



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on April 25, 2013

Senate Subcommittee Hears Harrowing Story of Drone War in Yemen

In a hearing of a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, a Yemeni man informed lawmakers that “What radicals had previously failed to achieve in my village one drone strike accomplished in an instant: there is now an intense anger and growing hatred of America.”

This was the testimony of Farea al-Muslimi (shown), a young man from the Yemeni village of Wessab. The village, [according to reports at LongWarJournal](#), was hit by a pair of strikes launched by Predator or Reaper drones piloted remotely by the United States. The attack killed five alleged “operatives” of al-Qaeda. One of the operatives, al-Muslimi noted, was well known in the village and could have easily been arrested by the Yemeni government.



As al-Muslimi tells the story (see video below), residents of his mountainous hometown live in constant fear of missiles fired from a U.S. drone. “They fear that their home or a neighbor’s home could be bombed at any time by a U.S. drone,” he [testified before the Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights](#).

There is legitimate reason to fear. Again, according to data reported by LongWarJournal:

Over the past 10 months, the US has begun to target AQAP [Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula] outside of the traditional strongholds of Abyan and Shabwah provinces in the south. Of the 27 strikes against AQAP since the beginning of June 2012 that have been recorded by The Long War Journal, only four have hit AQAP in Abyan and Shabwah. The other 23 strikes have targeted AQAP operatives in the provinces of Aden, Al Baydah, Al Jawf, Hadramout, Marib, Saada, and Sana’a (it is unclear if today’s strikes took place in Damar, Ibb, or Hodeida). Of the 18 strikes that were conducted between January 2012 and the end of May, 10 occurred in Abyan and Shabwah.

In 2012, the US launched 42 drone strikes in Yemen against AQAP and its political front, Ansar al Sharia. The previous year, the US launched 10 drone and air strikes against the al Qaeda affiliate.

U.S. officials have designated Yemen as one of the targets for the ever-expanding drone war, the pace of which has accelerated dizzyingly under President Barack Obama.

The human toll of this policy of death-by-remote-control is evident in the words of al-Muslimi and his countrymen. Yemenis are weary of the war and the reckless and indiscriminate killing of their countrymen by the government of the United States.

The threat to U.S. national security reportedly increases proportionately with the increase in the



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number of Hellfire missiles fired indiscriminately at suspects and bystanders in Yemen. This deadly relationship and the Obama administration's zeal for adding and subtracting names from their kill list is increasing the danger of blowback.

"Blowback" in this case refers to violent counter-attacks carried out as revenge for drone strikes that have killed hundreds, many of whom were doing nothing more threatening than going to the market or attending a funeral.

After a drone attack killed 13 Yemenis by "[mistake](#)" in September of last year, relatives of those killed in the strike spoke with the clarity and carelessness that comes from the mixture of mourning and rage.

"You want us to stay quiet while our wives and brothers are being killed for no reason. This attack is the real terrorism," said Mansoor al-Maweri, whom [CNN reports](#) as being "near the scene of the strike" that was carried out last September.

Then there was this from "an activist" who lives near the site of the September massacre: "I would not be surprised if a hundred tribesmen joined the lines of al-Qaeda as a result of the latest drone mistake," said Nasr Abdullah. "This part of Yemen takes revenge very seriously."

The irrefutable fact is the prosecution of the drone war in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and North Africa is [creating more enemies than it is destroying](#). Al-Qaeda couldn't cook up a more effective recruitment program than the U.S. drone war that is allegedly aimed at eliminating the "terrorist" organization.

Although U.S. officials typically do not comment on this or any other drone strike in Yemen or elsewhere, the president of Yemen isn't quite so close-mouthed about the arrangement between the two "allies."

In a [statement](#) made to the *Washington Post* in an interview published September 29, 2012, President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi said he "personally approves every U.S. drone strike in his country."

Hadi's praise for the Predators continued during a speech delivered at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. "They [drones] pinpoint the target and have zero margin of error, if you know what target you're aiming at," Hadi said, [according to the New York Times](#).

As the *Washington Post* rightly posits, it is likely this personal interest in promoting President Obama's drone war that has influenced U.S. officials to consider Hadi "one of the United States' staunchest counterterrorism allies."

The complicity of the Yemeni regime is likely key to the crescendo of drone strikes in that nation. Since 2002, when the Yemeni theatre of the drone war opened, [at least 411 people are known to have been killed](#) in the strikes.

To reiterate, these missile strikes are reportedly inspiring many young Muslims who otherwise take no thought of the United States to enlist in the ranks of those who have taken up arms against her.

In his testimony, al-Muslimi revealed that he has "seen al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula use US strikes to promote its agenda and try to recruit more terrorists." This is consistent with the stories told by others of his countrymen as related above.

Ironically, this purported spike in recruitment by alleged terror organizations in Yemen is the legal basis relied upon by successive American presidential administrations to justify the drone war.

Rosa Brooks, a Georgetown Law School professor, also [testified at the hearing on Tuesday](#). Professor



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Brooks accurately identified the essence of the issue. Brooks testified:

The manner in which the United States has been using drone strikes raises serious questions about their strategic efficacy and unintended consequences. Just as troubling — particularly with regard to this subcommittee’s mandate — are the legal theories used by the Obama Administration to justify many US drone strikes risk undermining the rule of law.

Senator Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) presided over the hearing and admitted that there were serious questions still left unanswered regarding the United States’ use of drones to execute suspected militants.

“The use of drones has, in stark terms, made targeted killing more efficient and less costly — in terms of American blood and treasure,” said Durbin. “There are, however, long-term consequences, especially when these airstrikes kill innocent civilians,” Durbin added.

With regard to the casualties caused by the drone strikes, the grander, more fundamental concern isn’t just who is killed, but why they are killed, explained Professor Brooks.

“When a government claims for itself the unreviewable power to kill anyone, anywhere on earth, at any time, based on secret criteria and secret information discussed in a secret process by largely unnamed individuals, it undermines the rule of law,” Brooks testified.

The rule of one man — the president — has supplanted the rule of law in the United States. Reportedly, President Obama and his drone war advisors meet every Tuesday in the Oval Office to add new names to his infamous kill list. Then, the drones are deployed and another alleged “enemy” (and those caught within the blast zone) are assassinated.

Beyond the body count, the apprehension of the buzz of drones overhead has had psychological effects in Yemen, as well. So feared are the strikes that al-Muslimi reported that Yemeni parents compel their kids to go to bed by warning, “Go to sleep or I will call the planes.”

Photo of Farea al-Muslimi: AP Images

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