



Written by on January 5, 2010

U.S. Reaction to al-Qaeda in Yemen

Following the failed attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253 by Nigerian Umar Abdulmutallab — a man with ties to al-Qaeda in Yemen — the United States is asking the Arabian Peninsula nation for help in restricting the terrorist organization's activities.

VOA News reported on January 5 that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the situation a "difficult set of challenges" during a joint appearance with the Prime Minister of Qatar, another Arabian Peninsula nation. "The spillover effects from instability directly impact the neighbors. Obviously, we see global implications from the war in Yemen and the ongoing efforts by al Qaeda in Yemen to use it as a base for terrorist attacks far beyond the region," Clinton said.



VOA quoted Hamad Bin Jassim Jabr al-Thani, Qatar's prime minister, who suggested dialogue rather than military action as a way to deal with al-Qaeda in Yemen. ?? "We have to concentrate on the terrorism.... And how we can fight the terrorism in our region and others so we don't export it somewhere else."

A report in the *Wall Street Journal* for January 5 noted that the U.S. Embassy in Yemen reopened that day, after being closed for two days, citing successful counterterrorism operations conducted by the government of Yemen the previous day.

The embassy closed on January 3 after officials said they received specific threats of possible attack by al-Qaeda militants. Over the weekend, the U.S. government promised to increase aid to Yemen in its effort to fight terrorism.

A report in the *Los Angeles Times* for January 5 cited a report from Yemen's official Saba news agency that the nation's Interior Ministry had strengthened security measures around foreign embassies and residential districts popular among the international community in Sana, Yemen's capital. ?? "The Ministry of Interior emphasizes that all embassies, diplomatic missions and foreign companies are fully secured and there is nothing to be worried about," the Ministry official reportedly said. "Security is maintained and there is no fear for the life of any foreigner or any foreign embassy in the country."

A January 5 *New York Times* report noted that Yemeni government forces had killed two suspected al-Qaeda militants the previous day and had wounded others in a firefight in the city of Arhab, 25 miles north of Sana. Yemeni officials had tied the militants to threats made against the U.S. and British embassies Sana.

Alistair Lyon, special correspondent for Reuters news, advised in a January 5 analysis that the United States use caution in dealing with al-Qaeda in Yemen:



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The United States must tread warily in Yemen if it is to avoid inadvertently broadening al Qaeda's appeal in a country plagued by poverty, corruption and conflict.

The botched bombing of a U.S. airliner on December 25, claimed by al Qaeda's Yemen-based wing, has spurred Washington to step up aid to President Ali Abdullah Saleh's government, even though diplomats say it is tainted by graft and short on legitimacy.

Such support may temporarily help sustain autocratic rule in Yemen, where militancy is only one of many woes.

Lyon quoted Yemeni analyst Abdul-Ghani al-Iryani, who predicted: "Deeper U.S. security involvement will cause a spike of al Qaeda recruitment [in Yemen]."

The analysis also quoted Ginny Hill of London's Chatham House (the British counterpart to the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations) who strongly cautioned against U.S. military involvement to fight terrorism in Yemen. A new war in Yemen would, owing to its proximity to Saudi Arabia and the holy city of Mecca, incite a stronger reaction in the Islamic world than the U.S. presence in Iraq or Afghanistan. (Osama bin Laden pointed to the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia when he helped found al-Qaeda, and publicly denounced the presence of foreign troops in the "land of the two mosques" — Mecca and Medina — which he said profaned sacred soil.)

"The Yemeni government would be placed in a very difficult position if the West were to push for troops on the ground in any kind of visible numbers," Hill added.

As events unfolded, the neoconservative U.S. Senator and 2008 Republican presidential candidate John McCain warned on January 5 that al-Qaeda is increasingly using Yemen as a base to launch attacks around the world, and called on Washington to help the Arab country expel the terror network.

AFP reported that McCain and fellow U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman, both of whom visited Yemen in August, told reporters during a one-day trip to Baghdad that the United States needed to help Yemen build up its economy. "We cannot allow Yemen to be a base for Al Qaeda to mount attacks on other countries in the region as well as the United States."

Such rhetoric was used by McCain's fellow neoconservative, former President George W. Bush, to justify the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Extending such reasoning to its logical conclusion, as al-Qaeda expands its operations to more and more countries, the United States would need to expand its military involvement in those nations, as well.

If recent history serves as a guide, the expansion of the U.S. military into Muslim nations to fight terrorism will breed resentment and fuel al-Qaeda's recruiting efforts in those nations. As al-Qaeda's ranks swell, they'll penetrate into additional neighboring nations, inviting U.S. military involvement in those locations. It is the equivalent of pouring water on a gasoline fire, serving only to spread the flames instead of extinguishing them.

The U.S. taxpayer, and the brave members of the U.S. military who are being asked to put their lives on the line in this "war on terrorism" may well ask: When will it end?

(Read also, "[U.S. and U.K. to Strengthen Yemeni Security and the UN.](#)")

Photo of portrait of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh: AP Images



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