

Trump Drones On

How Unpiloted Aircraft Expand the War on Terror

By [Rebecca Gordon](#), originally published on [Tom Dispatch](#), May 24, 2018

They are like the camel's nose, lifting a corner of the tent. Don't be fooled, though. It won't take long until the whole animal is sitting inside, sipping your tea and eating your sweets. In countries around the world – in the [Middle East](#), [Asia Minor](#), [Central Asia](#), [Africa](#), even the [Philippines](#) – the appearance of U.S. drones in the sky (and on the ground) is often Washington's equivalent of the camel's nose entering a new theater of operations in this country's [forever war](#) against "terror." Sometimes, however, the drones are more like the camel's tail, [arriving after](#) less visible U.S. military forces have been in an area for a while.

Scrambling for Africa

AFRICOM, the Pentagon's Africa Command, is [building](#) Air Base 201 in Agadez, a town in the nation of Niger. The \$110 million installation, which officially opens later this year, will be able to house both C-17 transport planes and MQ-9 Reaper armed drones. It will soon become the new centerpiece in an undeclared U.S. war in West Africa. Even before the base opens, armed U.S. drones are already flying from Niger's capital, Niamey, [having received permission](#) from the Nigerien government to do so last November.

Despite crucial [reporting](#) by Nick Turse and others, most people in this country only learned of U.S. military activities in Niger in 2017 (and had no idea that about [800](#) U.S. military personnel were already stationed in the country) when news broke that four U.S. soldiers [had died](#) in an October ambush there. It turns out, however, that they weren't the only U.S. soldiers involved in firefights in Niger.

This March, the Pentagon [acknowledged](#) that another clash took place last December between Green Berets and a previously unknown group identified as ISIS-West Africa. For those keeping score at home on the ever-expanding enemies list in Washington's war on terror, this is a different group from the [Islamic State in the Greater Sahara](#) (ISGS), responsible for the October ambush. Across Africa, there have been at least [eight other incidents](#), most of them in Somalia.

What are U.S. forces doing in Niger? Ostensibly, they are training Nigerien soldiers to fight the insurgent groups rapidly multiplying in and around their country. Apart from the uranium that accounts for over 70% of Niger's exports, there's little of economic interest to the United States there. The real appeal is location, location, location. Landlocked Niger sits in the middle of Africa's Sahel region, bordered by Mali and Burkina Faso on the west, Chad on the east, Algeria and Libya to the north, and Benin and Nigeria to the south. In other words, Niger has the misfortune to straddle a part of Africa of increasing strategic interest to the United States.

In addition to ISIS-West Africa and ISGS, actual or potential U.S. targets there include Boko Haram (born in Nigeria and now spread to Mali and Chad), [ISIS](#) and al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Libya, and [Al Mourabitoun](#), based primarily in Mali.

At the moment, for instance, U.S. drone strikes on Libya, which have [increased](#) under the Trump administration, are generally launched from a [base in Sicily](#). However, drones at the new air base in Agadez will be able to strike targets in all these countries.

Suppose a missile happens to kill some Nigerien civilians [by mistake](#) (not exactly uncommon for U.S. drone strikes elsewhere)? Not to worry: AFRICOM is covered. A U.S.-Niger Status of Forces Agreement [guarantees](#) that there won't be any

repercussions. In fact, according to the agreement, “The Parties waive any and all claims... against each other for damage to, loss, or destruction of the other’s property or injury or death to personnel of either Party’s armed forces or their civilian personnel.” In other words, the United States will not be held responsible for any “collateral damage” from Niger drone strikes. Another clause in the [agreement](#) shields U.S. soldiers and civilian contractors from any charges under Nigerien law.

The introduction of armed drones to target insurgent groups is part of AFRICOM’s expansion of the U.S. footprint on a continent of increasing strategic interest to Washington. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European nations engaged in the “[scramble for Africa](#),” a period of intense and destructive competition for colonial possessions on the continent. In the post-colonial 1960s and 1970s, the United States and the Soviet Union vied for influence in African countries as diverse as [Egypt](#) and what is now the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) (DRC).

Today, despite AFRICOM’s focus on the war on terror, the real jockeying for influence and power on the continent is undoubtedly between this country and the People’s Republic of China. [According to](#) the Council on Foreign Relations, “China surpassed the United States as Africa’s largest trade partner in 2009” and has never looked back. “Beijing has steadily diversified its business interests in Africa,” the Council’s 2017 backgrounder continues, noting that from Angola to Kenya,

“China has participated in energy, mining, and telecommunications industries and financed the construction of roads, railways, ports, airports, hospitals, schools, and stadiums. Investment from a mixture of state and private funds has also set up tobacco, rubber, sugar, and sisal plantations... Chinese investment in Africa also fits into Chinese President Xi Jinping’s development framework, ‘One Belt, One Road.’”

