

US drone strike in Yemen kills 15

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At least 15 people were killed yesterday in central Yemen, when missiles fired from an unmanned US drone slammed into a wedding convoy. Yemeni security officials said the attack took place near the city of Radda, the capital of Bayda province, leaving behind charred bodies and burnt out vehicles.

No names and few details have been released. The CIA and US military, which are responsible for the criminal program of targeted assassinations in Yemen, Pakistan and other countries, have made no statement.

Yemeni security officials have provided conflicting accounts of the attack. “An air strike missed its target and hit a wedding car convoy,” one official told Reuters. “Ten people were killed immediately and another five who were injured died after being admitted to the hospital.” Another five people were injured. No attempt was made to explain what the real target was, or why “a mistake” was made.

Another official sought to justify the strike, telling the Associated Press that militants from Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) were suspected to have been travelling with the wedding convoy. No evidence was provided. Radda is regarded as an AQAP stronghold.

The latest civilian deaths underscore the indiscriminate and illegal character of the US drone strikes that are being used to terrorise the local population and demonstrate American military might throughout the region.

Yesterday’s attack came days after a US drone strike on Monday that killed three people driving on a road in al-Qatan, in Hadramout province. “The vehicle and its occupants were completely burned,” a Yemeni official told Reuters.

The two drone strikes appear to be in retaliation for an Al Qaeda attack on December 5 on the government defence ministry building in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa. The attackers set off a large car bomb outside

the building then entered the complex, shooting people on sight. The attack in broad daylight left 56 dead and 167 injured. Al Qaeda claimed responsibility, saying it was in response to US drone strikes.

Having propped up the regime of Yemeni strongman President Ali Abdullah Saleh for decades, the Obama regime helped to engineer the installation of President Mansour Al-Hadi to try to quell mass anti-Saleh protests. As well as drone strikes, the US backs the Yemeni government through the provision of financial aid, military equipment and training.

Washington regards Yemen as vital to its strategic interests in the Middle East. The country 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.

According to a Human Rights Watch report published in October, the US Joint Operations Command, a semi-covert arm of the military and CIA, has carried out at least 81 killing operations in Yemen over the past decade. One was carried out in 2002 and the remainder have taken place since 2009—that is, under the Obama administration. At least, 473 people, most of them civilians, have been killed in the attacks.

The US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) investigators made two trips to Yemen to examine six strikes—one in 2009 and the rest from 2012-13—which killed 82 people, at least 57 of them civilians. Four were carried out by drones, one involved cruise missiles, and the last one either drones or warplanes.

The report concluded: “Two of these attacks were in clear violation of international humanitarian law—the laws of war—because they struck only civilians or used indiscriminate weapons. The other four may have violated laws of war because the individual attacked was not a lawful military target or the attack caused

disproportionate civilian harm, determinations that require further investigation.”

In the worst attack, on December 17, 2009, the US military fired up to five Tomahawk cruise missiles armed with cluster bombs at the small village of al-Majalah in the south of the country. Yemeni officials described the target as an Al Qaeda training camp in which 34 “terrorists” had been killed. A subsequent investigation found that 14 suspected militants had been killed, along with at least 41 civilians living in a Bedouin camp, including 9 women and 21 children. Cluster munitions subsequently killed another 4 civilians and injured 13 others.

Amnesty International also released a report in October documenting the killing of unarmed civilians in covert drone strikes in North Waziristan in Pakistan. “This secrecy has enabled the USA to act with impunity and block victims from receiving justice or compensation,” the report stated. “As far as Amnesty is aware, no US official has ever been held to account for unlawful killings by drones in Pakistan.”

The Obama administration dismissed the two reports out of hand. White House spokesman Jay Carney “strongly disagreed” that the US had acted illegally, adding: “The administration has repeatedly emphasised the extraordinary care that we take to make sure counter-terrorism actions are in accordance with all applicable law.”

Yesterday’s murderous drone strike on a civilian wedding convoy once again exposes the lies of the White House. The Obama administration has arrogated to itself the “right” to act completely outside American and international law as judge, jury and executioner for anyone deemed to be a threat to US imperialist interests.



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