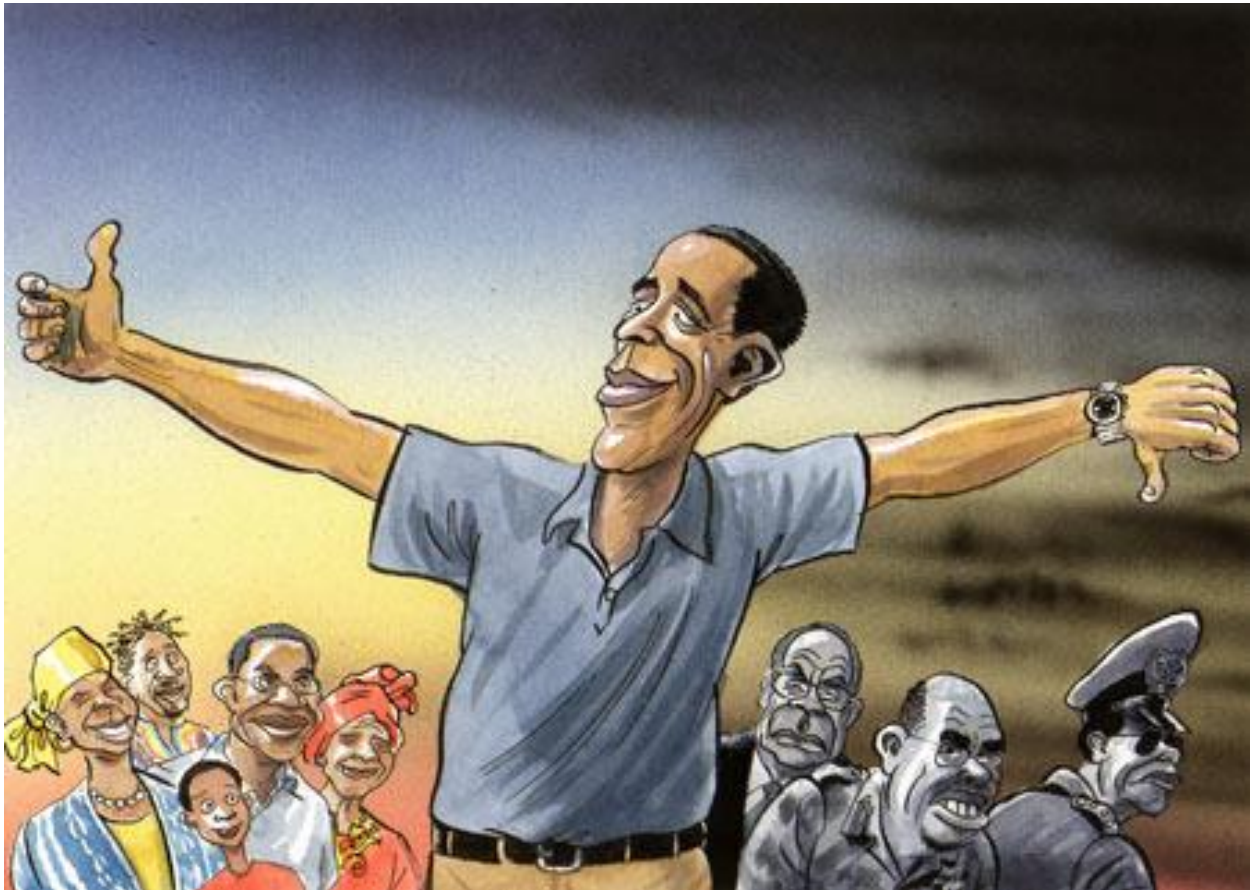


# Washington in Africa, 2012

## Who'll get 'whacked' next, to hasten oil extraction and repel Chinese and Islamic threats?

By Patrick Bond

Address to the Muslim Youth Movement 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference  
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 30 September 2012



[The Economist](#)

*At a time when popular revolutions are sweeping the globe, the United States should be strengthening, not weakening, basic rules of law and principles of justice enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But instead of making the world safer, America's violation of international human rights abets our enemies and alienates our friends. – Former US president Jimmy Carter, 25 June 2012, [The New York Times](#)*

*US actions since 9/11 represent the final stage in the US's century-long effort to complete the project of making US-led globalization a concrete reality across the world through three historical moments: 1) the attempted creation of a global Monroe doctrine between 1898 and 1919; 2) the Roosevelt administration's creation of the Bretton Woods Institutions – the World Bank and IMF – and the UN; and 3) globalization – the US-led effort to establish a new global regime based on free trade, deregulation, and privatization. – Neil Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization*, 2005*

The US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa and former three-time ambassador, Johnnie Carson, was feted by Brooks Spector recently at *Daily Maverick*, in an article entitled “[America’s Mr Africa](#)”. While it is always fitting to honour African-Americans who persevere to the top despite that country’s deep internal racism, Spector makes contentious political and economic claims about the ‘new’ [US Africa policy](#). “For some observers at least,” he says, “Barack Obama’s new partnership with Africa was announced in his speech in Accra [11 July 2009], when he declared the era of the authoritarian African big man to be over – kaput!”<sup>1</sup> As described below, however, Washington has maintained extremely cozy relationships with a variety of African dictators.

