



AP Photo/Yassir Hassan
People flee after gunfire on a street in the southern port city of Aden, Yemen, Wednesday.

Yemen government falls, U.S. has few options

WASHINGTON (AP) — The hasty maritime departure of Yemen’s U.S.-backed president on Wednesday illustrated how completely one of the most important American counterterrorism efforts has disintegrated, leaving the country wide open for what could be a deeply destabilizing proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Driven weeks ago from the capital by Shiite rebels, President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi abandoned the country, leaving on a boat from the southern port of Aden, Yemeni security officials said. His departure came after air strikes rained down on his troops, a sign that rebels held air superiority and that Hadi’s calls for an international no-fly zone had been disregarded. On the ground, the rebels were advancing toward his position.

Three years ago, American officials hailed Hadi’s ascension to power in a U.S.-brokered deal that ended the longtime rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh during the political

upheaval of the Arab Spring. And just a few months ago, President Barack Obama was still calling Yemen a counterterrorism success story, even as the CIA warned that Iranian-backed Houthi rebels were growing restive in the north of the country.

Now, U.S. officials acknowledge their efforts against Yemen’s dangerous al-Qaida affiliate are seriously hampered, with the American embassy closed and the last U.S. troops evacuated from the country over the weekend. Although the Houthis have seized control of much of the country and are avowed enemies of al-Qaida, they can’t project power against the militants the way the Hadi government could with American support, officials say. Deeply anti-American, the Houthis have rejected U.S. overtures, officials say.

The latest developments in Yemen have worrisome implications for a Middle East already wracked by Sunni-Shia conflict, experts say.

BRIEFLY

U.S. conducts airstrikes to help Iraq retake Tikrit

WASHINGTON (AP) — At Iraq’s request, the U.S. began airstrikes in Tikrit on Wednesday in support of a stalled Iraqi ground offensive to retake the city from Islamic State fighters. The bombing marked a significant expansion of the U.S. military role in Iraq.

“These strikes are intended to destroy ISIL strongholds with precision, thereby saving innocent Iraqi lives while minimizing” unintended damage to civilian structures, Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, the commander of the U.S.-led campaign to defeat the Islamic State group, said in a written statement.

Tikrit is deemed an important test of the ability of Iraq, with coalition support, to retake ground it ceded to the Islamic State last year. The U.S. initially did not provide air support in Tikrit because Baghdad pointedly chose instead to partner with Iran in a battle it predicted would yield a quick victory. In recent days, however, the Pentagon has called the Iraqi offensive “stalled.”

An Associated Press correspondent in Tikrit reported hearing warplanes overhead late Wednesday, followed by multiple explosions. An Iraqi commander in the city told the AP that a warehouse used to store Islamic State weapons was bombed by a U.S. plane, and a U.S. official in Washington confirmed that arms warehouses were among the targets.

Military: Bergdahl may face life in prison if convicted

FORT BRAGG, N.C. (AP) — Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who abandoned his post in Afghanistan and was held captive for five years by the Taliban, was charged Wednesday by the U.S. military with desertion and misbehavior before the enemy and could get life in prison if convicted.

The charges are the latest development in a long and bitter debate over Bergdahl’s case. They also underscore the military and political ramifications of his decision on June 30, 2009, to leave his post after expressing misgivings about the U.S. military’s role, as well as his own, in the Afghanistan war.

Bergdahl, 28, was captured by the Taliban and held by members of the Haqqani network, an insurgent group tied to the Taliban that operates both in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Last May 31, Bergdahl was handed over to U.S. special forces in Afghanistan as part of an exchange for five Taliban commanders who were imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The exchange set off a debate over whether the U.S. should have released the five Taliban members. Little is known about what the five have been doing in Qatar, where they are being monitored by the government. Some lawmakers have predicted that the five would return to the battlefield.

Racial disparities persist with legal pot

By KRISTEN WYATT
Associated Press

DENVER — The legalization of marijuana in Colorado hasn’t solved the racial disparities in enforcement that drug-policy reformers had hoped to end, with blacks still far more likely than whites to be charged with pot-related crimes, a new report says.

The report, issued Wednesday by the pro-legalization Drug Policy Alliance, showed that marijuana arrests in Colorado all but stopped after voters made the drug legal in small amounts for those 21 and older.

But the report noted continuing racial disparities involving the marijuana crimes that remain, including public use and possession in excess of the one-ounce limit.

The study examined drug arrests in all 64 Colorado counties for two years before and two years after legalization in 2012.

