

Beat: Local

Al-Qaeda apologizes for deadly attack on Yemen hospital

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USPA News - The military commander of al-Qaeda's branch in Yemen said one of the group's fighters disobeyed orders when he attacked a hospital during a coordinated assault earlier this month on the defense ministry complex in the capital, killing 52 people and injuring more than 150 others. Qassim ar-Reimy, the military commander for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), issued the unusual public apology after Yemeni state television broadcast security footage that showed a gunman attacking doctors and other hospital staff.

The government immediately rejected the apology, saying the video showed three militants at the hospital. "We saw what the Yemeni channel broadcast: a gunman entering a hospital at the Ministry of Defense, doing what he was doing," ar-Reimy said. "We did not order him to do so, and we are not pleased with what he did. Moreover, it wronged us and pained us. Because we do not fight in this manner, and this is not what we call people to do." The incident happened on December 5 when between 9 and 12 militants attacked the Defense Ministry complex in Sana'a, killing 52 people and injuring 167 others. The attackers first killed four guards before opening a gate and driving an explosives-laden car into the complex, after which militants in another vehicle went on a shooting spree before being killed. Ar-Reimy said the group had informed its fighters that the defense ministry complex includes a hospital and a place for prayer, and cautioned them not to enter either of them. "Eight of our brothers were cautious, but one was not. May Allah forgive him and have mercy on him," he said in the 4-minute video distributed on militant websites. The commander added: "We confess to this mistake and fault. We offer our apologies and condolences to the families of the victims. We did not want your lost ones; we did not target them on purpose. This is not our religion or our morals. We accept full responsibility for what happened in the hospital by paying Diyah (blood money), recompensing, medication and so forth." Mohammed Albasha, a spokesman for the Yemeni Embassy in Washington, D.C., rejected the apology and said its purpose was to counter "public rage" after the release of security footage from inside the hospital. "AQAP claims only one militant attacked the Urdhi Military Hospital but CCTV shows three militants," he said. Albasha also rejected al-Qaeda's claim that the government operates a "drone control center" inside the defense ministry. "I wonder what would have happened if the government didn't release the CCTV footage of the killings in Urdhi Military Hospital?" the spokesman questioned. "I won't be surprised if AQAP carries out - in the near future - a new attack on a security or army installation to shift attention." In the public apology, ar-Reimy also vowed to continue attacks against places that support American drones by spying, by providing information, or by offering intelligence advice. "All these are considered legitimate targets for us. We have a long list of these places," he warned. "In case they continue, we will continue. We will reach them."

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