

Dozens killed in Yemen in first US special forces raid under Trump

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US Special Forces carried out a raid on a number of homes in Yemen's central Al Baydah Province on Sunday, killing as many as 57 people, including 16 civilians. One American soldier was reported killed.

The raid marks President Donald Trump's first authorized military operation and first military fatality. The last US Special Forces raid in Yemen was in 2014, when a botched hostage rescue attempt resulted in the deaths of American journalist Luke Somers and South African teacher Pierre Korkie.

A US Central Command spokesman claimed on Sunday that 14 militants were killed in the raid but did not report any civilian casualties. According to the Pentagon, one US soldier was killed and at least three others injured in combat.

Two additional US soldiers were injured when the helicopter they were riding in was forced to make a hard landing as they sought to evacuate the American casualties. The helicopter was so damaged in the course of the raid that it had to be abandoned and was "intentionally destroyed in place."

The attack targeted the home of tribal leader and reputed member of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) Abdulrauf al Dhahab. In addition to the destruction of a number of homes, a school, a mosque and a medical facility were all damaged in the assault.

"The operation began at dawn when a drone bombed the home of Abdulrauf al-Dhahab and then helicopters flew up and unloaded paratroopers at his house and killed everyone inside," a resident told Reuters and the Associated Press.

"Next, the gunmen opened fire at the US soldiers who left the area, and the helicopters bombed the gunmen and a number of homes and led to a large number of casualties."

Among those killed in Sunday's attack was the eight-

year-old daughter of Anwar al-Awlaki, the American citizen and Muslim cleric who was assassinated by Obama with a drone missile strike in Yemen in 2011. Awlaki was related to Dhahab by marriage. Nasser al-Awlaki, the child's grandfather, told Reuters that the young girl "was hit with a bullet in her neck and suffered for two hours. Why kill children? This is the new administration—it's very sad, a big crime."

This is the second of Anwar al-Awlaki's children to be killed by the US government. His 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman, was killed in a drone strike in Yemen in 2011, a few weeks after his father.

Two other local tribal leaders, Abdulrauf's brother Sultan and Saif Alawai al-Jawfi, were also killed in the attack. The Dhahab brothers were allegedly motivated to join AQAP in early 2012 after a third brother, Sheikh Tariq al Dhahab, was killed by the Yemeni intelligence service.

Abdulrauf had previously been targeted for death by the Obama administration in September 2012 when a drone missile was fired at his car. He survived that attack when the missile, instead of hitting his vehicle, hit a minibus, killing 12 civilians, including a 10-year-old girl and her mother.

The US has waged a covert war in Yemen since 2002 when President George W. Bush ordered the first drone missile strike on suspected Al Qaeda members. The use of drone assassinations was dramatically expanded by Obama, who also claimed the right to use drone strikes to kill American citizens without due process anywhere in the world.

According to a tally by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, US drone strikes and other covert military operations over the last 15 years in Yemen have killed as many as 1,461 people.

The Pentagon carried out the first drone strikes under

the Trump administration in Yemen on January 20, 21 and 22, killing five alleged AQAP members in Baydah province.

In addition to the ongoing drone war, the US has been facilitating a devastating aerial onslaught in Yemen by Saudi Arabia and its allies against Houthi militants since March 2015. At least 7,469 Yemenis have been killed in the Saudi-led war and some 40,438 have been injured.

The Saudi coalition has deliberately bombed food markets, schools, hospitals, factories and residential neighborhoods in its efforts to break the Houthi insurgency and reinstate the government of President Adbrabbuh Mansur Hadi.

Supported by US intelligence, bombs, fighter jets and refueling flights, the Saudi-led coalition has pushed the poorest country in the Middle East to the brink of famine. A no-fly zone and naval blockade imposed by the Saudi coalition with the support of the US have blocked the delivery of desperately needed food and medicine. Prior to the war the country relied on imports for 90 percent of its food supply.

According to the latest figures published by the UN, some 14 million Yemenis, more than half of the country's population, are suffering from food insecurity, including 2.2 million acutely malnourished children and 500,000 children who are suffering from severe acute malnourishment. Approximately 19.4 million Yemenis currently lack access to clean drinking water or proper sanitation. The UN estimates that a child dies every 10 minutes in Yemen from preventable causes.

"Everywhere you go, you see people begging in the streets in bigger numbers, you see people rummaging through rubbish to survive," the UN humanitarian coordinator in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, told the BBC.

"You hear catastrophic stories of children dying because they can't get to health centers. People dying of malnutrition, people dying of preventable diseases. It will get worse because the problem is that the economy is in really bad shape and banking sector doesn't function."

Indicating the ferocity of the conflict, more than 100 fighters were killed over the weekend in clashes between troops loyal to Hadi and Houthi rebel fighters in the western city of Mokha, a major port which

overlooks the Bab al Mandeb Strait, a strategic oil shipping lane. Approximately 370 fighters have been killed on both sides in the offensive which was launched by the Saudi-backed forces on January 7 with the aim of retaking the Houthi-controlled port.



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