

## Drones Kill Innocents; Stir Hatred of U.S.A.

Farea Al-Muslimi is a Yemeni journalist who lived in the United States as a student. He testified before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights on April 23, 2013, on “Drone Wars: The Constitutional and Counterterrorism Implications of Targeted Killing.” Here are excerpts from his remarks. (The complete transcript is available on the [Committee website](#).)

...My name is Farea Al-Muslimi. I am from Wessab, a remote mountain village in Yemen, about nine hours’ drive from my country’s capital, Sana’a. Most of the world has never heard of Wessab. But just six days ago, my village was struck by a drone, in an attack that terrified thousands of simple, poor farmers. The drone strike and its impact tore my heart, much as the tragic bombings in Boston last week tore your hearts and also mine.

I have visited locations where U.S.-targeted killing strikes have hit their intended targets. And I have visited sites where the U.S. strikes missed their targets and instead killed or injured innocent civilians. I have spoken with grieving family members and angry villagers. I have seen Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (“AQAP”) use U.S. strikes to promote its agenda and try to recruit more terrorists.

I am here today to talk about the human costs and consequences of targeted killing by the United States in Yemen....

My family lives off the fruit, vegetables, and live-

stock we raise on our farms. We raise cows, goats, sheep, and hens. My father has been a farmer all his life. His income rarely exceeds \$200 per month....

My life changed forever in the 9th grade when I was awarded a scholarship from the U.S. State Department....

That scholarship allowed me to spend a year living with an American family and attending an American high school. The year I spent at Rosamond High School in Rosamond, California was one of the richest and best years of my life....

### Working in Yemen as a Journalist, Speaker, and Activist

I will carry the experiences of my time in America with me for the rest of my life. As a high school student, I served as an ambassador to America for the Yemeni people. After that year, however, I returned home and became an am-

bassador for Americans to my country. I will happily retain this role for the rest of my life. I am a defender of the American values I learned when I studied and lived in the United States.

Today, I am a writer, speaker, and freelance journalist. I have worked with many local, regional, and international non-governmental organizations, including the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, USAID, and Resonate! Yemen. At the age of 17, I was elected chairman of the Supporting Democracy Committee in the Yemeni Youth Consultative Council....

### A Drone Strike in My Home Village

Just six days ago, this so-called war came straight to my village. As I was thinking about my testimony and preparing to travel to the United States to participate in this hearing, I learned that a missile from a U.S. drone had struck the village where I was raised....

For almost all of the people in Wessab, I’m the only



C-SPAN

*Yemeni journalist Farea Al-Muslimi gave testimony to a Senate committee on the horrors visited upon his nation by U.S. drone strikes.*



alhattin.com

*The bloody aftermath of a drone strike on the village of Radda in Yemen, in which 12 civilians and 0 jihadis were killed, September 2012.*

person with any connection to the United States. They called and texted me that night with questions that I could not answer: Why was the United States terrifying them with these drones? Why was the United States trying to kill a person with a missile when everyone knows where he is and he could have been easily arrested?

My village is beautiful, but it is very poor and in a remote part of Yemen. Even though the region it is in is about the same size of Bahrain, there isn't a single meter of asphalt road in it. Developmental projects by the central government rarely reach my village and humanitarian aid from international organizations like USAID never does. I know that most people have never heard of Wessab. But I could never have imagined that it would be the location of a drone strike.

My understanding is that Hameed Meftah, who is also known as Hameed Al-Radmi, was the target of the drone strike. Many people in Wessab know Al-Radmi. Earlier on the night he was killed, he was reportedly in the village meeting with the General Secretary of Local Councilors, the head of the local government. A person in the village told me that Al-Radmi had also met with security and government officials at the security headquarters just three days prior to the drone strike. Yemeni officials easily could have found and arrested Al-Radmi.

After the strike, the farmers in Wessab were afraid and angry. They were upset because they know Al-Radmi, but they did not know that he was a target, so they could have potentially been with him during the missile strike. Some of the people that were with Al-Radmi when he was killed were never affiliated with AQAP and only knew Al-Radmi socially....

