

Obama ordered US air strikes on Yemen

By Barry Grey
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US President Barack Obama personally issued the order for US air strikes in Yemen last Thursday which killed scores of civilians, including women and children.

US warplanes used cruise missiles against alleged Al Qaeda camps in the Abyan village of al Maajala, some 480 kilometers southeast of the capital Sana'a, and in the Arhab district, 60 kilometers to the northeast of Sana'a. The US strikes were apparently coordinated with the US-backed dictatorship of Yemen President Ali Abdallah Saleh, whose military forces attacked the bombed towns as well as a third village, resulting in the deaths of some 120 people, according to Yemen opposition spokesmen.

Local officials and witnesses in the area of Mahsad, the site of the heaviest US bombardment, put the number of those killed at more than 60 and said the dead were mostly civilians. They denied that the target was an al Qaeda stronghold.

Brian Ross, an investigative reporter for ABC News, first reported Friday night on the "ABC World News" program that US warplanes had been involved in the attacks. He said, "White House officials tell ABC News the orders for the US military to attack the suspected Al Qaeda sites in Yemen on Thursday came directly from the Oval Office."

He continued: "The US military used cruise missiles in the attacks on two separate locations in Yemen. Pictures broadcast tonight on *al-Jazeera* showed dozens of bodies covered by sheets. Officials said some 35 suspected Al Qaeda figures had been killed. Opposition groups said dozens of civilians were also killed."

ABC News cited White House officials as telling reporters that Obama contacted Yemen President Saleh after the blitz to "congratulate" him on the attacks.

US officials refused to comment Friday on the ABC News report, but they did not deny it. "We are not going to get into any details at this point," one official said. He added that Yemen and the US "cooperate closely on counterterrorism."

Bryan Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman, told the *New York Times*, which reported Saturday on the US role in the attacks, "Yemen should be congratulated for actions against Al Qaeda."

Thousands of Yemenis took to the streets in southern Yemen Saturday to denounce the barbaric military operations. According to local sources, some 3,000 people in Dhal'e province and hundreds in Lahj and Abyan provinces marched in the protest, shouting anti-government slogans and demanding an investigation into the attacks.

The Joint Meeting Parties, an opposition coalition of six parties, condemned the targeting of civilians at a rally of 10,000 people in Taiz province, 260 kilometers south of Sana'a. A leading member of the coalition described the attacks as a "heinous crime."

The Southern Movement, which seeks secession from the north, said the raids were an attack on the people of the south, not Al Qaeda. "This is genocide," said Abbass al Asal, a leading politician in the Southern Movement. He said an air and ground attack in Abyan had killed 64 civilians, including 23 children and 17 women.

According to an Associated Press report on Saturday, residents of Abyan said there was no Al Qaeda training camp in the area and that the heavy assault had destroyed homes—a collection of mud brick houses, huts and tents—in the rural tribal area. A resident of the area, Ali Mohammed Mansour, said he helped bury the dead. He dismissed claims that the site was a training camp, pointing out that the community was only 100 meters from a major highway and two kilometers from an army base.

Mansour said that one of those killed, Mohammed Saleh al-Kazemi, a Saudi who had come to Yemen after fighting in Afghanistan and had been imprisoned for two years before being released in 2005, had lived in the village with his family since his release and was not in hiding.

Thursday's attacks were part of a growing US military escalation in Yemen, which is being coordinated with the US-allied regime of President Saleh and the Saudi monarchy, which, in turn, is backed by Egypt. Until Thursday, large-scale US military violence was concentrated in the north of Yemen and directed against an insurgency by fighters from the Houthi tribe, which practices a brand of Shiite Islam distinct from that of Iran.

Last week, Houthi fighters claimed that US fighter jets had launched 28 attacks on the northwestern province of Sa'ada,

which is near the border with Saudi Arabia. Since August, when President Saleh announced the launching of “Operation Scorched Earth” to wipe out Houthi resistance, Saudi troops and planes have been attacking border regions in Yemen to the south of Saudi Arabia. Saleh, Riyadh and Cairo claim that the Houthis are being backed and supplied by Iran, which denies the charges.

The Obama administration conflates the various oppositional movements in Yemen with Al Qaeda, despite the fact that Al Qaeda is a Sunni movement and is deeply hostile to Shiites, such as the Houthis. The British *Daily Telegraph* reported December 13, citing unnamed American officials, that the US had sent Special Forces troops to Yemen to train the country’s army. The newspaper quoted a US military official as saying, “Yemen is becoming a reserve base for Al Qaeda’s activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan.”

This is a clear signal that Washington is extending the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan to Yemen.

Saudi fighter jets are reportedly using phosphorus bombs against Houthi fighters. On December 13, Houthi sources said that Saudi forces had launched a major cross-border strike, leaving at least 70 civilians dead and more than 100 others injured in the northern district of Razeh.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have issued warnings on the dire conditions of hundreds of thousands of Yemenis who have been displaced by the combined government and Saudi assault on the north. UNHCR estimates that up to 175,000 people have been forced to leave their homes in Sa’ada and take refuge in overcrowded camps that have insufficient food and water. Children have died as a result of the conditions in the camps.

The US air strikes in Yemen last Thursday came on the same day that Washington carried out a massive drone attack in Pakistan’s North Waziristan province that pummeled a village, killing at least 17 people.

These developments, coinciding with the arrival of the first of the 30,000 additional troops Obama has dispatched to Afghanistan, demonstrate that the Obama administration is carrying out a policy of military aggression and colonial conquest surpassing even that of the Bush administration. They provide an indication of expanding death and destruction that were only hinted at in Obama’s December 1 speech at West Point, in which he announced his escalation of the war in Afghanistan, and suggested more directly in his December 10 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech.

In his West Point speech, Obama declared, “The struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly,” adding that it “extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan.” He went on to speak of “disorderly regions and

diffuse enemies” and mentioned by name Somalia and Yemen.

His Nobel speech was a bellicose brief for imperialist war and neo-colonialism. Obama touted the virtues of pre-emptive war and singled out a series of potential targets of US military aggression, including Iran, Sudan, Congo, Zimbabwe and Myanmar.

As with US imperialism’s interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the escalating US aggression in Yemen has nothing to do with defeating Al Qaeda or protecting the American people from terrorism. It is motivated by the drive of the American ruling elite to establish hegemony in the oil-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia and gain US control over strategically critical pipeline and maritime routes.

Yemen occupies a crucial geographical position, which made it a battleground between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. As the Associated Press noted in a report on last Thursday’s air strikes, “Yemen is located on a strategic maritime crossroad at the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, the access point to the Suez Canal—and across the Gulf is Somalia, an even more tumultuous nation...”

The US has already carried out military strikes on Somalia and used Ethiopia to conduct a proxy war and occupation of the country.

In its drive to establish American military and political control over Yemen, the US is inflaming tensions throughout the region—particularly between Saudi Arabia and Egypt on one side, and Iran on the other.

The US military intervention around the Gulf of Aden, both covert and overt, must be taken as a warning of the catastrophic implications, both for the targeted populations and for the American people, of US imperialism’s global designs. It is up to the American and international working class to put a stop to Washington’s neo-colonial strategy.

This requires a direct struggle against the Obama administration. Little more than a year after his election as the candidate of “change” and “hope,” Obama stands exposed as a war criminal and instrument of Wall Street and the US military-intelligence apparatus. To fight militarism, the working class must build an independent socialist movement in opposition to Obama, the Democratic Party and the two-party system, and capitalism, which is the source of oppression and war.

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