

Obama to Escalate Slaughter in Yemen

By [Bill Van Auken](#)

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With the opening of a new front in Yemen for the CIA's drone "targeted killing" program, the Obama administration is steadily escalating the role played by both the covert agency and secretive US military Special Operations forces as a global Murder Incorporated.

"The White House, in an effort to turn up the heat against Al Qaida's branch in Yemen, is considering adding the CIA's armed Predator drones to the fight," reported the Associated Press on Thursday, citing senior Washington officials.

"The US military's Special Operation Forces and the CIA have been positioning surveillance equipment, drones and personnel in Yemen, Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia" in preparation for the stepped-up killing spree, the *Wall Street Journal* reported Wednesday.

The *Washington Post* quoted intelligence officials as saying that the CIA now views Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula as a "more urgent" threat than the Qaeda organization in Pakistan.

Yemen, like Afghanistan and Iraq before it, is being targeted not to eradicate terrorism—the killing of civilians with cruise missiles and drone attacks will only produce more recruits for terrorist attacks—but because of its strategic location, bordering Saudi Arabia, the number-one oil exporter, and the vital Bab al-Mandab strait, through which three million barrels of oil pass daily.

"They're not feeling the same kind of heat—not yet, anyway—as their friends in the tribal areas of Pakistan," one official told Reuters Wednesday. "Everyone involved on our side understands that has to change."

The "kind of heat" inflicted upon the population of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas is well known. According to Pakistani officials quoted in the country's media, at least 700 civilians were killed by drone attacks in 2009. According to an estimate by a Washington think tank sympathetic to the Obama administration, at least a third of those killed in drone attacks in Pakistan are civilians. This year, drone flights have increased tenfold, with missile strikes increasing from one a week to at least one a day.

Even Pakistan's devastating floods have not brought an end to these robotic assassinations. The latest reported attack came Monday in North Waziristan, leaving 20 dead, including four women and three children.

Now, in the name of combating terrorism, Washington is proposing to inflict this same kind of state terror on a desperately poor country that is already torn by regional, religious, ethnic and tribal conflicts. A secessionist movement in the south of Yemen, which had been a separate country until uniting with the north in 1990, has simmered for the last 16 years.

Supporters of the assassinated dissident Shi'a cleric Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi have battled the predominantly Sunni government for the past six years in the northern Sa'ada and Amran provinces.

And the entire population is mired in extreme poverty and deprivation, with fully one quarter of the 24 million Yemenis suffering chronic hunger and nearly half living on less than \$2 a day. According to a 2008 World Bank report, fully 43 percent of children under five are malnourished.

To this already desperate situation, the Obama administration is proposing to contribute slaughter from the air by Hellfire missiles and assassination on the ground by special operations death squads.

The regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, having aligned itself with Washington, has utilized the US "global war on terror" as a justification for a brutal crackdown on all of its opponents.

"An extremely worrying trend has developed where the Yemeni authorities, under pressure from the USA and others to fight al-Qa'ida, and Saudi Arabia to deal with the Huthis, have been citing national security as a pretext to deal with opposition and stifle all criticism," Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa program, said this week in releasing a new report from the human rights group documenting abuses in Yemen.

The Amnesty report provides harrowing details concerning the saturation bombing of residential areas, the gunning down of peaceful demonstrators, and the imprisonment, torture and disappearance of the government's political opponents, including lawyers, journalists and human rights advocates.

The government of Yemen publicly rejected this week's assessment from Washington, charging that it and the Western media "exaggerate the size of al-Qaeda and the danger that it poses to Yemen's stability and security," and insisting that "fighting terrorism in Yemen remains the responsibility of Yemeni security authorities."

In reality, however, hundreds of US military and intelligence operatives are already deployed in Yemen, and the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh has repeatedly given a green light for US attacks on Yemeni soil. The statement repudiating any US escalation was no doubt issued for domestic consumption. The American military attacks have provoked widespread outrage, while intensifying opposition to the Yemeni government.

A CIA drone war will add to the war crimes already committed by the US military in Yemen on Obama's command. In the worst of these, at least 41 people, 21 of them children and 14 of them women, were slaughtered last December 17 when their homes in the southern district of Abyan were struck by US cruise missiles carrying cluster bombs—a weapon banned by international treaties.

Last June, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, Philip Alston, charged the US government with arrogating to itself "an ever-expanding entitlement for itself to target individuals across the globe" and a "strongly asserted but ill-defined license to kill without accountability."

This "license to kill" has also been claimed in relation to US citizens. Among those targeted

in Yemen is the American Islamic cleric Anwar al Awlaki. Last April, US officials revealed that the Obama administration had authorized the “targeted killing” of al-Awlaki, whose family is Yemeni. This marks the first time that a US government has admitted seeking the assassination of one of its own citizens.

Al-Awlaki’s family and civil liberties lawyers have attempted to secure a restraining order against this extra-judicial execution and gross abuse of power, insisting that if the New Mexico-born man is guilty of any crime, he should be charged and tried in a US court.

The Obama administration sought to stifle any lawsuit, however, claiming that because the government has deemed al-Awlaki a terrorist, it would be a criminal offense to seek a court order barring his assassination by the CIA or the US military. Earlier this month, the American Civil Liberties Union and the Center for Constitutional Rights were finally allowed to proceed with the action only after obtaining a special license from the US Treasury Department.

The Obama administration is escalating and spreading criminal wars abroad while continuing where Bush left off in erecting the scaffolding for a police state dictatorship at home. No section of the political establishment or the corporate media seriously opposes these measures, because they are driven by the interests of the financial aristocracy that both major parties and the government represent.

The preparations for a new war in Yemen must be taken as a serious warning to working people in the US. The unchecked growth of American militarism, coupled with the shredding of basic democratic rights and mounting attacks on jobs, wages and social conditions, threatens to unleash a catastrophe. No answer can be found within the present capitalist setup. Only the development of an independent and politically conscious movement of the working class fighting for socialism can provide an alternative.

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Articles by: [Bill Van Auken](#)

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