

US deploys Special Forces to train military units in North and West Africa

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The *New York Times* published a front-page article by Eric Schmitt on Monday detailing an Obama administration program aimed at establishing new elite military units in four African nations.

According to the *Times*, the “secretive program, financed in part with millions of dollars in classified Pentagon spending and carried out by trainers, including members of the Army’s Green Berets and Delta Force, was begun last year to instruct and equip hundreds of handpicked commandos in Libya, Niger, Mauritania and Mali.”

Although the ostensible purpose of the program is to combat terrorism, the new detachments are being set up to aid US imperialism in its drive to gain control of natural resources and establish positions of strategic geopolitical importance on the continent.

The *Times* reports that a total of \$70 million is being spent on training and the purchase of weapons and spy equipment for “counterterrorism battalions” in Niger and Mauritania, where, according to senior Obama administration officials, the new units are in their “formative stages.” Though funding for the new military programs has not yet reached Mali, an additional \$16 million has been spent to establish two companies of elite soldiers in Libya, where the Obama administration has, according to the *Times*, “tapped into a classified spending account called Section 1208, devised to aid foreign troops assisting American forces conducting counterterrorism missions.”

The move comes as the US and its Western imperialist rivals—France, the United Kingdom and Germany—are intensifying the neocolonial drive to carve up the African continent. Following the 2011 bombing campaign against Libya, the major imperialist powers have undertaken a series of new military adventures.

The French government under President François Hollande has waged war in Mali and the Central African Republic and the US has expanded its military presence on the continent. As of May 21, US soldiers were officially engaged in military operations in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti. (The US has a permanent military base in Djibouti). Prior to 2011, the US officially had troops on the ground in only four of the above-listed countries.

According to the US African Command (AFRICOM), military exercises and training partnerships have also taken place in South Africa, Morocco, Ghana, Tunisia, Botswana, Senegal, Liberia, Cameroon and Gabon in the last two years.

Details surrounding the new program underscore how American efforts to outstrip Washington’s rivals, including China, in the race for control of the continent have placed US imperialism in league with the exact forces it claims to be opposing.

Libya, one of the four countries where the US military is attempting to establish loyal elite units, is the prime example of US alignment with Islamic fundamentalist forces. A December 2013 report by the *Times* detailed how the forces that attacked the US consulate and a Central Intelligence Agency outpost in Benghazi on September 11, 2012 had previously been in the pay of the CIA. Such examples of “blowback” are evidence of the connections between the US and terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, which arose from anti-Soviet Islamist forces that were financed and armed by the US prior to and during the Soviet Union’s war in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

In Monday’s article, the *Times* made oblique references to US links to Islamist terrorist forces in

Africa. It quoted AFRICOM Commander Maj. Gen. Patrick Donahue as saying: “You have to make sure of who you’re training. It can’t be the standard, ‘Has this guy been a terrorist or some sort of criminal?’ But also, ‘What are his allegiances? Is he true to the country, or is he still bound to his militia?’”

Such statements by US military officials shed light on the events at a former American training camp outside of Tripoli, where the government says Libyan forces receiving US military training were overrun by Islamic militias in the summer of 2013. A report by the *Daily Beast* published at the end of April revealed that the former US base is now an operating center for Al Qaeda and serves, according to an anonymous US Defense Department official, as part of “a major thoroughfare, the I-95 for foreign fighters into Syria from Africa.”

The *Times* article references “the collapse of the American counterterrorism training mission last August at Base 27,” and cites it as a “sobering reminder” of the risks associated with the establishment of US-backed elite units. The *Times* cites American military officials who suspect that the raid of Base 27 was “an inside job in which a Libyan officer or soldier tipped off some local Tripoli militia members about the material stored at the base.”

The *Times* and its military sources have every interest in papering over both the proximity of the connections between the CIA and Al Qaeda-linked forces and the US government’s knowledge of those ties. Whatever the exact details of the working relationship between the US and terrorists, the comment from Donahue and the calls by a former US Special Operations officer cited by the *Times* for “more adult supervision” of US-backed elite military units is an acknowledgement that US imperialism chooses to work with forces that pose the danger of “blowback” and against which the “war on terror” is supposedly being waged.



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