For example, in a bid to corner the DRC's cobalt and copper reserves (part of an estimated [\\$24 trillion](#) in mineral wealth there), two Chinese companies have formed Sicominex, a partnership with the Congolese government's national mining company. The Pulitzer Center [reports](#) that Sicominex is expected "to extract 6.8 million tons of copper and 427,000 tons of cobalt over the next 25 years." Cobalt is essential in the manufacture of today's electronic devices – from cell phones to drones – and more than half of the world's supply lies underground in the DRC.

Even before breaking ground on Air Base 201 in Niger, the United States already had a major drone base in Africa, in the tiny country of Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen. From there, the Pentagon has been directing strikes against targets in [Yemen](#) and Somalia. As AFRICOM commander Gen. Thomas Waldhauser [told](#) Congress in March, "Djibouti is a very strategic location for us." Camp Lemonnier, as the base is known, occupies almost 500 acres near the Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport. U.S. Central Command, Special Operations Command, European Command, and Transportation Command all use the base. At present, however, it appears that U.S. drones stationed in Djibouti and bound for Yemen and Somalia [take off](#) from nearby Chabelley Airfield, as Bard College's Center for the Study of the Drone [reports](#).

To the discomfort of the U.S. military, the Chinese have recently established [their first base](#) in Africa, also in Djibouti, quite close to Camp Lemonnier. That country is also horning in on potential U.S. sales of drones to other countries. [Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab emirates](#) are among U.S. allies known to have [purchased](#) advanced Chinese drones.

The Means Justify the End?

From the beginning, the CIA's armed drones have been used primarily to kill specific individuals. The Bush

administration [launched](#) its global drone assassination program in October 2001 in [Afghanistan](#), expanded it in 2002 to [Yemen](#), and later to other countries. Under President Barack Obama, White House oversight of such assassinations only gained momentum (with an official “[kill list](#)” and regular “terror Tuesday” meetings to pick targets). The use of drones expanded 10-fold, with growing numbers of attacks in Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia, as well as in the Afghan, Iraqi, and [Syrian](#) war zones. Early on, targets were generally people identified as al-Qaeda leaders or “lieutenants.” In later years, the kill lists grew to include supposed leaders or members of a variety of other terror organizations, and eventually even unidentified people engaged in activities that were to bear the “[signature](#)” of terrorist activity.

But those CIA drones, destructive as they were (leaving civilian dead, [including children](#), in their wake) were just the camel’s nose – a way to smuggle in a major change in U.S. policy. We’ve grown so used to murder by drone in the last 17 years that we’ve lost sight of an important fact: such assassinations represented a fundamental (and [unlawful](#)) change in U.S. military strategy. Because unpiloted airplanes eliminate the physical risk to American personnel, the United States has embraced a strategy of global extrajudicial executions: presidential assassinations on foreign soil.

It’s a case of the means justifying the end. The drones work so well at so little cost (to us) that it must be all right to kill people with them.

Successive administrations have implemented this strategic change with little public discussion. Critiques of the drone program tend to focus – not unreasonably – on the [many additional people](#) (like family members) who are injured or die along with the intended targets, and on [civilians](#) who should [never have been](#) targets in the first place. But few critics point out that executing foreign nationals without trial in other countries is itself wrong and illegal under [U.S. law](#), as

well as that of other countries where some of the attacks have taken place, and of course, international law.

How have the Bush, Obama, and now Trump administrations justified such killings? The same way they justified the expansion of the war on terror itself to new battle zones around the world – through Congress’s September 2001 [Authorization for the Use of Military Force](#) (AUMF). That law permitted the president

“to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.”

Given that many of the organizations the United States is targeting with drones today didn’t even exist when that AUMF was enacted and so could hardly have “authorized” or “aided” in the 9/11 attacks, it offers, at best, the thinnest of coverage indeed for such a worldwide program.

Droning On and On

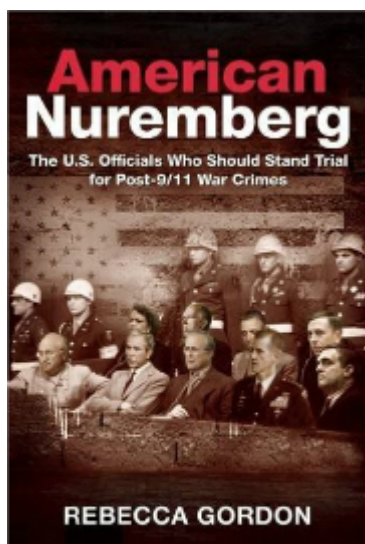
George W. Bush launched the CIA’s drone assassination program and that was just the beginning. Even as Barack Obama attempted to reduce the number of U.S. ground troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, he [ramped up](#) the use of drones, famously taking [personal responsibility](#) for targeting decisions. By some estimates, he approved [10 times](#) as many drone attacks as Bush.

