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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

21 January 2019

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23.01.2019

Latest US airstrike kills scores in Somalia

A US airstrike Saturday killed at least 52 people in Somalia, according to the Pentagon. As with all such attacks, the US military's Africa Command (AFRICOM) claimed that all of the victims were members of the al-Shabab Islamist militia.

AFRICOM reported that the strike was carried out near Jilib, a town in the Middle Juba region of southern Somalia near the coast of the Indian Ocean.

It was the bloodiest US airstrike since October, when the US claimed to have killed about 60 fighters near the al-Shabab-controlled community of Harardere in Mudug province in the central part of the country.

The latest bombing came in response to an al-Shabab attack that threatened to overrun a garrison of US-backed Somali government troops.

Al-Shabab reported that its fighters had killed 41 Somali soldiers in attacks on two separate bases in the area.

The US has been waging a war in Somalia for a dozen years, yet has failed to crush al-Shabab, which controls broad swathes of territory in the south of the country and retains the ability to carry out armed attacks across wider areas of Somalia and over the border into Kenya.

Saturday's airstrike comes in the wake of the internationally reported al-Shabab attack on a hotel and office complex in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi last week that claimed 21 lives.

The Islamist militia has conducted such attacks since Kenya, one of Washington's closest allies in Africa, sent its army into Somalia to combat al-Shabab. In 2015, al-Shabab

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gunmen killed 148 students at Garissa University and in 2013 it attacked Nairobi's luxury Westgate shopping mall in a three-day siege that killed 67 people.

Al-Shabab has managed to recruit inside Kenya, particularly after the country's crisis-ridden government responded to these first two major attacks by rounding up thousands of ethnic Somalis who were subjected to police abuse. It appears that all six involved in the latest attack were Kenyans.

The US has at least 500 troops, most of them from special operations units, deployed inside Somalia. It has relied heavily, however, on a bombing campaign using drones and US warplanes. Since Donald Trump took office, AFRICOM has doubled the number of airstrikes on Somalia, and previous restrictions on US military commanders ordering such actions have been waived.

The bombing campaign, which has inflicted increasing civilian casualties, has served to stoke anti-US sentiments within a population that has suffered decades of war and foreign occupation and is largely hostile to the corrupt and incompetent government in Mogadishu, which is kept in office only thanks to US and other foreign troops.

Al-Shabab was formed in response to a 2006 US-backed invasion of Somalia by the Ethiopian army, a regime change operation that toppled a moderate Islamist government, the Islamic Courts Union, which had established its control over most of the country.

Ethiopian troops still comprise the bulk of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), a 20,000-strong African military force funded by Washington, which occupies the country.

The Ethiopian Defense Forces announced Saturday that they were preparing a major offensive against al-Shabab in retaliation for an attack by the Islamist militia that reportedly killed more than 50 Ethiopian soldiers.

Tensions between Somalis and the Ethiopian occupation force have risen in recent weeks with its intervention in Somalia's South West State, where it killed 15 protesters, wounded many more and arrested over 300. The protests were provoked by the arrest of Muhktar Robow, the former second-in-command of al-Shabab, who quit the group and became the leading candidate for the presidency of the state.

The government subsequently expelled the United Nations representative in Somalia, Nicholas Haysom, after he raised questions about the involvement of UN-supported Somali security forces in the repression.

The Pentagon issued a review last June calling for cutting the number of special operations troops deployed across Africa in half as part of the Pentagon's announced strategic shift

from the war on terror to the preparation for great power conflicts with so-called “revisionist states” challenging US global hegemony, first and foremost China and Russia. It appears, however, that the 12-year-old shadow war being waged in Somalia, behind the backs of the American people, will go on. Washington views the country through the prism of its strategic position bordering the Gulf of Aden, a key chokepoint for the maritime transit of oil.

US National Security Adviser John Bolton spelled out Washington’s aims in Africa, asserting in a bellicose speech delivered last month that counter-terrorism had been eclipsed by the objective of confronting “great power competitors, namely China and Russia”.

He accused both countries of pursuing “predatory practices” on the content that “threaten the financial independence of African nations; inhibit opportunities for US investment; interfere with US military operations; and pose a significant threat to US national security interests.” In other words, Beijing and Moscow are becoming impediments to US imperialism’s aim of asserting semi-colonial domination over Africa and its vast resources.

Bolton emphasized the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa, which includes Djibouti—where the US has its main African base (in addition to dozens of smaller ones in the region) and China has set up its only overseas military base—Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia.

Determined to reverse its declining economic dominance in Africa by military means, US imperialism is prepared to continue and intensify the bloodletting in Somalia.