

Trump escalates US drone war in Somalia

By Timotheos Gaist
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The Trump White House escalated American imperialism's decades-long war in Somalia this week, ordering American military drones to launch repeated airstrikes against insurgent strongholds in southern regions of the impoverished Horn of Africa nation.

On Sunday, a US MQ-9 Reaper drone fired Hellfire missiles against an al Shabaab camp near the capital, Mogadishu. On Tuesday, American forces carried out another drone strike, described by the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) as a "collective self-defense strike," against "an al Shabaab troop concentration." The attacks are openly acknowledged in American ruling class media as marking the onset of a major expansion of the war.

During its first six months in office, the Trump administration has laid the foundations for a wider war in Somalia, extending and building upon the general policy of covert and proxy war against Somalia pursued by the previous two administrations under the banner of the "global war on terrorism."

In March, Trump granted US commanders open-ended authority to wage war throughout southern Somalia, without approval by civilian authorities. In April, President Trump approved deployment of scores of regular American ground troops to Somalia, the first such deployments since the 1992 "Operation Restore Hope," which saw some 30,000 imperialist troops dispatched to the outskirts of Mogadishu, under the pretext of providing humanitarian aid.

The Trump White House now favors "even more permissive rules of engagement for drone operations in Yemen and Somalia," Center for Drone Studies expert Dan Gettinger told Fox News last week.

The drone war in Somalia, waged by the Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) for more than 10 years, is being organized from AFRICOM's Camp Lemonnier, in neighboring Djibouti.

Local sources report seeing dozens of heavily armed drones and war planes leaving Lemonnier's airfield every day. American military and intelligence operatives have also established a secret drone and commando training base at Baledogle airport, some 70 miles north of Mogadishu, according to Homeland Security News Wire.

"We continue to work in coordination with our Somali partners and allies to systematically dismantle al Shabaab, and

help achieve stability and security throughout the region," an AFRICOM statement released Tuesday said.

"U.S. forces remain committed to supporting the Federal Government of Somalia [FGS], the Somali National Army and our Amisom partners in defeating al Shabaab and establishing a safe and secure environment in Somalia," Pentagon spokesperson Major Audricia Harris said.

The stepped up tempo of drone strikes comes in response to increasingly successful offensives by al Shabaab, whose popularity now far surpasses that of the American-backed Federal Government of Somalia (FSG).

The drumbeat of drone strikes, commando raids, and proxy wars by US-backed regional forces and warlords have completely failed to defeat or even stem the al Shabaab insurgency, which has consolidated its hold over large areas of the country, and continues to deal punishing blows against the government.

The Islamist militia, which emerged out of the youth wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), has achieved a series of tactical successes in recent months, aggressively engaging and defeating government troops across a broad swath of the country, from the oil-rich Puntland region in the north, to the Somali-Kenyan border in the south. On June 8, al Shabaab forces overran a government military base in Puntland, killing dozens of government soldiers, and seizing large quantities of weaponry, munitions and armored vehicles.

Al Shabaab "has cemented its hold on ungoverned territory across southern and central Somalia, even after decades of the United States partnering with some African nations to combat al-Qaida's third-largest affiliate," the American military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* reported Wednesday.

"In the last eight months, al-Shabaab has overrun three African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) Forward Operating Bases by amassing large numbers of fighters and attacking in overwhelming numbers. Al-Shabaab has also increased its combat capability by seizing heavy weaponry, armored vehicles, explosives, small arms, ammunition, and other miscellaneous supplies during its operations overrunning Burundian National Defense Forces FOB Leego, Ugandan People's Defense Force FOB Janaale, and Kenyan Defense Force FOB Ceel Ad," AFRICOM acknowledged in a June 11 statement.

"The terror organization has cemented its control over

southern and central Somalia, they have used this area to plot and direct terror attacks, steal humanitarian aid, and to shelter other radical terrorists,” AFRICOM said.

