

US expands military intervention into Yemen

Will Morrow
4 July 2012

Under the guise of the “war on terror,” the Obama administration is expanding US military operations in Yemen through stepped-up drone attacks and special operations forces on the ground.

What is being presented as a US offensive against the local Al Qaeda affiliate, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), is in reality a direct military intervention to prop up the widely despised regime of President Mansour al-Hadi, which confronts a developing civil war throughout the country. The Yemeni military is fighting armed tribal and Islamist forces, particularly in the south and, reportedly, southern separatist armed groups and protesters.

In its coverage of US military operations, the Western media has, predictably, repeated as good coin US and Yemeni government claims—without any evidence—that those killed by Yemeni forces and US drone strikes are AQAP “militants.”

In the latest display of the US military’s reckless indifference toward civilians, Yemeni officials told *Xinhua* news agency that a drone pursued a pick-up truck into the southern port city of Aden on June 25, before firing two missiles and killing all three passengers. It is reportedly the first strike inside Aden, which has a civilian population of more than 800,000 people. No evidence has been provided to support claims that the three men were AQAP members. Referring to an article in the Arabic-language *Mareh Press*, UPI noted: “Residents in Aden worry the drones will bring only destruction to the province.”

The Obama administration has escalated US drone strikes in recent months to coincide with the government’s offensive in the south. These strikes are carried out with no oversight or requirement to provide information about the targets. In April, Obama approved the use of “signature strikes,” which allow the CIA to destroy buildings, cars and people without even identifying who is being targeted, based solely on

activity patterns determined by satellites and agents in the country. This makes it virtually impossible to calculate the true number of civilian casualties. It was recently revealed that Obama personally authorises and oversees his targets for assassination.

According to the *Long War Journal*, a web site that tracks US drone attacks, there have been at least 33 strikes since May 2011, 24 of which have occurred this year, including 6 in March, 6 in April and 9 in May. This number is very likely a significant underestimation, since the Yemen government claims that its ageing air force is behind many bombings believed to be drone attacks. On June 13, a drone killed nine people in Shabwa province.

As part of the escalating US intervention, an unknown number of special operations forces are on the ground, training and providing direct logistical support to the Yemeni military, as well as directing drone attacks.

AP reported on May 15: “[Yemeni military] officials said that an air base called al-Annad in the southern province of Lahj is serving as a command center for nearly 60 U.S. troops who were providing advice, information and logistical support to Yemeni troops.”

An article in the *Los Angeles Times* on May 16 the following day commented: “The Obama administration’s direct military role in Yemen is more extensive than previously reported and represents a deepening involvement in the nation’s growing conflict.”

Referring to unnamed US and Yemeni sources, it added that the troops “have used satellite imagery, drone video, eavesdropping systems and other technical means to help pinpoint targets.” It continued: “Teams of CIA officers and U.S. contractors have operated in Yemen for some time.... They have recruited tribal militants to provide security.” A military official told the newspaper that the contingent was expected to

grow.

In a further indication of expanding US operations, on June 21, the *Los Angeles Times* quoted unnamed US military officials, who revealed plans to use aircraft to provide Yemeni troops with “vehicles and other supplies.”

In February, President Hadi, formerly vice president under President Ali Abdullah Saleh, became president under a deal orchestrated by Washington to maintain the country’s security apparatus and government, which have developed close ties with the US over the past decade, and end mass anti-government protests. Hadi has since given his open support to US operations in the country, while Saleh maintains control over the ruling GPC party.

In early May, the US announced it would redeploy “small numbers of trainers” to Yemen. The Obama administration claimed in 2011 that it had withdrawn its troops from the country following the fierce repression by Yemeni security forces—many of which were trained by US soldiers—of protests and opposition fighters.

The announcement was made just one day after the widely publicised and still unexplained “foiling” of a Yemeni terrorist plot to bomb a US-bound airliner. The “terrorist” was revealed the following day to be an agent of the CIA and Saudi Arabian intelligence. Underscoring the political calculations involved, the *Washington Post* published an editorial utilising the arrest to praise the sharp rise of US drone attacks in Yemen (see “The political uses of the latest ‘terror plot’”).

This month, the Yemeni military recaptured three towns in Abyan—Zinjibar, Shaqra and Jaar—which were taken under the control of anti-government tribal and Islamist groups in 2011. Reports of the towns indicate that the protracted fighting and military offensives have destroyed much of what little infrastructure exists, including water and electricity, and caused tens of thousands to flee.

According to a report by France24 on June 27, the Yemeni military has occupied the al-Mansoura district of Aden with tanks and snipers and repressed southern separatist protests, although it is unclear how many people have been involved in the demonstrations. Yemen was formally unified in 1990, and sections of the southern Yemeni elite promote the reactionary

perspective of separatism to gain a greater share of the country’s wealth, utilising the poverty of wide sections of the population.

The protracted fighting has led to a humanitarian disaster across the country. The United Nations estimates that in 2011 alone, 170,000 people fled from Abyan province. Thousands of people are now living in schools and makeshift housing in Aden and other towns. A report released by seven aid agencies on May 23 revealed that 44 percent of the population does not have enough food to eat. Even before the latest crisis, the Yemeni population was the poorest in the region, with more than 40 percent living below the official poverty line of US\$2 a day.

As part of its efforts to justify and cover up for the criminal role of the Obama administration in Yemen, the media has passed over in silence a recent interview in May with Jeremy Scarhill, the national security correspondent for the *Nation*, on National Public Radio. Scarhill said that there were “a tremendous number of innocent people...now living under an increasing bombardment.”

He added, “And what I was hearing as I travelled around the south of Yemen were reports from tribal leaders, from civilians, even from sort of pro-U.S. government officials within the Yemeni government that American bombs were not hitting the right targets, that there were cluster munitions, these sort of flying land mines, if you will, that were laying unexploded in various villages around the south in Yemen.”



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact