

US preparing new drone deployments to North Africa

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The US military's Africa Command (AFRICOM) is preparing to develop at least one new US drone and Special Forces base in North Africa, according to military officials cited by the *Wall Street Journal*.

The new base would initially host surveillance drones, but could soon be expanded to launching attack drones and Special Forces ground troops. New cadres of US military and intelligence forces stationed in North Africa would gather intelligence about targets associated with Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS or ISIL), US officials told the *Journal*.

"The presence of ISIL and other extremist groups in Libya, particularly in eastern Libya, is of significant concern to the US," General Carter Ham, former commander of AFRICOM and now a consultant with an elite Washington strategy firm, told the *Journal*.

"Not only has ISIL already conducted deadly attacks in Libya and Tunisia, eastern Libya remains a significant transit point for foreign fighters seeking to join ISIL in Syria and Iraq," he continued.

The Obama administration is prepared to order new airstrikes against Libya if the intelligence agencies so advise, according to White House officials, though such strikes would stop short of a "concerted, Iraq-style bombing campaign."

As the *Journal* openly states, the new US facilities in North Africa may be used as staging areas for US bombing runs and Special Forces missions against targets inside Libya in the near future.

Washington is in talks with a handful of North African governments over new basing arrangements, but the precise locations planned for the new AFRICOM facilities have not been revealed.

Official recognition of Tunisia as a "major non-NATO ally" on Friday suggests that Tunis is a leading candidate for the expanded US military presence. The

US State Department upgraded Tunisia to special ally status on Friday.

Any new US bases in North Africa will come in addition to a network of US military facilities, garrisons, and covert small-unit deployments that already spans the entire continent. AFRICOM has maintained some level of military presence in nearly every single African country for years. US forces under AFRICOM were engaged in live military operations in at least 13 countries as of 2014.

The ever-louder trumpeting of the threat or supposed threat of Islamist terrorism emanating from Libya is a sure sign a further deepening of the new scramble for Africa is being prepared.

While it is true that Libya has now become the primary hub and sanctuary for far-right militant groups, Islamist and otherwise, this is the direct responsibility of Washington. Together with its NATO allies, the US waged an illegal war and subversion campaign against the country, supporting reactionary Islamist forces linked with and essentially identical to those of ISIS, as part of efforts to overthrow both the Libyan and Syrian governments.

Just as with the ongoing imperialist-orchestrated military interventions throughout West Africa, Central Africa and the Horn of Africa, the threat of Islamist extremism is serving as the all-purpose pretext for efforts by the former colonial overlords to militarize the entire Mediterranean and reassert their own interests in both Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Having ransacked Libya, flooding the surrounding countries with weapons and militants that have profoundly destabilized the political structure of the entire region, US imperialism is preparing new catastrophes further afield.

In remarks Monday, US State Department spokesman

Admiral John Kirby pledged continuing US involvement in the civil war in Nigeria, issuing harsh denunciations of the Islamist group Boko Haram, the favored bogeyman and central pretext for an expanding US-led military buildup in West Africa. In the wake of the ascension of a US-backed former dictator to the Nigerian presidency and the deployment of thousands of US and US-backed troops on Nigeria's northeastern border, the meaning of such comments is clear.

The pretext of fighting ISIS is also being advanced to bring forward the US-backed military dictatorship of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo, the Saudi monarchy, the Gulf States and other reactionary imperialist-aligned governments to serve as super-empowered US "regional partners." The US-backed Saudi-led Arab coalition, which has bombed Yemen relentlessly since late March, is preparing to assume a regional role beyond Yemen, including potential operations in Libya, Iraq and elsewhere.

Egypt has already launched its own air force intervention in Libya and was recently green-lighted to purchase US-made F-16 warplanes. It is speculated to be another favored staging ground for the US drones.

Washington's military adventures on the continent have proceeded for years in relative harmony with those of its European counterparts, with the imperialists enjoying the advantages of a friendly division of labor in their efforts, steadily escalating in the wake of the dissolution of the USSR, to re-impose direct political and military control in Africa.

Such friendly relations will not last. Washington's own latest escalation of US forces in North Africa is being prepared not merely against ISIS but in anticipation of struggles with rival powers, including Germany, Italy and France, for control of the strategically critical region. The Europeans have moved to reassert their own grip over former colonial domains in the region, including the vast oil resources of Libya, which was the continent's leading oil producer prior to the 2011 war and continues to possess large reserves.

The danger of open conflicts between the main imperialist powers, each of which is determined to carve out the largest possible slice of Africa, has reached a new level in recent months, with the Italian government's revelation of its own proposals to intervene in Libya with thousands of ground troops.



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