

US closes diplomatic facilities in Yemen

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The US moved to close its diplomatic mission in Yemen on Tuesday, in the wake of the dissolution of Yemen's official government by the Shia Houthi insurgency that seized control of the capital last September.

Following the US lead, Britain, France and Germany also closed their embassies in Yemen Wednesday, as Houthi leaders engaged in UN-supervised talks with competing political factions. The US State Department has issued a warning advising all US citizens to leave Yemen immediately.

Previous statements by Pentagon and Obama administration officials indicated that the White House was considering an arrangement with the Houthis that will enable continuation of the US drone war. Nonetheless, the State Department issued muted condemnations of the Houthis this week, signaling the start of a pressure campaign to insure that Yemen's new rulers toe the US line.

"Recent unilateral actions disrupted the political transition process in Yemen, creating the risk that renewed violence would threaten Yemenis and the diplomatic community," US State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

"We will not hesitate to act in Yemen," Psaki declared.

The "transition" process referred to by Psaki was orchestrated through the US and Saudi-dominated Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), replacing the hated regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh with a similarly pliant puppet regime headed by Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who emerged as the victor of a one-man election held in February 2012.

Despite the recent collapse of the Hadi government, US Special Forces will continue to carry out operations in the country on a "unilateral" basis, US Admiral John Kirby stressed in public statements. While Kirby noted "concerns about the tentacles that Iran has throughout

the region," referring to the Houthis ties to Iran, he made clear that the main priority of the US is to continue its covert military operations in the country.

"We still have Special Operations forces in Yemen, we continue to conduct counterterrorism training with Yemeni security forces, and we are still capable inside Yemen of conducting counterterrorism operations," Kirby said.

"We want to be able to continue to have an effective partner there in Yemen," Kirby added.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers will continue working inside Yemen, despite losing their main outpost in the embassy, according to *Fox News*. The closed embassy had long served "as a base for the CIA and other US spy agencies," the *Washington Post* noted.

The decades-long Saleh dictatorship consolidated power on the basis of the 1990 unification of North and nominally Stalinist-led South Yemen, receiving covert support from major US and European transnational corporations in the process, according to a CIA report produced at the time.

After 2001, Saleh positioned himself as a loyal ally of Washington and the "war on terror," coordinating US military operations in Yemen—including those directed at Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)—through regular meetings with leading US government officials.

Top US politicians are calling for military escalation in Yemen in response to the Houthi coup. "Yemen has been of strategic importance to the United States, and I fear these latest developments will create a vacuum that will ultimately benefit" AQAP, US Senator Lindsey Graham said in a statement Wednesday.

AQAP "continues to harbor a burning desire to attack the United States," Graham said.

Though framed in terms of the struggle against AQAP, the underlying aim of the US in Yemen is to secure control of the strategically critical Bab al

Mandab straight. Connecting the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, the straight facilitates daily passage of massive commercial flows, including major sections of world trade in oil and grain, giving Yemen a strategic significance well beyond its small size and relative poverty of resources.

Directly across the straight lies Djibouti, where the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) maintains its largest military facility in Africa, Camp Lemonnier. The base serves as a central hub for US drone strikes and covert operations across the Horn of Africa and Arabian Peninsula.

Reports indicate that the Houthis themselves are seeking arrangements with US imperialism. “We didn’t want them to go, and we were ready to work with the American Embassy on measures that would ensure their protection and facilitate their work,” an anonymous Houthi leader told the *Times*.

At the same time, Yemen appears on the verge of civil war and social breakdown, as increasing areas of the country fall to various armed factions and its oil industry and economy reel from the withdrawal of some \$4 billion in annual Saudi aid. The central state administration, now under the de facto control of the Houthi Revolutionary Committee, may be incapable of paying employees for work in February, the *Times* reported.

Houthi fighters engaged in shows of force against mass demonstrations in the capital on Wednesday, according to *Reuters*, while continuing offensive operations aimed at seizing control of broader sections of southern Yemen. The insurgents captured the capital of Yemen’s central Al-Bayda province Tuesday, according to *Asharq al-Awsat*, leaving more than half of the country’s provinces under Houthi control.



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