

IS IT OKAY TO ADMIT THE US IS BEHIND THE DRONE STRIKES NOW?

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism noted something interesting in its coverage of the latest drone strikes in Yemen. The government is admitting to drone strikes, and thus presumably to our role in them.

Two to three suspected 'al Qaeda militants' were killed in the double strike which Xinhua initially reported as 'a botched air strike carried out by Yemeni warplanes.' But three Yemeni security officials have since told CNN it was a drone strike.

I think—but am not sure—that this is not new. That is, I think Yemen changed its policy of pretending it had launched any drone attacks some years ago. But I find the competing stories being told interesting, particularly in light of questions about who leaked information on the latest Underwear Bomb “plot.” At first, a “government official” told China’s Xinhua news that the Yemeni military had executed the attacks.

Earlier in the day, a botched air strike carried out by Yemeni warplanes hit a residential building near a compound used by al- Qaida militants in the insurgents-controlled town of Jaar, killing at least eight civilians and injuring five others, a government official said.[my emphasis]

But later, “three Yemeni security officials” blamed the strikes on drones, not the Yemeni military.

Two suspected U.S. drone strikes killed seven al Qaeda militants and eight

civilians in the southern part of Yemen on Tuesday, three Yemeni security officials said.

It was the latest of several U.S. strikes in Yemen, which is home to al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, described by U.S. officials as the al Qaeda affiliate that poses the most serious threat to the United States. At least seven civilians were injured in the Tuesday strikes, the officials said.

CNN also has a source (potentially one of those three security officials) making it clear that they've gotten terror threats against diplomatic targets in Sanaa.

The Interior Ministry warned on Tuesday that al Qaeda is planning to conduct suicide operations in Sanaa.

Tight security presence was noticeable near Western embassies and in the diplomatic zone of the capital.

"The ministry has been given intelligence information warning of a possible attack in the heart of the Yemeni capital and we are on high alert," one Interior Ministry official told CNN on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the media.

Now, I don't think this is a new development. That is, I assume this is not the first time that Yemeni officials blamed civilian strike deaths on US drones. But particularly in the face of questions about who leaked news of the UndieBomb (I'm increasingly convinced, btw, that Robert Mueller retrieved the UndieBomb when he made a surprise visit on April 24, which would mean some Yemenis would have been involved in the handoff), I find it interesting that the Yemenis are no longer willing to take the fall for poor Saudi pinpointing American targeting.

Update: Jim reminds me that this has been going on since at least October, when he examined a similar instance in-depth. And the Aviationist suggests (via David Axe) one thing Yemenis may be covering up with strikes they claim are not our drones, but our F-15s.

Some of the air strikes in Yemen were reportedly launched with the support of warplanes believed to be Yemeni Air Force ones. But there are also chances that U.S. conventional planes have been involved in air-to-surface operations officially or unofficially credited to the Yemeni government.