

US continues drone war against Yemen

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Since July 28, the US has launched nine drone strikes against targets in Yemen, killing at least 3 dozen people. The US carries out operations from bases surrounding Yemen, including installations in Saudi Arabia, Djibouti and the Seychelles. Washington has carried out 79 drone attacks against Yemen since 2002.

The US has allocated more than \$600 million in counter-terrorism aid to Yemen. According to the journal *Foreign Policy*, US officials have acknowledged the presence of at least three dozen US Special Forces on the ground in the impoverished country.

The recent drone strikes are part of an escalation of US military operations in Yemen and throughout the Middle East, carried out under the cover of the global terror alert announced August 2. As reported in a front page article in Monday's *New York Times*, the US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) has drawn up detailed plans for operations by US commandos in Yemen.

According to the *Times*, the US has loosened its drone strike "rules of engagement" to include suspected lower-level members of Al Qaeda who previously were not targeted.

"Before, we couldn't necessarily go after a driver for the organization; it'd have to be an operations director," said an anonymous senior US official. "Now that driver becomes fair game because he's providing direct support to the plot."

Security analysts quoted by the *Times* say intelligence agencies that were closely aligned with the United States, such as those of Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, have been severely disrupted by "political turmoil" associated with the Arab Spring. With the crucial pillars of US imperialist domination of the Middle East under threat, US policy experts are demanding a more aggressive military policy in the region.

"US intelligence has drastically lost its influence over Arab intelligence partners as a consequence of the Arab awakening and, more worryingly, its intelligence probing capability," the *Times* quotes Magnus Ranstorp of the Swedish National Defense College in Stockholm as saying. Ranstorp calls for a "longer-term US strategy" focused on "capacity building" in crucial countries.

John E. McLaughlin, former deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, quoted by the *Times*, warned in a speech to a recent security forum in Aspen, Colorado that terrorist groups are gaining strength throughout the Middle East. "Terrorists now have the largest area of safe haven and operational training that they've had in 10 years," McLaughlin said.

The *Times* article, quoting a number of unnamed "senior" American officials, has all the earmarks of a planted article, composed in consultation with top US military and intelligence officers.

President Obama has argued along the same lines, saying Friday that Al Qaeda has "metastasized into regional groups that can pose significant dangers."

In its concluding paragraph, the *Times* article warns about the growing strength of extremist militants in Syria: "A potential new center for Al Qaeda's operations may be developing in Syria. As foreign fighters pour into Syria at an increasing clip—now estimated at more than 6,000 combatants—extremist groups are carving out pockets of territory that are becoming havens for Islamist militants, posing what United States and Western intelligence officials say may be developing into one of the biggest terrorist threats in the world today."

Michael Morell, outgoing deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, warned the *Wall Street Journal* last week about the situation in Syria, saying "there are now more foreign fighters flowing into Syria each month to take up arms with Al Qaeda-affiliated

groups than there were going to Iraq to fight with Al Qaeda at the height of the war there.”

Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies said in a June interview that the failure of the US-backed “rebels” to bring down the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria posed a “threat to our entire strategic position in the Middle East.”

Strategists at various ruling class research institutions are pushing the claim that Al Qaeda affiliates such as Al Qaeda in Iraq are experiencing a resurgence. An article published in the *Washington Times* last week cited several establishment policy gurus arguing that the removal of the US occupation forces from Iraq has undermined America’s strategic position in the region. The article warned that mounting sectarian violence “could draw US troops back into Iraq.”

US Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has advised the administration to deploy fresh detachments of US military advisors to Iraq, where they would work in support of Iraqi security forces.

An article by Andrew Tabler in the July/August edition of *Foreign Affairs*, titled “Syria’s Collapse and How Washington Can Stop It,” makes the case for direct US intervention in Syria and around Syria’s borders. Tabler says that the war in Syria “is rapidly spilling over into neighboring countries,” and warns, “The meltdown of the Syrian state is empowering terrorist groups and could ultimately give them the freedom to plan international attacks, as the chaos of Afghanistan in the 1990s did for Al Qaeda.”

Tabler calls for a “measured by assertive” military intervention by Washington, including strikes to take out components of Assad’s arsenal and carve out “50 to 80 mile deep safe areas” along the Jordanian and Turkish borders by launching air strikes against Assad forces in these areas. He also calls for the US to arm opposition groups inside Syria on a “trial and error basis,” with aid to these groups being funneled through the Supreme Military Council, and to facilitate the creation of a “new viable political leadership on the ground based on local elections” in the “liberated areas.”

For Tabler, “the ultimate goal” in the wake of Assad’s removal would be the creation of a “decentralized structure that recognized regional

differences.” In other words, Syria would be Balkanized and broken up into statelets lacking any capacity to resist US and European imperialism.



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