

# U.S. plans secret Gulf air base to target terrorists in Yemen

WELL-DONE

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The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States is building a secret CIA air base in the Persian Gulf region to target terrorists in Yemen, preparing for the possibility that an anti-American faction may take over Yemen and ban U.S. forces from hunting a lethal al-Qaida faction there, The Associated Press has learned.

The anti-al-Qaida effort in Yemen is being run by the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), the top U.S. military counterterrorism outfit, and the CIA provides intelligence support.

JSOC forces have been allowed by the Yemeni government to conduct limited strikes there since 2009 and recently have allowed expanded strikes by U.S. armed drones and even warplanes against al-Qaida targets who are taking advantage of civil unrest to grab power and territory in the Gulf country.

The new CIA base provides a backup, if al-Qaida or other anti-American rebel forces gain control, one senior U.S. official explained.

The White House already has increased the numbers of CIA officers in Yemen, in anticipation of that possibility. And it has stepped up the schedule to construct the base, from a two-year timetable to a rushed eight months.

The Associated Press has withheld the exact location at the request of U.S. officials. They spoke on condition of anonymity because portions of the military and CIA missions in Yemen are classified.

Drones like Reaper and Predator are unmanned aircraft that can be flown from remote locations and hover over a target before firing a missile. Yemeni officials have indicated their preference toward drones, versus allowing U.S. counterterrorism strike teams on Yemeni soil, saying they are less apt to anger the local population.

The planned CIA base suggests a long-term U.S. commitment to fighting al-Qaida in the region, along the lines of the model used in Pakistan, where CIA drones hunt extremists with tacit, though not public, Pakistani government approval.

Its construction also indicates a possible shift in the internal debate in the administration over whether U.S. special-operations forces should keep leading the fight in Yemen, U.S. officials said.

While that policy debate plays out in Washington, U.S. special-operations forces based just outside Yemen are taking aim almost daily at a greater array of targets that have been flushed into view by the unrest.

Other U.S. forces have stepped up their targeting as well, because of the besieged Yemeni government's new willingness to allow U.S. forces to use all tools available — from armed drones to war planes — against al-Qaida as a way to stay in power, U.S. officials said.



ANNEKS MAHYOUR / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Anti-government protestors in Taiz, Yemen, display their hands while demanding the president's resignation.

The Obama administration has been working for months in concert with the mediation efforts of Yemen's Gulf neighbors to persuade President Ali Abdullah Saleh to transfer power. Saleh was evacuated for emergency medical treatment in Saudi Arabia, after being hit by explosive devices planted in the presidential mosque more than a week ago.

The United States has continued to press for a deal in the hope that a political solution could pre-empt any plan by the Yemeni leader of 33 years to return. That, officials fear, could lead to further instability.

With al-Qaida essentially in control of large swathes of an Peninsula essentially in Yemeni territory, the Yemeni government now hopes U.S. forces, guided by those operatives and intelligence under joint U.S.-Yemeni interrogation, providing information on al-Qaida operations and locations.

That, in turn, led to the best opportunity in early May. The radical cleric Anwar al-Qaida in the Arabi-

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