

US Special Forces will wage war in Africa “for at least a generation”

By Thomas Gaist and Eddie Haywood
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The number of American commandos fighting in Africa grew by 600 percent between 2006 and 2010, and by another 1000 percent between 2010 and 2016, according to documents authored by General Donald Bolduc, head of the Pentagon’s Special Operations Command-Africa (SOCAFRICA).

US Special Forces soldiers are waging over 100 missions in Africa at any given time, according to the leaked documents. AFRICOM headquarters in Stuttgart-Mohringen, Germany manages a growing empire of Special Forces bases and infrastructure, the documents show, including commands focused on the Horn of Africa, Uganda, West Africa, Trans-Sahara, as well as a “Naval Special Warfare Unit 10” and a “Joint Special Operations Air Component Africa.”

In an article published in the *Small Wars Journal* concurrent with the leaks, “The Gray Zone in Africa,” General Bolduc called for “at least a generation” of irregular warfare on the continent, and warned that threats to the United States from Africa may soon “surpass those from the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.” Bluntly stating the real geopolitical considerations driving Washington’s intervention, Bolduc described SOCAFRICA’s mission as “adversarial competition short of armed conflict, but with a military dimension.”

“Competition for strategic influence and relationships is complicated by the political, economic, military, and informational interests of China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran Everything we do for our partners in Africa today must prepare them for tomorrow’s threats and support strong political and military relationships,” he wrote.

A panoply of different types of US special forces are active in Africa under SOCAFRICA’s “mission command construct,” include “Regional SOCFWDs

(integrators),” “SOF teams (executors),” “Special Operations Forces Liaison Elements (synchronizers),” “logistics teams,” and “Joint Special Operations Air Component (JSOAC) groups,” according to PowerPoint slides presented by the US general.

Bolduc called on the “African partners” of SOCAFRICA’s commando network to implement “integrated campaigning and coordination of their military operations in support of a broader political strategy.” The elaborate strategy concepts advanced by the SOCAFRICA chief—“comprehensive population-centric approach that blends both kinetic and non-kinetic tactics, while operating among the populace,” “nested key leader engagements at all levels,” “regional comprehensive approach”—are merely new jargon for the same aims pursued by American imperialism and the European former colonial powers during the past 150 years.

The Pentagon is planning a further escalation of US power projection and war-making throughout African society. The exact scale of US activities on the continent remains shrouded from public view. AFRICOM is running “expansive and undocumented operations in at least 49 countries in Africa,” according to the *Brown Political Review*. In a letter to Congress published June 6, the Trump administration acknowledged deployments of at least 1,000 soldiers throughout the Lake Chad Basin countries of Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad, along with another 400 troops divided between the Congo, Uganda, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

On June 2, American military forces concluded joint war drills with 20 different national militaries at the Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Training Center in Ghana. Participants in the drills, codenamed United Accord 2017, included African units from Benin, Burkina

Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, as well as Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands and Britain. The exercises served as “an opportunity for regional African partners to develop relationships, enhance interoperability and hone mission command skills required to conduct peacekeeping operations in the region,” according to the Pentagon. Last month, the 101st Airborne Division deployed to Somalia in support of operations to build the new Somali National Army (SNA), whose formation was agreed at the London Conference on Somalia last month.

Every day, dozens of war planes and unmanned drones fly missions out of the American base at Camp Lemonnier, in Djibouti, according to witnesses cited by African media. Throughout Africa, there are at least seven known US drone bases, in as many countries. Many of these facilities are administered by private contractors, with some operated out of secluded hangars located in African military or civil airports. At the Arba Minch airport in Ethiopia, the US Air Force spent several million dollars developing a facility hosting MQ-9 Reaper drones which carry out operations across Somalia. From an aircraft facility adjacent to Entebbe International Airport in Uganda, the US military conducts covert surveillance flights over Central Africa and beyond.

Washington and its regional partners are mobilizing for war and mass repression against an African population beset by the worst social catastrophe since the World War II. As of May, Oxfam International reported that 4.9 million people are dangerously hungry in South Sudan, 7 million in Yemen, 3.2 million people in Somalia, and 4.7 million in Nigeria. Among four countries alone, this represents some 20 million people threatened with death by starvation in 2017. Millions more are classified as in crisis, emergency and famine conditions in Niger, Chad and Mali. In Somalia, tens of thousands have been stricken with curable diseases such as cholera and measles during the beginning months of the year.

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