

US secret armies gear up for global war

Bill Van Auken
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The “tide of war is receding” is a phrase President Barack Obama has employed ad nauseam—once in his State of the Union address, twice in the course of remarks last month at the unveiling of the Pentagon's new military strategy document, once again during his speech at the United Nations, also in his announcement of troop withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan, and in a Veteran's Day address.

The constant repetition of this hackneyed metaphor is aimed at obscuring the obvious—that US militarism has escalated dramatically under the Democratic president and its tide threatens to engulf the entire planet.

Among the latest indications is a behind-the-scenes campaign by the chief of the US military's Special Operations Command (SOCOM) for greater autonomy in dispatching elite killer squads to every corner of the globe.

Adm. William McRaven, who heads SOCOM, is, according to the *New York Times*, seeking “more autonomy to position his forces and their war-fighting equipment where intelligence and global events indicate they are most needed.”

The admiral's proposal, the *Times* notes, “would also allow the Special Operations forces to expand their presence in regions where they have not operated in large numbers for the past decade, especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America.”

McRaven argues that “[t]hickening the Special Operations deployments in these other regions would allow the United States to be ready to respond more rapidly to a broader range of threats.”

SOCOM includes as its key sub unit the Joint Special Operations Command, or JSOC, which is made up of such outfits as the Navy Seals and the Army's Green Berets, which carry out armed missions abroad. It is one area of the US military that is being spared even the minimal cuts that are being imposed on the Pentagon budget.

Its funding is being increased, a top officer in SOCOM reassured those attending last week's annual conference of the National Defense Industries Association, the premier lobby for America's vast military-industrial complex. “Because we will be continuing to engage in counter-terrorism operations around the globe, we are going to protect the investments in special operations forces,” Lt. Gen. Bradley Heithold, SOCOM's vice commander, told the audience of war profiteers. He confided that Pentagon plans are to increase the command to “70,000 SOF [special operations forces] warriors.”

SOCOM's personnel has doubled since 2001 to its current headcount of 66,000, while its budget has risen from \$4.2 billion to \$10.5 billion. JSOC's growth has been even more meteoric, going from just 1,800 troops in 1980 to over 25,000 today.

Special operations forces have already been deployed in over 75 countries, ranging from the Dominican Republic and Peru to the Philippines, Yemen, Somalia and central Asia.

According to published reports, the US troop withdrawal from Iraq and the draw-down of tens of thousands of soldiers and Marines from Afghanistan is to be offset by more extensive use of special operations forces. In Iraq, some of these forces will be kept in the country covertly, operating out of uniform, while others will be just across the border in Kuwait. In Afghanistan, a force of some 9,000 special ops troops will remain even after the 2014 formal deadline for a NATO troop withdrawal.

In both countries, JSOC units have been involved in some of the worst atrocities. They carried out wholesale assassinations of opponents of the Iraqi occupation during the 2007 “surge” ordered by the Bush administration, and were implicated in systematic torture of detainees.

In Afghanistan, these units were responsible for the

infamous 2002 wedding massacre, when they called in an AC-130 gunship to rake a wedding party and other civilian targets, leaving hundreds dead and wounded. They remain hated by the population for their night raids against Afghan homes and the calling in of air strikes.

Over the past decade, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have tied down 80 percent of special operations forces. If the White House and the Pentagon are now discussing shifting their expanded use to become a more global strike force, it is because they anticipate not a “receding tide” of war, but rather an explosion of US militarism.

The Obama administration has relied ever more heavily on these elite military units, which have become what amounts to a secret army under the command of the US president and accountable to no one. JSOC, like the CIA, has been empowered to draw up kill lists of alleged terrorists and launch assassination missions. Unlike the CIA, it is not required to secure a “presidential finding” authorizing lethal covert operations, or submit to congressional oversight.

The increasing reliance on such methods has been facilitated by the embrace of militarism and imperialism by a layer of the affluent upper-middle class that previously was identified with anti-war sentiments. Typical of this milieu is *Newsweek* editor Tina Brown, who penned a nauseating editorial recently praising Obama for being “the Caped Crusader when it comes to commanding America's killing machine.” She described a recent exploit by American special ops forces in Somalia as “like hearing from afar the lost chords of 'America the Beautiful,’” adding that “Seal Team 6 has become a more vivid symbol of the power of the great American idea than positive GDP statistics.”

Those prepared to extol the exploits of elite killing squads abroad as the essence of the “American idea” will not shrink from the use of similar methods in suppressing any challenge to the rule of the financial elite at home.

The deepest global economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s once again confronts mankind with the threat of world war and dictatorship. A successful struggle against these threats can be waged only by means of the independent political mobilization

of the working class against their source, the capitalist profit system.

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