Spector then endorses Carson’s claims that “US interests in the continent fundamentally stem from its interest in strengthening trade to help African states grow their economies and meet development needs,” and that “the US wants to work with African nations to strengthen democratic institutions, good governance and efforts to stamp out corruption [and] to spur economic growth through market-driven, free trade principles.” Sorry, but we recall Washington’s deregulatory support for Wall Street’s market-driven binge, which in 2008-09 contributed to the [worst global economic crash](#) in 80 years, resulting in around [a million South African job losses](#). We know that [only the wealthy recovered](#) so far, and that in the US, the [top 1 percent received 93 percent](#) of all new income since 2009, because the system wasn’t fixed. And who can forget White House hypocrisy when it comes to vast and

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<sup>1</sup> The standard list of African tyrants Obama has had to relate to, in order of longevity, includes:

- Moummar Gaddafi, Libya – 1969-2011
- Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasago, Equatorial Guinea – 1979-present
- Jose Eduardo dos Santos, Angola – 1979-present
- Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe – 1980-present
- Hosni Mubarak, Egypt – 1981-2011
- Paul Biya, Cameroon – 1982-present
- Yoweri Museveni, Uganda – 1986-present
- King Mswati III, Swaziland – 1986-present
- Blaise Compaoré, Burkina Fasso – 1987-present
- Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia – 1987-2011
- Omar al-Bashir, Sudan – 1989-present
- Idriss Deby, Chad – 1990-present
- Isaias Afewerki, Eritrea – 1993-present
- Yahya Jammeh, Gambia – 1994-present
- Paul Kagame, Rwanda – 1994-present
- Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia – 1995-2012.

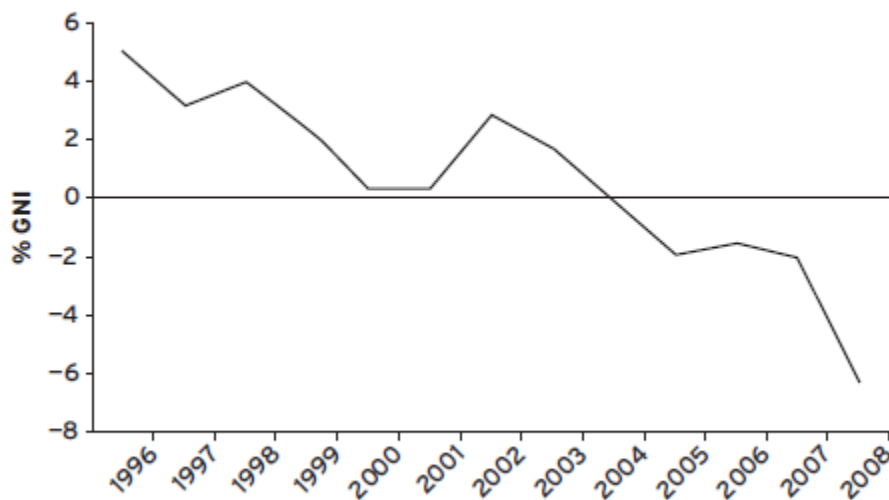
Three US-backed dictators above were overthrown (one, Gaddafi, through Obama’s direct intervention once he became less helpful than potential successors), and one, Zenawi died.

often [illegal US agro-corporate subsidies](#) which continue to thwart African production? And is there any capital city whose political system is more corrupted by corporate (especially banking) [campaign contributions](#) than Washington, resulting in such extreme malgovernance that [Obama cannot even make an effort to convict a single banker](#) for world-historic economic misdeeds?

Spector's most flawed assumption is that by increasing trade with (and vulnerability to) the world economy, "Africa" grows. Although a few elites have certainly grown rich from extraction, the opposite is more true, if we make a simple, rational adjustment to GDP: incorporating the wasting of Africa's "natural capital" (a silly phrase but one used increasingly by powerbrokers eyeing the 'Green Economy'). Measuring this loss is something that 10 African leaders agreed to start doing so in May, in the [Gaborone Declaration](#) initiated by Botswana president Ian Khama and the NGO Conservation International. The adjustment entails counting the outflow of natural capital (especially non-renewable mineral/petroleum resources) not only as a short-term *credit* to GDP (via "output of goods" measuring the resources extracted and sold), but also as a long-term *debit* to the natural capital stocks, as non-renewable resources no longer become available to future generations. Number-crunch the resource depletion, and net wealth declines in Africa as well as the Middle East.

Even the World Bank is taking seriously the need to adjust GDP, e.g. in its 2011 book [The Changing Wealth of Nations](#), which concludes that instead of *growing rapidly*, as often advertised by naive commentators, *Africa is shrinking even faster*. Conservatively [estimated](#) for the year 2007-08 (the last available measurements), SubSaharan Africa's decline in Adjusted Net Savings exceeded 6 percent of national income (and that does not even include diamond and uranium outflows, too hard for the Bank to calculate).

**Adjusted Net Saving in Sub-Saharan Africa as a Percentage of Gross National Income**



Source: Authors' calculations based on World Bank data.

The continent-wide Resource Curse makes the Marikana massacre look like a picnic, and allows us to dismiss Spector's article as the kind of idle spin-doctoring fluff one gets from the State Department's US Information Service (his former employer). But that is not a particularly satisfying place to leave matters, for the broader assumptions about the US in Africa also need a rethink, in part because South Africa is hosting the BRICS summit in Durban next March, and we're being subjected to rhetoric from [Pretoria](#) about a "new dynamic" in the emerging market power bloc, supposedly challenging the sole-superpower system of global governance. So it is timely to consider whether the two words US and Imperialism still fit snugly, and then (on another occasion in the near future) whether Resource-Cursed South Africa also deserves the description "sub-imperialist" because of its persistent collaboration as an economic deputy-sheriff to Washington. When a decade ago, Thabo Mbeki introduced the New Partnership for Africa's Development, it was termed "[philosophically spot on](#)" by Carson's predecessor in the Bush regime, Walter Kansteiner. With both presidents gone for nearly four years, what's new and different?

