

The global scale of US militarism

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Last month President Obama dispatched a formal letter to the Speaker of the House, John Boehner, listing a series of countries where US troops were or have been engaged in military operations during 2014. The preamble explains that the document is “consistent with the War Powers Resolution (Public Law 93-148), as part of my efforts to keep the Congress informed about deployments of U.S. Armed Forces equipped for combat.”

The War Powers Resolution was enacted by Congress in 1973, in the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Vietnam, and over the veto of President Richard Nixon, to require the president to keep the legislative branch regularly appraised of military operations that were being conducted without a congressional declaration of war.

Obama’s letter outlines a series of military operations in 2014, some completed, some ongoing, that go far beyond what is generally reported in the American media, which is generally limited to news of Afghanistan, the Iraq-Syria conflict (albeit very little) and occasional reports of drone missile strikes.

Not a single major US newspaper reported the issuance of the letter, titled, “Six Month Consolidated War Powers Resolution Report,” although it was released by the White House Press Office December 11 and is available on the White House web site.

If one combines the operations reported in this letter with published reports about the deployment of US troops in supposed noncombat situations, as well as joint military exercises with NATO countries and other US allies, it is possible to present a picture of the vast worldwide scope of US military activities in the course of last year.

The map presented here shows the countries where US forces are deployed in four of the six regional theaters of operations for the US military (all but the Northern and Southern Commands, which cover the Western hemisphere).

The White House letter to Congress declares that as part of operations against Al Qaeda and associated forces, “the United States has deployed combat-equipped forces to a number of locations in the U.S. Central, Pacific, European, Southern, and Africa Command areas of operation.”

The Obama administration thus maintains in full the pretext for global deployment of US military power, the “war on terror” first declared by George W. Bush in 2001. There is, of course, no acknowledgement that in several countries, notably Libya and Syria, Al Qaeda is not the enemy but a key ally in US efforts to overthrow the regimes of Muammar Gaddafi (murdered in 2011) and Bashar al-Assad (who would face a similar fate in the event of victory of the US-backed “rebels”).

The Obama letter continues: “It is not possible to know at this time the precise scope or the duration of the deployments of US Armed Forces necessary to counter this terrorist threat to the United States.” In other words, the Obama administration, like its predecessor, has declared war on the world, reserving the right to send US military

forces anywhere, anytime, regardless of any decision by Congress, let alone the wishes of the American people.

The letter devotes its main focus to the areas of responsibility of the US Central Command and US Africa Command, the first comprising the Middle East and Central Asia from Israel to Pakistan, the second comprising the entire African continent.

US Central Command

The Central Command has run US military operations in Afghanistan from 2001 to the present, in Iraq from 2003 to 2011, and again in Iraq and Syria from August 2014 on. At least 10,600 US troops remain in Afghanistan, despite the formal end of Operation Enduring Freedom, the official title of the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan begun by Bush and continued by Obama.

Under a Memorandum of Understanding with the US-backed puppet government of Afghanistan, all Afghan prisoners of US forces have been transferred to Afghan custody, and new Afghan detainees are to be transferred within 96 hours of capture. However, the letter informs Congress, “United States forces in Afghanistan continue to detain a small number of third-country nationals under the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (Public Law 107-40), as informed by the law of war.”

Translated into plain language, this means that US forces continue to imprison and interrogate (i.e., torture) an unspecified number of non-Afghan prisoners in military facilities in Afghanistan, where they are outside any legal regimen, whether Afghan, American or international.

The other main theater of operations for Central Command is the newly launched US war in Iraq and Syria, nominally against the Islamic fundamentalist group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Some 3,100 US troops are deployed in Iraq, and warplanes from the US, several NATO countries, and the Persian Gulf sheikdoms have bombed ISIS and Al Nusra Front targets in Syria. The long-term goal of the US intervention is to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria, while blocking the growing influence of Iran in Shiite-ruled Iraq.

For the first time, the US military is directly training and equipping Kurdish Peshmerga forces, which are currently fighting ISIS, but could turn against Baghdad, to fight in support of an independent Kurdistan.

Other countries within the Central Command area of operations include:

- Yemen, the target of frequent drone strikes against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), similar to those that killed three American citizens in 2011. The Obama letter declares: “The US military has also been working closely with the Government of Yemen,” without noting that that government is no longer in control of its own capital, having been displaced by rebel forces opposed to both the government and Al Qaeda. An unspecified number of US military personnel are on the ground in Yemen for “security” at the

US embassy. Further US military engagement in Yemen could quickly become as complex as the current intervention in Syria's multisided civil war.

