

America's War in the Horn of Africa: "Drone Alley" - a Harbinger of Western Power across the African Continent

US Military Confirms Washington's Secret New War in Somalia Despite Official Denials

By [Finian Cunningham](#)

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US military sources have confirmed that the Obama administration is engaged in a new war in the famine-hit Horn of Africa region.

The disclosure in the Washington Post [1] comes only days after other prominent Western media outlets, including the New York Times and the Financial Times, carried denials from the US government that it was involved in directly supporting Kenyan forces that invaded Somalia on 16 October.

Global Research first reported on 19 October [2] the lethal use of US drones in attacks on various locations across southern Somalia in a coordinated air campaign to assist the advance of Kenyan ground troops deep into Somali territory held by Islamic insurgents. We reported that US drones began attacking Somali targets days before the Kenyan army began its incursion, and have continued in a pattern that indicates American air power is being used to pave the way for ground forces as they advance towards the southern port city of Kismayu - the main stronghold of the Al Shabab insurgents, which the US government accuses of having links with Al Qaeda.

It is believed that scores of Somali fighters and civilians have been killed over the past two weeks by US unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that have attacked several cities and towns, including Qoqani, Afmadow and Kismayu. Global Research also reported on 26 October [3] that French naval forces had joined the bombing campaign - again despite official French denials carried in Western media - and that the conclusion from these military developments was clear: Washington and Paris are now engaging in a secret new war in East Africa - a region where up to 12 million people are at risk of starvation from years of drought and Western-induced conflict.

On 27 October, the Washington Post cited US military officials confirming the deployment of attack and surveillance drones in "a rapidly expanding US-led proxy war against an al Qaeda affiliate in East Africa". The UAVs - also known as Reapers or Hunter Killers - are believed to be operated from a site in southern Ethiopia, Arba Minch, as well as from US bases in Djibouti and the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean.

The WP report states: "The [US] Air Force has invested millions of dollars to upgrade an airfield in Arba Minch, Ethiopia, where it has built a small annex to house a fleet of drones

that can be equipped with Hellfire missiles and satellite-guided bombs. The Reapers began flying missions earlier this year over neighboring Somalia... The location of the Ethiopian base and the fact that it became operational this year, however, have not been previously disclosed.”

This disclosure of US military operations in Somalia amounts to an admission that Washington is at war. However, the Washington Post, while stating “rapidly expanding US-led proxy war”, does not highlight the legal implications of that startling admission, concentrating its reportage on technical and logistical issues that are providing “support for [US] security assistance programs”.

Iranian news channel Press TV – citing civilian eyewitnesses and Kenyan and Somali military officials – has been one of the few media outlets that has consistently reported the almost daily lethal US drone attacks in southern Somalia since the Kenyan invasion. However, even Press TV has not drawn the explicit conclusion that this amounts to war.

While the other Western news media, including the BBC, Reuters and the New York Times, had earlier reported increased US drone activity in Somalia between June and September, these outlets appeared to have dropped coverage of the deadly attacks being reported since and just before 16 October.

Following the disclosure in the Washington Post, the BBC on 28 October seemed to resume its coverage, with the headline: “US flies drones from Ethiopia to fight Somali militants”. The BBC, as with the WP, does not view this as an act of war, and stressed that the “remotely-piloted drones were being used only for surveillance” – contrary to evidence on the ground.

As well as playing down the fact of US-led war in Somalia, the mainstream media now seem to be crafting a new narrative for the military offensive. The initial pretext for the Kenyan ground invasion faithfully repeated in the Western media was the “hot pursuit” of kidnap gangs allegedly belonging to Al Shabab. It is true that there has been a spate of kidnappings of Western holidaymakers and aid workers from Kenyan territory by gangs suspected to originate inside Somalia. However, there is no proof that Al Shabab has been involved and indeed the militant group has denied any involvement.

Now it seems that the rationale being given for the Kenyan invasion and Western “technical support” has subtly morphed into an extension of the “war on terror”. Al Shabab has been waging an insurgency against the Transitional Federal Government in Mogadishu, which was installed in 2009 with the support of US and other Western governments as a bulwark against the Islamists. The TFG has only managed to maintain a tenuous grip on power thanks in part to Washington’s military and economic support and to the presence of thousands of African Union troops from Uganda and Burundi.

Al Shabab is on Washington’s terror list and is accused of having links to Al Qaeda. However, many Western analysts do not consider Al Shabab to be a regional threat. The Council on Foreign Relations, the Washington-aligned think-tank, estimates that the group has only a few hundred hardcore combatants and that its alleged links to Al Qaeda may be no more than rhetorical. Nevertheless, the militants have prevented the pro-Western TFG from gaining control of the country. In that way, the group has thwarted Washington and Western geopolitical dominance of the strategically important East African maritime territory.

This would seem to be a more plausible explanation for the US/French/Kenyan war in Somalia. Namely, the assertion of Western geopolitical control, rather than “war on terror” and certainly not the hot pursuit of kidnap gangs. That gives the real meaning behind the “constellation of US drone bases” being operated in the region – to strike any African country when and where required. Currently, Somalia (and Yemen) is in the firing line. But the entire region appears being turned into a “drone alley”. It is perhaps only a matter of time before reports emerge of drone activity in Sudan, Eritrea, Uganda and elsewhere. The recent deployment of US Special Forces in Uganda and other Central African countries is also a harbinger of this strategic force projection.

The bigger picture to this is, as John Pilger noted previously in Global Research, a “modern scramble for African resources” by Western powers, which have in recent years watched enviously the growing influence of China in the region. This neo-imperialist scramble for Africa is consistent with NATO’s conquest of Libya. The close collaboration between the US and France in the bombing of North Africa is now being rolled out in East Africa.

It also marks a new era of lawlessness by Western powers. Not only can President Barack Obama personally order the assassination of individuals with his penchant for “hunter killer” drones. Evidently from developments in Somalia, Commander-in-Chief Obama is no longer obliged to notify the US Congress or the American people of their country’s engagement in new wars. Nor is he obliged to even seek a phony UN mandate. Not so long ago such abuse of power would be sure grounds for impeachment.

Finian Cunningham is Global Research’s Middle East and East Africa correspondent

cunninghamfin@yahoo.com

Notes

[1]

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-drone-base-in-ethiopia-is-operational/2011/10/27/gIQAznKwMM_story.html

[2] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=27165>

[3] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=27310>

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About the author:

Finian Cunningham has written extensively on

international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website Globalresearch.ca. He is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

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