

The Pentagon's Increased Use of Elite Military Units

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Under president Barack Obama (2009–17) covert operations and raids by American military special forces intensified. Organisations like the US Special Operations Forces (SOF), Navy SEALs and CIA were infiltrating different states, violating their national sovereignty in kill/capture offensives aimed ostensibly at Islamic insurgents.

The countries targeted were those such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, etc. The kill/capture targets highlighted by Washington comprised part of a Joint Prioritized Effects List (JPEL), which even included some American citizens abroad deemed as enemies, and which was based on legal or extralegal assumptions according to classified information from president Obama.



The Pentagon chose to wage “unconventional war” through elite military units, through proxy forces and sabotage groups.

In executing night raids and other activities, the US special forces were often focused on countries outside of Washington's influence, in efforts to align them with the Western liberal order. For example president George W. Bush, Obama's predecessor, had sent special forces such as the Green Berets, along with US Marine Corps troops, to the Caucasus state of Georgia where they trained Georgian military personnel (1). The goal was to turn Georgia,

which borders Russia to the north, into a permanent US client nation.

John Nagl, a US lieutenant-colonel, described the kill/capture campaign as “an almost industrial-scale counterterrorism killing machine”. Nagl said that, in a 3 month period in 2010, US forces from the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) carried out 3,000 military operations in Afghanistan (2). This involved entering villages in the middle of the night, in order to kill or take prisoner Islamic militants.

From mid-2010 to mid-2011, US special forces liquidated or captured 12,000 Islamic fighters according to the US military (3). Many of the night raids were executed through faulty intelligence or recklessness, and as the months went by hundreds of innocent people and civilians were also killed. Under the leadership of General Stanley McChrystal, appointed by Obama as the top commander in Afghanistan in summer 2009, the US special forces killed or took prisoner 700 insurgent officers. In another 3 month period, from July to September 2010, US-led NATO forces executed 3,279 operations, resulting in the deaths of 293 insurgent commanders and the capture of 2,169 Islamic fighters. (4)

In July 2010, General David Petraeus succeeded McChrystal as overall commander of US-led forces in Afghanistan, as McChrystal had irreconcilable differences with the Obama administration. In a 1 year period, from 25 April 2010 to 25 April 2011, the US Special Operations Forces killed 3,200 insurgents and captured 800. Between February to May 2011, NATO purported it had carried out 1,400 operations in Afghanistan, which they said resulted in the deaths or capture of 500 “insurgent leaders” and 2,700 “lower-level insurgents” (5). These attacks, because of their often indiscriminate nature, would have again resulted in significant loss of life to non-combatants.

In 2011 president Obama authorised the construction of a network of US military bases on the Arabian Peninsula, and in the Horn of Africa (east Africa), with another base on the island of Seychelles in the Indian Ocean.

More US bases were established in central and east Africa, such as in South Sudan, Ethiopia and the Central African Republic. Obama dispatched special forces soldiers to central areas of Africa, apparently to assist in hunting down Joseph Kony, the Ugandan-born rebel commander (6). Kony was often described as “the world’s most wanted warlord” in Western media and he was never found. The US commandos have been operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), the Central African Republic and South Sudan.

The likelihood is that, rather than the main focus being the capture of people like Kony, the US has attempted to increase its presence in Africa for strategic purposes. Hundreds of American soldiers from the Special Operations Forces have been stationed at the US military base in Djibouti, east Africa, called Camp Lemonnier, where they work under concealed identities and have co-ordinated the flight path for American aircraft and drones. About 3,200 people, including some civilians, were stationed at Camp Lemonnier where US troops have provided training to foreign militants.



A US Marine Corps AV-8B Harrier landing at Camp Lemonnier in 2014 (Licensed under the Public Domain)

The Camp Lemonnier base is of importance, due to its location between east Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. The Port of Djibouti offers access to the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, and from Camp Lemonnier the US military can hit targets in nearby Somalia and Yemen within minutes. Washington continued to launch strikes over Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, countries which the Americans were not officially at war with. (7)

Washington was implementing a kill/capture offensive inside Pakistan, traditionally a pro-American country. An independent research organisation based in Pakistan, the Conflict Monitoring Center, estimated that the kill/capture raids in Pakistan during the 5 years up to June 2011 resulted in the deaths of 2,052 people, the majority of whom were civilians. From July 2008 to June 2011, the CIA carried out 220 attacks within Pakistan, and in doing so the CIA claimed to have killed 1,400 “suspects” along with 30 civilians. (8)



The American raids and drone strikes inside Pakistan swelled the ranks of armed radical groups, like the Taliban and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. The Pakistani author Ahmed Rashid believed that, around 2011, the Taliban within Pakistan was more formidable than the Taliban in Afghanistan. The US military attacks on Pakistan and Afghanistan also boosted the

legitimacy of Al Qaeda, whose members could rely on numerous safehouses in which to plan their operations.

