

# Washington exploiting Green Beret deaths to escalate Africa intervention

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27 October 2017

More than three weeks after four special operations troops died in a firefight in Niger, the Pentagon has yet to provide a coherent account of what led to this military debacle.

Combined with President Donald Trump's initial silence on the deaths, followed by his repugnant public debate with the widow of one of the slain soldiers, the incident has cast a spotlight on a rapidly expanding US military buildup in Africa that has been carried out behind the backs of the American people and with no public debate, much less authorization, by the US Congress.

The Trump administration has made no real effort to sell this burgeoning American military operation—conducted under the badly frayed banner of the “war on terrorism”—to the American public.

Meanwhile, leading figures in the US Senate, including Democratic Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, have claimed, however implausibly, that they knew nothing about the approximately 1,000 US special operations troops deployed in Niger and on its borders.

Trump himself provided an entirely credible claim of his own ignorance as to what is happening in Africa. Asked by reporters on the White House lawn whether he had authorized the mission in Niger, he said he had not, declaring idiotically: “I have generals that are great generals. These are great fighters; these are warriors. I gave them authority to do what's right so that we win.”

Even as top politicians say they do not know what is going on and the public has been kept completely in the dark about US troops fighting in Africa—not to mention why they are there—the Pentagon is setting US policy. It is orchestrating a steady drumbeat to exploit the October 4 incident in Niger to push for a qualitative escalation of the US intervention.

This ~~WSA~~ <sup>WSWS</sup> ~~reflects~~ <sup>reflects</sup> today in a story that was evidently planted by its principal sources, unnamed Pentagon officials, who argued that “US counterterrorism efforts are likely to focus more on Africa now that the so-called Islamic State has been ousted from its de facto capital of Raqqa, Syria.”

This same message was echoed by members of the Senate Armed Services Committee Thursday following a closed-door briefing by the US military brass. Both Republican and Democratic senators emerged from the meeting talking about the “rising terrorist threat” in Africa and the need to provide the US military there with “more resources.”

Specifically, the US military is seeking the rapid deployment of armed Reaper drones in Niger for a campaign of assassinations and massacres throughout the Sahel region of central West Africa.

US imperialism is preparing to inflict upon the African continent the levels of carnage that it has already wrought upon the Middle East, where the dead and wounded number in the millions and those driven from their homes in the tens of millions, while entire societies have been shattered.

This new stage in the global eruption of American militarism has been prepared through the extraordinary and largely secretive buildup of AFRICOM, the US regional military command set up under the Bush administration in 2007 and rapidly expanded under Obama. Today, some 6,000 US troops are spread across 24 African nations, carrying out some 3,500 exercises and operations a year, according to AFRICOM's own figures.

AFRICOM drew its first real blood in the US-NATO intervention to bring down the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, claiming the lives of some 80,000 Libyans and leaving the entire society,

over six years later, still in shambles. The regime-change war in Libya destabilized the entire region, igniting longstanding conflicts between the Tuareg people and the governments in Mali and Niger, and strengthening various Islamist movements, which were armed and supported by the US and its allies as proxy ground forces against Gaddafi.

As is in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere, the so-called terrorists that the US military is purportedly being deployed to fight represent the direct instruments or products of US imperialism's own wars of aggression and regime-change, providing the pretexts for new and even bloodier interventions.

Behind these pretexts, however, lie the unmistakable geostrategic interests of US imperialism. These interests were spelled out fairly bluntly in a statement to Congress earlier this year by AFRICOM commander Gen. Thomas Waldhauser:

“Just as the US pursues strategic interests in Africa, international competitors, including China and Russia, are doing the same. Whether with trade, natural resource exploitation, or weapons sales, we continue to see international competitors engage with African partners in a manner contrary to the international norms of transparency and good governance. These competitors weaken our African partners' ability to govern and will ultimately hinder Africa's long-term stability and economic growth, and they will also undermine and diminish US influence—a message we must continue to share with our partners.”

The invocation of “international norms of transparency and good governance” by a senior military official of a military-dominated regime in Washington that wages wars behind the backs of the American people and conspires to topple any government getting in its way is, of course, pretty rich. But the thrust of the general's remarks is clear.

AFRICOM's rapid expansion and the shift of the “war on terror” to Africa are directed first and foremost at countering the rise of Chinese influence on the continent. It is among the sharpest expressions of the global drive by US imperialism to counter its declining economic influence by means of armed force.

China surpassed the US as the continent's largest trading partner in 2009 and has continued to widen its lead. China-Africa trade has soared more than 20-fold from just \$10 billion in 2000 to \$220 billion in 2014. In

2015, Xi Jinping, China's president, pledged \$60 billion for African infrastructure projects in three years. Unable to compete with China economically and desperate for new sources of profits, US imperialism is resorting to military might.

Twice in the 20th century, Africa was the arena for savage armed conflicts between major imperialist powers for the control of colonies, markets and sources of raw materials and labor. In advance of World War I, Germany, demanding its “place in the sun” as a world power, sought to expand its dominance at the expense of the British, French and Belgian colonialists. It is estimated that one million people died in East Africa as a direct result of the war.

In the Second World War, Allied and Axis troops suffered over 400,000 casualties in the battles that raged over North Africa, while more than one million African troops were dragooned into military service on behalf of their European colonial oppressors.

It is not only the United States that is launching its military into a new scramble for Africa, but also the old European colonialists. France has deployed some 4,000 troops across its former Sahel colonies of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. Meanwhile, nearly three-quarters of a century after the defeat of Rommel's Afrika Korps, Germany has some 1,000 troops deployed in Mali, a major component in the resurgence of German militarism.

The crisis of world imperialism, and above all that of the US capitalist system, threatens to turn Africa once again into an arena of bloody global struggles.



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