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Al-Qaida branch says No. 2 leader killed in Yemen

AP By AHMED AL-HAJ July 17, 2013 4:56 AM



SANAA, Yemen (AP) — The Yemen-based branch of al-Qaida announced Wednesday that the group's No. 2 figure, a former Guantanamo Bay prisoner, has died in a U.S. drone strike.



FILE - In this undated frame grab from video posted on a militant-leaning Web site, and provided by the ...

The announcement, posted on militant websites, gave no date for the death of Saudi-born Saeed al-Shihri.

Yemeni security officials, however, said al-Shihri died of serious injuries sustained when a drone strike targeted him in November last year.

Al-Shihri had survived an earlier drone attack, in September 2012, the officials added, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to media.

Wednesday's announcement came in a video purporting to show the group's chief theologian, Ibrahim Al-Robaish, in which he eulogized al-Shihri.

In the video, al-Robaish said al-Shihri was hit by the drone while speaking on his mobile telephone in the province of Saadah, north of the Yemeni capital of Sanaa.

The authenticity of the video, which was first reported by the U.S. monitoring service SITE, could not be independently confirmed

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Al-Shihri, also known as Abu Sufyan al-Azdi, fought in Afghanistan and spent six years in Guantanamo. He was returned to Saudi Arabia in late 2007 and later fled to Yemen to join the al-Qaida branch there.

In one of his last videos, which appeared on the Internet in April, al-Shihri harshly criticized Yemen's neighbor to the north, Saudi Arabia, for its policy of allowing the United States to launch deadly drone strikes from bases in the kingdom.

Al-Shihri's death is considered a major blow to the Yemen-based al-Qaida branch, known as Al-Qaida in The Arabian Peninsula. Washington considers it the most dangerous of the group's offshoots.

The branch has been linked to several attempted attacks on U.S. targets, including the foiled Christmas Day 2009 bombing of an airliner over Detroit and explosives-laden parcels intercepted aboard cargo flights in 2010.

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