## **The US versus African democracy**

Has Washington, as Carson claims, helped Africa democratise? The quaint US State Department notion is based on Washington's "talking left" about democracy. On closer examination, Obama and Carson are "walking right," along the same neo-conservative track George W. Bush prepared across Africa's military, geopolitical and extractive-economic terrain. Thanks to White House patronage, murderous African dictators still retain power until too late, most obviously Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, who is personally worth at least \$40 billion (according to an [ABC News](#) report) and who was recipient of many billions of dollars in US military aid in the 18 months following Obama's speech. As Carson's boss [Hillary Clinton](#) remarked in 2009, "I really consider President and Mrs. Mubarak to be friends of my family," and offered this gaffe a few days before the corrupt tyrant was overthrown in February 2011: "Our assessment is that the Egyptian government is stable." As a result of her affection for one of the worst African big men, Egypt's democratic movement's core activists turned a cold shoulder to Clinton [again](#) and [again](#).

Washington's coddling of other dictators was signaled just weeks after Obama's Ghana speech, when his UN Ambassador [Susan Rice](#) announced a New York luncheon with 25 African heads of state (40 had been invited): "We are looking to have a dialogue with responsible leaders about the future of Africa's economic and social development." Obama dined with numerous tyrants that day, as only a few governments (Eritrea, Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Niger, Sudan and Zimbabwe) were specifically "left off the guest list because of disputes over their governance or an antagonistic relationship with Washington," according to Kenya's [Nation](#) newspaper. Amongst the 40 were Cameroonian dictator Paul Biya, and as his [office reported](#), "At the end of the two and a half hours that they spent together, most of the African leaders left the dining hall visibly satisfied." Democracy and human rights were apparently left off on the agenda, according to a briefing by the main White House Africa security official, [Michelle Gavin](#).



Another attendee was Gambian president Yahya Jammeh, a colonel who after overthrowing a democrat in 1994 and later claiming to have found an AIDS cure, last month came under renewed criticism from international human rights advocates after carrying out the first 9 out of a potential 40 mass death-row [executions](#) (those threatened include an elderly 84-year-old, eight prisoners with mental health issues and eight foreign nationals). As one local citizens' network put it, "Given that the [Gambia government uses the death penalty](#) and other harsh sentences as a tool to silence political dissent and opposition, Civil Society Associations Gambia believes that any execution is a further indicator of the brutality with which President Jammeh's regime is bent on crushing political dissent." Yet when asked whether, like the European Union, the US State Department would "also have some sort of response should they not heed these warnings not to proceed?," the official [answer](#) was chilling: "I think we haven't telegraphed any response at this point."

One reason not to annoy Jammeh was the US Central Intelligence Agency's reliance upon a Banjul airport as a secret destination and refueling site for "[rendition](#)" victims, i.e. the illegal transfer of suspected terrorists to countries carrying out torture on behalf of Washington. According to former US air force veteran and *Miami Herald* journalist [Sherwood Ross](#), amongst 28 countries "that held prisoners in behalf of the US based on published data" are a dozen from Africa: Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, South Africa and Zambia.

With the possible exceptions of Kenya and Zambia, all these regimes remain close Pentagon allies, and hence difficult for genuine democrats. Last March, as the Arab Spring wave moved east from Tunisia, Obama backed the Djibouti regime of [Ismail Omar Guelleh](#)

against pro-democracy protesters, apparently because of the tiny dictatorship's hosting of several thousand US soldiers at Washington's only solely-owned base on the continent.

Such hypocritical relations are not new, and even though he served less than a term in the US Senate, Obama developed ties to some of the continent's most venal elites. Promoting US interests in the form of petro-military complex profits, an ever-expanding "War on Terror" and an anti-Chinese political block, are the common denominators behind Washington's African alliances. Some examples are illustrative:

- In 2006, before becoming president, he [visited](#) Chad's dictator Idriss Deby in part to press the case for Chevron Texaco, which Deby had just expelled for failing to pay sufficient taxes.
- Obama infamously extended red-carpet treatment to oil-rich Gabon's world-class kleptocrat tyrant [Ali Bongo](#) 15 months ago in spite of nearly unprecedented controversy.
- This was followed by a similar invitation a few months ago to Ethiopia's then prime minister Meles Zenawi, in spite of objections from [Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International leaders](#) who complained, "The United States, the World Bank, and other states and institutions have shown little or no attention to Ethiopia's worsening human rights record. By inviting Meles to the G-8 summit, the US government is sending a message that at best shows a lack of concern about the human rights situation in Ethiopia, and at worst, will be perceived as a US endorsement of the Ethiopian government's policies." After Meles died in August, the [New York Times](#) acknowledged that "he was notoriously repressive, undermining Obama's maxim that [Africa doesn't need strongmen, it needs strong institutions](#)." The article quoted former US National Security Council official John Prendergast's concern about "a vexing policy quandary" in Washington's relations with Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan: "All of them have served American interests or have a strong US constituency, but all have deeply troubling human rights records." (Whether this is a "vexing quandary" or instead best described as a time-honoured tradition is up to the reader to decide.)
- Obama's support for Rwandan strongman Paul Kagame, including \$800 million a year in aid and in June 2012, protection against possible [UN censure](#) for supporting genocide in the Congo, attracted complaints by respected [social justice](#) groups (including the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation). [Maurice Carney](#) of Friends of the Congo explains, "Since Rwanda invaded Congo in 1996, millions of Congolese have perished, hundreds of thousands of women have been systematically raped and Congo's wealth has been looted. So the impact of Rwanda's role in destabilizing the Congo has been tragic for the people of the region and especially the Congolese people. And this is really the sad part about the whole situation, because it's within the means of the United States to hold its ally accountable, but it has not done so to date." Washington subsequently chided Kagame, apparently as a result of his turn to

new Chinese patrons, according to analyst [Eddie Haywood](#): “US State Department cables released by Wikileaks show that Washington has been keeping a close watch on Rwanda-China economic ties. Referring to meetings by Rwandan officials with a Chinese delegation, the cables took note of Rwanda's economic agreements with China and loans from Beijing for the construction of buildings to house the Office of Foreign Affairs and to finance a railway project. China also agreed to consider funding the construction of a new stadium, a women's center, and a Confucius Institute. Rwanda requested the delegation for duty-free access to Chinese markets, and Rwandan rice cultivation and road projects were discussed. As Rwanda is a transportation gateway for the Congo's vast resources to the global market, it goes without saying that China's 'control by investment' of a railway project traversing Rwanda through to a port in on the East coast of Tanzania would raise concerns in Washington.”

