



What Is the U.S. Military Doing in Yemen? Is It Worth the Cost?

The commando raid by U.S. Navy SEALs in Yemen on January 29 reportedly killed 14 al-Qaeda operatives. But at least 15 civilians including an eight-year-old girl were also killed, as was one Navy Seal.

Initial reports of the raid and the civilian deaths stated that the government of Yemen had withdrawn permission for the United States to launch any more Special Operations ground missions inside the country. However, those reports were not accurate. Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdul-Malik al-Mekhlafi told the Associated Press it was “not true” that his government had asked U.S. forces to cease ground operations in Yemen. “Yemen continues to cooperate with the United States and continues to abide by all the agreements,” he said.



Another unnamed senior Yemeni official told Reuters: “We have not withdrawn our permission for the United States to carry out special operations ground missions. However, we made clear our reservations about the last operation.”

“We said that in the future there needs to be more coordination with Yemeni authorities before any operation and that there needs to be consideration for our sovereignty,” the official added.

The young girl killed in the raid was Nawar al-Awlaki, the daughter of cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen who was assassinated by the U.S. military in 2011.

The American soldier killed in the raid was Chief Petty Officer Ryan Owens.

The conflict in Yemen that has prompted U.S. intervention has been years in the making, so it is difficult to provide all of its background concisely, but as [we noted in an article in 2015](#), our intervention in the beleaguered nation has only aggravated the situation. We observed in that article:

Much of this counterproductive intervention came under the leadership of exiled President [Abed Rabbo Mansour] Hadi when he was still in power. An [article posted by *The New American* in 2012](#) noted that since 2002, 358 people had died in Yemen in U.S. drone strikes. In a statement made to the Washington Post in an interview published September 29, 2012, President Hadi said he “personally approves every U.S. drone strike in his country.” The *Post* noted that it was likely this support of President Obama’s drone war that had influenced U.S. officials to consider Hadi “one of the United States’ staunchest counterterrorism allies.”

This may explain why Saudi Arabia has given Hadi refuge and is bombing Hadi’s opponents in



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Yemen — with U.S. support.

In September 2015, Hadi returned to the Yemen port city of Aden as Saudi-backed government forces recaptured the city.

In that article, we noted that the Houthi rebels, who are fighting against forces loyal to Hadi, are allied with forces loyal to President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was president of Yemen from 1990 to 2012. Furthermore, Saleh's loyalists are al-Qaeda's most powerful opponents, but the Saudi-led bombing threatens to weaken them. Therefore, the Saudi bombing of the rebels, which is supported by the United States, will have the effect of helping al-Qaeda!

We also observed in the same article that U.S. interventionism in Yemen "has not been any more productive than was our nation's long history of intervention in Iran — the country that we are now posturing to keep away from Yemen."

Interventionism — especially in the Middle East — is truly a bipartisan foreign policy. Barack Obama continued that policy started by George W. Bush and even kept Bush's Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in place for two and a half years after taking office. While Obama reduced the number of U.S. troops in Iraq, he left a few thousand in place and also launched airstrikes against militant targets in the country. Obama also authorized airstrikes and drone attacks in Yemen. Under Obama, the United States also joined NATO partners in a 2011 bombing campaign to support an uprising against longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi, who was toppled and killed.

While conservatives are optimistic that Donald Trump will reverse many of the harmful policies of Obama (particularly on domestic issues), the January 31 raid, which was the first commando operation approved by Trump, indicates that on foreign policy the Trump administration is more likely than not to follow the neoconservative, interventionist policies of George W. Bush. A noninterventionist leader such as former Rep. Ron Paul or his son, Sen. Rand Paul, had either of them been elected president, would have been unlikely to have approved such a raid.

The tragic death of U.S. Navy SEAL Ryan Owens in Yemen raises important questions:

- Should the U.S. military have boots on the ground there?
- Should we be engaged in a war in Yemen without the constitutionally required declaration of war — and without even a congressional debate?
- Should a single person decide when to plunge the nation into the crucible of war, regardless if he is President Obama or President Trump?
- Does our military interventionism in Yemen (and elsewhere in the Middle East) reduce the terrorist threat and make America safer, or does it have the opposite effects?
- And is the interventionism worth the sacrifice — including the ultimate sacrifice — of our soldiers?

