

Pentagon concealed role of US special forces in deadly Niger offensive

By Eddie Haywood
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AFRICOM acknowledged for the first time Wednesday that it kept quiet about a deadly offensive its elite forces conducted late last year with Nigerien soldiers, highlighting the scale of US special operations in West Africa and illustrating clearly the predatory aims that underlay the Pentagon's deployment of elite soldiers in the region.

On December 6 last year, Green Berets coordinating a military operation with Nigerien forces, killed 11 militants near the town of Diffa, close to the Nigerian border. The announcement by the Pentagon on Wednesday marks the first time it has acknowledged its role in the December engagement.

AFRICOM's silence regarding the operation was no doubt influenced by the international outcry provoked by the October 4 killing of four Green Berets during an ambush in northwestern Niger, which exposed the vast scale of US military operations across West Africa.

The Pentagon's operations in Niger are extensive and far-reaching—last year the US finished construction of a drone base in Agadez, located in central Niger, which AFRICOM stated is equipped with the capability of conducting armed drone flights across the entire Sahel region and into northern Africa to carry out surveillance and assassinations.

Speaking to the *New York Times* regarding the December 6 offensive, AFRICOM spokesperson Samantha Reho stated that American and Nigerien troops on a mission in the Lake Chad Basin region came under fire from a “formation of violent extremists.” Reho portrayed the event as an act of defense on the part of US and Nigerien troops after Islamist militants attacked their garrison.

“The purpose of the mission was to set the conditions for future partner-led operations against violent extremist organizations in the region,” she said. “There

was no aspect of this mission focused on pursuing enemy militants, and the combined force was postured to respond as necessary in case contact with the enemy occurred,” Reho claimed.

Reho added, “With that said, our forces do operate in unstable areas and are occasionally exposed to danger from enemy forces. When such a situation occurs, our personnel are authorized to respond to threats and violence appropriately.”

Refuting Reho's claims and making clear the predatory character of US military operations in Niger is the October interview of Nigerien Defense Minister Kalla Mountari by Reuters. When asked to describe the mission of US Special Forces deployed to Niger and their relationship to the Nigerien forces, Mountari matter-of-factly stated, “The Americans are not just exchanging information with us. They are waging war when necessary. We are working hand in hand. The clear proof is that the Americans and Nigeriens fell on the battlefield for the peace and security of our country.”

Further contradicting the account provided by Reho was the statement to the *New York Times* by an unnamed official familiar with the firefight, which suggested the elite commandos were conducting an offensive operation with the aim of establishing an outpost.

According to the official, US forces were conducting a multi-day operation with Nigerien troops. The official said that the operation's aim was to clear the area of hostile forces so that a new outpost could be created, which would be very advantageous to US aims in the region.

The location of the offensive near Diffa, a town in southeastern Niger close to the border with Nigeria, is a region long inflamed with conflict between the joint

Nigerien-US forces and the Islamist militia Boko Haram, which has been warring in northern Nigeria, with frequent cross-border skirmishes and raids.

The criminal character of US Special Forces deployed to West Africa was underscored by the arrest of two Navy Seals in Mali for the June 2017 murder of Logan Melgar, a Green Beret stationed at the US embassy in Bamako. US Special Forces troops were deployed to the West African nation to conduct intelligence and training operations against Al Qaeda-affiliated militants waging war against the US/French-backed government.

According to military officials investigating the murder, the two Navy Seals, who were also stationed at the embassy, were allegedly pilfering cash from a slush fund made available by the embassy to pay informants. When Melgar discovered the skimming operation and threatened to alert authorities, the two Seals killed him.

Joshua Geltzer, the senior director of counter-terrorism with the National Security Council under then-president Barack Obama, sought to place the blame for keeping the war in Niger secret entirely within the context of the Trump administration and thereby obscuring the role of the Democratic president who initiated the military intervention in Niger.

“It’s disappointing to see this administration show disrespect for Congress’s effort to obtain public answers to key legal questions of our time,” Geltzer told the *New York Times*.

As the WSWS has reported, Washington has been building and expanding its military forces on the African continent beginning with the Republican George W. Bush administration and continuing through Obama and Trump as part of America’s imperialist strategy for Africa.

The ongoing conflict in Niger and the wider region is the outcome of the 2011 US-backed NATO bombardment of Libya, in which the Obama administration utilized Islamist militias to conduct a regime change operation that culminated with the assassination of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and the killing of thousands of Libyans by NATO bombs. Libyan society was completely destroyed, and the Islamist fighters that Washington armed spilled forth from Libya across the Sahel and into West Africa.

Furthermore, the development of American military outposts across the African continent must be seen

within the context of China’s growing economic influence across the continent. Washington perceives Beijing as an intolerable rival for Africa’s vast economic resources, which includes substantial reserves of minerals, oil, gas, and precious metals and is using its vast military power in an effort to offset China’s economic clout.

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