

US launches new drone strikes against Yemen

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The US launched its fifth and sixth drone strikes in two weeks against Yemen on Wednesday and Thursday morning, killing seven alleged Al Qaeda militants in the first strike and at least three in the second. Wednesday's attack targeted members of a Bedouin tribe in Shabwa province. Thursday's hit a car allegedly carrying Al Qaeda members in the Erq Al Shabwan area of the Abeidah Valley in Mareb.

On Tuesday, five missiles from US drones struck a vehicle traveling in Mareb Province, killing as many as six people.

The US has carried out the drone strikes in rapid succession on orders from the Obama administration, ending a seven-week hiatus of strikes against Yemen. It is becoming increasingly clear that the global terror alert announced last Friday is bound up with foreign as well as domestic objectives.

Internally, the terror scare is being cited as justification for the police-state surveillance programs exposed by whistleblower Edward Snowden. The claim from the Obama administration and Democratic as well as Republican lawmakers is that the massive spying operations are directed solely against suspected terrorists and are essential to the "war on terror." The constant talk of an imminent attack, vague and completely unsubstantiated, is being used to create a climate of fear so as to intimidate and dissipate popular support for Snowden and popular opposition to the Big Brother surveillance programs.

Meanwhile, new revelations about the spying programs based on documents leaked by Snowden expose the all-embracing scope of the operations and show that official statements about their supposedly legal and narrowly targeted character are lies.

Internationally, the terror scare is being used as a cover for an escalation of US military violence in the Middle East. Frustrated by its inability to date to bring down the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria by means of proxy opposition militia, Washington seems intent on demonstrating the destructive power of its military

technology as a warning both to the Syrian regime and Damascus's allies, particularly Iran and Russia.

An Associated Press reporter in the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, said a US drone was circling the city for most of Wednesday. The *New York Times* reported that many streets in Sana'a are crisscrossed with military barricades and jet fighters have been flying overhead. US Special Forces teams have been placed on high alert in anticipation of incursions in the Arabian Peninsula.

Yemeni officials declared Wednesday that they had disrupted a terrorist plot against port, gas and oil facilities. Al Qaeda militants were supposedly planning to seize control of the Mukalla seaport and the Mina al-Dhaba oil terminal. These claims were greeted with a great deal of skepticism among Yemenis. They appear to be part of an effort to bolster the credibility of the US terror alert.

According to the Washington DC-based New America Foundation, "As of August 6, 2013, US drone and air strikes had killed an estimated 610 to 849 people in Yemen... Of these deaths, 99 percent occurred during Obama's presidency."

A study by the Swiss-based human rights organization Alkarama Foundation, entitled "The United States' War on Yemen: Drone Attacks," found that between 2002 and 2013 there have been as many as 226 US military operations in Yemen, including strikes launched from manned and unmanned aircraft and naval warships, causing at least 390 civilian deaths.

Yemen sits alongside the strategically crucial Gulf of Aden and commands the Mandab Strait, which controls access to the Red Sea. As the *World Tribune* reported in January, the US has long-term plans to build at least three military bases in Yemen, as part of an Obama administration initiative to strengthen America's military presence in the country. A *Yemen Times* report from May 27 stated that 35 international companies are currently jockeying for access to 20 new oil extraction sites in the country.

To the extent that there is a threat of terror attacks against Americans, it is rooted in the brutal and

reactionary policies of the United States in the Middle East and Central Asia, which combine wanton violence and killing with support for despotic regimes in Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich countries and backing for Israeli oppression of the Palestinians. The US is also backing the military junta in Egypt.

As Yemini journalist Farea al-Muslimi told the US Senate in 2012, “Drone strikes are the face of America to many Yemenis.” Al-Muslimi described a strike against al-Majala in December 2009 that took at least 40 civilian lives, including children and pregnant women.

Larry Lewis of the Center for Naval Analyses, who has carried out studies on the use of drones in the war in Afghanistan, found that drone strikes killed ten times as many Afghan civilians as strikes carried out by manned aircraft, in contrast to President Obama’s claim that “conventional airpower or missiles are far less precise than drones, and likely to cause more civilian casualties and local outrage.”

In February, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina acknowledged that the US has killed nearly 5,000 people with drones, noting complacently that “sometimes you hit innocent people.”

In an interview Wednesday night on the “Tonight Show with Jay Leno,” President Obama continued to defend the National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance programs, calling them “a critical component of counterterrorism.” In the face of leaked documents showing that the NSA collects the phone records of every American and the Internet communications of people all over the world, he made the absurd statement that “We don’t have a domestic spying program.”

Obama did not offer any further evidence to substantiate the terror scare, saying only that it is “significant enough that we’re taking every precaution.”



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