- Last year, citing US national security interests, Obama issued a waiver so as to send more than \$200 million in military aid to US-allied regimes in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, South Sudan and Yemen in spite of a 2008 US law prohibiting such funding because of their armies' recruitment of child soldiers. According to Human Rights Watch's [Jo Becker](#), “The Obama administration has been unwilling to make even small cuts to military assistance to governments exploiting children as soldiers. Children are paying the price for its poor leadership.”

Although Northwestern University professor [Richard Joseph](#) does give Washington credit for its roles in facilitating democracy (albeit in US interests) in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Malawi, the overall message is one of extreme hypocrisy: Obama is only opposed to African dictatorships which are anti-US (or allied to China), but if you are a sub-regional power, help hunt Al Qaeda or have substantial oil reserves, you may commit horrendous crimes and still get the prized White House photo op.

## **In WikiLeaks we trust**

We partly know this thanks to the NGO WikiLeaks, which in late 2010 published more than [250 000 US State Department cables](#). These repeatedly demonstrate how Clinton, Bush and Obama promoted, retained or imposed undemocratic regimes where these coincide with US interests. (Tellingly, Spector does not even mention this treasure trove as a source when reviewing Carson's *bona fides*.) Because of WikiLeaks, we know that just a month after Carson took office, Hillary Clinton asked eleven of Washington's embassies in Africa to collect fingerprints, DNA, iris scans, email passwords, credit card account numbers, frequent flyer account numbers and work schedules of local political, military, business and religious leaders, including United Nations officials. “To spy on the UN does take it a bit far,” remarks African politics researcher [Liesl Louw-Vaudran](#) of the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria. Thanks to WikiLeaks' revelations of “meddling chitchat” by Carson and his colleagues, says Louw-Vuadran, “I think many Africans are a little bit disgusted, a little bit shocked... once again forcing Africans to question the US's role [and] voice serious doubts about the US.”



One simple reason, she says, is “that if the US cannot protect its secrets, how on earth will they be able to protect people from terrorist attacks, for example?” Along with increased access to oil, imposition of market-driven (i.e. pro-corporate) economic policy, and hostility to China, Washington’s attempt to gain African cooperation in the “War on Terror” appears the most important factor in foreign policy. That role leaves the Pentagon’s Africa Command (AfriCom) very busy from its main bases in Frankfurt and Djibouti. “Rather than the simple and cheap rhetoric of bringing stability to the continent in the name of the ‘war against terror’,” according to veteran analyst [Daniel Volheim](#), “AfriCom is involved in almost 38 African countries [including] Chad, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone.”

In the watchdog website *Foreign Policy in Focus*, [Conn Hallinan](#) reports, “So far, AfriCom’s track record has been one disaster after another. It supported Ethiopia’s intervention in the Somalia civil war, and helped to overthrow the moderate Islamic Courts Union. It is now fighting a desperate rear-guard action against a far more extremist grouping, the al-Shabaab. AfriCom also helped coordinate a Ugandan Army attack on the Lord’s Resistance Army in the Democratic Republic of the Congo – Operation Lightning Thunder – that ended up killing thousands of civilians.” Add to that the failure to gain a satisfactory transition in Libya, after Washington and European powers misled the South African government about NATO’s bombing intentions, in the wake of the African Union’s failed efforts to settle the civil war peacefully.



But the problems are just beginning, observes US investigative journalist [Nick Turse](#): “Today, the U.S. is drawing down in Afghanistan and has largely left Iraq. Africa, however, remains a growth opportunity for the Pentagon.” Since 2009, Turse continues, “operations in Africa have accelerated far beyond the more limited interventions of the Bush years: last year’s war in Libya; a regional drone campaign with missions run out of airports and bases in Djibouti, Ethiopia, and the Indian Ocean archipelago nation of Seychelles; a flotilla of 30 ships in that ocean supporting regional operations; a multi-pronged military and CIA campaign against militants in Somalia, including intelligence operations, training for Somali agents, a secret prison, helicopter attacks, and U.S. commando raids; a massive influx of cash for counterterrorism operations across East Africa; a possible old-fashioned air war, carried out on the sly in the region using manned aircraft; tens of millions of dollars in arms for allied mercenaries and African troops; and a special ops expeditionary force (bolstered by State Department experts) dispatched to help capture or kill Lord’s Resistance Army leader Joseph Kony and his senior commanders.”

Adds University of Pittsburgh international affairs professor Michael Brenner, the AfriCom expansion “is self-perpetuating since there will be a steady supply of murderers and extortionists and Islamic radicals in this tormented environment which we never will be able to suppress. Our efforts, moreover, will generate the inevitable anti-Americanism and retaliation such ventures spawn – as in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. So why launch this latest enterprise of dubious value? Well, when you have created an AfriCom, when you have staffed it with a few thousand personnel, when you have a Special Forces corps numbering 60,000, when you have a vastly expanded CIA Operations Division, and when American strategic thinking is still locked in the auto-pilot mode set in September 2001 – when all these forces are at work, there will be action.”

Of course, corpses of US troops on African soil are to be avoided at all costs, as Bill Clinton’s disastrous 1994 Somalia mission taught the Pentagon. AfriCom’s head [General Carter Ham](#) explained last year that Washington “would eventually need an AfriCom that could undertake more traditional military operations, and he moved his command in that direction” although “not conducting operations – that’s for the Africans to do.” Writing more frankly about the anticipated division of labour in the U.S. Air University’s *Strategic Studies Quarterly* in 2010, [Maj Shawn T. Cochran](#) quotes a US military advisor to the African Union, “We don’t want to see our guys going in and getting whacked... We want Africans to go in.”

