is home to the "crown jewel" of the bases, Camp Lemonnier, the U.S. hub for operations targeting Yemen and Somalia.

Libya is shown housing three unnamed and previously unreported contingency locations near its coastline, although President Donald Trump said last year that he saw no US military role there.

Cameroon accommodates two more contingency bases. The 2018 map also notes the existence of a CSL in Chad's capital, N'Djamena.

There are two contingency locations in neighboring Mali. Tunisia hosts another contingency site. Only one base lies in the far south of the continent: A CSL in Botswana's capital, Gaborone.

"It is getting harder for the U.S. military to plausibly claim that it has a 'light footprint' in Africa. In just the past five years, it has established what is perhaps the largest drone complex in the world in Djibouti — Chabelley — which is involved in wars on two continents, Yemen, and Somalia," Moore said.

The expert also noted that the U.S. was building an even larger drone base in the city of Agadez in central Niger.

Earlier in the year, Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, the AFRICOM commander, told the House Armed Services Committee, "US Africa Command's posture plan is designed to secure strategic access to key locations on a continent characterized by vast distances and limited infrastructure."

"Our posture network allows forward staging of forces to provide operational flexibility and timely response," he added.

Putin Warns U.S. Against Developing Banned Missiles



Russia's Tor-M2MDT surface-to-air missile systems designed for the Arctic region are paraded during the 2017 Victory Day parade in Moscow.

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday warned the United States that if it walks out of a key arms treaty and starts developing the type of missiles banned by it, Russia will do the same.

Putin's remarks to Russian news agencies on Wednesday came a day after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced at a NATO meeting that Washington will suspend its obligations under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 60 days, citing Russian "cheating."

The U.S. has shared intelligence evidence with its NATO allies that it says shows that Russia's new SSC-8 ground-fired cruise missile could give Moscow the ability to launch a nuclear strike in Europe with little or no notice. Russia has denied the accusations.

President Donald Trump earlier this year announced his decision to withdraw from the INF, accusing Russia and China — which is not a signatory to the treaty — of violating it.

Putin on Wednesday accused the United States of making up excuses for pulling

out of the pact, saying that the U.S. first made up its mind to walk out of it and only then "started to look for the reasons why they should do it."

"It seems that our American partners believe that the situation has changed so much that the U.S. has to have this type of weapons," he said in televised remarks. "What would be our response? A very simple one: in that case, we will do the same."

Speaking at a briefing of foreign military attaches earlier, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, chief of staff of the Russian military, warned of a Russian response and said that it would be the countries that host U.S. intermediate-range missiles that would become immediate targets for Russia.

When signed in 1987, the INF treaty was lauded as a major safeguard for global security since they eliminated shorter-range missiles that take just a few minutes to reach their targets. The removal of such destabilizing weapons would in theory allow more time for decision-making in case of a warning of a missile attack.



BELGRADE (AP) — Serbia's prime minister warned Wednesday that the formation of a Kosovo army could trigger Serbia's armed intervention in the former province — the bluntest warning so far amid escalating tensions in the Balkans. Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said she hopes "we won't ever have to use our army, but unfortunately that is currently one of the options on the table." Kosovo's Parliament will vote Dec. 14 on transforming the country's security forces into a regular army. Serbian officials allege the army would be used to chase the Serb minority out of Kosovo — a claim repeatedly denied by Kosovo officials. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg Wednesday issued a warning on Kosovo's intention to transition into army. "Such a move is ill-timed. It goes against the advice of many NATO allies and may have serious repercussions for Kosovo's future Euro-Atlantic integration," he said. Russia, which is close ally of Serbia, called Kosovo's planned move "another destabilizing and provocative step."