In 2013, the Obama administration introduced [new guidelines](#) for drone strikes, supposedly designed to guarantee with “near certainty” the safety of civilians. Administration officials also attempted to transfer most of the operational

responsibility for drone attacks from the CIA to the military's only-slightly-less-secretive Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). Although the number of CIA strikes did drop, the Agency remained in a position to rev up its program at any time, as the *Washington Post* [reported](#) in 2016:

“U.S. officials emphasized that the CIA has not been ordered to disarm its fleet of drones, and that its aircraft remain deeply involved in counterterrorism surveillance missions in Yemen and Syria even when they are not unleashing munitions.”

It's indicative of how easily drone killings have become standard operating procedure that, in all the coverage of the confirmation hearings for the CIA's new director, Gina Haspel, there was copious discussion of the Agency's torture program, but not a public mention of, let alone a serious question about, its drone assassination campaign. It's possible the Senate Intelligence Committee discussed it in their classified hearing, but the general public has no way of knowing Haspel's views on the subject.



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However, it shouldn't be too hard to guess. It's clear, for instance, that President Trump has no qualms about the CIA's involvement in drone killings. When he visited the Agency's headquarters in Langley, Virginia, the day after

his inauguration, says the *Post*, “Trump urged the CIA to start arming its drones in Syria. ‘If you can do it in 10 days, get it done,’ he said.” At that same meeting, CIA officials played a tape of a drone strike for him, showing how they’d held off until the target had stepped far enough away from the house that the missile would miss it (and so its occupants). His only question: “Why did you wait?”

You may recall that, while campaigning, the president told Fox News that the U.S. should actually be targeting certain civilians. “The other thing with the terrorists,” he [said](#), “is you have to take out their families, when you get these terrorists, you have to take out their families. They care about their lives, don’t kid yourself. When they say they don’t care about their lives, you have to take out their families.” In other words, he seemed eager to make himself a future murderer-in-chief.

How, then, has U.S. drone policy fared under Trump? The *New York Times* has [reported](#) major changes to Obama-era policies. Both the CIA’s and the military’s “kill lists” will no longer be limited to key insurgent leaders, but expanded to include “foot-soldier jihadists with no special skills or leadership roles.” The *Times* points out that this “new approach would appear to remove some obstacles for possible strikes in countries where Qaeda- or Islamic State-linked militants are operating, from Nigeria to the Philippines.” And no longer will attack decisions only be made at the highest levels of government. The requirement for having a “near certainty” of avoiding civilian casualties – always something of a fiction – officially remains in place for now, but we know how seriously Trump takes such constraints.

He’s already overseen the expansion of the drone wars in other ways. In general, that “near certainty” constraint doesn’t apply to officially designated war zones (“areas of active hostility”), where the lower standard of merely avoiding unnecessary civilian casualties prevails. In March 2017, Trump

[approved](#) a Pentagon request to identify large parts of Yemen and Somalia as areas of “active hostility,” allowing leeway for far less carefully targeted strikes in both places. At the time, however, AFRICOM head General Thomas D. Waldhauser [said](#) he would maintain the “near certainty” standard in Somalia for now (which, as it happens, hasn’t stopped Somali civilians from [dying by drone strike](#)).

Another change affects the use of drones in Pakistan and potentially elsewhere. Past drone strikes in Pakistan officially targeted people believed to be “high value” al-Qaeda figures, on the grounds that they (like all al-Qaeda leaders) represented an “imminent threat” to the United States. However, as a 2011 Justice Department paper [explained](#), imminence is in the eye of the beholder: “With respect to al-Qaeda leaders who are continually planning attacks, the United States is likely to have only a limited window of opportunity within which to defend Americans.” In other words, once identified as an al-Qaeda leader or the leader of an allied group, you are by definition “continually planning attacks” and always represent an imminent danger, making you a permanent legitimate target.

Under Trump, however, U.S. drones are not only going after those al-Qaeda targets permitted under the 2001 AUMF, but also [targeting](#) Afghan Taliban across the border in Pakistan. In other words, these drone strikes are not a continuation of counterterrorism as envisioned under the AUMF, but rather an extension of a revitalized U.S. war in Afghanistan. In general, the law of war allows attacks on a neutral country’s territory only if soldiers chase an enemy across the border in “hot pursuit.” So the use of drones to attack insurgent groups inside Pakistan represents an unacknowledged escalation of the U.S. Afghan War. Another corner of the tent lifted by the camel’s nose?

Transparency about U.S. wars in general, and airstrikes in particular, has also suffered under Trump. The administration,

for instance, announced in March that it had used a drone to kill “Musa Abu Dawud, a high-ranking official in al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,” as the *New York Times* [reported](#). However, the *Times* continued, “questions about whether the American military, under the Trump administration, is blurring the scope of operations in Africa were raised... when it was revealed that the U.S. had carried out four airstrikes in Libya from September to January that the Africa Command did not disclose at the time.”

