

Pentagon Drone Attacks Escalate in Somalia While AMISOM Plans Withdrawal

by *Abayomi Azikiwe*, originally published on [Pan African News Wire](#), Jan 31, 2018

Trump administration creates conditions for further displacement and hunger

Somalia is facing yet another major crisis as the United States steps up its drone attack and combat operations in this Horn of Africa state.

Drone attacks are promoted by the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as an effective means of targeting so-called "terrorists" without threatening the lives of innocent people and American soldiers. This of course is not always the situation on the ground.

The impact of drones on civilian populations has proven to be devastating. In most cases those killed, injured and dislocated are not the targeted individuals or groups. Civilians including women, children and the elderly tend to be the primary victims.

Nonetheless, news reports related to the worsening security situation around Mogadishu asserts that the aerial drone strikes are taking a toll on Al-Shabaab, the Islamist organization which is said to be the major impediment to the stabilization of the country. Al-Shabaab grew out of the interference of Washington in the internal affairs of Somalia after elements within the Union of Islamic Courts were recruited into the transitional federal regime nine years ago.

An alliance of contiguous and regional states under the rubric

of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) was deployed to Somalia eleven years ago. At its height, AMISOM had 22,000 troops in Somalia along with several thousand para-military police units all backed, trained, funded and coordinated by the U.S., the European Union (EU) and their allies.

AMISOM has repeatedly said that Al-Shabaab is no longer a serious security threat in the capital of Mogadishu. However, periodic attacks are still occurring attributed to Al-Shabaab. A twin bomb attack during late 2017 was the most deadly since the deployment of AMISOM resulting in over 500 deaths, although it remains unclear whether Al-Shabaab was behind the operation.

Emphasis in recent weeks has been placed on praising the purported effectiveness of the drone bombings particularly coming from the AU special envoy to the country. Yet other issues which are surfacing are not being addressed along with the prospects of a withdrawal of AMISOM forces from the theater of battle.

AU representative Francisco Madeira said of the present situation that: "These drone attacks, in particular, are wiping out the Al-Shabaab in large numbers. And it is a good thing to put an end to terrorism in this way."

Well the problems of "terrorism" in Somalia and throughout other geo-political regions such as Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and Niger, has not been resolved to the satisfaction of imperialism through drone strikes. The spreading of destruction and displacement does not represent any long term solution for the Pentagon and NATO-allied forces or the majority of the people who live in these areas.

Fostering this dangerous illusion, Madeira went on to say: "The establishment of a comprehensive and effective Somali national army could take longer than expected." In making such a statement it implies that the U.S. policy of escalating the

bombing is the only viable response to the current political and security impasse.

In fact the western media has frequently lost track of the historical trajectory of events in Somalia over the last twelve years. It was in 2006 that the Union of Islamic Courts which was developing some semblance of stability in Somalia came under attack by U.S. proxies leading to the military intervention of Ethiopia and the eventual concoction and deployment of AMISOM.

Such a false scenario was published by the French Press Agency (AFP) on January 27 when the agency said:

“Deployed in 2007 to support the very fragile central Somali government, the AMISOM is expected to leave the country by the end of 2020, after transferring all its security prerogatives to the Somali army. But Francisco Madeira did not rule out an extension of the mission’s mandate.”

The question is what “fragile central government” was in existence in 2007? There had not been the pretense of an effective state authority in Somalia since 1991 when the government of former military leader and President Mohamed Siad Barre collapsed amid internecine conflict sweeping the entire country.

Displacement Fostered by U.S.-backed Government in Mogadishu

Another report published by the Guardian newspaper based in London portrays a more realistic picture of the actual developments in Somalia. The drone attacks, the utilization of Special Forces from the Pentagon and the constant misrepresentation of events inside the country are causing great harm to the Somalian people.

