

US Resumes Drone Strikes in Yemen

Twelve-year-old boy among three people killed

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Just days after Houthi rebels in Yemen's capital of Sanaa toppled the US-backed government of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Washington has resumed its drone war against the impoverished country, killing a 12-year-old boy and two alleged Al Qaeda militants in a missile strike against a car traveling in the eastern Marib province.

The strike was carried out by the Central Intelligence Agency, US officials told the *Wall Street Journal*. The CIA administers one of two US targeted killing programs directed against Yemen, with the other managed by the Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).

New waves of drone strikes against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) are currently in preparation, President Barack Obama and US military officials said Sunday. The US has launched hundreds of drone strikes against alleged terrorist targets in Yemen in recent years.

Monday's strike comes amid indications of preparations for expanded US and NATO military action in Yemen and a growing list of other countries. US Secretary of State John Kerry pointed to Nigeria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and the Central African Republic as candidates for new US military operations in remarks at the World Economic Forum in Davos last week.

President Obama announced Monday that he would cut short his visit with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to travel to Riyadh for discussions with Saudi leaders focused on the situation in Yemen and the US-led war in Iraq and Syria.

Obama administration national security official Ben Rhodes told Reuters that the meetings would focus on "the leading issues where we cooperate very closely with Saudi Arabia," so as to insure "good alignment" with regard to US-Saudi "overlapping interests."

US efforts to train Syrian opposition fighters are being closely coordinated with the Saudi monarchy, Rhodes said.

In statements on CBS News's "Face the Nation" program last Sunday, Senators John McCain, a Republican, and Dianne Feinstein, a Democrat, highlighted the bipartisan support enjoyed by the Obama administration as it plans to unleash yet another surge of military violence across broad areas of the Middle East and Africa.

Warning that Iran is "on the move in Bahrain" and is "winning," McCain called for new

training missions, Special Forces deployments, and air and drone campaigns against Iran's regional allies, including the Syrian government and Yemen-based Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). He also urged an escalation of the war against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

"Iran is on the march throughout the region," McCain said, adding, "The Iranians are now either dominant or extremely influential in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen. AQAP and the ISIS in both Iraq and Syria are doing quite well. There is no strategy to defeat them."

"We need more boots on the ground," McCain said. "Thousands of young people all over the world" are flocking to the banners of ISIS and similar groups, he warned.

Acknowledging that this was "a tough thing for Americans to swallow," McCain called for deployment of "Special Forces" and "air controllers," as well as "intelligence" and "other capabilities" to Yemen and areas along the Syrian and Iraqi borders.

"We can't train young people in Syria and send them back into Syria to be barrel-bombed by Bashar Assad," McCain said, making the case for a campaign to "neutralize" Assad's air forces with the imposition of a "no-fly zone."

Feinstein repeatedly noted her agreement with McCain during the talk show, warning of the threat posed by growing Iranian power and saying it was necessary to take "a good look at our policy with respect to Yemen."

She said, "My concern is, where is Iran going? Is Iran trying to begin the development of an Iranian crescent?"

Feinstein claimed Monday that AQAP had already attempted to smuggle four bombs—specially designed to evade metal detectors—into the US mainland. She called for new deployments of Special Forces units to "take out" the group's leadership and demanded further military aid to US-allied governments in Israel, Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Asked whether she favored new ground troop deployments, Feinstein avoided a direct answer while clearly implying her support. The US must "relook" at its policy in relation to Syria, she said, expressing agreement with McCain that the US must not "tolerate Assad."

Speaking on behalf of the Obama administration, White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough told "Face the Nation" that the Obama administration is preparing to expand military operations aimed at "destroying... manifestations of Al Qaeda" in South Asia, East Africa and North Africa.

McDonough said that the White House has sought to negotiate a "political agreement" with the Houthi militants who have taken control of the Yemeni capital that would allow the US military and CIA to "keep on the offensive against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula."

The US embassy in Yemen is being closed to the public and is suspending all consular services for an indefinite period of time, US officials announced Monday. The US embassy is closing because it is now surrounded by "chaos," an anonymous State Department official told Reuters. The US already carried out a partial evacuation of embassy staff last week.

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