

DRONE STRIKES IN YEMEN ARE VERY EFFECTIVE — FOR AQAP RECRUITMENT

Marcy has been all over the current episode of security theater surrounding the latest al Qaeda “conference call” that led to the closure of many US embassies, but I want to focus on news reports that have come out over the last month or so that remind us, once again, that high rates of civilian deaths in drone strikes in Yemen, as they do elsewhere, contribute dramatically to recruitment for al Qaeda. Analyst Gregory Johnsen is one of the most authoritative voices on militants in the region (a must-follow on Twitter as @gregorydjohnsen). He appeared on the PBS News Hour last week to discuss the latest flurry of US drone strikes in Yemen. A startling statistic he cited is that on the date of Underwear Bomb 1.0, Christmas Day of 2009, al Qaeda had approximately 200-300 members in Yemen. Today, after dramatic increases in US drone strikes, al Qaeda has “more than a few thousand”. Johnsen informs us that the estimate of al Qaeda force size in Yemen today comes from the US State Department. Here is his interview in full:

[youtuber
youtube='http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh5njqqe
HrY']

Wow, US “targeted killings” of high-level AQAP figures in Yemen has been so effective that the group is now only ten times larger than it was less than four years ago.

In an extended video report posted at BBC last week, Yalda Hakim talked to family members of civilians killed in US drone strikes along with a widely known “pro-US democracy advocate” and Yemen’s Foreign Minister.

A particularly sad story comes from Mohammed

Ahmad Bagash, whose eight year old daughter died in a strike:

During the fighting, al Qaeda fighters stored ammunition in the local hospital against the wishes of the doctors.

After the hospital was hit by a missile strike, Mohammed and his two children ran to a school and hid in the basement.

But then the school was hit in a suspected drone strike.

"It was as if everyone was burning. It was all dark," said Mr Bagash.

"When the smoke cleared, I saw my son's leg was bleeding, and my daughter was hit on the back of the head," he said.

He carried both children out. His son survived but his eight-year-old daughter bled to death on the way to the hospital.

/snip/

Mr Bagash has a question for the person who ordered the drone strike: "What did my daughter ever do to them? She was only eight years old."

And then a bleak observation.

"They think we're rats. We're not. We're human beings."

Even fans of the US in Yemen see that drone strikes work against the US:

"The US thinks it understands Yemen but the drones have been one of the most effective tools for AQAP to succeed in Yemen," said Farea al-Muslimi.

"A big part of al-Qaeda power at the moment is convincing Yemenis that they are in a war with America, (that) America is attacking the sovereignty of

Yemen and this government is non-legitimate.”

Mr al-Muslimi is one of the most pro-American voices in Yemen. He testified in front of a US Senate committee in a personal capacity after his own village was struck by a drone.

Despite the evidence that US drone strikes aid al Qaeda recruiting, Yemen’s Foreign Minister manages to parrot the US position, even while admitting “some truth” to the idea that strikes aid recruitment:

Yemen’s government says all means are necessary to root out al-Qaeda, even if the US drone strikes are rallying support for the militant group.

“I’ve heard this argument, there might be some truth to it,” said Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi.

“But if your targets are al-Qaeda leaders and if they are endangering the security of your country, there’s no alternative.”

Proving completely immune to the reality on the ground in Yemen, the US has chosen to widen its criteria for drone strikes in Yemen in the current security theater operation:

A senior American official said over the weekend that the most recent terrorist threat “expanded the scope of people we could go after” in Yemen.

“Before, we couldn’t necessarily go after a driver for the organization; it’d have to be an operations director,” said the official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss delicate intelligence issues. “Now that driver becomes fair game because he’s providing direct support to the plot.”

Senior American intelligence officials said last week that none of the about three dozen militants killed so far in the drone strikes were “household names,” meaning top-tier leaders of the affiliate, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. But the American official said the strikes had targeted “rising stars” in the Yemen network, people who were more likely to be moving around and vulnerable to attack. “They may not be big names now,” the official said, “but these were the guys that would have been future leaders.”

Yes. Our intelligence for targeting in Yemen is of such low quality that the latest barrage of strikes hasn't killed a single high level al Qaeda leader. Instead, we are now claiming that those killed “were the guys that would have been future leaders”.

Brilliant. I guess the drone targeting teams now have pre-cogs working for them so that we can know who the future AQAP leaders would have been. How much faster will AQAP grow now?