This week saw al Shabaab mount brazen attacks against targets associated with the US-allied Kenyan government to the south, whose Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) have served as a proxy occupation force on behalf of Washington since 2011.

On July 6, al Shabaab fighters launched attacks against a Kenyan police station near the coastal town of Lamu, and in the Boni forest along the Kenya-Somalia border. The fighting near Lamu, whose port facility sits at the eastern end of the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET) strategic infrastructure corridor, lasted throughout the day, leaving three Kenyan police officers dead.

The rise of al Shabaab is powerful measure of the ongoing collapse of the nation-state system. The extremist militia group has exploited the breakdown of Somalia’s central government to establish power bases in large areas of the country, taking on social and economic roles associated with normal sovereign states, such as levying taxes and providing basic services. The group’s internal intelligence service, known as the Amniyat, regularly carries out sophisticated covert operations in the heart of Mogadishu, assassinating top officials and bombing FSG facilities.

“Al-Shabab is becoming a shadow government, positioning itself as Somalia’s champion of disenfranchised and marginalized clans,” American University Professor Tricia Bacon wrote in an analysis for the *Washington Post*. “This is why al-Shabab won’t be going away anytime soon.

“Al-Shabab has shown an impressive ability to adapt and is positioned to not only survive, but to thrive. It has overrun AMISOM forward operating bases (FOB), killing and injuring scores of troops and seizing arms, military vehicles and heavy weaponry,” Bacon wrote. “Al-Shabab has a remarkably effective taxation system that few dare to defy, even those living, as one person I interviewed put it, ‘a stone’s throw from an AMISOM FOB.’ That brings in a steady stream of revenue. What’s more, al-Shabab is relatively uncorrupt and efficient. You can see that clearly on the roads that it controls, where it operates checkpoints that require set payments, offers a receipt to passengers, and keeps the roads relatively safe.

“Al-Shabab finds ways to exploit the vacuum left by the state, tapping into a deep reservoir of grievances. It has both conventional military strength and terrorist abilities as well as political and ideological influence that goes beyond its territorial holdings,” she wrote.

US ruling class strategists fear a repeat, in Somalia, of the seizure of large areas of northern Iraq by Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which took the Pentagon high command completely by surprise, and nearly toppled the US-backed government in Baghdad.

The FSG has proven incapable of securing and holding the vast majority of its own territory, aside from central areas of

Mogadishu, small portions of the surrounding Indian Ocean coastline, and narrow corridors linking the capital and the southern port city of Kismayo to the Kenyan and Ethiopia borders. Calls are growing for US forces to assume a much larger role in the FGS’s defense, until now left in the hands of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops drawn from the militaries of Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda, supported by American commandos, “advisers,” and air power. Such a mission would require thousands of conventional ground forces, along the lines of the ongoing US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“We’ve convinced ourselves that working through our African partners is going to solve the problem. But in many cases, it’s making the problem we’re trying to solve worse,” American Enterprise Institute analyst Katherine Zimmerman argued in an appearance on Fox News.

Whatever the exact form taken by future US war operations, it is clear that American imperialism is determined to employ ever greater levels of military violence against a Somali society that is already reeling from decades of imperialist-orchestrated war, and is wracked by historic levels of famine, drought and disease.

Over 750,000 Somalis have been displaced by drought since November 2016, with more than 20,000 displaced in June alone. More than 50,000 Somalis have been treated for cholera or acute watery diarrhea (AWD) since the beginning of 2017. Some 350,000 Somali children under the age of five are currently acutely malnourished, according to a United Nations Humanitarian Snapshot published July 6.

The spread of famine is accelerating the destabilization of US-backed political arrangements throughout East Africa, and placing mass social struggles against imperialism on the order of the day. AFRICOM is “war-gaming procedures to work in a famine environment,” US Marine Corps General Thomas Waldhauser told Congress in March.

Nearly 27 million people living in the broader East African region, including Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, urgently require food aid, according to the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Five million South Sudanese are projected to be “severely food insecure” by the end of July, according to the UN.

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