

US Defense Department announces deployment of troops in Yemen

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The US military announced Friday that dozens American “advisers” have been deployed to Yemen over the past two weeks. They are working with Saudi and Arab coalition troops seeking to assert control over southern portions of the country, including the areas controlled by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

The deployment of US ground forces to Yemen comes amid a general escalation of US war-making in the region, including the dispatch of 450 US commandos, Apache helicopters and B-52 bombers, along with hundreds of additional US Marines for operations in Iraq and Syria, where US air forces have carried out more than 5,000 strikes since August 2014, as part of an air war that has expended more than \$7 billion in Pentagon “contingency funds.”

In what is now standard operating procedure, the escalation of US involvement in Yemen was initiated completely behind the backs of the American people. Military operations were well underway before they were quietly announced in the American media.

The US forces are reportedly partnering with troops deployed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), assisting with a range of military operations providing intelligence, planning and naval support, according to the US Defense Department.

Additionally, the Boxer, a US assault ship carrying additional hundreds of US troops, is now stationed off Yemen’s coast in the Gulf of Aden, together with an American “amphibious readiness group,” including two destroyers, the Gravelly and the Gonzalez, according to *US News and World Report*.

Washington has also deployed attack helicopters to a base in southwestern Yemen. US air forces began carrying out direct strikes inside Yemen last month, with US war planes launching at least four airstrikes since April 23.

Pentagon spokesman Captain Jeff Davis described the deployments as “short-term” and claimed that only a few dozen American soldiers are present.

According to Yemeni media reports, however, the US deployments included some 200 US Marines and 100 Army Rangers. According to Yemen’s Al-Masirah satellite television network an unknown number of the US forces were sent directly into the southeastern port city of Mukallah.

The latest deployment of US troops underscores the ultimate responsibility of US President Barack Obama and his top advisers for the humanitarian catastrophe currently gripping Yemen, widely considered by human rights groups as one of the worst in the world, next to that produced by the US war for regime change in Syria.

Obama, who came into office in 2008 with the full support of all the official “anti-war” organizations, has overseen a major escalation of the US drone war against Yemen, a campaign that has included the first officially acknowledged extra-judicial assassinations of US citizens, including Anwar al-Awlaki and his 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki.

With full approval from the White House, the US military has organized and carried out massive acts of military violence and war crimes against Yemen’s impoverished population. US forces have been closely involved in backing Saudi air and ground attacks that have led to the deaths of thousands of Yemeni civilians and the destruction of much of the country’s vital infrastructure. Nearly 3 million Yemeni civilians have been displaced since the launch of war last spring, and more than 6,000 civilians killed, according to UN figures.

Equipped with American military equipment and munitions, and advised by US officers, the Saudi-led coalition has carried out numerous documented war crimes, including multiple uses of illegal, American-made cluster bombs against villages in the north. According to

the Associated Press, pro-Saudi gunmen spent Sunday capturing and forcibly evicting some 2,000 residents from Aden, who they claimed were threats to “security.”

Officially, all American troops were withdrawn from the country last year amid the toppling of the US and Saudi backed government of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi by Houthi militias. With American Special Forces currently deployed, according to varying reports, in anywhere between 80 and 130 countries worldwide, it is unlikely that all US forces were actually withdrawn. Given the US support for the Saudi war, which has included planning, target selection, and sophisticated logistical aid, there is every reason to believe that at least a skeleton crew of US military and intelligence agents has remained behind throughout the past year.

The renewal of direct, officially acknowledged US air and ground operations is only the latest chapter in more than 15 years of US covert, drone and air war. Washington seized on the 9/11 attacks as a pretext to launch a low-intensity war in Yemen that has seen hundreds of US special forces and intelligence personnel develop joint operations with the Yemeni military over a decade and a half.

While the current redeployment of US troops is being justified under the banner of the war against Al Qaeda, the US-backed Saudi coalition has promoted the Islamist group as part of its war strategy to the point where AQAP was able to seize control of significant portions of the south, including the port city of Mukallah.

Yemeni and Emirati troops backed by the Saudi coalition reportedly retook Mukallah last month, under circumstances that remain murky. The city, which had been transformed over the past year into the main stronghold of AQAP and center of lucrative trading operations run by the group, was recaptured with virtually no fighting.

From all appearances, AQAP reached a settlement with the Saudi coalition, which has sought to utilize the Islamist group as a proxy army in the course of its war. AQAP withdrew visible presence prior to entry of the Saudi-backed units into the city, informing residents via Twitter that it “withdrew to prevent the enemy from moving the battle to your homes, markets, roads and mosques.”

AQAP has actively courted Saudi support by offering its services against the Houthi militants, in return for which the group was allowed to establish, as Reuters put it in a recent report, a “rich mini-state along the Arabian Sea coastline.”

Amid the chaos generated by the Saudi war, AQAP has been allowed to rampage throughout the eastern portion of the country, and last September, Islamist militants flooded into the southern capital of Aden after control of the city had been transferred to UAE forces fighting with the Saudi coalition.

Aside from the occupation of Aden by a few thousand coalition forces, there is nothing to indicate a serious military push against AQAP, the supposed rationale behind the new US intervention.

The latest round of ceasefire talks between the Gulf coalition and the Houthi insurgency broke down Sunday, amid reports that Saudi airstrikes in the north had killed at least seven of the movement’s members.

The Yemen war has intensified regional tensions between the Saudi-led alliance, centered around the Gulf Cooperation Council, and a range of Shia-affiliated forces centered around the Iranian government.

The US-backed Saudi bloc, and an Iranian counter-alliance aligned with Russia and with deepening ties to European ruling elites, are being drawn deeper into a regional proxy war against one another for control over Syria and Iraq. Numerous reports in US media have alleged ties between the Houthi insurgency and Iran as a justification for the current Saudi-led onslaught, but little hard evidence has been produced.

The sharpening of geopolitical tensions globally takes on concentrated expression in the Middle East, which includes immensely strategic resources and commercial routes, including the Bab al Mandeb Strait, a strategic oil shipping sea lane which passes between Yemen and Djibouti in east Africa, connecting the Red Sea to the Sea of Aden.

The pressure of these tensions on the fragmented regional state system is driving a confrontation between Riyadh and Tehran with the potential to serve as the trigger for a third world war.

Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal highlighted as much in comments last week, when he threatened that the Saudi regime is prepared to move forward with plans to develop a nuclear weapons arsenal, if it believes it is necessary to counter Iran.



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