

US Officials Cite Deadly Drone Strike in Yemen to Defend NSA Spying Operations

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US drones launched missiles at vehicles carrying four men, alleged to be members of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, in Yemen's Marib province early Tuesday. The attack was the latest development in the global terror alert announced by the Obama administration last Friday. On Monday, the administration indicated that the alleged terror plot was centered in Yemen.

Also on Tuesday, the administration ordered US government personnel to leave Yemen and urged all Americans in the country to follow suit. Britain also ordered its official personnel out of the country.

These developments mark an escalation of the global terror alert that was announced Friday and expanded Sunday with the extension for a week of the closure of US diplomatic facilities in North Africa and the Middle East. The US has closed diplomatic posts in Abu Dhabi, Amman, Algiers, Basrah, Baghdad, Cairo, Riyadh, Dhahran, Dhaka, Jeddah, Doha, Dubai, Kabul, Kuwait City, Manama, Muscat, Sanaa, Tripoli and nine other cities. The US State Department's global travel alert remains in force until the end of August.

The Marib strike is the latest of at least four drone strikes launched by the US against Yemen since July 28. The US is known to have bombarded targets in Yemen with twelve missile strikes so far this year, following a total of forty strikes in 2012. At least 24 children under the age of 18 have been killed by US strikes against Yemen.

CBS News reported Tuesday evening that a Naval reconnaissance plane was hovering over Sanaa, the capital of Yemen, for much of the day, suggesting that Washington is planning to intensify its attacks on the country.

At an airborne press "gaggle" en route to Phoenix, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney took questions from reporters, but continued the White House's refusal to offer any evidence to corroborate its claims of terror threats. Not a single piece of concrete evidence has been produced to back up the government's assertions that US facilities abroad and perhaps within the US face an imminent threat of attack by Al Qaeda-linked forces. The substance of the supposed threat likewise remains completely vague, with government sources admitting they have no information on a specific target or time of attack.

Nevertheless, the government's claims are being reported by the media as unchallengeable fact and are being used by politicians of both parties to justify the massive and illegal National Security Agency (NSA) spying operations exposed over the past two months by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden. With consummate cynicism, lawmakers are citing the alleged terror threat to argue that pervasive spying on the American people is necessary

to protect the population from terrorists. This is the standard pretext that has been used since the post-9/11 launching of the “war on terror” to justify the erection of the infrastructure of an American police state.

In an editorial published Tuesday, the *New York Times* gave its stamp of approval to the terror scare, calling the decision to launch a global terror alert “reasonable” and “difficult to quarrel with.” The *Times*, along with the rest of the media, proceeds—dishonestly and hypocritically—as though the use of government lies to justify the invasion of Iraq and the rampant lying about the NSA spying programs had never happened.

Politicians and terrorism “experts” were quick to seize on the drone killings in Yemen on Tuesday as supposed proof of the efficacy and necessity of the mass surveillance programs. John McCain, Republican senator from Arizona, warned CBS News in an interview that, “to abandon some of the practices that have proven to be successful in countering Al Qaeda, well, would be a very serious mistake.”

John McLaughlin of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies said intelligence acquired on Al Qaeda activities in Yemen showed the value of the surveillance programs: “This is not pat-a-cake,” McLaughlin said. “You need every trick in the book.”

Western media continue to report that the terror alert is in response to the interception of communications between top Al Qaeda leaders Ayman al Zawahiri in Pakistan and Nasir al-Wuhayshi of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The BBC cited a high-level security source claiming that Yemeni intelligence services discovered Al Qaeda fighters preparing for large attacks against Western and US targets.

There has been scattered criticism and questioning of the terror scare from elements within the political establishment. Former US ambassador to Mauritius, Seychelles and Comoros John Price told FoxNews.com he did not understand why the threat in Yemen had been “so much in the public eye.”

“We’ve had threats, but never went to the media with them, and we didn’t deal with it the way it’s being dealt with today,” said Price. “The embassies that they’ve closed at random in Africa don’t make any sense to me.”

Amie Stepanovich of the Electronic Privacy Information Center made similar comments to the *Guardian*, expressing skepticism about the NSA’s decision to go public with this particular threat information. “The NSA’s choice to publish these threats at this time,” she said, “perpetuates a culture of fear and unquestioning deference to surveillance in the United States... The NSA takes in threat information every day. You have to ask, why now? What makes this information different?”

It is obvious that the terror threat is being used to intimidate and dissipate popular opposition to the NSA’s Big Brother spy programs and popular support for Snowden, who has been smeared by the government as a traitor and spy and who faces prosecution for espionage, should Washington succeed in capturing him and bringing him back to the US. Despite weeks of attacks on Snowden and endless official statements on the threat of terrorism and the need for spy programs that capture every telephone call and email of every American, opinion polls have shown continuing majority opposition to the NSA operations and majority support for Snowden.

What stands out is the absence of any criticism of the current terror scare or even questioning of the government's lurid claims by any prominent Democratic politician. This underscores the bipartisan character of the support for the attacks on democratic rights.

A new terror attack on the US cannot be ruled out. US foreign policy, including drone killings of innocent civilians in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, provokes outrage and indignation within these populations, providing fertile ground for terrorist organizations to recruit. A study conducted at Columbia Law School in October of 2012 found that up to 98 percent of those killed by drone strikes in Pakistan have been civilians.

The dropping of more drone missiles on Yemen can only further inflame popular anger and hatred and create conditions in which the lives of Americans are placed in jeopardy.

The question that must be raised is: What is the US government planning? There is a real danger that a provocation is being prepared by forces within the state so as to provide the pretext for an expansion of US military aggression in the Middle East, an intensification of the assault on democratic rights within the US, or both.

It cannot be excluded that the government itself is preparing to use a terrorist incident as a pretext for new attacks on democratic rights. The events of September 11, 2001, including the failure of the CIA and FBI to heed advance warnings or intercept the perpetrators, who were well known to the intelligence agencies, have never been explained. Every terror attack or attempted attack on US soil since then has been carried out by alleged perpetrators who were under US surveillance, including the Tsarnaev brothers, charged with detonating the bombs last April that killed three and wounded 264 people during the Boston Marathon.

That violent act became the pretext for placing Boston and surrounding areas under a military-police lockdown and suspending democratic rights under de facto martial law.

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