



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on May 13, 2016

Role of U.S. Special Forces Against ISIS/al-Qaeda Expanding

Several recent news reports indicate that the role of U.S. special forces in operations against ISIS and al-Qaeda in parts of the Middle East and Africa is expanding. These reports, including one on May 12 from CNN, referred to statements from General Raymond A. Thomas, who took command of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) on March 30.

The CNN report noted that Thomas, in his first trip overseas since taking command of USSOCOM, recently told an audience in the Middle East that “complex” fails to adequately describe the current security environment. That complexity is leading the Obama administration to expand the use of small teams of Special Operators in various terror hotspots.

“We are attempting to identify opportunities to expand [Special Operations’] global presence, forward access and relationships to leverage opportunities short of crisis,” CNN quoted.

Before being named as commander of USSOCOM, Thomas was in charge of all U.S. and NATO special forces in Afghanistan from 2012 until 2013. After completing that assignment, he was reassigned to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, where he served as the CIA’s associate director for military affairs. In August 2014, Thomas replaced General Joseph Votel as the commander of Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), a component command of USSOCOM.

CNN reported that the U.S. military is expanding the use of Navy Seals, Delta Force, and other U.S. special-op forces in places beyond Iraq and Syria, such as Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and West Africa. Among the missions these forces have been deployed to are:

- “50 U.S. troops operate at undisclosed locations across southern Somalia advising and assisting Somali, Kenyan and Ugandan forces in their fight against Al-Shabaab, the local al Qaeda affiliate.”
- “300 military personnel to Cameroon,” who are involved in conducting drone operations assisting in the fight against the Boko Haram terrorists.
- “a small number of U.S. troops went back into Yemen to help Saudi and United Arab Emirates forces in their battle against the al Qaeda affiliate there.”
- “A small number of U.S. forces occasionally travel into Libya” for a mission “that includes continued airstrikes against ISIS targets when they can be located.”

An AP report published by *Stars and Stripes* on May 9 quoted a statement made by Thomas at an international military conference in Jordan that “gaps and seams created by [national] boundaries ...





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have provided trans-regional terrorist organizations with maneuver space that needs to be addressed.”

Thomas said at the conference that cooperation with special forces from Nigeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Indonesia will become more important in the battle against ISIS. He also said that other countries in the region, including Jordan, are already part of a special-forces network.

We reported in [our article on May 3](#) that ISIS militants had that day killed a U.S. Navy SEAL who was serving as an advisor to Kurdish Peshmerga forces near the town of Tel Asqof in northern Iraq. An unnamed Peshmerga official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the American had been killed “by direct fire” from ISIS militants.

The death of the SEAL was the third U.S. combat casualty since the United States redeployed forces to Iraq in the summer of 2014 to advise local forces and conduct special operations against ISIS.

A May 3 report in the *Washington Post* observed that this latest U.S. combat death in Iraq was indicative of a change in strategy by the U.S. military. The *Post* writer noted:

The troops are moving outside the confines of more established bases to give closer support to the Iraqi army as it prepares for an assault on the northern city of Mosul — putting them closer to danger.

As we noted in our May 3 article:

It cannot be repeated too many times that ISIS first gained power in Iraq by filling the vacuum left in the country after our government removed strongman Saddam Hussein from power.... It is safe to say that, had the United States left Saddam Hussein in place, ISIS would never have gained such dominance in the region.

While there conceivably might be instances where terrorist threats directed against the United States might justify preemptive action to defend our citizens, the history of our interventionist foreign policy in the Middle East in recent years indicates that our efforts have only fueled the rise of terrorist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda.

The headline of an article posted by *The New American* in January 2015 sums up the situation perfectly: [“ISIS: The Best Terror Threat U.S. Tax Money Can Buy.”](#)

As the article concludes:

From arming and radicalizing Islamists who went on to become al-Qaeda to overthrowing the Iraqi dictator and supplying weapons to brutal jihadists to unseat brutal tyrants, U.S. foreign policy appears to have been practically designed to create the “Islamic State” rather than destroy it. In other words, ISIS is the “new and improved” best terror group U.S. tax money can buy. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have already paid the ultimate price for the machinations. It is time for Congress to rein in the administration before further “blowback” comes back to haunt the very American people forced to pay for it all.

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