



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on May 21, 2013

Obama Orders Drone Strikes, Killing of 6 “Suspected Militants” in Yemen

Just days before President Obama is scheduled to make a major policy speech announcing his legal justification for his use of drones as a means of summary execution, the U.S. has ramped up the remote control war in the Yemeni theater.

In a pre-dawn strike Friday night, May 17, drones piloted by U.S. officials (military or CIA) launched several missiles at a truck traveling on a road north of Ja’ar in the Abyan province of Yemen. [At least four and as many as seven people were killed with many others wounded.](#)



An AFP story reports that “the truck was carrying grenades and explosive belts” and that all the ordnance was destroyed by the missiles.

The AFP and other major media accounts of the story also reported that all those killed in the attack were “suspected militants” associated with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the local branch of the global terrorist network.

For President Obama and those pulling the triggers on the joysticks guiding the missiles toward their human targets, “suspected militants” are officially defined as “all military-age males in a strike zone.”

For those of us concerned with the Constitution, due process, and the rule of law, however, “suspected militant” is just a euphemism for a person not charged with any crime, not afforded even the most perfunctory due process protections, but executed by presidential decree anyway. In this way, we are no better than those we kill in the name of safety.

Last Friday’s attack was the first in Yemen in nearly a month, but it wasn’t the last.

On Monday — just four days after the previous strike — the Obama administration [ordered an attack on a motorcycle](#) as it drove away from a farm in the central Yemeni province of Baydah.

Striking a very familiar (and convenient) tone, the [Long War Journal reported](#) that “Two members of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula were killed in the airstrike. The Yemeni military identified the fighters as Abd Rabbo Mokbal Mohammed Jarallah al Zouba and Abbad Mossad Abbad Khobzi.”

[Long War Journal](#) also recounts the purported growth of the group in the area:

Since losing control of large areas of Abyan and Shabwa, AQAP has spread out into the provinces of Aden, Al Baydah, Al Jawf, Damar, Hadramout, Hodeida, Ibb, Marib, Saada, and Sana’a. Of the 29 drones strikes recorded by The Long War Journal over the past 11 months, 25 have taken place in the provinces of Aden, Al Baydah, Al Jawf, Damar, Hadramout, Hodeida, Ibb, Marib, Saada, and Sana’a.

AQAP has increased its presence in Baydah province over the past several years, and the US has



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pursued the terror group with drone strikes. On May 28, 2012, [the US targeted Kaid al Dhahab](#), AQAP's emir in the province, and his brother Nabil, who is also a senior leader in the terror group, in a strike in the town of Rada'a.

Although it is the official policy of the United States to refuse to confirm drone strikes or associated casualties, reports from Yemen indicate that the United States has launched nine drone strikes in the country in 2013.

In 2012, 42 drone strikes were ordered in Yemen by the U.S. government. In 2011, there were 10 such strikes, all of which were prosecuted under the pretext of targeting the leadership of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

This expansion of the Yemeni area of operation of the deadly drone war is likely to continue on its record-setting pace. In fact, U.S. "successes" in the region are being used as a blueprint for the execution of the tactic in other areas, particularly in North Africa.

With that in mind, Americans can expect the growth of anti-American sentiment to increase proportionally to the number of missiles fired from the powerful Predator and Reaper drones used to carry out the culling of the president's kill list.

That sentiment is already being channeled by al-Qaeda leadership as its primary recruitment message.

Testimony from victims and eyewitnesses of the drone-delivered devastation in Yemen reveals that the attacks are [serving better to recruit al-Qaeda than defeat them](#).

Since the inauguration of Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, the number of sorties sent to Yemen has spiked.

Although U.S. officials typically do not comment on this or any other drone strike in Yemen or elsewhere, Hadi isn't quite so close-mouthed about the arrangement between the two "allies."

In a [statement](#) made to the *Washington Post* in an interview published September 29, 2012, President Hadi said he "personally approves every U.S. drone strike in his country."

Hadi's praise for the Predators continued during a speech delivered at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. "They [drones] pinpoint the target and have zero margin of error, if you know what target you're aiming at," Hadi said, [according to the New York Times](#).

As the *Washington Post* rightly posits, it is likely this personal interest in promoting President Obama's drone war that has influenced U.S. officials to consider Hadi "one of the United States' staunchest counterterrorism allies."

Beyond the effect the winnowing of the president's kill list is having on domestic politics in Yemen, there is a larger threat to security from blowback.

Blowback in this case is defined as violent counter-attacks carried out as revenge for covert operations.

After a drone attack killed 13 Yemenis by "[mistake](#)" last September, relatives of those killed in the strike spoke with the clarity and carelessness that comes from the mixture of mourning and rage.

"You want us to stay quiet while our wives and brothers are being killed for no reason. This attack is the real terrorism," said Mansoor al-Maweri, whom [CNN reported](#) as being "near the scene of the strike."

Then there was this from "an activist" who lives near the site of the September massacre:

"I would not be surprised if a hundred tribesmen joined the lines of al Qaeda as a result of the latest



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drone mistake,” said Nasr Abdullah. “This part of Yemen takes revenge very seriously.”

Perhaps an increase in militancy isn’t a relevant consideration. There are some who argue that the goal of the drone war is not to reduce AQAP’s strength, but to increase the safety of the United States.

The problem with that premise is that there is no way to tell who is a “militant” and who isn’t.

Besides, when did militancy become a crime? If it is a crime, where is it defined? How can anyone know if he is guilty of militancy if such a crime is not defined? Could one hypothetically be a militant without knowing it, given that the crime is nowhere defined?

Incidentally, it is this very vagueness that dilates the grey area and makes the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) such a fearsome weapon in the arsenal of the seemingly all-powerful president.

With this record in mind, it is all but certain that President Obama’s speech on Thursday will continue to ring the “militant” alarm bell and warn that these threats to the homeland must be hunted and must be killed to keep America safe.

The New American will cover the speech and provide appropriate context for all the president’s claims.

Photo of MQ-9 Reaper drone: AP Images

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