According to the publication: “

Dozens of civilians have been killed and wounded in Somalia as U.S.-led airstrikes against Islamist militants increase to unprecedented levels, a Guardian investigation has found, raising fears that Washington's actions could bolster support for extremists. The escalation in strikes is part of the Trump administration's broader foreign policy strategy in Africa and the Middle East. There have been 34 U.S. airstrikes in Somalia in the last six months – at least twice the total for the whole of 2016. Regional allies active in the campaign against Islamic extremists in the east African country have conducted many missions too. These appear to be the most lethal for civilians.”(Jan. 23 article by Jason Burke)

The impact of the increased militarization by the administration of President Donald Trump is being compounded by the forced removals of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in the capital. Some 34,000 people have been cleared out of an IDP settlement in Mogadishu after the shelter was ordered torn down by the Washington-backed Somalia National Army (SNA).

Over a three week period from late December 2017 through mid-January 2018, some 3,000 shelters were destroyed. Such actions take on an added dimension of exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation in Somalia. The U.S.-backed war has crippled the capacity of the people to address the horrendous food deficits caused in part by drought. The near-famine conditions will not be adequately resolved without the realization of peace. Enhanced militarization portends much for the future of the Somalian people who have endured four decades of war and occupation dating back to the late 1970s.

The Guardian notes in their report:

“The sudden increase in the use of air power in Somalia by the U.S. comes after the relaxation of guidelines intended to

prevent civilian casualties and a decision by the Trump administration to give local military commanders greater authority in ordering attacks... A Kenyan military spokesperson referred the Guardian to AMISOM when asked about Kenya's operations in Somalia. Francisco Madeira, the head of AMISOM, said the force had 'not been responsible for any airstrikes' in ... Somalia in 2017. A U.S. military spokesperson said its forces complied 'with the law of armed conflict' and took 'all feasible precautions ... to minimize civilian casualties and other collateral damage'."

Another Large-scale Occupation May Be an Option

Perhaps the Trump administration is setting the stage for another failed large-scale military occupation which proved disastrous during 1992-1994. If the AMISOM project is being exhausted, the only other option is a U.S.-led intervention of greater magnitude.

There has been the reported death of a U.S. combatant last year in a mission which the administration says is strictly advisory. With Somalia being an oil-rich nation located in the strategic area close to vast energy resources throughout the East African coast and West Asia, the imperialists are not prepared to withdraw under a situation absent of a complete military defeat.

At any rate, the quagmire in Somalia cannot be settled without a regional political solution to the war between Al-Shabaab and the western-backed federal government in Mogadishu. The AU should focus its attention on a lasting solution rather than relying on the Trump administration which is only continuing the imperialist military options initiated by President George W. Bush, Jr. in 2006-2007 and its escalation under Barack Obama during his two terms from 2009-2016.

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Hancock Drones and Grass Roots Street Heat

Why Street Heat?

Back in the eighties when the U.S. anti-apartheid movement was at a boil, “Doonesbury” had a sequence satirizing the “activists” who spent all their time at their computers. At the time I thought those geeks were a pretty odd bunch.

Though I’ve yet to succumb to Facebook, etc., now as an activist I too have become computer-domesticated. I spend lots of time generating or responding to email or chasing after links. For better or worse, on-line is now one of my comfort zones. Maybe too comfortable.

Historically and currently, here and abroad, much, maybe most, necessary grassroots change only really begins when people join in solidarity and indignation in the “street.”

What is this thing we here in Central New York call “street heat”?

It’s a way of making it easy to start getting out into the street. It’s a way to get off our duffs, to break out of our cocoons – overcoming that seemingly deep hesitation about going public.

Since 2010 at 4:15 p.m. every first and third Tuesday of the month a handful of us have been going out to the main entrance of Hancock Air Base, the hunter/killer Reaper drone hub in our

back yard, on East Molloy Road in the Syracuse suburb of DeWitt. There for 45 minutes we stand facing the traffic with our anti-militarism signs. This time slot is the civilian rush hour on East Molloy and shift change at the base.

From early November through the end of March, our cold and dark season, we're only out there on first Tuesdays. That day has its macabre significance: each Tuesday Mr. Obama and his advisors choose the targets for the next six months for drone assassination in the Islamic oil lands – assassinations which are immoral, illegal and, while tactically clever, are probably strategically stupid.

