

NATO Claims Africa as Its ‘Southern Neighbourhood’

In August 2022, the United States published a new foreign policy [strategy](#) aimed at Africa. The 17-page document featured 10 mentions of China and Russia combined, including a pledge to ‘counter harmful activities by the [People’s Republic of China], Russia, and other foreign actors’ on the continent, but did not once mention the term ‘sovereignty’. Although US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has [stated](#) that Washington ‘will not dictate Africa’s choices’, African governments have [reported](#) facing ‘patronising bullying’ from NATO member states to take their side in the war in Ukraine. As global tensions rise, the US and its allies have signalled that they view the continent as a battleground to wage their [New Cold War](#) against China and Russia.

A New Monroe Doctrine?

At its annual summit in June, NATO [named](#) Africa along with the Middle East as ‘NATO’s southern neighbourhood’. On top of this, NATO’s Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ominously [referred](#) to ‘Russia and China’s increasing influence in our southern neighbourhood’ as a ‘challenge’. The following month, the outgoing commander of AFRICOM, General Stephen J Townsend, [referred](#) to Africa as ‘NATO’s southern flank’. These comments are disturbingly reminiscent of the neocolonial attitude espoused by the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, in which the US claimed Latin America as its ‘backyard’.

This paternalistic view of Africa appears to be widely held in Washington. In April, the US House of Representatives overwhelmingly [passed](#) the Countering Malign Russian Influence Activities in Africa Act by a vote of 415-9. The bill, which aims to punish African governments for not aligning with US foreign policy on Russia, has been widely [condemned](#) across the continent for disrespecting the sovereignty of African nations, with South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor [calling](#) it ‘absolutely disgraceful’.

The efforts by the US and Western countries to draw Africa into their geopolitical conflicts raise serious concerns: namely, will the US and NATO weaponise their vast military presence on the continent to achieve their aims?

AFRICOM: Protecting US and NATO's Hegemony

In 2007, the United States [established](#) its Africa Command (AFRICOM) 'in response to our expanding partnerships and interests in Africa'. In just 15 years, AFRICOM has [established](#) at least 29 military bases on the continent as part of an extensive [network](#) which includes more than 60 outposts and access points in at least 34 countries – over 60 percent of the nations on the continent.

Despite Washington's rhetoric of promoting democracy and human rights in Africa, in reality, AFRICOM aims to secure US hegemony over the continent. AFRICOM's [stated objectives](#) include 'protecting US interests' and 'maintaining superiority over competitors' in Africa. In fact, the creation of AFRICOM was motivated by the [concerns](#) of 'those alarmed by China's expanding presence and influence in the region'.

From the outset, NATO was involved in the endeavour, with the original [proposal](#) put forward by then Supreme Allied Commander of NATO James L Jones, Jr. On an annual basis, AFRICOM [conducts](#) training exercises focused on enhancing the 'interoperability' between African militaries and 'US and NATO special operations forces'.

The destructive nature of the US and NATO's military presence in Africa was exemplified in 2011 when – ignoring the African Union's [opposition](#) – the US and NATO launched their catastrophic military intervention in Libya to remove the government of Muammar Gaddafi. This regime change war destroyed the country, which had previously scored the [highest](#) among African nations on the UN Human Development Index. Over a decade later, the principal achievements of the intervention in Libya have been the return of [slave markets](#) to the country, the entry of thousands of [foreign fighters](#), and unending violence.

In the future, will the US and NATO invoke the 'malign influence' of China and Russia as a justification for military interventions and regime change in Africa?

Africa Rejects a New Cold War

At this year's UN General Assembly, the African Union firmly rejected the coercive efforts of the US and Western countries to use the continent as a pawn in their geopolitical agenda. 'Africa has suffered enough of the burden of history', [stated](#) Chairman of the African Union and President of Senegal Macky Sall; 'it does not want to be the breeding ground of a new Cold War, but rather a pole of stability and opportunity open to all its partners, on a mutually beneficial basis'. Indeed, the drive for war offers nothing to the peoples of Africa in their pursuit of peace, climate change adaptation, and development.

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