

U.S. military eyes larger 'footprint' about Africa

By Jim Lobe

WASHINGTON (IPS) — Africa appears to be getting more attention from the Pentagon as the U.S. military makes major geo-strategic shifts in its global deployments.

While the Defense Department has made no formal announcements about U.S. plans to acquire base rights on the African mainland, other moves suggest that interest toward that end is growing.

Last Thursday, the department announced that a U.S. counter-terrorism warship, the USS Mt. Whitney, is returning home from its tour off the coast of the Horn of Africa, but not before leaving off its command personnel and equipment at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti, which has acted as the main U.S. base for counter-terrorist activities offshore and in the region since after the Sep. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against New York and the Pentagon.

The Mt. Whitney's departure means that Camp Lemonier will now be home to 1,800 U.S. troops, sailors, fliers and civilian personnel at a highly strategic point sandwiched between Ethiopia and Somalia and just across the Red Sea from Yemen.

The announcement followed little-noticed remarks last week by NATO Supreme Commander, U.S. Gen. James Jones, that Washington plans to boost its troop presence in West Africa, a troubled region that now provides more than 15 percent of all U.S. oil imports, a percentage slated to rise to 25 percent within 12 years.

"The carrier battle groups of the future and the expeditionary strike groups of the future may not spend six months in the Med[iterranean Sea], but I'll bet they'll spend half the time going down the west coast of Africa," Jones told a Defense Writers Group breakfast in late April.

While he did not discuss the vast reserves of West African oil off-shore, Jones said the region included "large, un-governed areas...that are clearly the new routes of narco-trafficking, terrorists' training, and hotbeds of instability," which Washington and its NATO partners will have to address.

Both moves "capture exactly what the main interests

of the administration in Africa are at the moment," according to Daniel Volman, director of the African Security Research Project here. "They're very concerned about terrorism and Islamic fundamentalists in East Africa and the Horn, and they're clearly very interested in access to African oil."

The moves also come amid reports of plans for major changes in U.S. deployments around Eurasia in the wake of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the adoption by the administration of President George W. Bush of a far more ambitious global military strategy centered on preventing the rise of any possible regional rival in strategic parts of the Eurasian landmass.

The purpose of the deployments is both to reduce the U.S. military "footprint" in countries where the U.S. military presence has become a political burden for host governments, and to reposition U.S. forces globally for more rapid deployment to likely trouble spots, especially Central Asia, the Gulf and East Asia.

The Pentagon is particularly interested in getting access to facilities throughout the region where it can preposition weapons and supplies, rather than having to rely on their transport from more distant bases.

The administration has already announced it intends to withdraw virtually all of its 8,000 uniformed personnel from Saudi Arabia after 12 years of basing its gulf air operations there, and will move much of it to Qatar's Al-Udeid Air Base. The Pentagon also plans to reduce forces in Kuwait, the launching pad for its invasion of Iraq, although it will retain its use of naval facilities in nearby Bahrain.

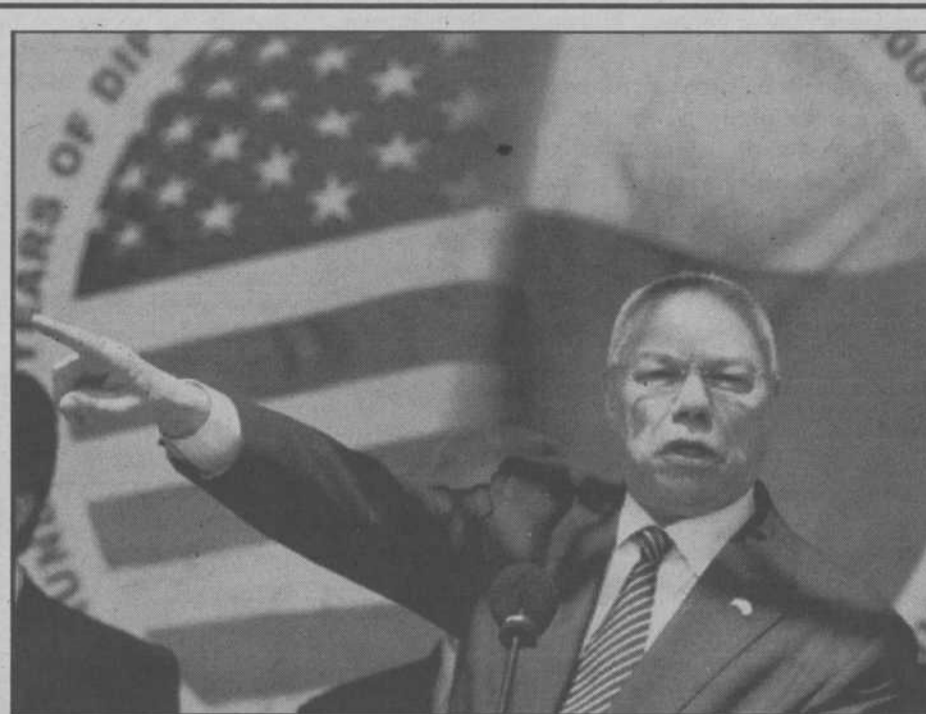
In Turkey, another country where hosting the U.S. military has become politically problematic, Washington has already withdrawn virtually all of its forces at the Incirlik Air base in the southwest, which was used as the base for patrolling Iraq's northern "no-fly" zone from 1991 until last month.