Similarly, the administration has been less than forthcoming about its activities in Yemen. As the *Business Insider* [reports](#) (in a story [updated](#) from the *Long War Journal*), the U.S. has attacked al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) there repeatedly, but “of the more than 114 strikes against AQAP in Yemen, CENTCOM has only [provided](#) details on four, all of which involved high value targets.” Because Trump has loosened the targeting restrictions for Yemen, it’s likely that the other strikes involved low-level targets, whose identity we won’t know.

Just Security, an online roundtable based at New York University, [reports](#) the total number of airstrikes there in 2017 as 120. They investigated eight of these and “found that U.S. operations were responsible for the deaths of at least 32 civilians – including 16 children and six women – and injured 10 others, including five children.” Yemeni civilians had a suggestion for how the United States could help them avoid becoming collateral damage: give them “a list of wanted individuals. A list that is clear and available to the public so that they can avoid targeted individuals, protect their children, and not allow U.S. targets to have a presence in their areas.”

A 2016 executive order [requires](#) that the federal director of national intelligence issue an annual report by May 1st on the previous year’s civilian deaths caused by U.S. airstrikes outside designated “active hostility” zones. As yet, the Trump

administration [has not filed](#) the 2017 report.

Bigger and Better Camels Coming Soon to a Tent Near You

This March, a jubilant Fox News [reported](#) that the Marine Corps is planning to build a fancy new drone, called the MUX, for Marine Air Ground Task Force Unmanned Aircraft System-Expeditionary. This baby will sport quite a set of bells and whistles, as Fox marveled:

“The MUX will terrify enemies of the United States, and with good reason. The aircraft won’t be just big and powerful: it will also be ultra-smart. This could be a heavily armed drone that takes off, flies, avoids obstacles, adapts and lands by itself – all without a human piloting it.”

In other words, “the MUX will be a drone that can truly run vital missions all by itself.”

Between pulling out of the Iran agreement and moving the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, Trump has made it clear that – despite his [base’s chants](#) of “Nobel! Nobel!” – he has no interest whatsoever in peace. It looks like the future of the still spreading war on terror under Trump is as clear as MUX.

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Trump's Military Drops a Bomb Every 12 Minutes, and No One Is Talking About It

by Lee Camp, originally published on [TruthDig](#)

We live in a state of perpetual war, and we never feel it. While you get your gelato at the hip place where they put those cute little mint leaves on the side, someone is being bombed in your name. While you argue with the 17-year-old at the movie theater who gave you a small popcorn when you paid for a large, someone is being obliterated in your name. While we sleep and eat and make love and shield our eyes on a sunny day, someone's home, family, life and body are being blown into a thousand pieces in our names.

Once every 12 minutes.

The United States military drops an explosive with a strength you can hardly comprehend once every 12 minutes. And that's odd, because we're technically at war with—let me think—zero countries. So that should mean zero bombs are being dropped, right?

Hell no! You've made the common mistake of confusing our world with some sort of rational, cogent world in which our military-industrial complex is under control, the music industry is based on merit and talent, Legos have gently rounded edges (so when you step on them barefoot, it doesn't feel like an armor-piercing bullet just shot straight up your sphincter), and humans are dealing with climate change like adults rather than burying our heads in the sand while trying to convince ourselves that the sand around our heads isn't

getting really, *really hot*.

You're thinking of a rational world. We do not live there.

Instead, we live in a world where the Pentagon is completely and utterly out of control. A few weeks ago, I [wrote about the \\$21 trillion](#) (that's not a typo) that has gone unaccounted for at the Pentagon. But I didn't get into the number of bombs that ridiculous amount of money buys us. President George W. Bush's military [dropped 70,000 bombs](#) on five countries. But of that outrageous number, only 57 of those bombs really upset the international community.

Because there were 57 strikes in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen—countries the U.S. was neither at war with nor had ongoing conflicts with. And the world was kind of horrified. There was a lot of talk that went something like, “Wait a second. We're bombing in countries outside of war zones? Is it possible that's a slippery slope ending in us just bombing all the goddamn time? (Awkward pause.) ... Nah. Whichever president follows Bush will be a normal adult person (with a functional brain stem of some sort) and will therefore stop this madness.”

We were so cute and naive back then, like a kitten when it's first waking up in the morning.

The [Bureau of Investigative Journalism reported](#) that under President Barack Obama there were “563 strikes, largely by drones, that targeted Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. ...”

It's not just the fact that bombing outside of a war zone is a horrific violation of international law and global norms. It's also the morally reprehensible targeting of people for [pre-crime](#), which is what we're doing and what the Tom Cruise movie “Minority Report” warned us about. (Humans are very bad at taking the advice of sci-fi dystopias. If we'd listened to “1984,” we wouldn't have allowed the existence of the National Security Agency. If we listened to “The Terminator,” we

wouldn't have allowed the existence of drone warfare. And if we'd listened to "The Matrix," we wouldn't have allowed the vast majority of humans to get lost in a virtual reality of spectacle and vapid nonsense while the oceans die in a [swamp of plastic waste](#). ... But you know, who's counting?)