## **Terror blowback**

However, even with military ventriloquism, blowback damage results from Washington’s aggression, Volman argues. “The 2006 invasion of Somalia by the Ethiopian forces was clearly a proxy war, with AfriCom providing the logistics-allowing a criminal organization like al-Shabab to claim a legitimate reason for its war and brutal terror against the very people both sides claim to be freeing: the poor ordinary Somalis.” The next stage of the proxy war was in 2010 when the US gave aid to the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG), but when the *New York Times* reported the growing AfriCom role,

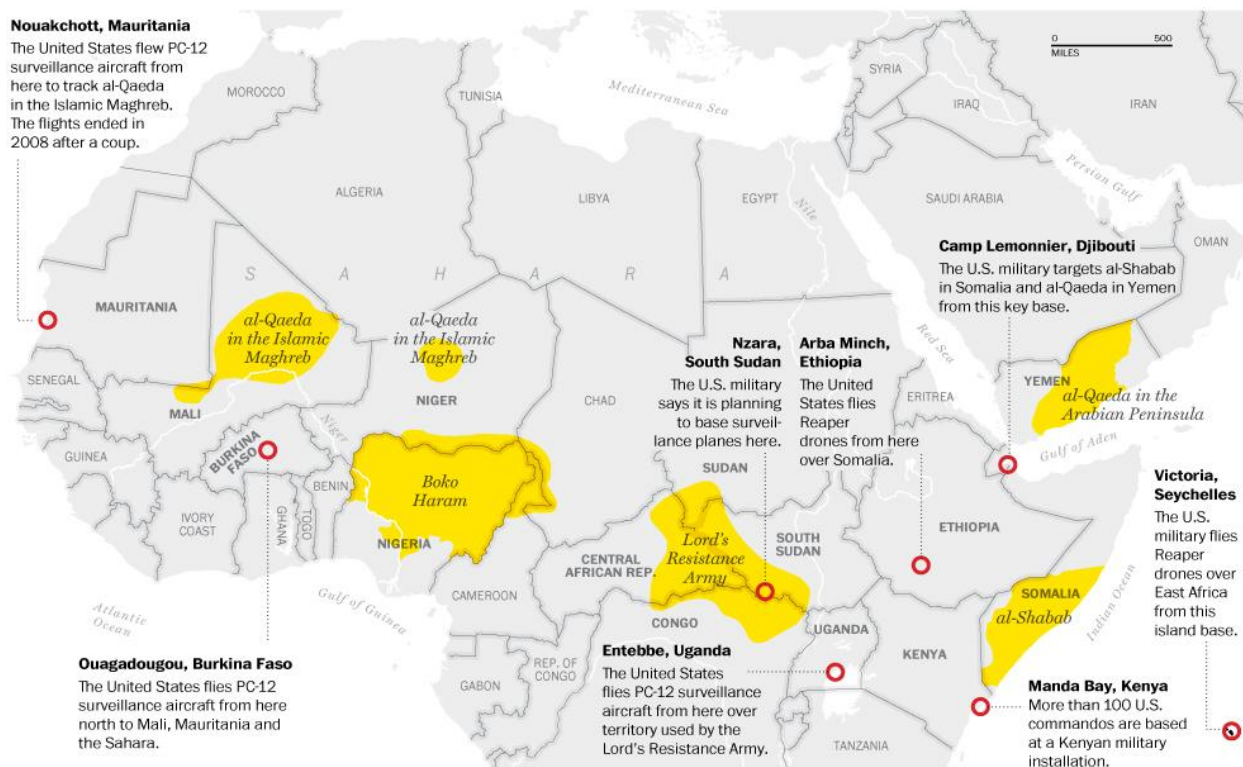
[Carson said](#) its reporter's allegations of Washington "military advisors assisting and aiding the TFG... [and] helping to coordinate the strategic offensive that is apparently underway now, or may be underway now, in Mogadishu, and that we were, in effect, guiding the hand and the operations of the TFG military... are incorrect." Yet it turned out, within a few months, that the Central Intelligence Agency was extremely active in Somalia and that mercenaries (such as Bancroft Global Development) were Washington's hired guns, as Carson admitted to the [New York Times](#), "We do not want an American footprint or boot on the ground." Hence, according to *The Times*, drones were used against the Shabab (Al-Qaeda's allies in Somalia).



The contradictions grow, because as *The Times* reported in mid-2010, Washington would need to spend "\$45 million in arms shipments to African troops fighting in Somalia. But this is a piecemeal approach that many American officials believe will not be enough to suppress the Shabab over the long run. In interviews, more than a dozen current and former United States officials and experts described an overall American strategy in Somalia that has been troubled by a lack of focus and internal battles over the past decade." Most worrisome, Washington aimed to get African armies addicted to mercenary trainers: "The governments of Uganda and Burundi pay Bancroft millions of dollars to train their soldiers for counterinsurgency missions in Somalia under an African Union banner, money that the State Department then reimburses to the two African nations."

Obama's repeated drone-war executions of innocent civilians is another manifestation of cowardly attacks from far above which then exacerbate hatred and revenge sentiments, creating the conditions for the counterproductive, violent mob attacks by Islamic

extremists witnessed recently. Most blowback from US military extremism is felt within Africa, reports Turse: “Last year's US-supported war in Libya resulted in masses of well-armed Tuareg mercenaries, who had been fighting for Libyan autocrat Muammar Qaddafi, heading back to Mali where they helped destabilize that country. So far, the result has been a military coup by an American-trained officer; a takeover of some areas by Tuareg fighters of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, who had previously raided Libyan arms depots; and other parts of the country being seized by the irregulars of Ansar Dine, the latest al-Qaeda ‘affiliate’ on the American radar.”



