

US backs Saudi airstrikes against Houthis in Yemen

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The Saudi ambassador to the United States, Adair Al Jubeir, announced Wednesday night from Washington, D.C. that his country, in coordination with the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, had begun airstrikes on Houthi rebel positions inside Yemen. He said that Saudi Arabia and others in the coalition were prepared “to protect and defend the legitimate government” of President Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi.

Jubeir declared that Saudi Arabia would do “whatever it takes” to keep Hadi in power.

The Saudi strikes are backed by the Obama administration, which released a statement stating that the US was providing “logistical and intelligence support.” A ground offensive involving 150,000 Saudi troops is also reportedly being prepared.

Airstrikes were reported at the Sanaa airport and at the Al Dulaimi military base. Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi’s Ansarullah politburo, warned that the airstrikes would set off a “wide war” in the Arabian Peninsula. “The Yemeni people are a free people and they will confront the aggressors. I will remind you that the Saudi government and the Gulf governments will regret this aggression,” Bukhaiti told *Al Jazeera* news.

According to US officials, Saudi Arabia has also positioned heavy artillery and other military equipment on its border with Yemen. At a weekend meeting of Gulf state princes and defense ministers, Saudi officials had presented their plans for air strikes against Houthi targets and a naval blockade of Houthi supply routes. Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister, Prince Saud Al Faisal, told reporters earlier this week that his country was prepared to “take the necessary measures for this crisis to protect the region.”

With the latest developments Yemen’s escalating civil war has openly taken on the character of a regional

conflict, involving both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia’s Sunni monarchy is now openly backing Hadi as the legitimate leader of the country, while Shiite-dominated Iran has called for him to cede power, giving its support to the Houthis, who belong to the Zaydi Shiite sect of Islam.

In recent years, Saudi Arabia, which receives military support from the United States, has undertaken military incursions to suppress popular Shiite uprisings in neighboring countries. In late 2009, the Saudi military launched operations against the Houthi militias inside Yemen in coordination with the government of former president and longtime dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh. The Saudi monarchy also dispatched troops to Bahrain in March 2011 to suppress protests by that country’s Shiite majority against the dictatorship of Sunni King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa.

A letter sent by Hadi to the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday asked for the adoption of a resolution supporting “all means necessary, including military intervention, to protect Yemen and its people from the continuing Houthi aggression”.

The beleaguered Hadi reportedly left Yemen on Wednesday as Houthi rebel fighters backed by army units loyal to former president Saleh seized the Al Anad airbase in Lahj province as well as Aden’s international airport and central bank headquarters.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Hadi fled Aden on a boat with the assistance of a retinue of Saudi Arabian diplomatic officials to escape the impending Houthi assault. Reports of Hadi’s departure were denied by Yemen’s chief of national security, Major General Ali Al Ahmadi, who told Reuters, “He’s here, he’s here, he’s here. I am now with him in the palace. He is in Aden.”

Until their evacuation last weekend, US and

European special forces soldiers had used the Al Anad airbase to coordinate military operations and drone missile strikes against members of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in southern and eastern Yemen.

The Houthis seized the base as they pushed south towards the port city of Aden, where Hadi had fled after escaping house arrest in Sanaa in February. The president had been forced to announce his resignation and dissolution of the government after the Houthis seized control of the presidential palace in January.

The Houthi rebels, who took control of the capital of Sanaa in September 2014, began their advance south last week after fighting broke out in Aden between forces loyal to Saleh and Hadi over control of the international airport.

Wednesday's advance put the Houthis within striking distance of the compound where Hadi has been marshaling military forces still loyal to him in an attempt to reassert control over the country. Fighter jets manned by Yemeni air force pilots supporting Saleh have been strafing the compound for the last few days.

The loss of Al Anad air base amid the complete collapse of the US puppet regime headed by Hadi is the latest debacle for American imperialist foreign policy following in the wake of Iraq, Syria, and Libya. The disastrous intervention of American imperialism in Yemen has stoked long-simmering sectarian tensions to the point of explosion, completely destabilizing the deeply impoverished Arab country.

Al Anad was one of the key sites used by the US military and CIA to launch drone strikes inside Yemen. According to estimates by the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, the drone war, which began under the direction of US president Barack Obama in 2009 with the assent of then-president Saleh, has killed more than 1,000 people. The massively unpopular drone strikes were also supported by Hadi, who came to power in 2012, after Saleh was ousted by mass protests.

After the Houthi rebels seized control of Sanaa in January, the Pentagon worked to establish relations with them in order to continue drone strike operations against alleged Al Qaeda militants. The last reported strike came on March 1 in Bayda province, killing as many as three people. It was in an area where Houthi militants had been fighting members of AQAP.

Underscoring the debacle in Yemen, the Pentagon

admits that it has lost track of more than \$500 million worth of weapons and equipment amid the ongoing fighting. US military officials testified in recent closed-door congressional hearings that they have no idea whether the equipment has fallen into the hands of either Houthi fighters or Al Qaeda militants. "We have to assume it's completely compromised and gone," a legislative aide told the *Washington Post*.

Among the US equipment provided to the Yemeni government since 2007 that has now been lost are 200 M-4 rifles, 1.25 million rounds of ammunition, 160 Humvees, and 4 Huey II helicopters. An additional unknown amount of weapons and equipment provided by the CIA and Pentagon through classified programs has also been lost.



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