

OBAMA'S "SUCCESSFUL" COUNTERTERRORISM APPROACH IN YEMEN HAS QUADRUPLED MEMBERSHIP IN AQAP

On September 10, 2014, President Obama gave a speech advocating for the same kind of approach to counterterrorism against ISIL his Administration had been using with Yemen (and Somalia).

Now, it will take time to eradicate a cancer like ISIL. And any time we take military action, there are risks involved -- especially to the servicemen and women who carry out these missions. But I want the American people to understand how this effort will be different from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It will not involve American combat troops fighting on foreign soil. This counterterrorism campaign will be waged through a steady, relentless effort to take out ISIL wherever they exist, using our air power and our support for partner forces on the ground. This strategy of taking out terrorists who threaten us, while supporting partners on the front lines, is one that we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years. And it is consistent with the approach I outlined earlier this year: to use force against anyone who threatens America's core interests, but to mobilize partners wherever possible to address broader challenges to international order.

Today, the Soufan Group wrote up an alarming detail from the State Department Country Report on Terrorism for last year: AQAP has quadrupled in size since Obama's speech.

One of the more consequential details in the U.S. State Department's Country Reports on Terrorism for 2015, released on June 2, received very little notice. The estimated strength of the group long-described by the U.S. government as the most capable and worrisome al-Qaeda affiliate has quadrupled since the last report. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has swollen in size and made enormous financial gains since Yemen's political crisis turned into the ongoing war in March 2015.

The 2015 Country Report posits that AQAP had 4,000 members as of last year. The estimated AQAP strength in the 2014 report was approximately 1,000 members, as in the 2013 and 2012 reports. The first year the group was listed in the annual report was 2010, when it was said to have 'several hundred' members. The 2011 report said AQAP had 'a few thousand members,' and attributed the growth to the chaotic Arab Spring demonstrations in Yemen and the government's suppression of resistance.

The complete collapse of the central government and ongoing military campaigns have resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen. The conflict has also empowered AQAP more than at any other point since its current incarnation was announced by Nasir al-Wuhayshi in January 2009.

Mind you, the US counterterror approach in Yemen can be said to have changed when it assisted Saudi Arabia in a senseless invasion of the country, which has enabled AQAP to grow.

Maybe the Administration needs to rethink this:
partnering with Saudi Arabia on CT with
conventional forces up close has failed, and
partnering with Saudi Arabia on CT without
conventional forces committed has failed.

Maybe it's not the approach, but the CT partner,
that is the problem?