

Beat: Miscellaneous

Deputy regional head of al-Qaeda denies death in audio tape

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USPA News - The deputy commander of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi national Said al-Shihri, is believed to have released an audio recording on Monday to deny government reports that he died during a military operation in eastern Yemen last month. The 11-minute audio tape featuring al-Shihri was distributed by al-Qaeda's media arm on Islamist Internet forums on early Monday morning.

The militant leader remarked on recent events in Yemen and the wider region, and described reports that he was killed in a military operation in September as an attempt to cover up civilian deaths caused by U.S. drones. On September 10, Yemen's defense ministry said al-Shihri was among seven al-Qaeda members who were killed by Yemeni security forces during a "qualitative operation" in the remote eastern province of Hadhramaut. But intelligence sources said the operation was likely carried out by a U.S. drone with no involvement of the Yemeni armed forces. Al-Shihri was publicly identified in January 2009 as the deputy leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is based primarily in the tribal areas outside of the Yemeni capital city Sana'a, which remain outside the control of the Yemeni government. The group has orchestrated high-profile attacks since 2009, making it al-Qaeda's most active branch. In January 2010, when the U.S. government designated al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), then-U.S. State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said al-Shihri helped carry out terrorist acts by generating targets, recruiting new members, assisting with training and attack planning, and tasking others in the preparation of attacks. Al-Shihri, who is sometimes also known as Abu-Sufyan al-Azidi, was a former officer in Saudi Arabia's internal security force and spent about five years at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility in Cuba before being released into a Saudi rehabilitation program for militants. During his imprisonment at the controversial facility, Shihri had said he wanted freedom so he could work at his family's furniture store in Saudi Arabia.

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