- Jordan, where the US has deployed "Patriot missile systems, fighter aircraft, and related support, command, control, and communications personnel and systems" at the invitation of the US puppet regime of King Abdullah, including 1,700 American troops.

- The Gulf monarchies: there are 2,500 US troops in Kuwait, a US air base in Qatar, the headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, and 2,000 US military personnel at Eskan Village Air Base in Saudi Arabia. US warplanes and warships also have the use of bases in Oman and the United Arab Emirates. None of these are currently classified as combat operations, so they are not mentioned in the White House letter. The precise base locations are detailed here, in a 2012 Al Jazeera graphic.

- Egypt: On the border with Israel, about 700 US military personnel are in the Sinai desert, monitoring Egyptian compliance with the 1977 Camp David Accords, which provided for Israeli return of the territory to Egypt, and a largely demilitarized Egyptian presence in the region.

US Africa Command

The US Africa Command (Africom) has the fastest-growing field of operations. Before Obama took office, Africom had an office in Stuttgart, Germany, because no African country would allow it to locate on its territory, and US troops were based in Djibouti, the former French Somaliland, and conducted operations in Somalia.

Under Obama, Africom played a key role in the US-NATO war against Libya in 2011, and US forces have returned to Libya on several occasions, most recently to evacuate the US embassy from Tripoli last summer (this entailed combat deployments in both Libya and neighboring Tunisia).

According to Obama's notification to Congress, there are 200 US military personnel in Niger who "continue to provide support for intelligence collection and to facilitate intelligence sharing with French forces conducting operations in the Sahel and with other partners in the region." There are also US military personnel in Chad detailed to "security cooperation activities."

Somalia is a major target of US military operations, including both drone missile strikes, such as those that killed Ahmed Godane and Tahlil Abdishakur, two top leaders of the Al Shabab Islamist militia.

The Obama administration deployed US military personnel to several countries in central and east Africa in 2011, on the pretext of seeking to apprehend Joseph Kony and other leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army, a guerrilla group active in Uganda, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As many as 300 US military personnel are still engaged in anti-Kony operations in this region, Obama told Congress, but all details about locations and activities were relegated to a classified annex of the December 11 letter. The map assumes that US military personnel operate in all the countries targeted as locations of the LRA. There was a separate deployment of US troops to the Central African Republic as a response to the collapse of the central government and a series of ethnic/tribal massacres in the capital city, Bangui, and other towns.

The most recent deployment of US Africom troops is the 3,000 sent to Liberia, in West Africa, to build healthcare facilities for treating patients in the ongoing Ebola epidemic. All three former colonial powers in the tri-country region affected by the epidemic have used the crisis to send in military forces: British troops in Sierra Leone,

French troops in Guinea, and US troops in Liberia. The Obama administration hopes eventually to establish the headquarters of Africom in Liberia.

US European Command

The US European Command coincides with NATO, always commanded by an American general, and included joint operations with the 24 NATO member nations in Europe, as well as three former Yugoslav republics, Bosnia, Montenegro and Macedonia, which are candidates for future NATO membership.

The European Command also controls operations in Kosovo, the breakaway region of Serbia whose independence has been recognized by most but not all of the EU countries and by the United States. The NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) was rubber-stamped by the UN Security Council after the illegal NATO war against Serbia in 1999 that led to the creation of an independent Kosovo. There are 700 US military personnel in Kosovo as part of a force of nearly 5,000 NATO troops.

NATO forces have carried out a series of exercises in Ukraine as well as supplying military equipment to the right-wing regime established in early 2014 by a political coup backed by the United States and Germany. Last month the Ukrainian parliament voted to scrap the country's nonaligned status, the first step towards applying to join NATO. US military personnel have operated in both Ukraine and Georgia as part of exercises with anti-Russian regimes in the two countries.

An 11-page fact sheet issued in November by the European Command details the virtually continuous series of air, sea and ground exercises conducted by NATO forces and joined by most of the non-NATO countries in the region, including Sweden, Finland, Serbia, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Romania, Poland and the Baltic states were the main focus of these activities, as part of the US-NATO buildup in the course of the Ukraine crisis.

US Pacific Command

Not listed under "combat-equipped forces," although by far the most formidable US military deployment is the Pacific Command, which operates throughout the Asia/Pacific region with headquarters in Hawaii and large troop deployments in Japan and South Korea, including nuclear-armed units.

Under Obama's "pivot to Asia," the Pacific Command will account for more than 60 percent of all US military forces, up from 50 percent under the Bush administration. This includes new US basing arrangements in the Philippines, Singapore and Australia, as well as renewed close military ties to New Zealand, and ongoing US military exercises in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Taiwan.



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