

US drone strikes in Somalia part of drive to control Horn of Africa

By Tom Eley
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On Monday evening US drones carried out an assassination attempt in Somalia targeting the leader of the al-Shabab Islamist group, Ahmed Abdi Godane. It was not clear whether or not Godane, who is also known as Mukhtar Abu Zubeyr, was killed in the attack that took place in the Sablale region, roughly 100 miles south of the capital, Mogadishu, or how many others might have died.

“We are assessing the results of the operation and will provide additional information as and when appropriate,” said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby on Monday. A Somali official said that Godane “might have been killed along with other militants,” while the regional governor, Abdiqadir Mohamed Sidii, claimed that Godane, aged 37, was one of seven killed. Several vehicles were incinerated in the attempt on Godane, who was reportedly leaving a meeting.

Media reports and US officials refer to Godane as “the spiritual leader” of al-Shabab, which is allegedly linked to al Qaeda, and also as the “mastermind” behind a number of terrorist attacks on civilians and government targets in Somalia and neighboring countries whose militaries have contributed to the African Union force assisting the US. One of these attacks resulted in the killing of 67 people at Kenya’s upscale Westgate Mall in Nairobi last September.

Like similar operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq, and Libya, Monday’s drone attack was carried out under the pretext of the “war on terror,” in contravention of US and international law. The Obama administration has asserted the right to launch military attacks in any country of the world on the basis of its own declarations that its targets are engaged in terrorist acts.

A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, claimed that in the operation there were no “boots on

the ground,” i.e., direct involvement of US combat soldiers. However, it is known that there are US Special Forces, including Navy SEALs, operating in Somalia.

The main US tactic in Somalia appears to be to assassinate leaders of al-Shabab and thereby decapitate it. In October of last year, in the wake of the Kenya mall attacks, US Navy SEALs launched a failed ground attack at the port of Barawe, very near the site of yesterday’s drone bombing, that had aimed to kill or abduct an al-Shabab figure known as Ikrimah. Drone strikes in January of this year and October of last also killed alleged “top leaders” of al-Shabab.

Also engaged against al-Shabab is a force of some 22,000 African Union troops, for all intents and purposes conscript mercenaries of US and Western imperialism. The AU forces have reportedly made gains in recent weeks in the Shabelle and Hirnan regions near Mogadishu.

However, on Monday al-Shabab carried out a brazen attack in Mogadishu in which seven militants and five others were killed. The target appears to have been Godka Jilacow prison, described in one media account as “an interrogation center for Somalia’s intelligence agency [where] many suspected militants are believed to be held in underground cells”—and presumably subjected to torture overseen by US personnel.

The broader strategic aim of US imperialism is to control the Horn of Africa. Somalia—one of the poorest countries in the world with GDP per capita of \$112 and a life expectancy of about 52 years—lies adjacent to the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, the narrow entryway into the Red Sea through which passes a substantial share of world trade to and from the Suez Canal. Somalia also lies directly across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen—itself a major target of US drone operations—and the Arabian

Peninsula, home to the largest oil deposits in the world.

For over a century these characteristics have made the Horn of Africa and Somalia, formerly divided between the Italian and British empires, a central target of Great Power intrigue.

Direct and indirect US military intervention in Somalia has been underway for years, beginning in 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when US Marines landed in Mogadishu at the head of a UN force. The following year came the “Black Hawk Down” incident, in which 18 US Army Rangers died and hundreds of Somalis were killed. The US ended its direct combat involvement in 1994.

From 2006 until 2011, al-Shabab ruled Mogadishu, along with much of southern Somalia, before being forced out by the African Union troops backed by the US. The US also supported Ethiopia in a war and occupation of parts of Somalia that lasted from 2006 until 2009, and in 2007 carried out direct military strikes against alleged al-Qaeda targets that “kill[ed] an unknown number of civilians,” according to the BBC.

Beginning in 2008, the US and European powers seized on and promoted fears over Somali pirates in order to launch extensive naval operations off its coast. The US backed a Kenyan invasion of Somalia in 2011, when al-Shabab’s territorial control was at its greatest extent, and the same year began drone operations from a base in Ethiopia.

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