

AFRICOM envisions two years of open-ended warfare in Somalia

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The Pentagon has submitted operational plans to the White House which outline at least two years of combat operations in Somalia against the militant group Al-Shabaab. The plans coincide with AFRICOM's ramped-up campaign of airstrikes in Somalia, carrying out 32 so far in 2017, more than twice the number conducted the previous year. In November, AFRICOM bombed an alleged Al-Shabaab training camp, killing more than 100.

The announcement marks a further escalation of Washington's military offensive in Somalia which has been ramped up since Trump's inauguration, including the deployment of 500 special forces personnel.

According to anonymous officials speaking to the *New York Times*, the Pentagon's proposal seeks to delay its review of its military campaign in Somalia for 24 months and to conduct its report internally, without review from outside agencies, such as Congress or the State Department.

The new rules of engagement approved by Trump in March essentially codify greater leeway to AFRICOM's commanders, giving them complete autonomy and immunity to conduct all-out war.

The Pentagon's proposal also comes after new rules signed by Trump in October designated Somalia as subject to the Pentagon's program for "counter-terrorism operations outside of conventional war zones."

In a country already ravaged by decades of US imperialist warfare, the declaration by AFRICOM that it is going to wage an indefinite military offensive in Horn of Africa promises further social catastrophe for the Somali population.

Trump's granting the US military near-blanket autonomy in conducting its offensive Somalia has provoked an outcry from a section of foreign policy

officials, who fear that Trump's "no holds barred" military strategy in Somalia will have an adverse impact on Washington's imperial strategy and American capitalist interests in the region.

Luke Hartig, a senior director for counter-terrorism for the White House National Security Council during the Obama administration told the *New York Times*, "A ton can happen in 24 months, particularly in the world of counterterrorism and when we're talking about a volatile situation on the ground, like we have in Somalia with government formation issues and famine issues."

Underscoring the Trump administration's contempt for the Somali population, National Security Council spokesperson Marc Raimondi said of the Pentagon's proposal, "We are not going to broadcast our targeting policies to the terrorists that threaten us, but we will say in general that our counterterrorism policies continue to reflect our values as a nation."

Cynically invoking concern for the Somali population, who have suffered an incalculable loss of life as well as the destruction of their society brought by Washington's over two-decade imperialist offensive against the country, Raimondi claimed that the American military has been careful to shield civilians from its bombardment.

"The United States will continue to take extraordinary care to mitigate civilian casualties, while addressing military necessity in defeating our enemy," Raimondi asserted.

On Tuesday, Washington's "extraordinary care" for civilians was exposed as a lie when Somali intelligence officials reported that the US carried out a drone strike near the village of Mubarak in the Lower Shabelle region, around 40 miles south of Mogadishu, striking a minibus. In a statement to the media, AFRICOM

claimed the bus carried militants who planned to travel to Mogadishu to carry out an attack.

Minibuses are a common mode of transportation for the population, and while it is unknown if the vehicle carried civilians, a drone attack conducted in or around concentrated population centers belies AFRICOM's claims to mitigate civilian casualties.

Further laying bare Washington's claim of concern for the Somali population is the August 25 raid on the southern Somali village of Bariire, conducted by US elite commandos in the lead with the Somali army providing support.

In November, the *Daily Beast*, relying on several eyewitness accounts, reported that US commandos carried out a massacre, shooting and killing 10 civilians, including one child.

The Somali Army initially claimed that those killed were Al-Shabaab militants, but were forced to retract the official story when hundreds of angry residents from the nearby town of Afgoye poured into the streets and demanded that the perpetrators of the massacre be brought to justice.

As part of its investigation, the *Daily Beast* discovered that payouts were made by the Somali Government for \$60,000 to each of the victim's families.

While completely denying that US forces were responsible for the killings, AFRICOM admitted that, "[T]he Somali National Army was conducting an operation in the area with U.S. forces in a supporting role."

Bariire resident Abdullahi Elmi told the *Daily Beast* that he and a friend, Goomey Hassan, took cover after hearing gunfire near Elmi's home. Moments later, the two were confronted at gunpoint by troops with the Somali National Army and placed under arrest.

After the soldiers conducted a search of Elmi's home, the two were forced to move to the scene of the massacre. Elmi saw the bodies of fellow residents, including a friend bleeding profusely from a gunshot wound who cried out for help. Elmi and Hassan recounted that the soldiers threw them to the ground and forced face down, and held in place by boots of US soldiers on their heads.

As a consequence of the *Daily Beast's* report, AFRICOM head Thomas Waldhauser requested the Naval Criminal Investigative Service conduct a

whitewash investigation.

Under the fraudulent guise of the war on terror, Washington is pursuing by military force an effort to assert geostrategic dominance over the Horn of Africa, with the region fronting the waterway of the world's oil traffic from the Middle East through the Red Sea.

A key obstacle to the United States' imperialist dominance is China, which has dramatically increased its economic influence in nearly every nation and industry of the African continent.

The initiative by the Pentagon to escalate its military offensive in the Horn of Africa has the air of reckless desperation. The recent inauguration by Beijing of a naval base in Djibouti has prompted Washington to amplify its military offensive in the region threatening to set off a wider war between major powers.



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