There was basically a media blackout while Obama was president. You could count on one hand the number of mainstream media reports on the Pentagon's daily bombing campaigns under Obama. And even when the media *did* mention it, the underlying sentiment was, "Yeah, but look at how suave Obama is while he's OK'ing endless destruction. He's like the Steve McQueen of aerial death."

And let's take a moment to wipe away the idea that our "advanced weaponry" hits only the bad guys. As [David DeGraw put it](#), "According to the C.I.A.'s own documents, the people on the 'kill list,' who were targeted for 'death-by-drone,' accounted for only 2% of the deaths caused by the drone strikes."

Two percent. Really, Pentagon? You got a *two* on the test? You get five points just for spelling your name right.

But those 70,000 bombs dropped by Bush—it was child's play. DeGraw again: "[Obama] dropped 100,000 bombs in seven countries. He out-bombed Bush by 30,000 bombs and 2 countries."

You have to admit that's impressively horrific. That puts Obama in a very elite group of Nobel Peace Prize winners who have killed *that many* innocent civilians. The reunions are mainly just him and Henry Kissinger wearing little hand-drawn name tags and munching on deviled eggs.

However, we now know that Donald Trump's administration puts all previous presidents to shame. The Pentagon's numbers show that during George W. Bush's eight years he averaged 24 bombs dropped per day, which is 8,750 per year. Over the course of

Obama's time in office, his military dropped 34 bombs per day, 12,500 per year. And in Trump's *first year* in office, he averaged 121 bombs dropped per day, for an annual total of 44,096.

Trump's military dropped 44,000 bombs in his first year in office.

He has basically taken the gloves off the Pentagon, taken the leash off an already rabid dog. So the end result is a military that's behaving like [Lil Wayne](#) crossed with [Conor McGregor](#). You look away for one minute, look back, and are like, "What the fuck did you just do? I was gone for like, a second!"

Under Trump, five bombs are dropped per hour—every hour of every day. That averages out to a bomb every 12 minutes.

And which is more outrageous—the crazy amount of death and destruction we are creating around the world, or the fact that your mainstream corporate media basically *NEVER* investigates it? They talk about Trump's flaws. They say he's a racist, bulbous-headed, self-centered idiot (which is totally accurate)—but they don't criticize the perpetual Amityville massacre our military perpetrates by dropping a bomb every 12 minutes, most of them killing 98 percent non-targets.

When you have a Department of War with a completely unaccountable budget—as we saw with the \$21 trillion—and you have a president with no interest in overseeing how much death the Department of War is responsible for, then you end up dropping so many bombs that the Pentagon has reported [we are running out of bombs](#).

Oh, dear God. If we run out of our bombs, then how will we stop all those innocent civilians from ... farming? Think of all the goats that will be allowed to go about their days.

And, as with the \$21 trillion, the theme seems to be

“unaccountable.”

Journalist Witney Webb [wrote in February](#), “Shockingly, more than 80 percent of those killed have never even been identified and the C.I.A.’s own documents have shown that they are not even aware of who they are killing—avoiding the issue of reporting civilian deaths simply by naming all those in the strike zone as enemy combatants.”

That’s right. We kill only enemy combatants. How do we know they’re enemy combatants? Because they were in our strike zone. How did we know it was a strike zone? Because there were enemy combatants there. How did we find out they were enemy combatants? Because they were in the strike zone. ... Want me to keep going, or do you get the point? I have all day.

This is not about Trump, even though he’s a maniac. It’s not about Obama, even though he’s a war criminal. It’s not about Bush, even though he has the intelligence of boiled cabbage. (I haven’t told a Bush joke in about eight years. Felt kind of good. Maybe I’ll get back into that.)

This is about a runaway military-industrial complex that our ruling elite are more than happy to let loose. Almost no one in Congress or the presidency tries to restrain our 121 bombs a day. Almost no one in a mainstream outlet tries to get people to care about this.

Recently, the hashtag #21Trillion for the unaccounted Pentagon money has gained some traction. Let’s get another one started: #121BombsADay.

One every 12 minutes.

Do you know where they’re hitting? Who they’re murdering? Why? One hundred and twenty-one bombs a day rip apart the lives of families a world away—in your name and my name and the name of the kid doling out the wrong size popcorn at the movie theater.

We are a rogue nation with a rogue military and a completely unaccountable ruling elite. The government and military you and I support by being a part of this society are murdering people every 12 minutes, and in response, there's nothing but a ghostly silence. It is beneath us as a people and a species to give this topic nothing but silence. It is a crime against humanity.

Truthdig is running a reader-funded project to document the [Poor People's Campaign](#). Please help us by [making a donation](#).

