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Media Analysis

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Office of Research

Europe: U.S. Should Be Wary of "Al Qaeda Trap" in Yemen

European media see Yemen as a new front in the war on terror. Many outlets warn a military campaign would turn Muslims against the United States and prefer a non-military strategy promoting development.

European commentators paid scant attention to Yemen prior to the Christmas Day bombing attempt. Some did mention the return of Guantanamo detainees and the potential for Yemen to serve as a haven for terrorists. But only a few outlets in Turkey and Britain reported on U.S. air strikes in early December. At the time, the *Daily Telegraph* stood out for boldly labeling Yemen "bin Laden's new base."

Military approach could backfire

Since the Christmas Day attempt, the floodgates of editorial opinion have opened. A broad spectrum now believe a U.S. intervention in Yemen is possible and just what al Qaeda wants. A Lithuanian commentator for centrist *Lietuvos Zinios* writes sardonically, "one does not need to be a genius" to understand how the Muslim world would react to opening a new front line against Yemen.

"The U.S. view—that Iraq was a war of yesterday, Afghanistan is a war of today and Yemen will be a war of tomorrow unless pre-emptive action is taken—underlines the significance of this new front in the struggle against terrorism."

**Finland's right-of-center *Aamulehti*
December 29, 2009**

A number of outlets say airstrikes will drive more people into the arms of radical Islamists and "make the local population more sympathetic with al Qaeda," as Russia's centrist *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* puts it. Some believe an attack on Yemen could lead to a conflict spreading throughout the region. Referring to President Obama's inaugural address, a

Turkish commentator for the Islamic reformist daily *Yeni Safak* writes "a possible U.S. intervention in Yemen would make the Muslim world 'clench its fist' again."

Several papers speculate a major U.S. military intervention in a country as unstable as Yemen will lead the United States into a quagmire. France's left-of-center *Le Monde* says this outcome is "precisely what al Qaeda is seeking to achieve." Commentators believe it will be difficult to drive al Qaeda out of Yemen, which a Belgian writer calls "an al Qaeda Trap." A columnist for France's right-of-center *Le Figaro* wants the international community to consider the tactics used against the Jihadists until now "before we dive headlong into battle," a view shared by others.

Nation-building may be required

Numerous observers say the United States should employ a broad strategy in Yemen, not just a military one. Several German papers argue, as left-of-center *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* does, that the country needs "development and better government" rather than air strikes against al Qaeda camps. Similarly, a pundit for Britain's left-of-center *Independent* wants the international community to provide "sustained and intensive attention, capacity building, and support" to the Yemeni people. Italy's centrist *Corriere della Sera* hopes the United States will opt for "all out collaboration" with Yemen, but a commentator for Britain's left-of-center *Guardian*, expressing a view shared by others on the left and right, says the United States should not be seen as propping up the unpopular president of Yemen.

This product analyzes commentary from Europe December 28-January 13, 2010 reacting to the attempted bombing of NWA flight 253. Reports are selected by post for their relevance to U.S. policy and public diplomacy efforts. Prepared by the Office of Opinion Research, Media Reaction Division, rnrMail@state.gov; (202) 736-4330. Drafted by Andrew J. McLean.

The findings presented do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Government.