

# Killings of four elite soldiers in Niger highlight vast scale of American military operations in Africa

Eddie Haywood  
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On Wednesday, four US Green Berets soldiers were killed in an ambush while conducting a training mission with the Nigerien military in southwestern Niger near the border with neighboring Mali. The Nigerien soldiers suffered four casualties. Two other US soldiers, along with eight Nigerien soldiers were injured in the attack.

The ambush occurred 120 miles north of the capital city Niamey, near the village of Tongo-Tongo in the remote Tillaberi region. During the course of conducting a patrol with Nigerien forces, the troops came under attack.

According to the *Washington Post*, the garrison of US elite troops and Nigerien forces were led into an ambush by Malian Islamist militants affiliated with Al-Qaeda who crossed the border into Niger. The remote region has been an area of frequent raids by Islamist militants targeting Nigerien garrisons and checkpoints.

The official claim that US troops practice “non-engagement” with hostile forces, and are only providing training and sharing intelligence with the Nigerien military, has been exposed as a lie by this latest incident. It is clear that the US soldiers were carrying out an offensive operation, since the elite troops were patrolling with Nigerien forces deep into a hostile region.

The deployment of troops to Niger is an element of Washington’s “scramble for Africa,” which was commenced by Obama and is being continued under Trump. In occupying the Sahel region, soldiers under the command of AFRICOM have also been stationed in neighboring Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Nigeria.

Measuring the vast dimension of US military

operations, General Donald Bolduc, head of US Special Operations for AFRICOM, recently reported that there are over 100 active US special operations missions at any given moment across the African continent.

The exact number of elite US forces deployed in Niger is unknown, but it is reported to be at least several dozen. The cumulative numbers deployed across the Sahel and surrounding region number in the hundreds. These forces occupy numerous outposts in Niger and the Lake Chad region, with some 250 US military service personnel deployed to a military base in Garoua, Cameroon. Dozens of special forces soldiers have been deployed to neighboring Nigeria last year.

Underscoring the scope of US military activity across Africa is Flintlock, an annual military exercise conducted by AFRICOM and the military forces of several Sahel countries, including Niger, as well as forces from Canada, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The military exercises began in 2005.

Flintlock is just one of the numerous military exercises conducted in recent years across the continent. The nature and scale of warfare scenarios the exercises conjure up, comprising aircraft and ground combat exercises, crowd control, mass bombardment and urban warfare, makes clear that Washington is preparing for much larger wars in Africa.

The backdrop to Washington’s hostile presence in the Sahel is the joint US and French-led war conducted in neighboring Mali, and the imperialist US/NATO bombing and destruction of Libya in 2011.

Under US-French leadership, the Nigerien forces have been conducting offensive missions against Malian Islamist militants since 2014, under the guise of

the G5 Sahel, a proxy army comprised of forces from nations in the Sahel region. In addition to Niger, the G5 Sahel includes Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso.

The roots of the war in Mali flow from the fallout of the US-backed NATO regime change operation against neighboring Libya, in which the US/NATO nexus armed and trained Islamist fighters to carry out its dirty operation of capturing and assassinating Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Spilling forth from the complete breakdown of Libyan society brought about by US/NATO bombardment, the Islamist forces scattered to various parts of Northern Africa and the Middle East, including the Sahel region.

This began in 2012 with the Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali after a coup ousted Mali President Amadou Toure, as the Tuareg rebels took advantage of the diversionary chaos the coup afforded. The rebels advanced deeper into Mali's interior and began taking control of territory and cities formerly held by government forces.

In early 2013, France, with Washington's backing, deployed troops to Mali to neutralize the rebel militias. In exchange for deploying its military forces, France extracted agreements from the new Malian government for establishing French bases to host a permanent contingent of French troops.

After the joint US-French effort stabilized the government in Bamako, France supported the installation of the current president of Mali, Ibrahim Keïta, a figure with a long history in Mali politics who resided in Paris, where he obtained his education.

Niger is seen as an integral component of American military operations in West Africa with AFRICOM's Niamey base conducting drone flights across the region. The construction of a new drone facility in Agadez, a city in central Niger, constitutes an expansion of the United States' drone capability in the Sahel with further flight range and duration.

The US military outposts in Niger are part of an extensive network of such bases reaching into nearly every corner of the African continent. Over 60 bases dot the African continent, highlighting Washington's determined effort to establish US dominance over Africa's vast economic resources by force. The Sahel region alone possesses trillions of dollars of mineral

wealth, as well as holding significant gas and oil reserves.

The US military forces arrayed across the Sahel underscore the reckless imperialist ambition behind Washington's geopolitical strategy for the region, that in its drive for military domination it runs the risk of sparking a conflict with its rivals that could lead to all-out war on the continent.

A significant part of the equation in the new "scramble for Africa" is Washington's aim to neutralize China. In the last decade, Beijing has increased its economic influence across the continent, drawing up investment deals signed with various African governments for the rights of resource extraction and development, including minerals, oil, and gas.



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