

America's Creeping Militarization of Africa

It's time to re-assess how America goes to war

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President Obama recently concluded his weeklong [trip to Africa](#), so his administration's policies on that continent deserve careful attention. The Obama administration appears ready, under the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force, to significantly expand 13 years of war policy by increasing counterterrorism operations throughout the African continent.

This is the wrong way forward. It is time to end our policy of perpetual war and to repeal the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force law.

We already have spent \$1.4 trillion – and may spend as much as [\\$6 trillion](#), including the cost of veteran care on wars overseas – since 2001. We cannot afford more war spending. Shifting our military focus and activity to Africa will only cost us more blood and more wealth. Certainly, the September 11th, 2001 attack will always live in our memories, and its victims in our hearts, but it should not continue to bind our policies.

As the U.S. war in Afghanistan winds down and military eyes move to Africa, our country is at a crossroads. This is a logical point at which to repeal the 2001 AUMF, a sanction never intended to last indefinitely. As the New York Times [wrote](#) on March 9th of this year, it is time to revoke the military force authorization and put a decade of war firmly behind us, not double down on failed military tactics. We believe this is the correct course of action for several reasons.

First, Congress must acknowledge that the AUMF has served its purpose. While military force cannot eliminate ideological extremism, it is clear that, nearly thirteen years after this war started, al-Qaida no longer poses an existential threat to the United States. Military force is certainly not solely responsible for this truth, as it has allowed many costly mistakes along the way.

To perpetuate these policies is to force the AUMF to live far beyond its appropriate duration. Attempting to track down elements of al-Qaida linked only by ideology, not capabilities, would be costly and counterproductive.

Second, the global war on terror, too, must end. Since 9/11, bad decisions and mission creep have pushed the U.S. into more, not fewer, conflicts. The U.S. invaded Iraq on the premise that Saddam Hussein had al-Qaida ties. The U.S. has used drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia to kill alleged affiliates of al-Qaida. Thousands of people have been killed, but fewer than 2 percent have been the key leaders the U.S. has said it is targeting.

According to [recent reports](#) and congressional [hearings](#), the U.S. is expanding operations all over the African continent under the AUMF law, using an undisclosed list of "associated forces" the administration claims are tied in some way to al-Qaida. This militarization of U.S. policy toward Africa is likely to undermine legitimate diplomatic relations and cause untold harm to ordinary Africans. The U.S. cannot afford, financially or ethically, another decade of war fought by U.S. troops or proxies. Rather than expand these policies, let's dial them back and end the longest era of war in our history.

Finally, perhaps most importantly, Congress must reclaim its oversight responsibilities. The AUMF has been characterized by very weak oversight and accountability. According to data from Special Operation Command, U.S. Special Forces were operating in [92 countries](#), most likely including a number of African countries, as of this past March. The U.S. drone program is reportedly expanding throughout the African continent.

When Obama negotiates military agreements with other countries, most recently with [Niger](#), Congress is rarely consulted. The AUMF is not confined by geographical boundaries; military operations and assistance missions also have taken place in Mali, Niger, Kenya, Uganda and Somalia without a declaration of war.

Strikingly, in the face of this absence of oversight, Congress only recently has begun to hold hearings on transparency and accountability. During the recent debate on the military authorization bill, the House had a timely

opportunity to debate the AUMF, but failed to do so. Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., offered an amendment to the bill (identical to his legislation, [HR 2324](#)) to repeal the use of force law, but debate on the amendment was denied.

Obama should use his return from Africa to forcefully call for the repeal of the 2001 AUMF. It is an opportunity to explain to the American public that we will not engage in warfare on the continent without robust consultation with Congress. We owe that to the men and women who put their lives on the line and to the taxpayers who shoulder the burdens of war here at home.

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