Mistrust between the US and Pakistan increased on 26 November 2011, when NATO helicopters and aircraft bombed an outpost in northern Pakistan in an unprovoked attack, killing at least 24 Pakistani soldiers, in the Mohmand District (9). Pakistan's government quickly retaliated, by cutting supply routes for US-NATO troops into Afghanistan, and demanded that Washington shut down its drone launch base. The Americans, despite these actions, did not want to lose Pakistan as an ally; because Pakistan, a strategically important country and nuclear power, shares borders with Afghanistan, India, Iran and China, and has a lengthy coastline which provides the Pakistanis with access to lucrative sea routes.

The US was pursuing two kill/capture campaigns inside Yemen (10). One was overseen by the CIA and the other was executed by the US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). General James Jones, of the US Marine Corps, said Yemen was "an embryonic theater that we weren't really familiar with". The Americans, however, were aware that Yemen like Pakistan is strategically placed, beside crucial sea lanes and the Persian Gulf's oil reserves.

The CIA was operating as a de facto paramilitary force. On top of the CIA's intelligence activities, it was partaking in many of the tasks assigned to the special forces. On 17 September 2001, Bush had authorised a secret presidential finding, which enabled the CIA to develop teams with the goal of catching, killing or apprehending designated insurgents in different countries.

Obama greatly surpassed Bush in the deployment of elite units, such as from the Joint Special Operations Command. In the middle of 2010, the US Special Operations Forces were present in 75 countries at that time (11). Colonel Tim Nye, a Pentagon spokesman, said the Special Operations Forces would probably be operating in 120 countries by late 2011. Unsurprisingly then, Obama had requested a 5.7% increase in the Special Operations Forces budget for 2011, amounting to \$6.3 billion with a contingency fund of another \$3.5 billion. By 2015 it was reported the Special Operations Forces were active in 135 countries that year, clearly a mind-boggling number. (12)

The combined population, of the US and its allies, is much lower than that of the states of Eurasia and the Global South, many of whom increasingly desire a multipolar world rather than a unipolar world governed by the US. European nations like Britain, in decline for generations and losing its sovereignty, has hung on to the coat-tails of the US empire. The American-led NATO continues expanding but this is not, as the liberal media insists, a strategic defeat for Russia or China. NATO enlargement endangers the world, including the US, which would suffer a total defeat in a nuclear war as is known.

When Obama assumed the presidency in January 2009, he was faced with the upheaval that Bush left behind. There was the very high cost and failure of the war in Iraq, and ongoing uncertainty with the conflict in Afghanistan, another distant country which most Americans had a limited understanding of.

A survey conducted by the American media in March 2012, over a decade after the US invasion of Afghanistan was launched, revealed that 69% of American adults who partook in the survey did not want their nation involved in the war in Afghanistan. Only 23% of respondents felt America was "doing the right thing" by participating in the war. Twenty-seven per cent of Americans believed the conflict "has been mostly a success for the US",

just 25% felt the fighting was progressing well, and 59% stated that it had not been a successful war. (13)

Obama decided to pursue more cost-effective methods, and which he felt would not risk as many American lives. Obama, advised by intelligence expert and CIA director John Brennan, changed the “war on terror” to a “high-tech war”. The conflicts created more jobs in the US arms industry, and shored up the tax revenues of the states where the weapons firms are based, such as in Texas, California, Virginia, Massachusetts and Maryland.

Between 2001 and 2007, the US arms companies Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Boeing Defense, Space & Security recorded over \$30 billion in yearly sales, and Raytheon and General Dynamics posted annual revenues of more than \$20 billion during the same period (14). In June 2015 Obama sanctioned the National Military Strategy which outlined that Iran, Russia, China and North Korea are the countries most challenging to US interests in various regions. Yet the Pentagon’s Military Strategy conceded that none of the above countries was seeking a direct armed conflict, against the US or its allies. (15)

With Obama as president, US foreign policy continued to be focused on expansionist doctrines. In announcing a “pivot” to Asia, Obama tried to encircle and contain China with the construction of large numbers of bases in the Asia-Pacific areas, while he maintained the Pentagon military budget at over \$600 billion per year. Contingency plans have been made for a US military attack on China, which is a nuclear state.

The American commander, Douglas MacArthur, had wanted to pursue a US-backed invasion of China in the early 1950s. General MacArthur, who at the time was commanding US-led forces in the Korean War, wished to extend the conflict to China in order to overthrow the communist government in Beijing. MacArthur supported the use of atomic bombs during the Korean War, but he had fallen out with president Harry Truman, and he was removed from his position as overall commander in April 1951. (16)

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Notes

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