



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on October 9, 2017

Will Trump Withdraw Troops in Niger After Ambush?

“In Somalia, they over-reacted and withdrew their troops,” lamented Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, a former official with the United Nations (UN) in Somalia, after four American soldiers were killed in an ambush in Niger last week. “My worry is that after this attack they will also over-react. Trump might just say, ‘Why should we die for this?’ I hope they don’t.”



Abdallah’s reference to Somalia was in regard to the infamous “Black Hawk down” episode in which 18 American soldiers were killed by Islamic militants in early 1993. After that attack, American forces were pulled out of Somalia.

Most Americans are not even aware that U.S. forces are in Niger, a nation in western Africa that is experiencing a war with forces of the Islamic State. The Islamic State insurgents are thought to be led by Dondou Chefou, active in the border region with Mali. The four Americans were part of a joint exercise involving American advisors and troops of the nation of Niger.

One American soldier was missing after the initial attack, but was found dead this weekend. Three other American soldiers were also killed, identified as Staff Sgt. Bryan Black of Washington State; Staff Sgt. Jeremiah Johnson of Ohio; and Staff Sgt. Dustin Wright of Georgia. They were part of the Third Special Forces Group based at North Carolina’s Fort Bragg.

Four Niger soldiers were also killed in the ambush. Eight more Niger soldiers and two additional American soldiers were wounded in the attack.

When the ambush occurred, U.S. forces called for air support from French fighter jets nearby, but the French proved unable to help, arguing that the American forces were so close to the Islamic State forces that any bombing could have killed them as well. French helicopters, however, were able to evacuate some U.S. soldiers after the attack.

Insurgents also captured four vehicles in the ambush.

The purpose of the mission was to establish relations with local leaders. U.S. Colonel Mark Cheadle told reporters, “It was not meant to be an engagement with the enemy. The threats at the time were deemed to be unlikely, so there was no overhead armed air cover during the engagement.”

American special forces have been working with soldiers of Niger, with the goal of improving their ability to combat Islamic forces in the region. Nigeria’s Boko Haram, a leader in the Islamic insurgency, is tied to al-Qaeda. About 800 American soldiers are deployed in Niger. The United States runs a drone base in Niger’s capital city of Niamey, and is building a second building in Agadez, which will cost around \$100 million.

“It’s a pretty broad mission with the government of Niger in order to increase their capability to stand



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alone and to prosecute violent extremists,” explained Lt. General Kenneth McKenzie. American forces do not have an official combat mission, but instead provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance to forces of Niger fighting Islamic insurgents.

Although the United States has no official “combat” role, this is not the first American casualty in the African counter-insurgency efforts. A Navy SEAL was killed in May during a raid on an al Shabaab compound in Somalia.

Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger are joining forces to create a 5,000-man force to fight the Islamic State in the Sahel region.

Despite the green light from the UN Security Council in a June resolution, Congress has not authorized the deployment (as is required by the Constitution). The entire operation appears to follow the tendency of the U.S. government — regardless of who sits in the White House — to operate as “policeman of the world.” After repeated deployments in this vein during the first Bush administration, then the Clinton administration, then-presidential candidate Governor George W. Bush of Texas denounced efforts to be “policeman of the world,” and promised a “more humble American foreign policy.”

Once in office, however, Bush continued the same interventionist foreign policy that has been prevalent for decades. Although he criticized Bush’s interventions in Iraq and elsewhere, Barack Obama of Illinois adopted pretty much the same “policeman of the world” policy of his predecessors.

Finally, then-candidate Donald Trump of New York assured Americans he was not going to conduct a “policeman of the world” foreign policy, but was going to put “America First.” With Americans now dying on multiple continents under a Trump presidency, one must wonder: Will any American president ever end this interventionist drive that seems to infect every occupant of the Oval Office?

And will Congress ever reclaim its rightful constitutional role of deciding when and where American military forces will be deployed? If Trump will not say, “Why should we die for this?” perhaps Congress should follow its duty and ask that question.



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