

US drone strike in Yemen kills AQAP leader

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In its second extralegal targeted assassination in as many days, the US military killed Nasir al-Wuhayshi with a drone strike against Yemen Monday.

Wuhayshi was the leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Yemen's Al Qaeda affiliate, which has been increasingly singled out in the US media as the "most lethal" Al Qaeda affiliate since officially being proclaimed to be a terrorist organization by then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton in 2009.

The strike comes one week after another US drone strike near the Yemeni city of Mukalla reportedly killed three alleged Al Qaeda militants.

The strike also comes only one day after US F-15s bombed a farmhouse in Libya in a strike that US officials claim killed 24 militants, including longtime Al Qaeda figure Mokhtar Belmokhtar (the latter's death remains subject to conflicting reports).

In addition to their being targeted for extrajudicial killing by the US government on consecutive days, commonalities in the origins and personal trajectories of Belmokhtar and Wuhayshi underscore the deep entanglement of the American government and its allies with the same jihadi forces supposedly targeted by the US "war on terror."

In contrast to their public reputation as anti-American fanatics, both men rose to power within international terrorist networks that have been supported and cultivated by Washington to serve the political objectives of the US ruling class.

Both born in the mid-1970s, Belmokhtar and Wuhayshi launched their careers as militants during the 1990s, training in Afghanistan with fundamentalist militants descended from the fighting groups mobilized by during the previous decade as part of the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) efforts to topple the secular Soviet-backed government in Kabul and destabilize the Soviet Union itself.

It is increasingly clear that AQAP as a whole

similarly benefits from covert relations with the US and its regional allies, even as it uses anti-imperialist rhetoric and attacks on Western targets as recruiting tools.

AQAP has somehow managed to expand its organization steadily since its official formation in 2009, despite years of continuous intervention by US Special Forces in Yemen, backed up by US drone strikes launched in close coordination with Yemen's government and military.

During the ongoing Saudi-led air assault against Yemen, AQAP has enjoyed virtual immunity from attack by the Saudi and Gulf forces, even as a murderous bombardment of US-made ordnance has rained down on Yemeni cities and towns.

The Saudi air war, though coordinated with the US military at a recently established US-Saudi "joint coordination planning cell" in Riyadh and waged with intelligence and logistical support from the US, has studiously avoided strikes against AQAP.

AQAP has in fact "thrived" in the political chaos that has followed the outbreak of the Saudi-led air war, CNN noted in its report Tuesday.

While thousands of Yemeni civilians have been slaughtered and the majority of the country plunged into conditions of outright starvation, the AQAP militants have been allowed to seize substantial territory, including entire cities and military bases, suffering only a few small "surgical strikes."

This is because the dreaded AQAP is increasingly viewed by Riyadh and its patrons in Washington as a useful ally against the Iran-linked Houthi militants, who have overrun large areas of Yemen since overthrowing the US-Saudi installed puppet government of President Mansour Hadi this January.

Wuhayshi's assassination Monday, touted as "the biggest blow against Al Qaeda since the death of Osama bin Laden," was more likely ordered to secure

AQAP's participation as a party on the side of Saudi coalition.

An *Al Jazeera* report released Tuesday, "Al Qaeda informant," presents evidence that the new AQAP leader who will replace Wuhayshi, Qasim al-Raymi, was previously recruited by the intelligence agency of the US-backed Yemeni government, and subsequently maintained ties to the US-backed regime through the former dictator's cousin, Colonel Ammar Abdullah Saleh.

Such a move would merely build upon the broader strategy of training Islamist militants pursued by the US across the region with increasing aggressiveness since 2011. In its wars to overthrow the governments of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Washington has promoted and armed to the teeth extremist forces, producing civil wars that destroyed both countries as functioning societies.

Amid the gloating over Wuhayshi's corpse, US imperialism and its regional allies are preparing new machinations in Yemen along the lines of those that have already led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people in Libya and Syria.



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