US carries out three drone strikes in Somalia

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US forces carried out three separate drone strikes across Somalia within less than 24 hours last weekend, underscoring the sharp escalation of Washington's military offensive in the Horn of Africa.

Reportedly targeting the Somali Islamist militia Al-Shabaab, the first strike occurred on Saturday in Garuud, some 250 miles southwest from the capital city, Mogadishu. The second drone strike was executed in the early morning hours on Sunday in the Lower Shabelle region around 40 miles west of the capital. The final drone strike came six hours later, hitting the northern Puntland region.

Addressing the drone strikes the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) released a statement noting, "U.S. forces will continue to use all authorized and appropriate measures to protect Americans and to disable terrorist threats." In all, according to AFRICOM, the three strikes killed "several militants."

In its statement to the media, AFRICOM made the questionable claim that the strikes resulted in no civilian deaths. "We assess no civilians were anywhere near the site. We take all measures during the targeting process to painstakingly ensure that civilian casualties and collateral damages are avoided and that we comply with the principles of the Law of Armed Conflict."

Exposing as a lie AFRICOM's claim that drones strikes avoid civilian casualties is "The Drone Report " published by the Intercept in 2015, compiled from classified documents leaked to the news agency, which document thousands of civilian deaths from drones strikes in the Middle East and Africa since 2009. The numbers cited in the documents are an estimate, and are likely to be far higher.

Underscoring Washington's callous disregard for civilian casualties, the source which provided the documents told the Intercept that the US considers "anyone caught in the vicinity [of a drone strike] is guilty by association," and that when "a drone strike kills more than one person, there is no guarantee that those persons deserved their fate… So it's a phenomenal gamble."

The drone strikes follow last month's double truck bomb attack in a central district in Mogadishu, which killed more than 350 people and injured 300 more. The Somalia Islamist militia Al-Shabaab has been blamed for the bombing, and Somalia's US-backed government declared a "state of war" against the militia following the attack.

Since the beginning of 2017, the US has carried out 26 drone missile attacks in Somalia. The missile strikes are a component of Washington's military escalation and expansion in the Horn of Africa, with Trump's announcement in March of efforts to rout Islamist militants belonging to Al-Shabaab including the deployment of additional US troops to Somalia.

Underlining the dimension of the US military offensive and operations in Africa, AFRICOM notes that US forces "advise" Somali soldiers and the 22,000-strong African Union force in "targeting terrorists, their training camps and safe havens throughout Somalia, the region and around the world."

Trump has approved newly rewritten rules of engagement for the US forces in Somalia, which essentially constitute an open-ended authority to conduct war across Somalia. In revising the rules of engagement, Trump is absolving the US of responsibility for future war crimes.

Added to the mix of forces warring across the Horn of Africa is ISIS, who were estimated by the UN to number in the "several dozens" in Somalia as recently as 2015. The ISIS forces now are estimated to number in the hundreds, and these foreign militants have spilled into the country from the battlefields of Iraq and Syria, and have garnered new recruits with defectors from Al-Shabaab.

In October 2016, ISIS militants captured the city of

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Qandala in the northern Somali region of Puntland, holding the city and surrounding region for two months, before Puntland forces guided by the US military routed them.

The emergence of ISIS in Somalia is a consequence of US-backed wars conducted for regime change in the Middle East and Northern Africa, with Washington enlisting and arming Al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamist militants to do its dirty work. The American military, with the assistance of these Islamist forces, has laid waste to Iraq, Syria, and Libya. Emerging from the fallout of these devastated societies, these fighters have spilled forth to various points across the Middle East and south into Africa.

Washington's expanding military operations in Somalia must be seen within the framework of its imperialist strategy to control the Horn of Africa by force which is being motivated by China's expanding economic influence in Africa.

In neighboring Sudan, Beijing secured several investment deals with the government in Khartoum, including the development of its oil deposits, with state-owned oil company China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) constructing extraction and refinement facilities.

To Somalia's south in Kenya, Beijing has procured deals with the Kenyatta government for the construction of an East Africa railway. The Standard Gauge Railway, running between the Kenyan cities of Nairobi and Mombasa is currently in operation, as the first part of the railway, which Beijing projects will traverse across the continent.

Adding to Washington's consternation is Beijing's opening in August of a naval base in Djibouti, only five miles from Camp Lemonnier, the joint US/French military base. Speaking on the inauguration of the nation's first overseas military base, Beijing characterized the installation as a "logistics facility."

In reporting on the base's opening China's state news agency Xinhua, noted: "The base will ensure China's performance of missions, such as escorting, peacekeeping and humanitarian aid in Africa and west Asia." Elaborating further it explained, "The base will also be conducive to overseas tasks including military cooperation, joint exercises, evacuating and protecting overseas Chinese, and emergency rescue, as well as jointly maintaining security of international strategic seaways."

Desperate to stop China's advance and influence, Washington seeks to neutralize its Asian rival by expanding its military interventions across the continent from the Lake Chad basin in West Africa to the Great Lakes Region in East Africa. In the Horn of Africa, Washington is striving for total domination of the region fronting the waterway from which much of the world's oil traffic flows from the Middle East through the Red Sea.

The Trump administration's war in Somalia is the product of an over 20-years long effort by successive Democratic and Republican governments to secure a puppet regime in Mogadishu, a government which has no popular support anywhere in the country. During the brutal course of its imperialist operations, Washington has completely devastated Somali society, leaving the Somali masses utterly impoverished, susceptible to disease, famine, and a lack of vital infrastructure.

The author recommends:

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[08 July 2017]

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