

US AFRICOM blacklists reporter Nick Turse as “not a legitimate journalist”

By Eddie Haywood
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Journalist Nick Turse, who has reported extensively on US military operations in Africa, was recently told that he has been deemed “not a legitimate journalist” by AFRICOM, the US military command which oversees operations across the continent.

The move is of a piece with the US government’s drive to silence critical reporting by alternative news outlets and comes amid the global effort to censor oppositional and alternative viewpoints on the Internet.

Turse explained in an article published by the *Intercept* on Saturday that AFRICOM officials began stonewalling his queries after he authored an article in July which documented torture by US-trained Cameroonian forces at a US base in Salak, Cameroon.

For several years, the Pentagon has been perturbed by Turse’s reporting, which has exposed the vast spectrum of United States military operations across Africa, most of which it wishes to keep shrouded in secrecy.

Turse related a telephone conversation in October with Lt. Commander Anthony Falvo, the head of AFRICOM’s public relations office, in which Falvo told him, “Nick, we’re not going to respond to any of your questions...We just don’t feel that we need to.”

When asked by Turse if Falvo believed AFRICOM did not need to address questions from the press in general, or just Turse himself, Falvo stated abruptly, “No, just you. We don’t consider you a legitimate journalist, really.” Falvo then hung up on Turse.

Turse noted several attempts by AFRICOM to stonewall his queries into US military operations on the continent in the weeks following his phone call with Falvo. During the course of his investigation into torture by US-trained Cameroonian forces, he stated that AFRICOM essentially ignored his emails and telephone calls.

Around 10 days before his call with Falvo and after several fruitless phone calls to AFRICOM by Turse to verify details in his July article published by the *Intercept*, “Cameroonian troops tortured and killed prisoners at base used for US drone surveillance,” his call was finally taken by AFRICOM spokesperson Robyn Mack, who told Turse to proceed with his questions.

Bizarrely, Turse says that while in the middle of giving her his list of queries, Mack interrupted, “Hello, hello, Nick are you there? Hello?” as if the two had a faulty connection. Turse replied several times that he was still on the line, but after several moments, Mack hung up.

After several attempts to call back went unanswered, finally someone picked up the line. When Turse asked to speak to Mack, he was told that she “went out for lunch, along with everyone in the office.”

On November 15, several days after the first phone call, Robyn Mack answered, but when Turse identified himself, Mack again hung up.

Turse’s exposures have shed light on the Pentagon’s vast array of secret military bases and its operations across the African continent. In the course of several years of reporting Turse has sought to exhaustively document the extent of Washington’s criminal drive to re-colonize Africa.

Since October, when five Green Berets were killed in an ambush in Niger, exposing the extent and scale of the US military offensive in West Africa, AFRICOM and its offensive operations across the continent have come under greater scrutiny.

With the blacklisting of a journalist who has exposed its criminal operations, the United States military is attempting to control the flow of information to those media outlets who toe the official line, such as the *New*

York Times, *Washington Post*, and other such officially approved media organs which make up the corporate press on which the ruling class can depend.

The antidemocratic attempt by the US government to establish “genuine journalism” coincides with Washington’s drive to censor the Internet in coordination with the big tech companies, including Google, Facebook and Twitter.

The attempt to smear Turse as an illegitimate journalist comes after Google’s introduction last April of a new search engine algorithm which resulted in a decline in search results leading to sites with political views which are critical of the right-wing reaction coming out of Washington.

Various left-leaning and anti-war websites have seen a drastic decline in incoming traffic from Google, with the *World Socialist Web Site* suffering the most with a 75 percent decline in incoming searches. *The Intercept* has also experienced a noticeable decline in traffic generated by Google searches.

The attack on the democratic right of the American population to freedom of the press and access to information online should be taken within the broader context of the campaigns conducted against former NSA contractor Edward Snowden and journalist Julian Assange of Wikileaks, who have been condemned and pursued as criminals by Washington for exposing the crimes of US imperialism.

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