

“Al Qaeda in Yemen”: U.S. military involvement may worsen situation in Yemen

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SANAA: The U.S. military's high-profile involvement in Sanaa's operations against al-Qaida in Yemen may further fuel anti-U.S. sentiment among local population and make things worse for the Yemeni authorities, analysts say.

The U.S.'s open involvement is also causing embarrassment for Yemeni authorities, who have insisted Yemeni military forces alone are responsible for anti-terror operations in the country and that the U.S. military's job is limited to intelligence and training.

U.S. officials have recently admitted that the U.S. has mounted raids on al-Qaida's affiliates in Yemen and they have also indicated that the U.S. anti-terror focus is shifting to Yemen.

According to a New York Times report on Aug. 14, the U.S. launched an air raid on al-Qaida's branch in the northeastern province of Marib in May, in its fourth onslaught on al-Qaida bases in the country since last December.

Washington had been tight-lipped about its "secret bombing raids" against al-Qaida's affiliates.

And according to a Washington Post article on Aug. 25, for the first time since Sep. 11, 2001, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) called al-Qaida in Yemen the top terror threat to U.S. security, as al-Qaida has been decimated by predator strikes in Pakistan.

The Obama administration officials have called for an escalation of U.S. operations, worried that Yemen may become the next training center for al-Qaida. Drone strikes were suggested.

Asked to comment on these reports, a Yemeni Foreign Ministry spokesman told Xinhua by telephone that the reports about the U.S. military's involvement in anti-terror operations in Yemen have left the Yemeni government in an awkward dilemma, and the United States should be responsible for these reports.

During a visit to Sanaa earlier this year, Senator Joseph Lieberman, chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, said: "Iraq was yesterday's war. Afghanistan is today's war. If we don't act preemptively, Yemen will be tomorrow's war."

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Ayman al-Zawahiri, deputy operations chief of al-Qaida, said last month the U.S. military forces had already been involved in operations in Yemen and he urged religious leaders to mount a jihad, or holy war against the U.S.

He mentioned U.S. missile attacks in southern Yemen in the Gulf of Aden last December, in which 43 al-Qaida members and 42 civilians were killed.

In January, over 100 religious leaders gathered in Sanaa, declaring that they would start a jihad if there was a foreign military invasion.

On May 24, Yemeni tribes condemned the U.S. for its air raid on Marib, as well as bombings of oil pipelines between May 25 and June 12.

A former bodyguard of Osama bin Laden predicted on Friday that a war between the Yemeni government and al-Qaida troops may break out and the U.S. would intervene militarily when it is deemed necessary.

Al-Qaida's rise in the south of Yemen has aroused deep concerns in the U.S. However, Washington's high-profile military involvement would only backfire, as it is likely to have a negative impact on the political situation in the country and further stoke up anti-U.S. sentiment, with more extremists swarming to Yemen to join a jihad against the U.S., analysts say.

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