The people in my village wanted Al-Radmi to be captured, so that they could question him and find out what he was doing wrong so they could put an end to it. They still don't have an answer to that question. Instead, all they have is the psychological fear and terror that now occupies their souls. They fear that their home

or a neighbor's home could be bombed at any time by a U.S. drone....

I personally don't even know if it is safe for me to go back to Wessab, because I am someone who people in my village associate with America and its values. I don't know whether it is safe to travel to visit my mom, because the roads are dangerous.

There is nothing villagers in Wessab needed more than a school to educate the local children or a hospital to help decrease the number of women and children dying every day. Had the United States built a school or hospital, it would have instantly changed the lives of my fellow villagers for the better and been the most effective counterterrorism tool. And I can almost certainly assure you that the villagers would have gone to arrest the target themselves.

Instead of first experiencing America through a school or a hospital, most people in Wessab first experienced America through the terror of a drone strike. 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....

### **Visiting with Victims of Targeted Killings**

In my work with foreign journalists, I have visited many areas struck by drones or warplanes that residents believe were dispatched as part of the targeted

killing program conducted by the United States. I have traveled most frequently to Abyan, an area in southern Yemen, which had been seized in early 2011 by Ansar Al-Sharia, a group aligned with AQAP. One of my trips to Abyan, with National Public Radio, was in mid-January 2012, just two days after the area was freed from AQAP. Traveling in the area was dangerous, both because some AQAP members had simply gone underground by shaving their beards and remaining in town, and because we did not know whether we might find ourselves in a place where a drone might strike next.

In Abyan and other places in Yemen, I visited many locations where local residents were suffering from the consequences of targeted killing operations. I have met with dozens of civilians who were injured during drone strikes and other air attacks. I have met with relatives of people who were killed by drone strikes as well as numerous eyewitnesses. They have told me how these air strikes have changed their lives for the worse.

In early March 2013, I was working with *Newsweek* in Abyan when I met the mother of a boy named Muneer Muhammed. Muneer, an 18-year-old boy, transported goods for shops via his donkey in the local souk of Ja'ar town. He had recently been engaged and was preparing for his wedding. Muneer was at work when a missile hit and killed him in May 2012....

The people with whom we spoke in Abyan told us that Muneer was not a member of AQAP. But that has not stopped AQAP from trying to use his death to recruit supporters to their cause. Local residents told us that they approached one of Muneer's relatives, urging him to join AQAP in order to seek revenge for Muneer's death....

Days after Abyan was freed from AQAP control in June 2012, I met a fisherman named Ali Al-Amodi in a hospital in Aden. The day before, his house in Shaqra, on the sea side of Abyan, was targeted by a U.S. air strike. Al-Amodi told me that he stood helplessly as his 4-year-old son and 6-year-old daughter died in his arms on the way to the hospital.

Al-Amodi had no links with AQAP. He and other locals said that his house was targeted by mistake. In that same strike, four other children and one woman were killed. Witnesses said none were militants.

Later in June 2012, I visited Al-Makhzan, a town outside of Ja'ar, where a drone strike targeting Nader Al-Shadadi took place. Al-Shadadi is identified by the

Yemeni government as a terrorist and a leader of Ansar Al-Shariah. He has been targeted at least three times in different places, but the strikes have missed him every time. This time, it targeted his aunt's house. Neighbors say he was not there, and his aunt's only son was killed. There is no evidence that the son was affiliated with AQAP.

In Aden, I spoke with Saleh Bin Fareed, one of the tribal leaders present on December 17, 2009 at the site where a U.S. cruise missile targeted the village of Al-Majalah in Lawdar, Abyan. In the poor village that day, more than 40 civilians were killed, including four pregnant women....

## **Widespread Impact of Targeted Killing in Yemen**

The killing of innocent civilians by U.S. missiles in Yemen is helping to destabilize my country and create an environment from which AQAP benefits. Every time an innocent civilian is killed or maimed by a U.S. drone strike or another targeted killing, it is felt by Yemenis across the country. These strikes often cause animosity towards the United States and create a backlash that undermines the national security goals of the United States. The U.S. strikes also increase my people's hatred against the central government, which is seen as propped up by the Persian Gulf governments and the United States....