There have been persistent reports that the Pentagon hopes to use as many as four army and air bases in Iraq,

although Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has denied them.

But Washington appears intent on retaining access to bases in Central Asia, notably Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, which it used during the war in Afghanistan.

In Europe, it appears virtually certain that Washington will soon be withdrawing most of the 60,000 troops from bases in Germany that it has occupied for more than half a century. Romania and Bulgaria have offered much cheaper deals for bases that will be closer to both the Caucasus and the Middle East and Gulf sub-regions.



MENDING FENCES

US Secretary of State Colin Powell left for France for a Group of Eight foreign ministers' meeting, hoping to overcome deep rifts among the world's industrialized nations caused by the war in Iraq.

Africa's first cloned cow: Boon for world?

By Yolandi Groenewald

JOHANNESBURG (IPS/GIN) — A South African veterinarian who helped clone a prized dairy cow, the first to be cloned in Africa, says the technology might rescue the continent's impoverished economy.

Morne de la Rey, a veterinarian involved in cloning the champion Holstein cow, says cloning of highly productive animals might secure Africa's food security in the future. But he warns that much work needs to be done.

"At this stage the venture is not economically viable. Apart from the procedure being very expensive, it still has to be developed further," he says. "We have a long way to go and the procedure will have to be done again and again before we can even think of going with this to the market."

The cost of cloning is one of several obstacles in the way of creating cloned champion animals commercially. Cloning currently costs between \$15,000 and \$25,000 per cow, but prize animals can fetch \$40,000 or more, according to Ron Gillespie of the Massachusetts company, Cyagra.

In addition, experts say that cloning raises troubling health questions. Cloned animals that look healthy may have subtle defects or weird physiologies that defy the textbooks. Herds of identical cloned animals would be a "welfare disaster," says Joyce D'Silva of Compassion in World Farming. "There would be a huge loss of genetic diversity with unforeseeable results in terms of animal illness."

And for farmers in developing countries, livestock cloning offers no benefits to small or even medium-sized farmers, according to the Compassion in World Farming Trust, a British advocacy group. "Small farmers would be unlikely to be able to afford the technology and its use could accelerate the trend visible in the U.K., the U.S. and now the developing world, towards fewer, bigger and more industrialized farms."

For consumers, commercial livestock cloning could inundate the food supply with novel products that have not been safety tested, raising safety concerns among some of the leading scientists in the cloning field. For farm animals, the spread of cloning is likely to bring genetic defects, premature aging, and widespread suffering.

Danie Barry, a University of Stellenbosch agricultural scientist and veterinary surgeon who is an expert in embryology, says there are better ways to reproduce animals than by cloning.

"Instead of cloning the cow, superior semen from another bull could be used. Through artificial insemination the cow could then produce a superior calf," he says.

"The main advantage of cloning would be the replacement of endangered species. But even here the progeny derived from a DNA cell would have all the genetic faults of the donor animal, such as being prone to certain diseases. In nature it is

best to have a range of DNA in a species," he says.

Barry says it was fantastic that an African team had produced a cloned animal. "We have the expertise in South Africa to do this kind of research. The team in Brits (a small town near Johannesburg) has done wonderful pioneering work. I think it is a wonderful breakthrough in genetics in Africa," he says.

The calf was named Futhi, meaning "gain" in Zulu.

The heifer was introduced to the world at its birthplace near Brits in North West province, about 80 kilometers northwest of Johannesburg, this week. De la Rey says he and his team wanted to show it was possible to clone an animal in Africa. The veterinarian and Robert Treadwell, a colleague at the Embryo Plus Centre and Artificial Insemination Centre at Brits, collaborated with Professor Gabor Vajta, an embryologist from the Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences.

The Embryo Plus Centre has a worldwide reputation for its work in embryology and exports embryos of farm animals to overseas markets.

"It is quite an achievement for us because it was the first time we had attempted cloning, let alone Professor Vajta's technique. We are lucky it was a success the first time round," says De la Rey.

Vajta's technique is different from other cloning methods, such as that used with the first cloned animal, Dolly, the sheep in Scotland. The protective covering of the unfertilized egg is removed before the cloning process is begun. This makes the entire procedure more difficult, says De la Rey.

"We were lucky that the recipient cow did not reject the egg and instead carried it (the fetus) to term," says De la Rey.

Futhi was cloned from DNA taken from the ear of a 9-year-old Holstein cow that set the South African milk production record. The cow peaked at 78 liters of milk a day. The scientists at the Embryo Plus Centre believe that Futhi will be as productive.

The cell was inserted into a second cow's egg, from which

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