

Suicide bombings kill more than one hundred in Yemen

Niles Williamson**21 March 2015**

Yemen's civil war continued its spiral downward on Friday as a branch of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) claimed responsibility for suicide bombings at two Houthi mosques in the capital city of Sanaa during the peak of weekly prayers.

ISIS claims that four of its fighters blew themselves up at the Badr and Hashush mosques in Sanaa. A third attack on a mosque in the northern Houthi-controlled province Saada was thwarted by security forces.

The attack was one of the deadliest assaults on civilians in Yemen in recent years, killing at least 142 people and injuring hundreds more. The Houthis, who belong to the Zaydi Shia sect, are considered heretics amongst the Sunni Salafi fundamentalists that comprise ISIS.

An audio recording published online, reportedly from the ISIS affiliate, cautioned that Friday's attack was "the tip of the iceberg" in attacks on Houthis. "Let the polytheist Houthis know that the soldiers of the Islamic State will not rest and will not stay still until they extirpate them," the statement warned.

Friday marks the first known foray by forces associated with ISIS into the multifaceted sectarian conflict which threatens the breakup of the Yemeni state. The existence of the branch in Yemen was first announced by ISIS head Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in November of last year.

The Houthi militias have been consolidating control over the capital after the forced resignation of President Abdu Rabbuh Mansour Hadi in January. The Houthis have been occupying the capital since September and took control of the presidential palace at beginning of the year. Last month, Hadi escaped house arrest in Sanaa and fled to his hometown of Aden in southern Yemen. He subsequently declared that he was still the President of Yemen and that the Houthi regime was

unconstitutional.

The assault by ISIS comes amidst escalating factional fighting for control over the country between the Houthis, Hadi, and forces loyal to former longtime dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was forced to cede power in 2012 in the face of mass protests. Saleh, currently in exile in Ethiopia, has been backing the Houthis and asserting influence in the country through members of the Special Security Forces (SSF) which remain loyal to him.

Forces loyal to Saleh launched an assault on the international airport in Aden Thursday, days after Hadi attempted to dismiss the commander of the SSF. Hadi's forces were able to repel the attack and overran the SSF base. Jets under the control of Saleh loyalists responded to Thursday's setback by bombarding Hadi's Aden compound for a second day on Friday.

Yemen is rapidly descending into chaotic conflict between multiple sectarian factions stoked by American imperialism and the regional powers of Saudi Arabia and Iran. The United States supported the transition from Saleh to Hadi in 2012 and has since worked with the Houthis to maintain its drone operation and the presence of CIA and other special operatives in the country. Saudi Arabia has given support to the Sunni tribes and Al Qaeda forces in their fight to overthrow the Houthis. Iran, meanwhile, has backed both the Houthis as well as Saleh in his effort to unseat Hadi.

Further escalating the situation, it was reported that forces associated with the Al-Qaeda affiliated Ansar Al Sharia seized control of the southern city of Al Houta on Friday. Fighting between Yemeni security forces, Al Qaeda militants, and other separatist fighters resulted in the deaths of at least 27 Yemeni soldiers.

Since 2002 the United States government has been launching drone strikes and cruise missiles against

members of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). According to Bureau of Investigative Journalism estimates, as many as 639 people have been killed in confirmed US drone strikes between 2002 and 2015, with 96 of the total being civilians.

The last reported drone strike, carried out on March 1 in Shabwa province, killed as many as three people. The strike came as AQAP militants were engaged in combat with Houthi militias in Bayda province.

Yemen occupies a geo-strategically vital position along the Mandeb strait, a strategic waterway through which ocean-faring transport ships gain access to the Suez Canal in Egypt. A significant portion of the world's oil and other commodities therefore passes by Yemen.

Years of fighting amongst the various parties has resulted in a serious humanitarian crisis throughout the country which is amongst the poorest in the Arab world. Constant attacks on oil, gas, electric and communications infrastructure have seriously affected economic development. The poverty rate in Yemen rose from 42 percent in 2009 to more than 54 percent in 2012. The country's economy has seen negligible growth since it contracted by nearly 13 percent in 2011.



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