As we have stressed in many articles in this magazine, the Constitution (in Section 8) gives power to declare war to Congress alone. The last time that Congress issued a declaration of war was on June 5, 1942 (against Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania, which were allied with Germany). The fact that the United States has gone to war many times since then without a declaration of war (as in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq) under both Democratic and Republican presidents sets a bad precedent — but does not change the unconstitutionality of such actions. That should answer two of the questions posed above.



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An article posted by the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity on February 3 by the institute's Executive Director Daniel McAdams concentrated on disputing the claim, broadcast by the media, that the mission was a success, because of a great "treasure trove" of intelligence seized at the compound in Yemen raided by U.S. forces, along with the claimed killing of a senior al-Qaeda official.

The article pointed out several areas where the attack was a failure, which precluded labeling it as a successful mission: "An American was killed, millions of dollars in US military equipment destroyed, at least a dozen innocent women and children were killed, U.S. military cover had been blown before the attack, the mission was poorly planned, the mission had been turned down twice by President Obama only to be dusted off by President Trump, and so on."

A good point for conservatives elated by the succession of Donald Trump to the presidency to keep in mind is that interventionism is interventionism, whether pursued by George W. Bush, Barack Obama, or Donald Trump.

There is a lesson to be found in an article that former Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas) wrote for Townhall.com almost exactly two years ago, entitled: "The Failed 'Yemen Model.'" In that article, Paul noted that during the previous September, President Obama had cited his drone program in Yemen as a successful model of U.S. anti-terrorism strategy. Obama said that he would employ the Yemen model in his effort to "degrade and ultimately destroy" ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Paul wasted no time in calling out the former president, writing: "If Yemen is any kind of model, it is a model of how badly U.S. interventionism has failed."

Paul summarized the history of U.S. interventionism in Yemen as follows:

In 2011 the U.S. turned against Yemen's long-time dictator, Saleh, and supported a coup that resulted in another, even more U.S.-friendly leader taking over in a "color revolution." The new leader, Hadi, took over in 2012 and soon became a strong supporter of the U.S. drone program in his country against al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula.

The Paul described an incident that is eerily similar to what happened again last week:

And the drone strikes have continued. Last Monday, in the first US strike after the coup, a 12 year old boy was killed in what is sickeningly called "collateral damage." Two alleged "al-Qaeda militants" were also killed. On Saturday yet another drone strike killed three more suspected militants.

The U.S. government has killed at least dozens of civilian non-combatants in Yemen, but even those it counts as "militants" may actually be civilians. That is because the Obama administration counts any military-aged male in the area around a drone attack as a combatant.

Paul concluded his article with this lesson: "The lesson from Yemen is not to stay the course that has failed so miserably. It is to end a failed foreign policy that is killing civilians, creating radicals, and making us less safe."

If Americans had wanted a continuation of the interventionist Obama foreign policy, they would have elected Hillary Clinton as president, since during her time as Obama's secretary of state she was a key architect of that policy.

Instead, Americans chose Donald Trump, in part because they perceived that he would steer America away from the interventionism of his predecessors. An article posted by Infowars.com a year ago was typical of how his supporters viewed Trump:



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Candidate Trump's take on interventionism is a departure from the rest of the field committed to the establishment and the military-industrial complex. Although many of his proposed solutions to a number of issues appear to be reactionary and often authoritarian, his take on the forever war agenda and the foreign policy of the establishment is encouraging.

Was that assessment wrong or did Trump only *appear* to be a noninterventionist to appeal to Republicans of the Ron Paul/Rand Paul stripe? We can only speculate. As Daniel McAdams wrote recently:

We can only hope that the young Trump Administration will learn from this black eye and very quickly retreat from its increasingly aggressive positioning in the Middle East. A president elected on the promise that he would start no new wars is swaggering us into something his panting advisors cannot, in their blind enthusiasm, even imagine.

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