But the main issue is not whether AQAP recruits more terrorists because of drone strikes. AQAP's power and influence has never been based on the number of members in its ranks. AQAP recruits and retains power through its ideology, which relies in large part on the Yemeni people believing that America is at war with them....

## **The U.S. War Against AQAP Is a War of Mistakes**

If it's not already clear from my testimony today, let me say this very plainly: I hate AQAP. I don't support their ideology. I don't like the way they have distorted my religion. And I despise their methods. The fight against AQAP, however, is not a traditional war. And I fear that these air strikes undermine the United States' effort to defeat AQAP and win the hearts and minds of the Yemeni people....

To be clear, I am not only referring to the mistake of killing innocent civilians. Of course, the death of an innocent civilian is the most tragic mistake of all. Never-

theless, even when no civilians are harmed, the United States makes a huge mistake when missiles fail to reach their intended target. Drone strikes that miss their targets make these terrorists look brave. They become role models, simply by evading weapons being launched by the greatest military power on Earth. Perhaps the greatest source of satire, ridicule, and propaganda against the United States and Yemeni government occurs when they claim to have killed ranking terrorists, like Saeed Al-Shahri or Nader Al-Shadadi, only to be proven wrong days later....

## Conclusion and Recommendations

...As someone who has lived and worked on this issue very closely, I cannot help but feel that the American and Yemeni governments are losing the war against AQAP. Even when drone strikes target and kill the right people, it is at the expense of creating the many strategic problems I have discussed today. Every tactical suc-

cess is at the expense of creating more strategic problems. I do, however, believe that things can still be fixed. If the United States wants to win the battle against AQAP in Yemen, I strongly suggest that it consider taking the following steps:

- Stop all the targeted killing strikes.
- Announce the names of those already on the “kill list,” so that innocent civilians can stay out of harm’s way.
- Issue an official apology to the families of all civilians killed or injured by targeted killing strikes.
- Compensate the families of innocent civilians killed or injured by strikes conducted or authorized by the United States.
- In every village where there has been a targeted killing, build a school or hospital so that the villagers’ only experience with America will not be the death and destruction caused by an American missile.

Thank you very much.

## Rand Paul: End Killing of Americans Without Trial

April 28—On April 23, Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) submitted testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights, chaired by Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.). Paul, who held a 13-hour filibuster on the drone question March 6, temporarily blocking the nomination of CIA Director John Brennan, expanded the issue beyond killing Americans on American soil. In his testimony, Paul said, “even overseas, even traitors deserve some due process if they are American citizens....”

In his written statement, Paul said:

“We now know that the President has a kill list, which has already included American citizens, such as terror suspect Anwar al-Awlaki. But particularly if they are not actively involved in combat. If he was actively engaged in combat against our soldiers, there would’ve been no question you take him out. But he was riding in a vehicle nowhere near American troops when he was killed.

“My preference would be that we try Americans

accused of aiding and abetting terrorism as traitors. But if they don’t return, or won’t return, try them in absentia. The Constitution makes clear that treason is a federal crime.

“We should also remember this was the same man who was invited to dine at the Pentagon just months after 9/11. Could the same people whose judgment we trusted to invite al-Awlaki to wine and dine in Washington, also be mistaken in their judgment in their decision to assassinate him? We will never know, because this American citizen never received any trial or due process.”

In his April 23 testimony, Paul also quoted members of the military community who have “argued that our current drone program makes the nation less safe and undermines our national security.” He said:

“Kirk Lippold, Commander of the *USS Cole*, which as we all know, was attacked by al-Qaeda in 2000, said recently of our drone policy: ‘This president, in my opinion, has fundamentally undermined our ability to defend this nation by killing terrorists rather than capturing them.... I think ultimately the drone program is setting us up for failure because for each high-level terrorist you kill, that is a high-level intelligence asset that is no longer available to exploit.’”