We place ourselves across the road from those Reaper drone robots remotely operated over Afghanistan by 174th Attack Wing of the NY National Guard based at Hancock.

We seek to prick the conscience of the Hancock personnel, cogs in Hancock's criminal role in the war machine. We also seek to reach the public driving by. Our signs declare variously,

*"DRONES FLY,
CHILDREN DIE"*



and

"BAN WEAPONIZED DRONES" and "STOP DRONE TERRORISM"

and

“U.S. OUT OF THE MIDDLE EAST,”

etc.

Without our persistent presence week in, week out, year in, year out, it's all too easy, given U.S. mainstream media, for folks to forget that the U.S. is engaged in perpetual war – a war not “on” terrorism, but “of” terrorism. And it's all too easy for airbase personnel, leading their classified, insulated, indoctrinated lives to forget they are part of a war machine.

Are We the Terrorists?

Are we the terrorists? This is the subject of Ed Kinane and Dave Kashmer's informative Workshop on Drone Warfare at SUNY Cortland. Students were informed about the actions of military drones around the world then engaged on the subject of 'Are We the Terrorists'. Very interesting result. A good model for introducing the subject to those who have not had an opportunity to see things as we do.

Terrorism is Killing or Instilling Fear – No Matter Who Does It

We watch proliferating terror and violence. . . Mourning and fear come too. What's the remedy? More of the same?!

Peacemakers on retreat were playing a game where the caller, standing in the middle of a circle of seated people says, "The Big Wind Blows on anyone who . ." All for whom it's true – including the caller – must find another seat. The person left standing is the next caller.

My friend said, "The Big Wind Blows on anyone who has ever been part of a Terrorist Organization." I was shocked. Why did he ask that? And was the room bugged? Would the FBI, who bugs peace groups, think that meant we're terrorists? Why would he ask that?

Since I wasn't the only confused-looking person, he said, "Well, I was part of a terrorist organization: the U.S. military."

The Buffalo News said in its December 4 headline story "Massacre again raises question of when to define it as terrorism,"

Federal law defines terrorism as dangerous acts intended to intimidate a civilian population, influence government policy or affect government conduct "by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping."

Some examples are

- our weaponized drone program, where, per Intercept based on leaked U.S. internal documents, nearly 90% of those killed were not the intended targets (assassination,

- mass destruction and community intimidation included);
- night raids in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, which terrify surprised families and whole communities. War is state terrorism.
- “policing” murders, especially of black people. People of color, activists, and innocents know and are highly intimidated because even moving (Amadou Diallo); questioning (Sandra Bland); or failing immediate obedience (12-year-old Tamir Rice) – could result in one’s getting killed.

Terrorism is killing and/or instilling fear. Let’s kill the people who are killing people? Which causes more people to kill? How can that work? It doesn’t make sense. (Don’t hit your sister. *Whap!!*) Restraining and preventing aggression is necessary. Instilling fear and Islamophobia promote a police state.

The U.S. treatment of whistle blowers confirms governmental intimidation. Hero Edward Snowden caused policy improvements, yet he faces espionage charges. Drone pilots revealing program truths have had their bank accounts and credit cards frozen. Police have generally been protected from charges of murder, wrongful death, or brutality until quite recently. State violence is excused.

State terrorism is still terrorism, and like violence, Terrorism begets more Terrorism. In fact, besides our government’s above-described intimidation of civilian populations, the U.S. efforts to influence other governments’ policies and/or affect their conduct are well known worldwide. The Project for the New American Century espoused our challenging policies or conduct of other governments that are not aligned with our interests and prominence.

Do we need more or less violence? Hope we can agree we need less.

We need faith, courage, and resolute adherence to principle. Let's work cooperatively, fearlessly, to mainstream nonviolence, including petitioning our government. You can join organizations like the WNY Peace Center and allies on specific campaigns.

Victoria Ross, QCSW, LMSW, MALD, is the Executive Director of the WNY Peace Center, a consultant for the Interfaith Peace Network, and Holy Trinity Lutheran Church's delegate to the Network of Religious Communities (all cosponsors of the Solidarity Rally along with Muslim Public Affairs Council, and 40 other groups).