PARIS (Reuters) — U.S. President Donald Trump has taken another swipe on Twitter at his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron prompted by Macron's woes over violent protests against fuel taxes. "I am glad that my friend @EmmanuelMacron and the protestors in Paris have agreed with the conclusion I reached two years ago," Trump tweeted late on Tuesday. "The Paris Agreement is fatally flawed because it raises the price of energy for responsible countries while whitewashing some of the worst polluters," said Trump, referring to a global deal on the environment drafted in Paris in late 2015. Earlier this week, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe decided to suspend planned increases to fuel taxes for at least six months in response to weeks of sometimes violent protests, marking the first major U-turn by Macron's administration in 18 months in office.

GENEVA (AP) — The UN secretary-general's envoy for Western Sahara is meeting with foreign ministers from Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania plus leaders of the Polisario Front over the future of the Morocco-annexed territory. UN envoy Horst Koehler, a former German president, hosted a "round-table" discussion among the attendees at the first UN-hosted talks on the territory in six years, after meeting with them bilaterally earlier Wednesday. The UN says the two-day meeting is a first step toward a renewed negotiations process aiming to "provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara." Morocco annexed the former Spanish colony in 1975 and fought the pro-independence Polisario Front until a UN-brokered cease-fire in 1991. Morocco has proposed wide-ranging autonomy for Western Sahara, while the Polisario Front wants a referendum on the territory's future.

WELLINGTON (AP) — A powerful earthquake that struck in the southern Pacific Ocean on Wednesday sent jitters around the region after authorities warned of possible tsunamis, but there were no initial reports of destructive waves or major damage. The magnitude 7.5 quake hit in the afternoon near New Caledonia at a shallow depth, where earthquakes are generally more damaging. It was felt as far away as Vanuatu. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said tsunami waves of between 1 and 3 meters were possible along some coasts of New Caledonia and Vanuatu.

SARAJEVO (Reuters) — A Bosnian Serb ex-commander, who was jailed for 28 years by the UN war crimes tribunal for rape and enslavement in Bosnia's war of the 1990s, has now been indicted over the killing of Muslim civilians, Bosnia's prosecutors office said on Wednesday. Dragoljub Kunarac, 58, who was the commander of a special unit of the Bosnian Serb army, is accused of taking part in killing of at least six people and torture and persecution of Muslim civilians from villages around the eastern Bosnian town of Foca in July 1992, the prosecutor said in a statement. He is also accused of taking part in looting and burning down Muslim homes, the statement said. Foca was notorious for the mass persecution and killings of Muslims by the Bosnian Serb forces as part of a campaign to form an exclusively Serb region, and for detention camps in which women and young girls were raped and enslaved.

SOFIA (AFP) — Bulgarian police have busted a huge illegal weapons arsenal in a garage in the capital Sofia, seizing dozens of rifles, guns and pistols, the Interior Ministry announced Wednesday. Sixty-five Kalashnikov rifles, 37 Scorpion guns and 43 pistols were seized in the operation conducted by the police's counter-terrorism unit over the weekend, the ministry's anti-organized crime chief Iyaylo Spiridonov told a press conference. Police also found eight kilograms of highly explosive black powder, 14 rocket-propelled grenade launchers and tens of thousands of cartridges, he added. The suspected ring leader of the weapons smuggling operation was held during the raids, along with six others. Another 17 Kalashnikov rifles and 15 pistols equipped with silencers were also confiscated by police agents in the central town of Kazanlak, home to Bulgaria's biggest and oldest light arms and munitions maker Arsenal, where officials said the arms came from.

Police Arrest Scores of Mobsters Across Europe



Settimo Mineo, considered the successor to Sicilian Mafia boss "Totò" Riina, is escorted by Italian Carabinieri officers after his arrest in Palermo, Sicily, on Dec. 4, 2018.

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Hundreds of police in Germany, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands arrested at least 84 suspected mobsters and seized around 2 million euros (\$2.3 million) Wednesday in a series of coordinated raids targeting a powerful Italian organized crime syndicate.

