

US steps up military operations in Yemen

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An aerial attack in Yemen killed eleven civilians, including three women and three children, in the town of Radda last week. The atrocity, one of a growing number of deadly strikes carried out either by US drone aircraft or by the Yemeni armed forces operating under US direction, also injured several other civilians in the area.

According to local news sources, the September 2 attack in Radda occurred when Yemeni military aircraft opened fire on two vehicles traveling through the town, which is located in the impoverished Al Bayda province, about 100 miles south of the Yemeni capital, Sana'a.

Al Bayda province is a frontline in the civil war between the Yemeni government and a tribal-based opposition in southern Yemen. Local media reported that the killings sparked protests in Radda and among tribesmen in surrounding area.

Yemen's armed forces later took responsibility for the Radda attack, with a military spokesman claiming that the operation was based on "faulty intelligence" that the targets were part of a convoy that included Al Qaeda fighters.

The Yemeni military also claimed that on the same day as the attack in Radda, two US drone aircraft carried out a separate strike in the southern city of Hadramawt. The target was Khaled Batis, an alleged Al Qaeda operative who was connected to the bombing of the French oil tanker *Limburg* off the coast of Yemen in 2002.

Batis was killed in the drone strike. A Pentagon spokesman refused to say if US personnel, intelligence reports or resources had been involved in either the Radda or Hadramawt operations.

The death toll from the long-running campaign by the US military and the CIA in Yemen is rising. Presented as a key front in the US "global war on terror," Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East, with over half

the population living below the poverty line.

The aerial attacks in Radda and Hadramawt came just four days after the August 29 killing of several suspected Islamist fighters in southern Yemen. Reportedly carried out by a US drone aircraft, the strike provoked strong criticism from local tribal leaders, who claimed that one of the dead was a senior Muslim cleric, Salem bin Ali Jaber.

Commenting on the August 29 attack, Yemeni Foreign Minister Abubakr al-Qirbi told Bloomberg News that his government frequently asked for the help of US forces "where there is a need against the militants who have gone to plot terrorist attacks."

Although the US military refuses to release figures on the number of casualties caused by its operations in Yemen, it is estimated that up to 1000 people have died in scores of US drone strikes and special operations attacks over the past decade. The Pentagon and the CIA also work closely with the government and military of Yemen, providing them with advanced weaponry, intelligence and training for their conflict with various sectarian, political and tribal opponents.

While the stated target of US operations in Yemen is Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, accusations of AQAP membership are frequently used by the regime in Sana'a to justify assassinating its rivals.

Behind the constant invocations of the threat of Al Qaeda, Washington's bloody role in the country has far more to do with the fact that Yemen occupies a strategically vital position on the southern border of Saudi Arabia. It is next to the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, the main shipping lane connecting the oil fields of the Persian Gulf with the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and access to Europe.

With these interests in mind, last year the Obama administration backed the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh against a mass uprising of workers, youth and tribesmen. While hundreds of thousands of

anti-government protesters took to the streets of the capital to protest poverty, inequality, and dictatorship, Washington backed the regime on the grounds that Saleh was a bulwark against AQAP.

During the 2011 protests, the Yemeni regime murdered hundreds of demonstrators without any significant complaint from its sponsors in Washington. Only when it became clear that a revolutionary situation was emerging in Yemen that threatened US interests in the entire region, including the spread of protests into Saudi Arabia, did the Obama administration and the Saudi monarchy demand that Saleh resign in favor of his deputy, Vice President Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi.

The “new” regime—which is virtually identical to Saleh’s government in terms of policy and is staffed by many of the same personnel—continues to slavishly support US imperialism’s policies in the region, including the drone bombing campaign.

The difference in Washington’s response to the presence of Al Qaeda in Yemen compared to Syria provides stark expression of the bogus character of the so-called war on terror. In Yemen, the alleged activities of AQAP cadres are used to justify US support for the al-Hadi regime, including the stationing of significant military and CIA assets in the country.

In Syria, however, Washington is waging a proxy war against the regime of Bashar al-Assad using various Islamist militant groups—including those with affiliations to Al Qaeda—as its shock troops.

The apparent contradiction in US policy toward the civil conflicts in Syria and Yemen in fact reflects the real interests of Washington in the Middle East. The US military views the Yemeni regime as an ally and base of operations in the oil-rich region and therefore backs it to the hilt—even when it is engaged in brutally putting down internal opposition to its rule.

The Assad government, however, is being targeted for regime-change and assassination because it is allied with Iran, which is viewed as the main regional obstacle to US hegemony.

In addition to the drive to isolate and ultimately depose the Iranian government, the explosion of US and European imperialist aggression in the Middle East and North Africa is driven by class hostility to the mass uprisings of the “Arab Spring” last year. The ouster of key US assets Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and

Hosni Mubarak in Egypt in revolutionary movements dominated by the working class terrified the major powers and their local proxies.

In reaction to these developments, Washington and the Persian Gulf sheikdoms have sponsored right-wing Islamist forces, including those tied to Al Qaeda, to repress the working class and impose regimes committed to the defense of capitalism and the imperialist division of the Middle East.



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