

Pentagon Explanations for Niger Operations Cannot Conceal Strategic Interests

Cover up underway to obscure why AFRICOM is escalating its presence on the continent

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Almost on a daily basis the recounting of circumstances involving the killings of four United States Green Berets in the West African state of Niger has shifted.

Even senior members of the Senate have stated that they had no idea that Pentagon troops were conducting offensive operations in the country. Niger, a former French colony, is ranked as the world's fourth largest producer of uranium, a fact which has been interestingly omitted from the limited discourse on the deaths of the troops deployed under the banner of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

A recent report published in the Washington Post claims that the only African American soldier in the group of dead troops, **Sgt. La David Johnson**, had been kidnapped and killed execution style. Purportedly, people living in the area where Johnson's body was discovered indicated that his hands were bound behind his back with a gaping wound in the rear of his head. (Nov. 10)

Other reports say that the Nigerien troops, who were ostensibly on a patrol mission with the AFRICOM forces, fled while the Green Berets stood and fought the alleged assailants. Who these "hostile elements" were has still not been clearly defined. What has been mentioned is that they are somehow affiliated with ISIS. (Guardian, Nov. 4)

AFRICOM in a statement issued on November 12 said it was investigating the incident in order to report its finding to the family of the slain soldiers. Nonetheless, the family of Johnson complained about what they described as the insensitive nature of a phone call received from President Donald Trump in the aftermath of the news reports of the Green Beret's death.

Family members of Johnson also noted that they were prohibited from viewing what was said to have been the remains of the African American soldier. They, along with **Congresswoman Fredrica S. Wilson** of Florida, have expressed their dissatisfaction with the response of the White House, particularly the subsequent utterances of administration chief of staff **Gen. John Kelly**, who came to the defense of Trump saying that the president's actions were appropriate.

U.S. Military Misrepresents African Interventions

A report published on the AFRICOM website dated October 23 utilizes what many may

consider to be racist terminology in regard to the character of Niger and other African states. This attitude was echoed by members of Congress as well as the White House.

[This article](#) by AFRICOM writer **Jim Garamone** said:

“ISIS seeks to survive in the dark corners of the world where local inhabitants lack the power and expertise to control the violent group, Dunford (Pentagon chair) said. ISIS operates where it can exploit weaknesses in local government and local security forces, he added. Libya, Somalia, West Africa, certain places in Central and Southeast Asia are places where ISIS and like groups choose to operate.”

Later in this report Garamone quotes the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff U.S. Marine Corps **Gen. John Dunford** as saying:

“If you think of those enablers as connective tissue between groups across the globe, our strategy is to cut that tissue, while enabling local security forces to deal with the challenges within their countries and region. Our soldiers are operating in Niger to build the capacity of local forces to defeat violent extremism in West Africa. Their presence is part of a global strategy.”

The same article goes on to make even more contradictory claims stressing:

“The United States is working with nations around the world to improve their military capabilities and capacities, Dunford said. U.S. troops, he added, have been working with forces from Niger for 20 years, the general said, training more than 35,000 soldiers from the region to confront the threats of ISIS, al-Qaida and Boko Haram.”

Yet the Boko Haram insurgency which originated in neighboring Nigeria only began in 2009 after the country’s military attacked the headquarters of the organization in Maiduguri city in Borno state in the northern region. Prior to this time period Boko Haram had largely functioned as an above-ground group focused on its own notions of the Islamic region.

ISIS arose after the collapse of the Pentagon occupation strategy in Iraq over the last six years when Washington sought to curtail growing Iranian influence in the region. Even al-Qaeda had not been cited as an existential threat in West Africa prior to recent years. This was clearly not the case in 1997 as Dunford asserted.

Moreover, what is never addressed is the supposed strategic and security interests of the U.S. in Niger, West Africa and the continent as a whole. The presence of Pentagon military forces in Africa has rapidly grown over the last decade.

These policies have been consistently implemented through successive administrations both Republican and Democratic. The destruction of Libya, Ivory Coast and Sudan all occurred during the administration of **President Barack Obama**.

Obama continued to prop up the western-oriented regime in the Horn of Africa state of Somalia where genuine stability and security remain elusive. Constructing drone stations in Niger is part and parcel of a broader strategic plan to further dominate Africa military and

economically.

The Sahel region of West Africa is a treasure trove of valuable minerals and other natural resources including oil, gold, uranium and natural gas. U.S. military occupations although said to be based on cooperative efforts between the host governments and Washington, clearly the Pentagon represents the interests of international finance capital based on Wall Street.

Much is made within the western press that the intervention of AFRICOM follows the request of regional states. These governments however, are not in any position to refuse Pentagon interference in their internal affairs. If they dare to challenge the purported authority of the White House to send special units of the U.S. military into their countries they of course will face the concerted efforts to remove their administrations from office.

In fact in Mali during early 2012, a U.S.-trained lower-ranking military officer staged a coup against an elected government. There was no level of remorse or contrition expressed by the-then Obama White House.

Niger People Must Assess Present Course

Obviously, the White House along with Wall Street corporations view the African continent as a source of wealth through the exploitation of natural resources including land and waterways. The question is what will the Niger people gain from this Pentagon military intervention which appears to have no end in sight?

Since its independence from France in 1960, the country has been subjected to draconian debt impositions of finance capital. Under the military occupation of the Pentagon such problems will not be overcome. Military and economic "support" from the U.S. comes inevitably at a heavy price. There is the entire history post-colonial Africa to attest to this analysis.

Just three weeks after the killing of the four AFRICOM soldiers, demonstrations erupted in Niamey, the capital, against the economic policies of **President Mahamadou Issoufou**. The unrest was prompted by an austerity budget which is the stock and trade of neo-colonialism led by the U.S.

According to a report on the protest actions:

"Twenty-three police were hurt and a police station was set on fire in demonstrations against financial reforms late Sunday (Oct. 30) in the Niger capital of Niamey, the interior minister and private TV stations reported. The police commissariat at the Habou Bene market, the country's biggest trading spot, was torched and the front of the building housing the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), Niger's voting watchdog, was vandalized, private television reported." (Citizen, Oct. 30)

The report goes on to report that:

"Local civil society organizations have for weeks been denouncing the 2018 budget for imposing austerity on one of the poorest countries on the planet.... More than 80 percent of Niger is covered by the Sahara desert. Its economy has been affected by falls in both oil prices, which it officially began exporting

in 2011, and uranium, of which it is a major exporter.... The country also has to spend resources to combat attacks by Boko Haram, whose Islamist insurgency has spilled over from Nigeria, as well as from jihadists, including the Islamic State group, near the border with Mali.”

These developments portend much for the future political situation in Niger. Regional African states should take notice of the parallel between U.S. military presence and social instability.

In the long term African Union (AU) member-states and their affiliates such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) must eventually move towards independent economic and security policies. Otherwise the dependency upon the West will undermine efforts aimed at genuine growth and prosperity.

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