[Washington Post](#)

In the *Washington Post* in early October, [Greg Miller and Craig Whitlock](#) report that “al-Qaeda’s African affiliate has become more dangerous since [gaining control of large pockets of territory in Mali](#) and acquiring weapons from post-revolution Libya,” leading the White House counterterrorism office, the CIA, State Department and AfriCom to recruit Mauritania, Algeria, Niger, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Gambia to carry out war games (with French help), and in coming months to undertake probable proxy duties, not to mention drone attacks. According to their report, “the emphasis is on replicating aspects of the counterterrorism formula in Somalia. The United States has conducted intelligence operations there, as well as strikes, but has mainly relied on African troops to battle an al-Qaeda-linked militant group.” However, they acknowledge, “Some counterterrorism experts voiced concern that the administration is inflating the threat posed by al-Qaeda in North Africa”, which is considered “the most underperforming affiliate of al-Qaeda.”

Of course, the very idea of ‘terror’ is suspect when it comes to Washington vocabulary. On two occasions (1994 and 1996) I worked in the office of a man officially labeled a “terrorist”, a South African targeted by the CIA in the early 1960s and only taken off the US State Department’s no-entry “terror watch-list” in July 2008 (!) thanks to a formal [Congressional intervention](#). We learn lots about Washington’s whimsy not only from Nelson Mandela’s experience, but also from the Pentagon’s embrace of – and arms-supply to – [Saddam Hussein](#) for so long, and from US Vice President [Joe Biden](#) labeling WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange a “hi-tech terrorist” two years ago, since hounding him to the point he today cowers in a tiny Ecuadoran embassy room in London.



### [The Exception](#)

## **Petro-military complex, Chinese competition and climate polluters**

As WikiLeaks demonstrated, Washington is choc full of pathological hypocrites. For example, "China is a very aggressive and pernicious economic competitor with no morals. China is not in Africa for altruistic reasons," [Carson](#) argued in early 2010 to a cozy Lagos mansion meeting with his most important constituencies: executives from Shell, Chevron, Exxon, Schlumberger oil and the American Business Council.

“It’s a common observation, to the point of triteness, that we tend to hate those traits in others that we’re prone to ourselves,” replied political economist [Kevin Carson](#). For has China “maintained a ‘defense’ budget almost as large as those of the rest of the world put together? Deployed a navy with a dozen carrier groups capable of raining death from the skies on any country that defied their will? Formulated a national security doctrine which explicitly calls for China to remain the world’s sole superpower forever and ever, and to prevent any other power from ever arising to challenge its hegemony?” The “trip wires” that Carson informed the oil executives will make Washington “start worrying” about the Chinese are: “Have they signed military base agreements? Are they training armies? Have they developed intelligence operations?”

Explaining why this attitude could revive Africa's status as a Cold War battleground, one of Carson's predecessors, Ryan Henry, revealed in April 2007 that Washington's rationales "for establishing AfriCom included fighting terrorists in Africa, countering Chinese diplomacy on the continent, and gaining access to Africa's natural resources, especially oil." Added AfriCom's second-in-command, [Vice-Admiral Robert Moeller](#), "the free flow of natural resources from Africa to the global market" was a guiding principle," along with preventing "oil disruption," "terrorism," and China's "growing influence."

Another source of oil disruption in Nigeria of concern to Washington was a civil society case against Shell Oil in May 2012 in which [Shell argued](#) it should have no human rights liabilities because of its corporate status, a position that the US rejected when it came to US citizens' rights to sue. "But when the Supreme Court ordered a rehearing in the case, and asked whether human rights lawsuits could be brought when the abuses happened outside the US," according to EarthRights International's [Marco Simons](#), Washington actually sided with Shell. "Obama is saying that if a foreign government abuses human rights, we can bomb them, like we did with Libya. But we can't hold anyone accountable in court, because *that* would threaten international relations."

This essentially pro-corporate predatory perspective has informed Washington's '3D' strategy. "The concept of cooperation among diplomacy (State Department), development (US Agency for International Development) and defense in order to dry up support for extremists and terrorists has been adopted by the US government," explains US Air War College researcher [Stephen Burgess](#). "The criticism from think tank experts and others is that the military dominates because of the preponderance of resources and the large D of the military swamping the much smaller D of diplomacy and development. The critics believe that AfriCom will dominate the diplomatic and development instruments of power in Africa."

AfriCom was initially rejected by every African country that then Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld desired as host country, says Burgess. "Only the reversal of the directive to place the command on the continent brought grudging acceptance, along with US offers of training exercises and other forms of security assistance." For in this "American way of diplomacy, the military leads the way with well-resourced and powerful and regionally focused combatant commands. Congress is willing to fund the military and not the State Department and the US Agency for International Development."

Confirms a leading US Africanist scholar, Michigan State University sociologist David Wiley, "The continuing US budget for the Egyptian military is more than the entire US aid budget for HIV, food emergencies, and other programs for the entire continent. Carson also needs to be tweaked for his participation in folding together the US military, intelligence, State Department, USAID, and other agencies into the new 'whole of government' philosophy that results in the military being the face of US policy and programs in Africa." In the words of Carson's [State Department](#) colleagues, "Civilian power is as fundamental to our national security as military power and the two must work ever more closely together."

That means wherever there is socio-ecological, religious and economic pressure, such as Uganda and Somalia, Washington's instinct is the iron fist, followed by denialism and 'goo-goo' good-governance rhetoric. "From Carson's presentations two years in a row at the annual African Studies Association meetings, most of us felt we heard the same speeches we heard in the Bush Administration," says Wiley.