Lee Camp is an American stand-up comedian, writer, actor and activist. Camp is the host of the weekly comedy news TV show "[Redacted Tonight With Lee Camp](#)" on RT America. He is a former comedy writer for the Onion and the Huffington Post and has been a touring stand-up comic for 20 years. *If you think this column is important, please share it. Also, check out Lee Camp's weekly TV show "[Redacted Tonight](#)" and weekly podcast "[Common Censored](#)."*

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.

Abayomi Azikiwe is Editor of [Pan African News Wire](#).

We are Killing Terrorists and Attack We Will

*Those who slaughter innocent people will find no glory in this life or the next. They are nothing but thugs and criminals and predators, and that's right losers.
~President Donald Trump*

We are Killing Terrorists and Attack We Will, Trump's Most Vicious Racist Rants

by Brian Terrell, Originally Published in "[The Sower](#)", Dec. 17, 2017

On Monday, August 21, President Donald Trump delivered a prime-time speech almost shocking in its ordinariness. It was such an address as either of his immediate predecessors, George W. Bush or Barack Obama, could easily have given over the previous decade and a half. While hinting at nebulous new strategies and ill-defined new metrics to measure success, President Trump announced that the sixteen year old war in Afghanistan will go on pretty much as it has. And the establishment breathed a sigh of relief.

Reviews were glowing. While acknowledging how low the bar had been set, on August 25, the Washington journal, The Hill, opined that even the most hardened members of the anti-Trump camp must admit that Monday's speech communicated a remarkable amount of humility and self-awareness, particularly for this president. The timing of the president's crowd pleasing speech was duly noted: Unfortunately, his very presidential announcement of the Afghanistan decision was bookended by Charlottesville and the president's rally in Phoenix on Tuesday night.

Ten days before, in Charlottesville, Virginia, torch bearing

white supremacists had marched in a “*Unite the Right*” rally to protest the planned removal of a statue of the Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Replete with flags of both the Confederacy and the Nazi Third Reich and traditional fascist chants of blood and soil, the rally met with resistance from anti-racist activists, one of whom was murdered and others injured when one of the united right used his car as a weapon of terror, driving it into the crowd. There was outrage when Trump responded by condemning the violence on all sides and declaring that there are very fine people on both sides of the issue.



Afghan Peace Volunteers work for peace at their Border Free School in Kabul

In the next days, thousands marched in cities nationwide and the denunciations of racism and white supremacy resounded from many surprising quarters. Trump’s tolerance of the use and

celebration of overt symbols and slogans associated with hatred, slavery, anti-Semitism and genocide offended all but his most fanatical base. Members of his own party, many who had stood by Trump through other scandals, took steps to distance themselves from his statements, if not from Trump himself.

Five of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, representing the Navy, Marines, Army, Air Force and National Guard, came extraordinarily close to rebuking their commander in chief. While they did not address Trump by name, they posted messages on social media condemning neo-Nazis and hatred, citing the events at Charlottesville.

"@USNavy for ever stands against intolerance and hatred."

"No place for racial hatred or extremism in @USMC."

"The Army does not tolerate racism, extremism or hatred in its ranks."

"We're always stronger together-it's who we are as #Airmen."

"I stand with my fellow Joint Chiefs in condemning racism, extremism & hatred. Our diversity is our strength #NationalGuard."

In his prime time address on the war, Trump called for the national unity that he had seemed in the days before and after to disdain- *"Loyalty to our nation demands loyalty to one another."* Saying that *"the young men and women we send to fight our wars abroad deserve to return to a country that is not at war with itself at home,"* Trump seemed even to shame his detractors for letting down those he calls the "special class of heroes whose selflessness, courage, and resolve is unmatched in human history." *"Let us make a simple promise to the men and women we ask to fight in our name: that when they return home from battle, they will find a country that has*

renewed the sacred bonds of love and loyalty that unite us together as one."

The healing balm that should bring Americans together, Trump said to general applause, will be a continuing commitment to a seventeen year old war. When that war began in October of 2001, Vice-President Richard Cheney suggested that the US would eventually take it to forty to fifty other nations, an expanding war that he predicted "may never end" but would "become a permanent part of the way we live." Like Cheney before him, Trump urges Americans to set aside the issues that divide us and unite behind an endless war of aggression against a people who never met us any harm.

It should be self evident that the war against Afghanistan and the broader war on terror, like every war that the US has engaged in since the end of World War II, is as much a war about race and white supremacy as was the Civil War. The fact that the war on terror was presided over for eight years by our first African American president (who in his last year in office dropped 26,171 bombs exclusively over populations of people of color) does not alter the fact that it is a racist war. If the war on terror does not divide our nation's people as severely as did our war against the people of Southeast Asia fifty years ago, it is only because fewer Americans are paying attention to it.

