

“They are waging war when necessary”

## Niger defense minister exposes US military role in West Africa

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2 November 2017

Making clear the October 4 ambush that killed four Green Berets is to be utilized as a pretext for a major escalation of American military operations in the region, Nigerien Defense Minister Kalla Mountari requested that the US deploy armed drones against reputed militants.

During an interview with *Reuters* on Wednesday, Mountari said, “I asked them some weeks ago to arm them (the drones) and use them as needed.” When asked if Washington had granted the request, Mountari replied ominously, “Our enemies will find out.”

Washington has claimed that the 800 US special forces personnel stationed in Niger are restricted to providing training and surveillance assistance to Nigerien forces and have no direct combat role.

Shedding further light on the nature of the joint operation of October 4 conducted by the US elite troops with Nigerien forces, Mountari revealed that the team of 12 elite commandos and 30 Nigerien troops had been “right up to the Mali border and had neutralized some bandits” moments before the ambush took place.

Further exposing Washington’s fraudulent claims of a non-combat role, Mountari said, “They [U.S.-Nigerien contingent] came back to Niger, they greeted the population, they gathered intelligence and it was inside the country, when they didn’t expect anything, that the attack happened.”

This damning admission by the top military official in Niger not only exposes as a lie Washington’s claim that its elite soldiers have no direct combat role, but illustrates clearly that the US is spearheading the military offensive in the region.

Mountari corroborated this, saying, “The Americans are not just exchanging information with us. They are

waging war when necessary. We are working hand in hand. The clear proof is that the Americans and Nigeriens fell on the battlefield for the peace and security of our country.”

The public announcement of the request for drone strikes comes as the Trump administration has agreed to provide \$60 million for a new UN-backed military offensive in West Africa, together with the completion of a \$100 million drone facility in Agadez, Niger.

When all these developments are taken together it must be presumed that a major US military onslaught is imminent in the resource rich region.

The extent of US forces arrayed across the region has been highlighted by recent reports on the June murder of Green Beret Staff Sgt. Lance Melgar in a housing complex at the US embassy in neighboring Mali, suspected to have been carried out by two unidentified Navy Seals.

The elite troops were part of the US counter-terrorism effort in Mali, charged with a mission similar to the one carried out by elite soldiers in Niger.

Illustrating the murderous character of the type of operations carried out by the elite commandos deployed to the Sahel, Navy Seals were part of the special operation that conducted the 2011 raid on Osama Bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in which the Al-Qaeda leader was killed.

The US soldiers deployed to West Africa have been mostly drawn from elite military units, such as Navy Seals and Green Berets, which carry out Washington’s most secret and illegal operations around the globe, including assassination, counter-terrorism raids, special reconnaissance, unconventional warfare, psychological operations, and training of foreign troops.

On Monday in an appearance before the United Nations Security Council, UN Ambassador Nikki Haley officially pledged \$60 million towards the UN-authorized G5 Sahel force, a joint US-French-led military unit consisting of 5,000 troops from the five West African countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.

In June, France drafted a resolution before the UN Security Council asking the body to fund G5 Sahel, as well as requesting the council grant the five-nation force a sweeping mandate to use “any means necessary” to carry out its mission of neutralizing Islamist militants, drug smugglers, and human traffickers.

The request for the designation of G5 Sahel as an offensive force bears similarity to the mandate granted to the UN Force Intervention Brigade formed in 2013 to neutralize the Rwandan M23 militia in eastern Congo.

Washington, in agreeing to provide funding for the G5 Sahel, sharply opposed the French proposition to give the force full authorization, arguing that the resolution was overly broad and unnecessary. Fundamental to Washington’s opposition is concern that France may gain a strategic advantage over the US in West Africa.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, in announcing the funding pledge, elucidated Washington’s aim of geopolitical domination of the Sahel: “Defeating terrorism depends on making sure terrorist organizations cannot have safe havens on any continent. This is a fight we must win, and these funds will play a key role in achieving that mission.”

Washington’s professed objective of “fighting Islamist rebels” deliberately leaves out the fact that these same Islamist militants wreaking havoc across the Sahel are the product of the US strategy of utilizing these forces as a proxy army in the 2011 US/NATO war against Libya. Following the shattering of Libyan society and the assassination of the country’s leader Muammar Gaddafi, these fighters scattered across northern Africa and throughout the Sahel.

Behind the US escalation of its military offensive in the Sahel is Washington’s broader imperialist design of securing Africa’s vast economic resources for the American capitalist elite, in direct competition with European rivals who maintain significant economic

interests in their former colonial holdings on the continent.

Above all, Washington’s push for geostrategic dominance over West Africa is being driven by concerns over China’s expanded economic influence in the region, which Washington perceives as an intolerable intervention which can only be countered by military might.

Beijing secured agreements with the Nigerien government in 2008 to extract the country’s oil deposits, acquiring the Agadem block near the border with Chad. Under the terms of the agreement, China’s state-owned China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) set out a plan for the construction of a refinery and a 2,000-mile pipeline for a capacity of 20,000 barrels per day.



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