

SPYING OPS: Australian Secret Squadrons Operating in Africa

Underground Special Forces in Civilian Clothes...

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A [recent article](#) published by the Australian newspaper *The Age*, reveals that the Australian Army and Intelligence Service are working hand in glove in the development of a secret squadron to be used for spying activities all over Africa. This initiative is being carried out in close liaison with the U.S. military: "The intelligence gathered by the Australian soldiers in countries such as Kenya all flows into databases used by the US and its allies in Africa." (Rafael Epstein and Dylan Welch, [Secret SAS squadron sent to spy in Africa](#), *The Age*, March 13, 2012)

Although the existence of the SAS's 4 Squadron has never been officially acknowledged, former Australian foreign minister Kevin Rudd demanded its deployment in Libya last year, a request opposed by Defence officials, according to *The Age*. The report states further that it was "confirmed that troopers from the squadron have mounted dozens of secret operations over the past year in African nations including Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Kenya."

Interestingly, *The Age* reports that the 4 squadron was created the moment Australian intelligence officers were given the right "to have weapons for self-defence and to participate in violent operations provided the officers themselves do not use force." The soldiers were "expected to be an elite version of bodyguards and scouts for ASIS [Australian Secret Intelligence Services] intelligence officers." The creation of the squadron, notes *The Age*, "mirrors the US model, where the military and the intelligence services have closer links."

This kind of [underground army](#) is actually what the U.S has been contemplating as a means of lower the cost of conventional military operations worldwide.

Among other operations in African countries, the 4 Squadron "assessed African border controls [and] explored landing sites for possible military interventions." The soldiers work in civilian clothes and "at the outer reaches of Australian and international law."

The lack of legal protection for the soldiers raises concern and is discussed in the article. The illegality aspect of such operations is a matter of concern. They are in derogation of international law and constitute a violation of state sovereignty.

The Americans have been using the term "enemy combatant" to describe al-Qaeda operatives and other suspected terrorists. .

Their explanation was that the law of war requires lawful combatants to wear uniforms or

distinctive signs, and since al-Qaeda members do not obey this rule, they are not lawful combatants and are not protected by the Geneva conventions. It can therefore be assumed that if undercover U.S. or Australian soldiers in civilian clothing were captured in a foreign country, they could, like al-Qaeda operatives, be described as “enemy combatants”.

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