

US launches raid in Yemen as Trump concludes Middle East trip

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24 May 2017

On Tuesday, as President Donald Trump was wrapping up his three-day trip to the Middle East, US Special Operations troops carried out a raid deep into Yemen, with the US Central Command claiming that they killed seven members of Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Both Centcom and local Yemenis reported that the raid conducted in Yemen's central Ma'arib province was accompanied by intense air strikes by US planes, drones and helicopters.

A Centcom spokesman claimed that the raid was not aimed at killing or capturing any individual, but rather at capturing computers, hard drives and cellphones that could yield information on the AQAP's plans.

This was also purportedly the purpose of a similar raid conducted on January 29 some 30 miles south of Tuesday's target in which dozens of civilians were massacred, a Navy Seal was killed and the Pentagon lost a \$75 million aircraft. While the Pentagon claimed that the action produced valuable information, US military sources admitted that no actionable intelligence had been uncovered.

Citing local sources, Yemen's Khabar news website reported that the gun battle involved local tribesmen and some 30 troops, most of them American but including some from the Saudi-led force that is attacking the country. It claimed that several of the US raiders were wounded in the attack, and that no AQAP fighters were in the area at the time of the raid.

Later on Tuesday, CBS news quoted Pentagon officials acknowledging that at least two US troops, members of Navy SEAL Team Six, were wounded. The officials also admitted that they are "still assessing" who they killed in the raid. Earlier they acknowledged that no "high value targets," meaning known AQAP commanders or operatives, were among the dead.

A US military official told CBS, "there will be more of these," signaling an intensification of US involvement in the war in Yemen. Since Trump took office in January, US warplanes have carried out at least 81 airstrikes against Yemeni targets, with the majority of victims civilians.

Pentagon officials indicated that Trump did not directly authorize the latest raid, as the White House has given Pentagon commanders, including the chief of Centcom, Gen. Joseph Votel, free rein in terms of escalating the multiple interventions being waged by the US in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Somalia.

The raid follows Trump's trip to Saudi Arabia over the weekend in which he concluded arms deals with the ruling monarchy that could total as much as \$350 billion over the next decade. Both in his speech to the collection of Sunni monarchs and despots assembled in Riyadh for his visit and in his subsequent trip to Israel, Trump made it clear that the main aim of his administration is to forge a regional alliance against Iran, based on a deliberate stoking of tensions between Sunnis and Shiites in the Middle East.

In particular, Trump praised Saudi Arabia and its allies for having "taken strong action against Houthi militants in Yemen." The near-genocidal Saudi war has killed some 12,000 Yemenis, while laying waste to basic infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, factories and water and sanitation facilities in the Arab world's poorest country, leaving over 17 million people, fully 60 percent of the population, on the brink of starvation according to UN estimates.

The International Committee of the Red Cross on Saturday described the country as "the world's single largest humanitarian crisis," pointing as well to the outbreak of a cholera epidemic with over 25,000 cases reported and hundreds dying.

The arms deals concluded by Washington and the Saudi regime include US tanks, warplanes, Blackhawk helicopters, ships, precision-guided bombs and other ammunition and weapons that will be used directly to slaughter more Yemeni civilians.

Under the Obama administration, the US began providing logistical and intelligence support for the brutal Saudi-led war, including the aerial refueling of Saudi warplanes to allow for continuous bombing of the impoverished country. Limited restrictions on arms shipments imposed as a “human rights” gesture have now been lifted by the Trump administration, and Pentagon chief James “Mad Dog” Mattis has called for stepped up US support for the war.

Both Saudi Arabia and Washington have attempted to portray the Houthi rebels as a proxy force for Iran, though there is no evidence to support this charge. The real issue is that they see any weakening of Saudi Arabia’s domination of its southern neighbor as potentially strengthening the influence of Iran, which is viewed by Washington as a principal obstacle to its drive to assert hegemony over the oil-rich region. To that end, it is now prepared to fuel a war that threatens to kill millions through starvation.

Another evident byproduct of Trump’s Middle East tour came Tuesday in Bahrain, where the ruling Sunni monarchy launched a brutal crackdown against protesters supporting Sheikh Isa Qassim, the spiritual leader of the country’s Shia majority, who has been stripped of his Bahraini citizenship and prosecuted on various trumped-up charges. The ruling monarchical regime has carried out systematic repression against the population since it crushed, with the aid of Saudi tanks, a mass movement for democratic rights in 2011.

During a photo session in Riyadh on Sunday with Bahrain’s king, Sheikh Hamad bin Issa al-Khalifa, Trump declared, “Our countries have a wonderful relationship together, but there has been a little strain, but there won’t be strain with this administration.” The message was clear: carry out whatever repression you like, there will be no more hypocritical noises about human rights from Washington. The US administration is also pursuing some \$5 billion in arms deals with the Bahraini regime.

In Tuesday’s crackdown, security forces laid siege to the northwestern village of Diraz, attacking a sit-in protest with tear gas, birdshot and live ammunition. At

least two protesters were killed and several others were reported in critical condition. They stormed the house of Sheikh Isa Qassim, whose fate was not immediately known. The Bahraini Interior Ministry announced that at least 50 demonstrators were arrested in the village.



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