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Yemen Jets Strike al-Qaeda Target

The Middle East-based al Jazeera news network reported on January 20 that Yemeni fighter jets have conducted an attack against the home of Ayed al-Shabwani a suspected al-Qaeda leader. The raids took place in Erq al Shabwan village in Maarib province, about 80 miles east of Yemen's capital, Sanaa.



A Yemeni military official who would not be named told al Jazeera that there had been three attacks on al-Shabwani's house and one on an orange grove near the village where authorities believe the al-Qaeda leader had built a safe haven for dozens of members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The AQAP is a militant Islamic organization that is primarily active in Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

The official also reported a large deployment of government forces at the city of Maarib, about three miles from Erq al-Shabwan.

One day earlier, when the the United Nations Security Council's al-Qaeda and Taliban Sanctions Committee announced new sanction against AQAP, Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, issued a [statement](#) noting: "Today's actions strengthen international efforts to degrade the capabilities of AQAP."

Yemen is under pressure from the United States to crack down on al-Qaeda, which has claimed responsibility for the Christmas-day attempt to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight from Amsterdam as it approached Detroit.

An AFP report cited Shabwa provincial Governor Ali Hassan al-Ahmadi, who said dozens of fighters, including Saudis and Egyptians who had fled Afghanistan, were holed up in his province. Among them, he said, were current AQAP chief Nasir al-Wahishi, his Saudi number two man, Said al-Shihri, and radical U.S.-Yemeni cleric Anwar al-Awlaqi.

AFP also quoted a Yemeni journalist close to Awlaqi, Abdullah Shaea, who said the cleric had told him he would not surrender and denied claims the government was negotiating with him in hopes he would give himself up.

Shaea also described a radical change in sentiment in Shabwa following a deadly December 24 air raid there by government forces that killed al-Qaeda suspects as well as a number of civilians. Shaea said that after that raid people were "furious" throughout the region. "They all went over to the side of al-Qaeda and prevent anyone from approaching."

A summary of the situation in Yemen carried by Reuters news service on January 20 observed: "Western powers and neighboring Saudi Arabia worry Yemen could turn into a failed state, and fear al-Qaeda



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could exploit the ensuing chaos to strengthen its foothold in the poorest Arab state and turn it into a launchpad for further attacks.”

In an interesting twist, New York’s *Daily News* for January 20 published a story about a new Senate report revealing that ex-convicts who converted to Islam in New York and other state prison systems have turned up in Yemen as al-Qaeda terrorist recruits. That article quoted from the foreword to the report written by Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee: “These Americans are not necessarily of Arab or South Asian descent” but “include individuals who converted to Islam in prison.”

The *Daily News* article went on to say that the FBI and CIA are also concerned about a separate group of fewer than 10 Americans without criminal records who went to Yemen, converted to Islam, and married Yemeni women so they would be allowed to remain in the country.

The Senate report quoted a U.S. official who described the smaller group as “blond-haired, blue eyed-types” who fit the profile of Americans wanted by al-Qaeda for terror missions.

It was evident from the first September 11, 2001 attacks that the goal of al-Qaeda (and whomever controls and funds al-Qaeda) was not merely to destroy important U.S. buildings. The organization could have bought its own planes and flown them into buildings, eliminating the possibility that the hijackers might have been stopped before completing their mission. The goal of terrorism goes far beyond destroying lives and property; it is — as its name suggests — to inflict *terror*, forcing the targeted nation’s government to curtail civil liberties for the real or stated purpose of preventing further attacks.

Many have argued that instead of subjecting all Americans to intrusive invasions of their privacy, our security agents should concentrate mainly on those of Middle Eastern or Islamic heritage. This latest plan by al-Qaeda to recruit “blond-haired, blue eyed-types” is an obvious attempt to evade being profiled because of obvious Middle Eastern physical characteristics.

It could be considered in another light, however. Rather than helping terrorists get past airline screeners, it merely provides added justification for government agents to treat *everyone* with suspicion, with or without justification.

One positive aspect of the Yemeni air assault on the al-Qaeda position is that it is an example of a Muslim nation taking complete responsibility for its own anti-terrorist operations. Yemen’s leaders in fact, have stated publicly that they do not want U.S. troops in Yemen. The nation has an impressive airborne arsenal for a nation of only 23 million people, with over 120 Soviet-era MiGs, and many other types of aircraft.

President Obama has stated that he has no plans to send U.S. military forces to Yemen, a position with which U.S. General David Petraeus agrees. However, the U.S. government plans to increase military aid to Yemen to \$140 million in 2010. While neither option is constitutional, our tax dollars at least do not bleed, nor do they leave grieving widows behind.

Photo of soldiers guarding the Yemeni House of Representatives: AP Images



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