The Pentagon has approved a broader range of secret military operations against militant groups in the Middle East and Africa, The New York Times reported Monday.

The newspaper said Gen. David Petraeus, the head of U.S. Central Command, signed a directive in September authorizing Special Operations troops to conduct surveillance missions in such countries as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Somalia.

The document says the goals are to "penetrate, disrupt, defeat or destroy" militant groups, including al-Qaida, and "prepare the environment" for future attacks. The Times said the document does not authorize offensive action.

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