

Obama extends global reach of US Special Operations death squads

By Patrick Martin
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In major actions reported only briefly by the establishment press, President Obama has given vast new scope to the Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), authorizing it to carry out assassinations across the globe.

The units of JSOC have long been employed by the chiefs of the six major regional military commands, such as Centcom, which covers the Middle East and Central Asia, to conduct counter-terrorism operations. One such unit, Seal Team Six, carried out the assassination of Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in May 2011.

Obama has approved a proposal to give JSOC independent authority to operate outside the regional commands, essentially as a globalized assassination force. JSOC units will bypass the regional commanders and report directly to Special Operations Command (SOCOM) in the Pentagon.

According to the *Washington Post*, "The missions could occur well beyond the battlefields of places like Iraq, Syria and Libya, where Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) has carried out clandestine operations in the past. When finalized, it will elevate JSOC from being a highly-valued strike tool used by regional military commands to leading a new multi-agency intelligence and action force."

The mandate of the new formation, to be called the "Counter-External Operations Task Force," or Ex-Ops in Pentagon jargon, will embrace the entire planet. This means US military death squads could be sent to virtually any location, from European cities to South American jungles, including the United States itself.

According to the *Post*, a reorganization making counter-terrorism an independent, global command has been discussed in the Pentagon for 15 years, since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but it was always rejected on the

grounds that it would cause friction with the regional commanders and create duplication in command structures.

The newspaper did not address the question of why now, a decade-and-a-half later, the Obama administration has decided to press forward with the new global counter-terrorism initiative. The decision is likely, at least in part, a response to the debacle of the US "war on terror" from the standpoint of the global aims of American imperialism.

The US wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria and repeated drone strikes in other countries, including Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, have inflicted catastrophic levels of death and destruction, but they have not achieved the hoped-for hegemonic control of the region and its vast energy resources. Obama's decision represents a determination to escalate US military violence in Central Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and beyond.

Another likely consideration is the possibility that the ongoing military offensives against Islamic State territories in Syria and Iraq, and particularly the siege of Mosul, could lead to thousands of ISIS militants turning to terrorist attacks outside the Middle East.

Defense Secretary Ashton Carter traveled to Paris last month with SOCOM Commander Raymond Thomas for talks with security officials from several European countries. A major topic was the impact on Europe of a sudden weakening in the military position of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Carter told his European counterparts that JSOC "has been put in the lead" of countering ISIS external operations, the first mention of the impending Pentagon reorganization.

The *Post* report sought to present the Obama-approved reorganization as an effort to set limits on the operations of special forces under the

incoming Trump administration, including “approval by several agencies before a drone strike and ‘near certainty’ that no civilians will be killed guidelines.” But these restrictions are for cosmetic purposes only and have not stopped the mass slaughter of civilians by drone missile warfare.

Moreover, Trump is not bound in any way by executive orders issued by Obama. The fascistic president-elect has already made his intentions clear, as far as US Special Forces operations are concerned. He has vowed to order the killing of the wives and children of suspected ISIS fighters, a war crime under the Geneva Conventions.

The latest White House orders serve to facilitate these homicidal intentions. Less than a month ago, Obama was campaigning against the election of Trump, denouncing him as unfit to be commander-in-chief and as a menace to the world. Now, as *Foreign Policy* magazine reported, Obama is “handing the incoming Trump team tools to wage war that no president has held before.”

In one particular theater of US counter-terrorism operations, Somalia, Obama has taken additional action to escalate the carnage by declaring the Islamist group al-Shabab to be part of the armed conflict authorized by the US Congress in 2001 after the 9/11 attacks.

The legal maneuver, reported Monday by the *New York Times*, demonstrates the infinitely expandable scope of the US-declared “war on terror.” The Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), passed by Congress on September 14, 2001, approved military action against Al Qaeda and associated forces, including the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

The 2001 AUMF has been interpreted by the Bush and Obama administrations as a blanket authorization for military action wherever the president claims to find a connection to Al Qaeda, no matter how tenuous. Al-Shabab was not founded until 2007, six years after the 9/11 attacks, in response to the US-backed invasion of Somalia by Ethiopian troops. It has never conducted operations outside of East Africa.

The *Times* noted that the Somalia decision was one of a series of Obama actions expanding the military’s authority, including broadening the scope of air strikes in Afghanistan and approving air strikes against Sirte, the Libyan city held by supporters of ISIS. More than 400 air strikes followed, pounding into rubble a city

already devastated by five years of civil war following the 2011 US-NATO bombing campaign.

The preparations to reinforce the pseudo-legal basis of the war in Somalia no doubt began well before the election, when Obama expected to hand off authority to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. But it has continued uninterrupted after Trump’s victory, and as the *Times* reported, it is “a move that will strengthen President-elect Donald J. Trump’s authority to combat thousands of Islamist fighters in the chaotic Horn of Africa nation.”

Earlier this month, the British-based *Guardian* reported that “Barack Obama will not tighten the rules governing US drone strikes ahead of Donald Trump’s inauguration.” An Amnesty International USA official, Naureen Shah, told the newspaper, “Obama has normalized the idea that presidents get to have secret large-scale killing programs at their disposal.”

These events shed a new and sinister light over the reports of frequent closed-door discussions between Obama and Trump during the three weeks since the November 8 election. “They’ve been talking regularly on any number of issues,” Trump campaign manager Kellyanne Conway said on CNN’s “State of the Union” program Sunday.

Obama was at pains, in his first post-election statement, to dismiss the bitter vituperation of the election campaign, declaring that the electoral struggle between the Democrats and Republicans was merely “an intramural scrimmage.” This is profoundly true: both parties represent the same class, the American financial aristocracy, and its global interests, defended in the final analysis by death and destruction inflicted by the American military machine.

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