

US drone targets key Qaeda figure in Yemen



AFP, Aden

US-Yemeni cleric and terror suspect Anwar al-Awlaqi escaped unhurt from a US drone attack which killed two local al-Qaeda members in restive southern Yemen, a tribal source told AFP yesterday.

A US drone targeted Awlaqi's car had on Thursday at Abadan in Shabwa province, where al-Qaeda is well entrenched, the source from Awlaqi's tribe said.

He said Awlaqi was travelling with a Saudi al-Qaeda member and that both were unhurt, but their car was "slightly damaged."

"Their car had minor damage, but they were able to proceed in another car," said the source who is linked to the local administration in the region where Awlaqi's tribe has considerable influence.

The drone attack hit another car in which two local Qaeda members, both brothers, were travelling. It killed them and wounded a third.

The attempt on Awlaqi came three days after US forces killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Obama's counterterrorism chief, Michael Leiter, has said al-Awlaqi posed a bigger threat to the US homeland than bin Laden did.

But al-Awlaqi is considered a long shot to replace bin Laden as leader of al-Qaeda, according to CNN terrorism analyst Paul Cruickshank.

'We have cut off their head and will defeat them'

Mission 'well done,' Obama tells troops

AFP, Fort Campbell

President Barack Obama on Friday praised US special forces warriors who killed Osama bin Laden for a "job well done," saying America had cut off al-Qaeda's head and would ultimately defeat it.

An exuberant Obama wrapped up what he said was a "historic week" by meeting and decorating the secretive force which stealthily flew into Pakistan and gunned down the al-Qaeda leader in his hideout after a 10 year manhunt.

"It was a chance for me to say on behalf of all Americans and people around the world, job well done. Job well done," Obama said.

On a day when al-Qaeda vowed revenge for its founding leader's death, Obama argued that the mission showed his policies in the long war in Afghanistan were working, and vowed ultimate victory over the terror group.



"We have cut off their head and we will ultimately defeat them," Obama said, at the Fort Campbell army base in Kentucky.

Obama marvelled at the bravery of the bin Laden assault force.

"When I gave the order, they were ready. And in recent days the whole world has learned just how ready they were.

"These Americans deserve credit for one of the greatest intelligence and military operations in our nation's history."

Obama handed out Presidential Unit Citations -- the highest such honor that can be given to a unit -- "in recognition of their extraordinary service and achievement," a White House official said on condition of anonymity.

The commandos who swooped in on the compound reportedly came from a renowned squad known as "Team Six," an elite unit drawn from the already elite ranks of the SEALs.

Bin Laden directing al-Qaeda figures

Seized documents reveal facts about operations

AP, Washington

The wealth of information pulled from Osama bin Laden's compound has reinforced the belief that he played a strong role in planning and directing attacks by al-Qaeda and its affiliates in Yemen and Somalia, senior US officials said Friday.

And the data further demonstrated to the US that top al-Qaeda commanders and other key insurgents are scattered throughout Pakistan, not just in the rugged border areas, and are being supported and given sanctuary by Pakistanis, a senior defence official said.

US counterterrorism officials have debated how big a role bin Laden and core al-Qaeda leaders were playing in the attacks launched by affiliated terror groups, particularly al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which is based in Yemen, and al-Shabab in Somalia.

Information gathered in the compound, officials said, strengthened beliefs that bin Laden was a lot more involved in directing al-Qaeda personnel and operations than some-

times thought over the last decade. And it suggests bin Laden was "giving strategic direction" to al-Qaeda affiliates in Somalia and Yemen, the defence official said.

Laden's first priority, the official said, was his own security. But the data shows that he was far more active in providing guidance and telling affiliated groups in Yemen and Somalia what they should or should not be doing.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive material.

The American public, meanwhile, will get a peek at bin Laden's life inside the secret compound in Abbottabad today, according to US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because the data has not yet been released.

Officials say they have already learned a lot from bin Laden's cache of computers and data, but they would not confirm reports that it yielded clues to the whereabouts of al-Qaeda deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Officials say the handwritten notes and computer material are being scoured for intelligence that could help track down new targets.

Al-Qaeda chief's death 'game changer'

AFP, Washington

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said Friday the death of Osama bin Laden could be a "game-changer" for the US-led war effort in Afghanistan.

Gates said it was too soon to say for certain what the effect of the raid might be on the nine-year-old war in Afghanistan.

"I think in terms of the impact of the killing of Osama bin Laden, in terms of the situation in Afghanistan, I think that there is a possibility that it could be a game changer," Gates told service members at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina.

The Pentagon chief suggested that the killing of Bin Laden could aggravate tensions between the Taliban insurgency, which includes spiritual leader Mullah Omar, and al-Qaeda.