In 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. noted *"Now, it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war."* He said that for those working against racism in the US, silence on the war against Vietnam was nothing less than betrayal. Many questioned whether peace and civil rights mix and if by trying, King was hurting the cause of his people. *"Indeed,"* he said of these critics, *"their questions suggest that they do not know the world in which they live."* About that same time, Eldridge Cleaver said *"The black man's (sic) interest lies in seeing a free and independent Vietnam, a*

strong Vietnam which is not the puppet of international white supremacy. If the nations of Asia, Latin America and Africa are strong and free, the black man in America will be safe and secure and free to live in dignity and self respect."

Last year, the Movement for Black Lives excited great controversy publishing its platform that draws these connections in the present context:

"...we know that patriarchy, exploitative capitalism, militarism, and white supremacy know no borders. We stand in solidarity with our international family against the ravages of global capitalism and anti-Black racism, human-made climate change, war, and exploitation. We also stand with descendants of African people all over the world in an ongoing call and struggle for reparations for the historic and continuing harms of colonialism and slavery. We also recognize and honor the rights and struggle of our Indigenous family for land and self-determination."

The violence that we see in American streets is a direct and inevitable result of the violence of our country's wars. Since the war on terror began, police departments from large cities to rural counties have been plied by the Defense Department with an array of offensive weaponry from tanks to assault rifles, accompanied with training in counterinsurgency. Police department hiring preferences favor veterans who often bring with them skills honed in night raids of Iraqi and Afghanistan and the Afghan homes. Full scale Special Weapons and Assault Tactics (SWAT) teams then terrorize American families, disproportionately in communities of color and most often to serve simple warrants and summonses for nonviolent offenses.

The Obama administration's determinations that any male 14 years or older found dead in a drone strike zone is a "combatant" unless explicit intelligence posthumously proves him innocent and that "the condition that an operational

leader present an 'imminent' threat of violent attack against the United States does not require the United States to have clear evidence that "*a specific attack on US persons and interests will take place in the immediate future*", have poisoned the culture of policing at home. The consequence of these policies is the summary killings of innocent young men because of who they are and where they live, in American cities as well as in places far away. The racial profiling that results in the killings of unarmed black citizens by American police is the domestic expression of surveillance by drones of the "*patterns of behavior*" that trigger the "*signature strike*" executions of countless people of color in our wars abroad.

"A nation which continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death," Dr. King noted in 1967. There is no serious discussion of racism in the United States today, or of providing health care and education and basic human services that does not address the ever expanding cost of the present war.

Some of the outrage over Trump's responses to the events in Charlottesville and for his shameless affinity for hate and misogyny in general from his campaign until today may well actually be for his violation of a tacit "*gentlemen's*" agreement not to say such things aloud. None the less, it is a sign of social progress that language and symbols celebrating hate raise so much public indignation. The discredited institutions of slavery and Nazism need to stay discredited and those who forget that are rightly and necessarily called out. There are, however, manifestations of hatred and racism that continue to be tolerated and celebrated even in the most polite, progressive and politically correct venues and these need to be called out as well.

As grating and offensive as Trump's off-script train wreck persona is, it is when he is most "*very presidential*," when he

acts and speaks from the same teleprompter as those who preceded him, that he is at his most malicious and hateful. When he declares as he did on August 21 that *"we are killing terrorists"* and threatens *"attack we will"* and when he praises the civilian catastrophe that he called the *"liberation of Mosul in Iraq"* as a model for the future of the war in Afghanistan, Trump is on a racist rant. His speech on August 21 calling for more war is hate speech, pure and simple.

The generals of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who bravely spoke out against neo-Nazis, where are they now? Some of them apparently huddled with Trump to devise his hateful and racist assault on the Afghan people and all of them, along with Defense Secretary General Mattis (whose advice to the troops is *"You just hold the line until our country gets back to understanding and respecting each other and showing it."*) and White House Chief of Staff General Kelly are busily working to implement it. If generals Lee and Jackson of the 19th century who served under Confederate President Jefferson Davis in the cause of slavery and white supremacy deserve the censure of history and the scorn of every person of good will, so much more these generals who serve the hateful and vile agenda of Trump and his predecessors. To give Trump his due, one truth that he told in his celebrated speech is that those *"who slaughter innocent people will find no glory in this life or the next. They are nothing but thugs and criminals and predators, and that's right -losers."*

Those thousands of good people who took to the streets to denounce the celebration of racism and hate in its archaic and discredited forms need to seek the courage get back out and demand an end to racism and hate in its present, most virulent form. Together we need to demand a US withdrawal from Afghanistan and reparations for all the nations that have suffered US aggression in the so-called war on terror.

War Crimes Indictment for Good Friday

WAR CRIMES INDICTMENT

[WAR_CRIMES_INDICTMENT_Good_Friday_2017.pdf](#)

Indictment read by Matt Ryan, recorded by Judy Bello:

http://upstatedroneaction.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/Audio/Good_Friday_Indictment-Matt_Ryan.mp3

To President Donald Trump, to Secretary of Defense Secretary James Mattis, to the full Military Chain of the Command, including Command Chief Michael Will, to all Service Members and civilian staff of Hancock Air Base, and to the local police and Sheriffs Department of the Town of Dewitt, NY:

Each one of you, when you became a public servant, serving in a government position or when you joined the United States Armed Forces or police, you publicly promised to uphold the United States Constitution. We take this opportunity to call your attention to Article VI of the US Constitution, which states:

“This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, anything in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding.