"Today we send a clear message to organized crime groups across Europe," said Filippo Spiezia, vice president of Eurojust, the EU prosecution agency that coordinated the raids. "They are not the only ones able to operate across borders; so are Europe's judiciary and law enforcement communities."

It was the second significant mob takedown in as many days. On Tuesday, Italian authorities said they had dismantled the rebuilt upper echelons of the Mafia in the Sicilian capital of Palermo by arresting 46 people, including the man presumed to have taken over as provincial kingpin.

Wednesday's raids were the culmination of a two-year investigation codenamed Pollino against the powerful 'ndrangheta criminal group on allegations of cocaine trafficking, money laundering, bribery and violence, said Eurojust.

The 'ndrangheta is Italy's most powerful criminal organization, eclipsing

by far Sicily's Cosa Nostra or the Naples area Camorra.

The Hague-based agency said the massive probe was the biggest of its kind in Europe. Some 4 tons of cocaine were traced during the investigation. Cocaine and ecstasy pills also were seized in Wednesday's raids.

Italian police hailed the cooperation between European police forces and Eurojust's coordination, saying it was an important new crime-fighting tactic that allowed investigators in different countries to share information in real time.

But Italy's top Mafia prosecutor, Federico Cafiero De Raho, also sounded a note of caution, saying the raids only scratched the surface of the powerful 'ndrangheta, whose tentacles and illicit activities, including huge cocaine trafficking operations, were spread all over the world.

Speaking in The Hague, Cafiero de Raho said the arrests "are nothing for 'ndrangheta. There are thousands of people who should be arrested and billions of euros that should be seized."

A leading expert on the 'ndrangheta, Catanzaro-based Prosecutor Nicola Gratteri, recently said the Calabrian-based 'ndrangheta syndicate has for years been buying up hotels, restaurants and other properties in Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Germany to both launder some of the billions of dollars it rakes in through cocaine trafficking, as well as invest that money to start "clean" businesses and earn even more revenue.

Eurojust said Italian authorities arrested 41 suspects, mainly in Calabria.

J.P. Morgan: Chances of UK Calling Off Brexit Rise

LONDON (Reuters) — Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal came under fire from allies and opponents alike Wednesday after the government was forced to publish legal advice showing the United Kingdom could be locked indefinitely in the European Union's orbit.

After a string of humiliating parliamentary defeats for May the day before cast new doubt over her ability to get a deal approved, U.S. investment bank J.P. Morgan said the chances of Britain calling off Brexit altogether had increased.

As investors and allies tried to work out the ultimate destination for the world's fifth largest economy, the Northern Irish party which props up May's government said legal advice about the deal was "devastating".

advice from the government's top lawyer about the fallback mechanism, or backstop, to prevent the return of border controls between British-ruled Northern Ireland and the EU-member Irish Republic.

"Despite statements in the Protocol that it is not intended to be permanent and the clear intention of the parties that it should be replaced by alternative, permanent arrangements, in international law the Protocol would endure indefinitely until a superseding agreement took its place," the advice said.

"In the absence of a right of termination, there is a legal risk that the United Kingdom might become subject to protracted and repeating rounds of negotiations."

Brexit, the United Kingdom's biggest economic and political shift since World War Two, has repeatedly plunged British politics into crisis since the shock 2016 vote to leave

the EU.

Now May is trying to get her deal approved by a Parliament which shows every sign of striking it down in a vote on Dec. 11. It is unclear what happens if the deal is rejected as Britain is due to leave on March 29.

Nigel Dodds, the deputy leader of the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party, said the legal advice proved that Northern Ireland would be treated differently to the rest of the United Kingdom.

On Tuesday, just hours before the start of a five-day debate in the British Parliament on May's Brexit deal, a top law official at the European Court of Justice said Britain could pull back its formal divorce notice.

"The UK now appears to have the option of revoking unilaterally and taking a period of time of its own choosing to decide what happens next," J.P. Morgan economist Malcolm Barr wrote in a note to clients.