

# US drone strike kills two children in Yemen

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Two Yemeni boys, aged 10 and 12, were killed Monday in a US drone strike in south-central al-Bayda province.

Residents identified the young victims as brothers, Ahmed and Mohammed al-Khobze. They were reported to have been tending a herd of goats when, without warning, they were blown to bits by a Hellfire missile.

The Pentagon, which routinely denies or ignores US military actions resulting in civilian casualties, has yet to comment on the killings.

The killing of these two children is part of a growing list of war crimes perpetrated by the Pentagon as Washington escalates its military intervention in war-torn Yemen, the most impoverished country in the Middle East.

The Pentagon has acknowledged carrying out more than 40 drone strikes since launching a new bombing campaign against Yemen last week. It is not clear how many civilians have been killed, as the US military counts any adult male as a suspected member of Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). A number of civilians have been reported wounded in the attacks.

A Pentagon spokesman claimed that a former Guantanamo detainee, Yasir al-Silmi, was killed in a missile strike on March 2. Silmi had been held without charges at the US detention center in Cuba from 2002 to 2009.

The road on which the two young Yemeni boys were killed in Tuesday's drone strike was just outside the village of Yakla, the scene of a botched but brutal US Special Forces commando raid on January 29.

Ostensibly launched with the aim of capturing an AQAP leader, who was not found at the scene, the raid was described by local residents as a massacre, with US soldiers going house to house and slaughtering everyone inside, men, women and children alike. In all, as many as 30 were killed, including a three-month-old

baby and several other children. One of them was eight-year-old Nawar al-Awlaki, the daughter of Anwar al-Awlaki, the Islamist cleric and American citizen who was assassinated in Yemen by a drone strike ordered by Barack Obama in September 2011.

Also killed in the raid was US Navy Seal William (Ryan) Owens, whose father subsequently refused to meet with President Donald Trump. He has demanded an investigation into what he called a "stupid mission" designed as a "grand display" for the new administration. Two other US troops were wounded in the raid, which also saw the loss of a \$75 million helicopter.

Even as the US steps up its drone war in Yemen, Saudi Arabia is escalating its own military intervention, which has already claimed 12,000 Yemeni lives. The Saudi monarchy is attempting to reinstall the US-Saudi puppet government of President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi and crush Houthi rebels who won control of much of the country in 2015.

Riyadh is able to wage its war, which has driven millions of Yemenis to the brink of starvation and left the country with one of the highest child malnutrition rates in the world, only thanks to US-supplied arms and the Pentagon's logistical support. This has included the establishment of a joint US-Saudi operations headquarters and the US aerial refueling of Saudi warplanes.

The *Washington Post* reported Wednesday that the Trump administration is lifting a partial suspension imposed by the Obama administration on the provision of precision-guided weapons to the Saudi regime. The suspension was put into effect in the wake of a Saudi air strike last October on a Yemeni funeral hall that killed over 100 people and amid overwhelming evidence that the Saudi bombing campaign deliberately targets civilians, striking schools, hospitals, farms, homes and even livestock.

Prior to the suspension of the sale of the precision munitions guidance systems to Riyadh, the Obama administration had negotiated \$115 billion worth of arms sales to the Saudi monarchy.

A senior US official who spoke to the *Post* tied the opening up of the arms spigot to Saudi Arabia to the Trump administration's increasingly provocative military buildup against Iran, which has shown sympathy but little in the way of material support for the Houthis. "We'll be looking for ways to blunt Iranian malign influence in the region. And we'll be looking for all the tools that the U.S. government has," the official said. "In that context, I think you have to look at Yemen."

The buildup to war against Iran is the only coherent element of US policy in Yemen. On the one hand, it is carrying out drone strikes and commando raids against AQAP, while on the other, arming the Saudis to the teeth to suppress the Houthi rebels. AQAP, a Sunni Islamist faction that is among the most virulent enemies of the Houthis, has been vastly strengthened by the Saudi war.

In the final analysis, the US intervention serves only to escalate the killing, while fueling hatred of US imperialism among all layers of the population and creating the conditions for a wider regional war.



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