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US: Major Policy Shift in Syria (II)

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When the U.S. special operations troops get to Syria, they might apply lessons from the experience of the roughly 1,400 special operations troops and supporters working “coffee-breath close” with partners in 23 African countries, the chief of U.S. Special Operations Command-Africa Brig. Gen. Donald Bolduc said on November 2.

“I think SOF operations in Africa opens up a unique opportunity to look at how we advise and assist, train and equip and conduct a full spectrum of SOF operations ... to understand how to operate a lethal force that can develop effectively and operate in and among the populace,” said

Brig. Gen. Donald Bolduc at the Defense One Summit in Washington, D.C.

Bolduc said U.S. special operators have had success training and equipping African security forces to face threats from many terrorist groups, including the Islamic State.

Under the so-called Leahy Law — named for Vermont senator Patrick Leahy — the U.S. is prohibited from providing assistance to units “of the security forces of a foreign country if the secretary of state has credible information that such unit has committed a gross violation of human rights.” But this hasn’t stopped the U.S. from conducting training exercises alongside the military forces of African countries with genuinely dismal records in that regard. The list includes Mauritania, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia (the countries of the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership).

The U.S. trained the Nigerian military at for many years. As a result the Boko Haram terrorist group grew from a small radical sect northern Nigeria to a raging regional terrorist movement. Terror groups, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Murabitun, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, and Ansaru, a Boko Haram splinter group, have all been on the rise and expanding the scope of their operations. There are cases, when U.S. trained military grab power as a result of coup. Last year, the government of Burkina Faso was, like Mali before it, overthrown by a U.S.-trained officer — a former student of the Defense Department’s Joint Special Operations University. There were also coups by the U.S.-backed militaries of Mauritania in 2005 and again in 2008 and Niger in 2010 as well as a 2011 revolution that overthrew Tunisia’s U.S.-backed government after its U.S.-supported army stood aside.

Despite US special operations efforts West African nations face the threat of a plethora of insurgent groups and members of their own armed forces with one conflict following another.

The African Command’s 2015 posture statement admits after a decade of military interventions, “In North and West Africa, Libyan and Nigerian insecurity increasingly threaten U.S. interests. In spite of multinational security efforts, terrorist and criminal networks are gaining strength and interoperability.”

It also reads. “Al-Qaida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb, Ansar al-Sharia, al-Murabitun, Boko Haram, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, and other violent extremist organizations are exploiting weak governance, corrupt leadership, and porous borders across the Sahel and Maghreb to train and move fighters and distribute resources.”

The US record of using SOF for training purposes and combat mission has failed to turn the tide in Africa, war lords and terrorists expand operations. It has also failed so far in the Middle East.

An ABC report says some Republicans in Congress have already criticized the announcement, questioning whether the president is simply trying to run out the clock through the end of his presidency.

The US spent about ten years to train Afghan security forces and Iraqi army. It’s well-known what the result is. Earnest admitted that the change should not be expected to be a game-changer

in the fight against ISIS without a diplomatic resolution in Syria. Rings true. The way to the peaceful settlement in Syria lies through Vienna negotiation process, not unilateral SOF deployment.