This clause is known as the Supremacy Clause because it

provides that the Constitution and laws of the U.S., including treaties made under authority of the U.S. shall be supreme law of the land.

The Supremacy Clause provides part of the Supreme Law of the Land.

One Treaty duly ratified by the U.S. is the United Nations Charter. It was ratified by a vote of 89 to 2 in the U.S. Senate, and signed by the President in 1945. It remains in effect today. As such, it is part of supreme law of the land.

The Preamble of the U.N. Charter states that its purpose is to "save future generation from the scourge of war" and it further states, "all nations shall refrain from the use of force against another nation."

This Treaty applies both collectively and individually to all three branches of government, on all levels, U.S. federal, state and local governments, starting with the executive branch: the U.S. President and the executive staff; the judicial branch: all judges and staff members of the judiciary; the legislative branch: all members of the U.S. Armed Forces and all departments of Law Enforcement and all civilian staff, who have sworn to uphold the Constitution, which includes Article VI.

Under the U.N. Charter and long established international laws, anyone—civilian, military, government officials, or judge—who knowingly participates in or supports illegal use of force against another nation or its people is committing a war crime.

Today you must recognize that when you promised to uphold the Constitution, you promised to obey Treaties and International Law – as part of the Supreme Law of the Land and furthermore, under the Uniform Code of Military Justice of the U.S., you are required to disobey any clearly unlawful order from a superior.

Based on all the above,

WE, THE PEOPLE, CHARGE THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENT, DONALD TRUMP AND THE FULL MILITARY CHAIN OF COMMAND

TO COMMAND CHIEF MICHAEL WILL, EVERY DRONE CREW, AND SERVICE MEMBERS AT HANCOCK AIR BASE, WITH CRIMES AGAINST PEACE & CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY, WITH VIOLATIONS OF PART OF THE SUPREME LAW OF THE LAND, EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS, VIOLATION OF DUE PROCESS, WARS OF AGGRESSION, VIOLATION OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY, AND KILLING OF INNOCENT CIVILIANS.

We charge that the Air National Guard of the United States of America, headquartered at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base, home of the 174th Fighter Wing of the Air National Guard, under the command of the 174th Fighter Wing Commander, Command Chief Michael Will, is maintaining and deploying the MQ-9 Reaper robotic aircraft, called drones.

These drones are being used not only in combat situations for the purpose of assassinations but also for killings far removed from combat zones without military defense, to assassinate individuals and groups far removed from military action.

Extra judicial killings, such as those the U.S. carries out by drones are intentional, premeditated, and deliberate use of lethal force to commit murder in violation of U.S. and International Law.

It is a matter of public record that the US has used drones in Afghanistan and in Iraq for targeted killings to target specific individuals which has nearly always resulted in the deaths of many others.

There is no legal basis for defining the scope of area where drones can or cannot be used; no legal criteria for deciding which people can be targeted for killing, no procedural

safeguards to ensure the legality of the decision to kill and the accuracy of the assassinations.

In support of this indictment, we cite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, who has said that the use of drones creates “a highly problematic blurring and the law applicable to the use of inter-state force... The result has been the displacement of clear legal standards with a vaguely defined license to kill, and the creation of a major accountability vacuum... In terms of the legal framework, many of these practices violate straightforward applicable legal rules.”

See [United Nations General Assembly Human Rights Council Study on Targeted Killings](#), 28, May 2010.

The drone attacks either originating at Hancock or supported here are a deliberate illegal use of force against another nation, and as such are a felonious violation of Article VI of the US Constitution. By giving material support to the drone program, you as individuals are violating the Constitution, dishonoring your oath, and committing war crimes. We demand that you stop participating in any part of the operations of MQ-9 drones immediately, being accountable to the people of United States and Afghanistan.

As citizens of this nation, which maintains over 700 military bases around the globe, and the largest, most deadly military arsenal in the world we believe these words of Martin Luther King still hold true, “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today is my own government”.

There is hope for a better world when WE, THE PEOPLE, hold our government accountable to the laws and treaties that govern the use of lethal force and war. To the extent that we ignore our laws and constitution and allow for the unchecked use of lethal force by our government, allowing the government to kill who ever it wants, where ever it wants, how ever it wants with no accountability, we make the world less safe for

children everywhere.

We appeal to all United States citizens, military and civilian, and to all public officials, to do as required by the Nuremburg Principles I-VII, and by Conscience, to refuse to participate in these crimes, to denounce them, and to resist them nonviolently.

Signed by: THE UPSTATE COALITION TO GROUND THE DRONES AND END THE WARS