Pakistan arrests 25 suspects

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistani intelligence and security agencies have conducted a sweep in the garrison city of Abbottabad, where al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden was killed in a US raid on Monday, and arrested at least 25 suspects.

The search operation was conducted to deal with the potential consequences of the US military operation in Abbottabad, the channel said.

A local politician claimed the security forces had rounded up "hundreds of people" during the search operation.

There was no official word on the number of arrests.

Before the search was launched, members of the media were "driven out of the city," Arab News reported.

Musharraf slams US over bin Laden raid



AFP, Dubai

Former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf has slammed the United States for violating Islamabad's sovereignty in carrying out the raid that killed Osama bin Laden, a media report said yesterday.

The former military strongman told the expatriate Pakistan community in Dubai that all "peace loving people" should be happy that bin Laden was killed, but no Pakistani accepted the violation of their sovereignty.

However, Musharraf insisted that Pakistan and the US must work together to eliminate terrorism.

Musharraf said he did not believe that Pakistani government or military officials had knowledge of bin Laden's presence or were harbouring him.

"It is not unusual for blunders to occur," he said. "Look at 9/11 - unfortunately those attacks did happen, so where was their [US] intelligence then?"

In an interview with the National Public Radio in the US, Musharraf had on Friday blamed incompetence by his country's intelligence agencies for allowing Al-Qaeda leader to live undetected in Pakistan for years.

"One can draw only two conclusions," Musharraf told NPR. "One is complicity from our intelligence agencies. The second is incompetence and I strongly believe in the latter," Musharraf said.

"I cannot imagine that there was complicity."

NEWS IN brief

Blast, gun attacks kill seven in Thai south

AFP, Yala

Seven people were killed and 16 wounded in a string of attacks across Thailand's far south that included two roadside bombs detonating within minutes of each other yesterday, police said.

The first blast hit a military patrol vehicle on a village road in Yala. A second device, buried in the car park of a football field in Pattani province, killed three police officers and wounded 14 others.

In a separate attack, four gunmen riding motorbikes shot dead a 45-year-old Muslim man as he drove his car

China archaeologists uncover more Great Wall ruins

AFP, Beijing

Chinese archaeologists have uncovered previously unknown Great Wall ruins in a mountainous area in northeast China, state media reported Saturday.

The bricks and stones that once formed a section of the wall were found in mountains in Suizhong County in Liaoning province, the official Xinhua news agency said, citing a report by provincial relics and mapping

Britain decisively rejects voting change

AFP, London

Britons have voted by a majority of 67.9 percent to 32.1 percent against making historic changes to the electoral system, final results from a referendum showed yesterday.

With all the results in from Thursday's referendum, there were 13,013,123 votes against changing the current first-past-the-post system to elect lawmakers at

Troops kill two students south of Yemeni capital

AFP, Sanaa

Troops opened fire to break up a Yemeni student demonstration yesterday killed two students and wounded 15 others, a protest organiser told AFP.

Hundreds were taking part in the protest at Al-Maaf, a village in Taz province, some 200 kilometres south of the capital Sanaa, when security forces fired live bullets

Japan rallies against nuclear power

AFP, Tokyo

Thousands of people rallied in Japan yesterday to demand a shift away from nuclear power after an earthquake and tsunami sparked the world's worst atomic crisis since Chernobyl a quarter-century ago.

Braving spring drizzle, thousands of demonstrators gathered at a park in Tokyo's Shibuya district, many holding hand-made banners reading: "Nuclear is old!" and "We want a shift in energy policy!"

The protest came a day after Prime Minister Naoto Kan called a halt to operations at a nuclear plant southwest of Tokyo because it is near a tectonic faultline, fearing a disaster.

Gaddafi forces shell Misrata fuel depots, drop mines

Tribal chiefs urge amnesty to all fighters

AFP, Benghazi

Muammar Gaddafi's forces yesterday shelled fuel depots in Misrata and dropped mines using helicopters bearing the Red Cross emblem into the harbour, rebels said, as they braced for a new ground assault on the besieged port city.

The latest fighting comes as Amnesty International lashed out at the Libyan regime, saying its more than two-month "horrifying" siege of Misrata could be a war crime.

"There are still attacks by Grad missiles and our fighters are still resisting," said Colonel Ahmed Omar Bani, military spokesman of the rebels' Benghazi-based National Transitional Council.

"They tried again to destroy the Misrata port but our fighters didn't allow them to do that," he said, adding that gaddafi loyalists had switched tactics and were now focusing their offensive on fuel depots.

