

Obama deploys hundreds of US troops to Cameroon

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The US Defense Department (DOD) began deployment of at least 300 additional troops to the West African country of Cameroon this week, the White House announced on Wednesday.

At least 90 of the additional troops have already arrived in Cameroon, US President Barack Obama informed Congress in a letter. The expanded US forces will “remain in Cameroon until their support is no longer needed,” Obama wrote, making clear that the enhanced US presence is essentially permanent.

In addition to establishing a new joint command center in Cameroon, the new forces will provide security for a new US drone base, the latest of at least a dozen such facilities maintained by US Africa Command (AFRICOM), including bases in Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti, and Uganda.

The US military is asserting itself as a major political player in the West African region. On Friday, following private discussions with Cameroonian President Paul Biya, AFRICOM chief General David Rodriguez personally transferred a gift of six advanced military vehicles to Cameroonian forces after the meeting.

Two days before, just as the Cameroon deployment was announced, General Rodriguez was meeting with Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari for another round of military talks. Buhari declared that Nigeria will step up joint military efforts with Washington, and hailed the US decision to station additional forces in Cameroon.

With US support, Boko Haram will be “completely obliterated” by year’s end, Buhari vowed on Wednesday. “The United States has given the pledge to support the fight against Boko Haram in Nigeria and in the region. This is the fulfillment of that pledge and we are very happy about it. The United States’ move is

quite commendable,” a Buhari spokesperson told Western media.

Sections of the Nigerian military have echoed Buhari’s comments, signaling their readiness to align fully with the US regional agenda. “We appeal to other nations to emulate the good example of the United States. The United States has experience in fighting terrorism,” Nigerian military spokesman Colonel Rabe Abubakar said Thursday.

“This is how the fight can be done collectively with partners’ cooperation with us to fight against a common cause, terrorism,” Abubakar said, referring to the latest US deployment.

The constant invocation of the Islamist militant faction known as Boko Haram, a fighting force of several thousands that represents dissident factions of the Nigerian elite, is the surest sign that further military escalations are at hand.

In the name of fighting Boko Haram, Washington has orchestrated the intensified militarization of broad areas around the Lake Chad basin during the past year. Under US direction, a regional “multinational” coalition of proxy forces, consisting of military units from Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, invaded and occupied portions of northern Nigeria in March.

Bolstered by the new forces in Cameroon, the US is now preparing to launch new military-intelligence operations inside Nigeria, unnamed sources cited by Agence France Presse said on Friday. The new US operations will be part of “our Boko Haram efforts that will be operating throughout the region,” the sources claimed.

As if on cue, a series of bombings ripped through Nigeria’s northwestern city of Maiduguri this week, following the pattern of previous attacks attributed to Boko Haram.

Though presented as a response to each new wave of terror attacks, the US moves in West Africa flow from a long-term strategic agenda. The Obama administration and the Pentagon have repeatedly signaled their intention to pursue a major intensification of US involvement in the region in recent months.

In May, US Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to Nigeria to congratulate Buhari on the occasion of his inauguration. Kerry met for private discussions with General Rodriguez, after which Buhari emerged to hail US leadership in the continent-wide struggle against “cultist jihadism.”

Prior to the visit, Secretary Kerry had already vowed in January that the US was “prepared to do more” militarily in Nigeria. Kerry’s remarks came just days before General Rodriguez demanded a “huge” military intervention in the West African region, in the name of fighting Boko Haram.

“I think it’s going to take a huge international and multinational effort there to change a trajectory that continues to go in the wrong direction,” Rodriguez told a conference at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in January.

The latest US deployment was prefigured in remarks by General Rodriguez last December. “President Biya, as well as other senior leaders, have asked for support in both equipment and training. We have already begun our effort and we will continue to grow the effort based on their demand. We will support the Cameroon effort to improve their capacity, and to work with them and defeat Boko Haram and protect the population in the northern part of Cameroon,” he said.

The US buildup in West Africa is one component of the creeping militarization, stretching across the entire northern two-thirds of the African continent, that has been implemented by AFRICOM since its founding in 2008.

Over the past decade, the US has developed a huge logistical system stretching across the whole continent, as the basis for a constantly growing network of new bases and deployments. Beginning in 2004, well before the official founding of AFRICOM, the Pentagon began establishing “Forward Operating Sites” and “Cooperative Security Locations” throughout the Sahara/Sahel, Gulf of Guinea, and Horn of Africa regions.

Today, AFRICOM maintains a presence of at least

7,000 troops across the continent, twice the number of US troops currently stationed in Iraq, and nearly as many as remain in Afghanistan. Always couched in terms of “training local forces,” AFRICOM’s strategy focuses on grafting US military components onto African forces as the means to enhance Washington’s grip over political life in targeted countries.

The drive for enhanced US military-political control over Africa is aimed at countering Chinese economic influence and gaining leverage over Washington’s European “partners,” which retain substantial interests and neocolonial ambitions on the continent.

Illustrating the geopolitical dynamics at work, Germany has announced that it will station a permanent military attaché in Yaounde, the capital city, beginning in 2017. Cameroon was a German colony from 1884 to 1918, passing into French control after World War I.

The announcement signaled Berlin’s intention to assume a large military role in the region, according to AllAfrica. Cameroon’s foreign minister met with the German ambassador in Yaounde on Thursday for discussions focused on “reinforcing defense ties,” according to the Cameroonian government.



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