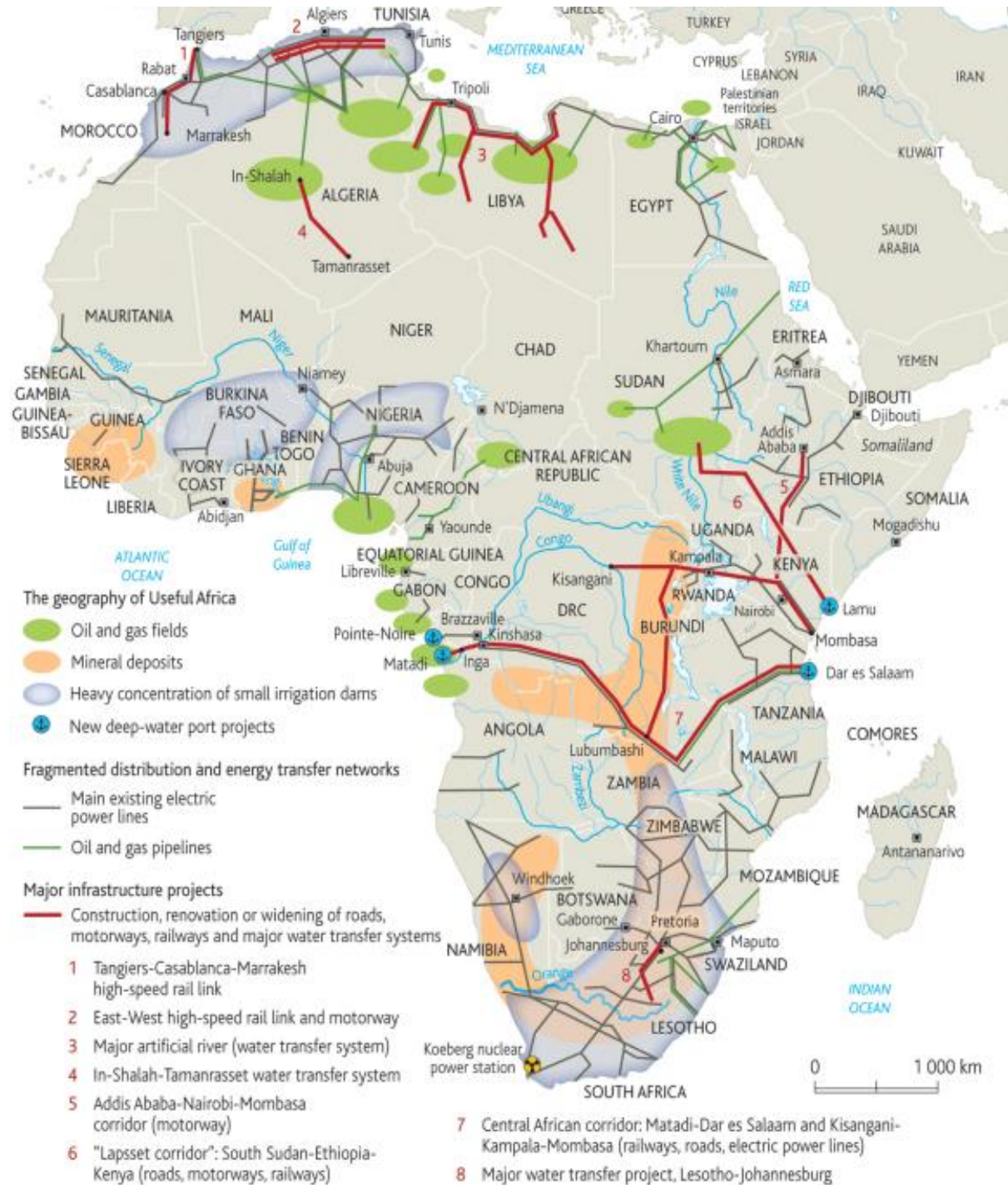
Add Mauritian rights activists [Rams Seegobin and Lindsey Collen](#), "It is clear that the Obama administration is following essentially the same policy that has guided U.S. military policy toward Africa for more than a decade. Indeed, the Obama administration is seeking to expand U.S. military activities on the continent even further." For as they point out, while hesitant to put its own people in harms' way in Africa, Obama has budgeted for weapons deals to assist regimes with human rights violations in Morocco, Kenya, Nigeria, Algeria, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC amongst others.

In Kampala, the authoritarian rule of Yoweri Museveni has lasted three decades, and in 2005, Carson – no longer working for the State Department – explained in the *Boston Globe* that his longevity was "motivated by a desire to protect those around him, including his son and half-brother, from charges of corruption for alleged involvement in illegal activities." Complained Uganda *Daily Monitor* journalist [Tabu Butagira](#), "It is such a paradox that Mr Carson, as chief of Barack Obama administration's diplomatic engagement with the continent, flies to Kampala regularly to confer with Museveni on wide-ranging issues, including regional security operations and democracy. When this newspaper asked him if he felt Museveni of 2011 was a worse dictator than that of 2005, Mr Carson said the US considers him a 'duly elected President of Uganda'."

Apparently because Uganda has vast, newly-discovered oil reserves at Lake Albert, the Museveni of 2011 qualified that year for \$45 million in US military equipment, 100 US troops, four drone planes to hunt Shabab and an impressive network of Western oil companies fused with mercenaries, as the London NGO [Platform](#) recently revealed. The "Kony 2012" viral video may be a useful surface-level distraction to justify US intervention, but as [Steve Horn](#) of *Alternet* argues: "If there is one thing that is nearly for certain, it is that the Lord's Resistance Army and Joseph Kony, as awful as they are, likely have nothing to do with this most recent US military engagement in Uganda. In the end, it all comes back to oil." Horn's evidence is not only that Kony has not been seen for years in Uganda, but that Obama also "quietly waived restrictions on military aid to Chad, Yemen, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo" even though their armies all have recent documented records of recruiting child soldiers.

