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The United States Is Fighting How Many Wars?

By: Kevin Gosztola
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US Marines in Djibouti in March 2010

With neoconservatives and neoliberals amplifying calls for US military intervention in Syria, it is worthwhile to take a moment and consider all the places in the world, where the US currently has forces engaged in daily operations.

Secrecy, the reality that a substantial portion of US military or espionage operations with troops are likely happening covertly, may mean it is impossible to truly get a complete picture of where

America is projecting power and targeting and killing people. But, Linda J. Bilmes and Michael D. Intriligator, ask in a recent paper, “How many wars is the US fighting today?”

Today US military operations are involved in scores of countries across all the five continents. The US military is the world’s largest landlord, with significant military facilities in nations around the world, and with a significant presence in Bahrain, Djibouti, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Kyrgyzstan, in addition to long-established bases in Germany, Japan, South Korea, Italy, and the UK.¹ Some of these are vast, such as the Al Udeid Air Force Base in Qatar, the forward headquarters of the United States Central Command, which has recently been expanded to accommodate up to 10,000 troops and 120 aircraft.

Citing a page at US Central Command’s (CENTCOM) website, they highlight the “areas of responsibility” publicly lists:

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) is active in 20 countries across the Middle Eastern region, and is actively ramping-up military training, counterterrorism programs, logistical support, and funding to the military in various nations. At this point, the US has some kind of military presence in Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, U.A.E., Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

US Africa Command (AFRICOM), according to the paper, “supports military-to-military relationships with 54 African nations.”

Altogether, that makes 74 nations where the US is fighting or “helping” some force in some proxy struggle that has been deemed beneficial by the nation’s masters of war.

Beyond that, there are Special Operations forces in countries. Jeremy Scahill in *Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield*, writes, “By mid-2010, the Obama administration had increased the presence of Special Operations forces from sixty countries to seventy-five countries. SOCOM had about 4,000 people deployed around the world in countries besides Iraq and Afghanistan.”

The forces were deployed, as the *Washington Post* reported, to “go beyond unilateral strikes” and train “local counterterrorism forces” and engage in “joint operations with them.” Plans for both “preemptive” and “retaliator strikes” existed in “numerous places around the world, meant to be put into action when a plot” was identified or “after an attack linked to a specific group.”

Scahill also reports, based on his own “well-placed special operations sources”:

...[A]mong the countries where [Joint Special Operations Command] teams had been deployed under the Obama administration were: Iran, Georgia, Ukraine, Bolivia, Paraguay, Ecuador, Peru, Yemen, Pakistan (including in Baluchistan) and the Philippines. These teams also at times deployed in Turkey, Belgium, France and Spain. JSOC was also supporting US Drug Enforcement Agency operations in Colombia and Mexico...

Since President Barack Obama has been willing to give the go ahead to operations that President George W. Bush would not have approved, operations have been much more aggressive and, presumably, JSOC has been able to fan out and work in way more countries than ever expected.

Global assassinations have been embraced by the current administration, opening the door to night raids, drone strikes, missile attacks where cluster bombs are used, etc. Each of these operations, as witnessed or experienced by the civilian populations of countries, potentially inflame and increase the number of areas in the world where there are conflict zones.

A Congressional Research Service (CRS) provides an accounting of all the *publicly* acknowledged deployments of US military forces. It indicated that, as many Americans may not be aware, in February of this year, 100 military personnel were deployed to Niger to “provide support for intelligence collection” and to “facilitate intelligence sharing with French forces conducting operations in Mali, and with other partners in the region,” according to President Obama.

Also, according to the report, Pentagon chief Chuck Hagel ordered American troops to be deployed to Jordan. Hagel told the Senate Armed Services in a statement on Syria that they would be there to “work alongside Jordanian forces to ‘improve readiness and prepare for a number of scenarios.’” Up to 200 troops would be deployed.

In 2012, Obama reported to Congress that “US combat-equipped military personnel” had been deployed to Uganda “to serve as advisors to regional forces” that were “working to apprehend or remove Joseph Kony and other senior Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) leaders from the battlefield and to protect local populations.” About 90 US military personnel were deployed and “elements” were sent to “forward locations in the LRA-affected areas of the Republic of South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic.” President Obama stated US forces were not to engage LRA forces “except in self-defense.”

Approximately 817 military personnel were contributed to the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR), presumably to “stop the ‘movement, arming, and financing of certain international terrorist groups,’ as well as the “proliferation by sea of weapons of mass destruction and related materials.”” there were continued operations in Libya as well as operations in Yemen that were acknowledged. [By the way, it takes thirty-three pages for CRS to list all "notable deployments of military forces overseas" since 1798.]

Obama administration officials might argue that none of these operations in various different countries represent different conflicts or wars. All are connected to the “Global War on Terrorism” and the Authorized Use for Military Force (AUMF) after the 9/11 attacks give the president the executive authority to have forces in all parts of the world conducting whatever operations are deemed necessary to fight “terrorism.” Or, they might claim the US is technically not “involved” in wars if they are merely operating as advisors, who help facilitate military operations of other allied or proxy forces.

Any number of games with semantics or euphemism can be played by officials authorizing these operations. Undoubtedly, there are probably countries where the US has forces that have gone unmentioned in this post.

The reality is current US wars are not limited to the one winding down in Afghanistan and the other one that recently ended in Iraq. There are numerous wars going on unannounced, undeclared and in secret. The world is literally a battlefield with conflicts being waged by the US (or with the “help” of the US). And, no country is off-limits to US military forces.