

Obama answers failed airline bombing with threat of new wars

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Three days after the failed attempt by a 23-year-old Nigerian student to trigger an explosion on a Northwest Airlines passenger jet, President Barack Obama threatened to unleash US military power in Yemen and across the globe.

Obama interrupted his Hawaii vacation Monday to deliver his bellicose remarks in the face of a crescendo of Republican criticism. The Republican right has tried to exploit the abortive attack in order to indict the Democratic administration as “soft” on terrorism.

This campaign has been fueled in part by the claim initially made by Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano that “the system worked” in the incident, which easily could have claimed the lives of 300 passengers and crew members.

In fact, there are serious questions about how the student, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, was able to board the plane. He reportedly bought a one-way ticket, paid for in cash, and checked no luggage. Moreover, according to an account given by fellow passengers, he and an accomplice had tried to get him on the flight without showing a passport.

On Tuesday, the Associated Press cited unnamed intelligence officials as stating that they had recordings of conversations between Abdulmutallab and at least one member of al Qaeda. His father had informed the US Embassy in Lagos more than a month earlier that his son had fallen in with Islamist extremists in Yemen, which resulted in his name being placed on a terror watch list.

Any one of these things should have triggered intense scrutiny. That they did not suggests the possibility that Abdulmutallab’s boarding the flight was facilitated from within the national security apparatus, allowing him to carry out an action that is now being used to justify yet another US military intervention abroad.

Clearly, the Republicans in Congress have no interest in probing any of these issues. Rather, they are trying to turn

the failed bombing into an argument in defense of torture, for keeping open the US prison camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and to vindicate all of the criminal policies of the Bush administration.

Obama’s response has been an attempt to outflank his Republican critics from the right by threatening another expansion of US militarist aggression. There can be little doubt that this will be supplemented with intensified attacks on democratic rights and the continuation of the policies of torture and preventive detention.

In his remarks Monday, Obama vowed “to use every element of our national power to disrupt, to dismantle, and defeat the violent extremists who threaten us—whether they are from Afghanistan or Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia, or anywhere where they are plotting attacks against the US homeland.”

The US administration is already in the midst of an escalation that is sending another 30,000 US troops into Afghanistan. It has mounted an intensified campaign of Predator drone missile attacks against Pakistan, while, according to recent press reports, also sending Special Operations units and CIA operatives into the country to conduct covert assassination and “snatch and grab” missions.

It has justified these acts of military aggression as a necessary defense of the “homeland” against terrorist attacks, the same rationale given by the Bush administration for launching the eight-year-old war in Afghanistan as well as the invasion and occupation of Iraq, now in its seventh year.

Now, the Obama White House is preparing to unleash “every element of our national power” against Yemen and Somalia, and perhaps other nations yet unnamed.

The Pentagon and the CIA are already involved in semi-covert operations in both of these countries. In Somalia, having organized a proxy invasion by US-assisted Ethiopian troops in 2006, Washington is now channeling

arms and other military aid to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), while carrying out clandestine assassination raids by American commandos operating from US warships.

In Yemen, US warplanes have carried out repeated strikes against purported Al Qaeda targets as well as against Shia rebels known as the Huthis in the country's northwest. Washington has cemented increasingly close relations with the repressive dictatorship of Field Marshal Ali Abdullah Saleh, dispatching top officials, including Central Command chief General David Petraeus and Obama's counterterrorism advisor, John Brennan, to the Yemeni capital of Sana'a.

The December 25 bombing attempt on the Northwest flight may now be used to make the US military interventions in both countries more direct, overt and deadly.

In his remarks Monday, Obama justified these actions as a means of keeping the American public "safe and secure" in the face of what he termed "a serious reminder of the dangers that we face and the nature of those who threaten our homeland."

The reality is that the military actions being prepared by Washington will have just the opposite effect. If the statement attributed to the group Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula claiming responsibility is to be believed, the attempted airline bombing was undertaken in retaliation for the December 17 US bombing of Yemen that claimed the lives of more than 60 civilians, nearly half of them women and children.

What does the December 25 incident reveal about "the nature of those who threaten our homeland"? Abdulmutallab, the son of one of Nigeria's wealthiest bankers, was apparently radicalized while attending the prestigious University College London. Like millions of young Muslims, most from far less privileged backgrounds, he undoubtedly was outraged by the images of dead and wounded men, women and children produced by the US invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as by the slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza by Washington's closest ally and client state, Israel.

That this anger is channeled into the retrograde Islamist politics and reactionary terrorist methods of groups like Al Qaeda is no accident. These organizations represent in a real sense Washington's Frankenstein's monster. For decades, the CIA promoted Islamist movements ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood to the precursor of Hamas as a means of undermining socialist and left-nationalist movements in the Middle East.

This policy found its most lethal expression in Afghanistan, where Washington spent billions of dollars in financing and arming an Islamist insurgency against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul, triggering a war that devastated the country and killed more than 1 million Afghans. It was in this war, initiated in 1978, that Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda got their start.

Similarly, in Yemen, as part of its Cold War crusade, Washington backed the Islamist regime in the North against secular nationalists in the South who called themselves socialists and forged ties with Moscow. In the country's 1994 civil war, Yemenis returning from fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan played a prominent role in helping to secure the rule of Saleh.

That the Obama administration is now threatening to launch offensives in Yemen and Somalia, supposedly to root out terrorism, only exposes similar justifications for the wars in Afghanistan-Pakistan and Iraq as a fraud against the people of the United States and the world.

Three hundred innocent people nearly lost their lives in Detroit on December 25. If they had, their deaths would have been one more episode of "collateral damage" in a military offensive by US imperialism that has cost the lives of well over a million people over the past eight years in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere.

These military campaigns have been driven by the interests of US capitalism in asserting dominance over the strategic oil supplies as well as the pipelines and shipping routes of the Middle East and Central Asia.

In targeting Yemen and Somalia, Washington is preparing to militarily straddle the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, giving it control of the chokepoint in a key route for shipping oil from the Persian Gulf to the West.

America's ruling financial elite is pursuing these aims with cold-blooded indifference to the loss of human life that they entail, including among innocent American civilians forced to pay the price for the criminal acts of their government.



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