Horn warns, "Throughout all of this, it is vital to bear in mind the bigger picture, which is that the United States and China have been competing against one another in the new 'Scramble' for Africa's valuable oil resources." Horn is pessimistic, "knowing the players involved, and seeing the geopolitical and resources maneuvering taking place in the Lake Albert region." He predicts a conflict between Western firms backed by US army and mercenary firepower on the one hand, and the Chinese National Offshore Oil Company on the other: "If the United States and its well-connected guns-for-hire have any say, Tullow Oil, Heritage Oil, ExxonMobil will take home all the royalties, and CNOOC will be sent home

packing.” In Museveni’s most recent meeting with Carson, a few weeks ago in Addis Ababa, the Ugandan dictator remarked, “A lot of time has been wasted on clichés such as Africa needs good governance”. According to a [Xinua](#) report, he “dismissed the linkage between economic growth and good governance saying that many African countries that have not had political instability are as backward as those that have gone through instability.”



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Indeed, it is appropriate to ask why backwardness prevails in countries that are only [‘useful’](#) insofar as they have resources. Of course, oil and minerals are not Washington’s only economic objective. As WikiLeaks revealed after a February 2010 [meeting](#) with Ethiopian dictator Meles Zenawi, “Carson encouraged Meles to hasten steps to liberalize the telecommunications and banking industries in Ethiopia,” according to the secret State Department cable. An additional economic objective, also revealed at that meeting, was the destruction of the Kyoto Protocol’s binding cap on greenhouse gas emissions, a project that Obama and the heads of Brazil, China, India and South Africa agreed to in Copenhagen at a UN climate summit in December 2009. As [WikiLeaks](#) demonstrated, much diplomacy in subsequent weeks was aimed at achieving buy-in even if that entailed bribery and coercion.



The same approach – refusing to make substantive greenhouse gas cuts even if it results in the unnecessary death of 185 million Africans this century, according to [Christian Aid](#) – was taken to extremes in Durban at the United Nations climate summit last December. According to the *New York Times*, at the recent World Economic Forum in Switzerland, a top aide to chief US State Department negotiator Todd Stern remarked that “the Durban platform was promising because of what it did not say.” After all, revealed Trevor Houser, “There is no mention of historic responsibility or per capita emissions. There is no mention of economic development as the priority for developing countries. There is no mention of a difference between developed and developing country action.”

These are the kinds of policy perspectives that make sense from the standpoint of Washington’s self-interest, and that in the process will loot and fry the African continent. But with Obama half-Kenyan by ancestry (a factor regularly raised by right-wing commentators who even make ridiculous claims as to the land of his birth), this treatment should not be considered as specifically *anti-African*; instead, it is best described as *pro-corporate*. For Washington’s whacking of Africa is not so different than the whacks its rulers give everywhere.





## Obama's traditions

The dozen worst acts of political treason that Obama has committed against US progressives who worked hard to elect him were, according to Moravian College political scientist [Gary Olsen](#),

- recycling discredited economic advisors like Robert Rubin and Tim Geithner,
- rescuing ruthless Wall Street speculators,
- extending the Bush-era tax cuts for the super-rich,
- abandoning his healthcare 'public option' and quickly selling out to private insurers,
- going back on his pledge to close the Guantanamo Bay prison,
- maintaining 50,000 troops in Iraq while substituting mercenaries for others,
- a pitifully inadequate stimulus package,
- doing virtually nothing about the real unemployment rate of 18 percent and shrinking paychecks,
- a record-setting Pentagon budget,
- pushing anti-labor trade deals,
- renegeing on his campaign promise to reform management-friendly labor laws and reducing payments to social security, and finally,
- in Obama's Vietnam, the disastrous and immoral Afghanistan War which costs taxpayers \$2 billion per month, 98,000 US troops remain on the ground.

Subsequently, further information has become available about former constitutional law professor [Obama's personal role](#) in civilian-killing drone warfare (including US citizen victims), [cyberterrorism](#), [warrantless eavesdropping](#), [suppression of civil liberties](#), lack of

[transparency](#) and other apparent contradictions. However, do these contradictions represent, as Prendergast put it, a vexing quandary – or instead, a *tradition*?

Arguing the latter case, consider a prediction made 16 years ago by then Yale professor Adolph Reed, Jr.: “In Chicago...we’ve gotten a foretaste of the new breed of foundation-hatched black communitarian voices: one of them, a smooth Harvard lawyer with impeccable credentials and vacuous-to-repressive neoliberal politics, has won a state senate seat on a base mainly in the liberal foundation and development worlds. His fundamentally bootstrap line was softened by a patina of the rhetoric of authentic community, talk about meeting in kitchens, small-scale solutions to social problems, and the predictable elevation of process over program – the point where identity politics converges with old-fashioned middle class reform in favoring form over substances. I suspect that his ilk is the wave of the future in US black politics here, as in Haiti and wherever the International Monetary Fund has sway.”

For South Africans, there’s another whack to suffer: Obama’s 8 percent funding cut to the AIDS programmes that help people here in Durban get life-saving AntiRetroViral (ARV) medicines. [Hilary Thulare](#) of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation helped arrange a protest to complain about “lack of access to HIV testing, treatment and prevention, wavering political commitment to funding the global AIDS response, and the excessive AIDS drug pricing by pharmaceutical companies so that treatment is available for more patients,” and observed that Obama “already pulled out funding for ARVs from Saint Mary’s Hospital, McCords Hospital and Ithembalabantu Clinic in Umlazi.” (I personally know people adversely affected.) The cut-backs are consistent with Obama’s overall favouring of big corporations which want to sell AIDS drugs for massive profits, as opposed to universal access that necessarily relies upon generic medicines, as demonstrated during his 2009 [India visit](#). As a result, according to American University professor [Sean Flynn](#), Obama “endorsed a set of policy proposals in its trade negotiations with developing countries that is much worse for access to medicine concerns than those of any other past administration.”

Africa and so many other examples show how the Obama Administration has become a rotten fusion of the worst instincts within neoliberalism and neoconservatism. I hope that on November 6, he soundly defeats Mitt Romney, who is worse on all counts except the ability to huckster people in Africa that Washington acts in their interests.