The rebels also accused Gaddafi forces of using helicopters bearing the Red Cross

emblem and dropping mines into the harbour of Misrata, the major western hold-out of the insurgents.

He said the choppers had been disguised as humanitarian aircraft carrying the emblems of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

A spokeswoman at the ICRC's Geneva headquarters said they had received similar reports but could not confirm them, as the organisation currently has no team on the ground.

The rebels said they were bracing for a new ground assault on Misrata.

Libya's tribal chiefs called in a meeting Friday for a "general amnesty law which will include all those who were involved in the crisis and took up arms."

But doubts were cast on the proposal of National Conference for Libyan Tribes, as its statement referred to rebels as "traitors" and pledged not to "abandon" or "forsake" Gaddafi, whose ouster the insurgents are demanding.

Singapore polls close after high voter turnout

AFP, Singapore

Voting in Singapore's parliamentary elections closed yesterday with the opposition hoping to reduce the ruling party's overwhelming majority after a high voter turnout.

Results were expected within hours.

The opposition held just two seats in the 84-member parliament dissolved in April but the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) admitted in the campaign that many voters were unhappy over issues like the rising cost of living and immigration policies.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong issued an unprecedented apology to voters for policy mistakes and government gaffes since Singapore last voted in 2006.

LADEN KILLING AFTERMATH

Al-Qaeda to release Laden's last tape message

PTI, Dubai

Al-Qaeda has promised to "soon" release its slain chief Osama bin Laden's final audio message, which was recorded a week before his killing by the US special forces in Pakistan's garrison city of Abbottabad.

In a four-page statement, the terror group said bin Laden recorded the audio message a week before his death which will be released "soon", according to the

US eyed strike in 2007: Rice

AFP, Washington

The United States drew up a plan to kill Osama bin Laden in 2007 in Afghanistan's Tora Bora region, former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice said Friday, confirming a New York Times report.

The administration of George W Bush considered bombing a meeting of al-Qaeda leaders during the summer of 2007, in what would be the last chance to kill bin Laden before the 2008 presidential election, the Times reported.

Rice, in an interview with ABC News to be broadcast Sunday, confirmed the information.

Laden lived longer in Pak urban areas than thought

AFP, Washington

Pakistani investigators involved in piecing together Bin Laden's life during the past nine years said this week that he had been living in Pakistan's urban centres longer than previously believed," The New York Times said

Two Pakistani officials say that bin Laden's Yemeni wife, one of three wives now in Pakistani custody, told investigators that before moving in 2005 to the mansion in Abbottabad, bin Laden had lived with his family for nearly two and a half years in a small village, Chak Shah Mohammad.

One of the officials said this means that bin Laden left Pakistan's rugged tribal region sometime in 2003.

Pakistan's ex-FM urges resignations

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's former foreign minister called on the country's president and prime minister to resign yesterday following the American raid that killed Osama bin Laden, one of the highest-profile calls so far for senior officials to be held accountable.

Some Pakistanis have focused their anger on the country's powerful army and intelligence chiefs. But former Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza

Plane crash in Indonesia kills 27

AFP, Jakarta

A plane with around 25 passengers and crew crashed into the sea yesterday in eastern Indonesia, killing everyone on board, a navy officer told local radio.

"I can confirm that all the passengers were killed when the plane exploded as it crashed into the sea," a navy officer involved in the search told ElShinta radio.

"The aircraft was smashed to pieces... We found 15 bodies floating on the water and the other passengers are trapped inside the wreckage."

A transport ministry spokesman earlier said there were 27 people on board the Merpati Nusantara airlines MA-60 aircraft, 21 passengers and six crew.

Taliban launch string of attacks on key Afghan city

AFP, Kandahar

The Taliban unleashed a wave of attacks including six suicide bombings on government targets in the major southern Afghan city of Kandahar yesterday, leaving at least 30 people wounded.

Militants with guns and rocket-propelled grenades attacked the governor's office, and ten explosions including six suicide blasts rocked the city, the heartland of the Taliban, after violence began around 1:00pm local time.

Gunmen occupied a hotel near the local office of Afghanistan's intelligence service, while suicide bombers tried to attack two police offices but were shot before they could reach their targets.

In chaotic scenes, an AFP reporter said gunfire was still ringing out as ambulances evacuated the wounded, who included five policemen, from the area.

"Small-arms fire is still going on. Two RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades) have been fired onto the (governor's) building so far," provincial spokesman Zalmay Ayubi told AFP.

"The northern and eastern sides of the compound are under direct attack," he said, also giving details of the other attacks.

It is believed that Kandahar governor Tooryalai Wesa was holed up in his compound.

A spokesman for Kandahar's main hospital, Doctor Hashem, said that 30 people had been brought in with injuries.