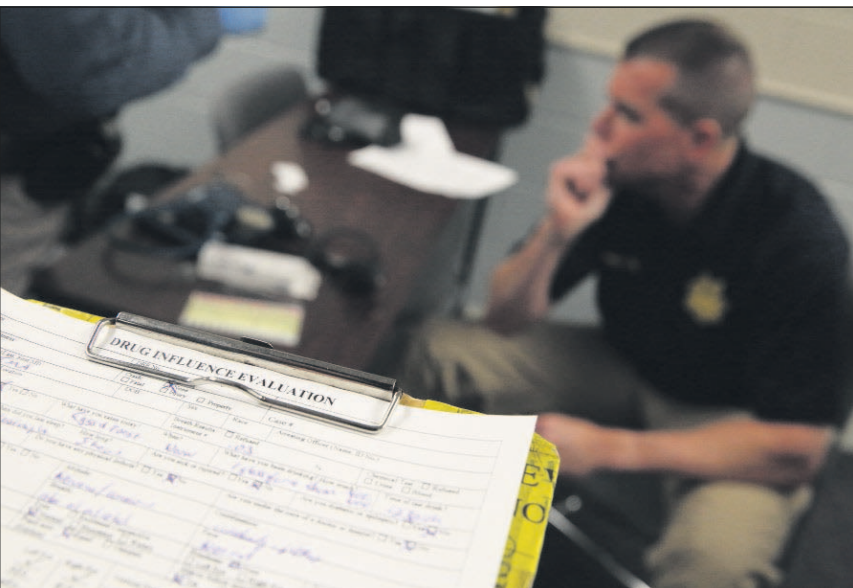
The total number of charges for pot possession, distribution and cultivation plummeted almost 95 percent, from about 39,000 in 2010 to just over 2,000 last year.

Even after legalization, blacks were more than twice as likely as whites to be charged with public use of marijuana. Blacks were also much more likely to be charged with illegal cultivation of pot or possession of more than an ounce.

“Legalization is no panacea for the longtime issues that law enforcement had with the black and brown community,” said Art Way, Colorado director for the Drug Policy Alliance.

Still, the overall drop-off in arrests is good news for minorities, said Tony Newman, also of the Drug Policy Alliance.

“Despite the unsurprising racial disparities, these massive drops in arrests have been enormously beneficial to people of color,” Newman said.



AP Photo/Brennan Linsley, file
In this 2014 file photo, an instructor for a Drug Recognition Expert class sits near a roadside Drug Influence Evaluation sheet on a clipboard at the Colorado State Patrol Training Academy in Golden, Colo.

The analysis did not break out data for Colorado’s largest ethnic minority, Latinos. That’s because data comes from the National Incident-Based Reporting System, which does not tally numbers for Latinos.

One of the region’s top officials for coordinating drug enforcement, Tom Gorman of the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program, insisted that officers are not racially profiling pot users.

“Racial disparities exist in other laws. What does that mean, that homicide law, rape laws, weapon laws are racist? There are other factors going on here that we need to address,” Gorman said.

After legalization, racial disparities did ease somewhat for marijuana distribution charges. Blacks accounted for about 22 percent of such arrests in 2010 and around 18 percent in 2014.

The arrest data got a mixed response from the regional head of the NAACP.

“The overall decrease in arrests,

charges and cases is enormously beneficial to communities of color who bore the brunt of marijuana prohibition,” Rosemary Harris Lytle said in a statement.

“However, we are concerned with the rise in disparity for the charge of public consumption and challenge law enforcement to ensure this reality is not discriminatory in any manner.”

In 2014, the year Colorado’s recreational marijuana stores opened, blacks were 3.9 percent of the population but accounted for 9.2 percent of pot possession arrests.

For illegal marijuana cultivation, the disparities didn’t just persist. They got much worse.

In 2010, whites in Colorado were slightly more likely than blacks to be arrested for growing pot. After legalization, the arrest rate for whites dropped dramatically but ticked up for blacks. In 2014, the arrest rate for blacks was roughly 2.5 times higher.

France jet audio shows pilot locked out of cockpit

SEYNE-LES-ALPES, France (AP) — The first half of Germanwings Flight 9525 was chilling in its normalcy. It took off from Barcelona en route to Duesseldorf, climbing up over the Mediterranean and turning over France. The last communication was a routine request to continue on its route.

Minutes later, at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday, the Airbus A320 inexplicably began to descend. Within 10 minutes it had plunged from its cruising altitude of 38,000 feet to just over 6,000 feet and slammed into a remote mountainside.

To find out why, investigators have been analyzing the mangled black box that contains an audio recording from the cockpit. Remi Jouty, the head of France’s accident investigation bureau BEA, said Wednesday that it has yielded sounds and voices, but so far not the “slightest explanation” of why the plane crashed, killing all 150 on board.

A newspaper report, however, suggests the audio contains intriguing information at the least: One of the pilots is heard leaving the cockpit, then banging on the door with increasing urgency in an

unsuccessful attempt to get back in.

“The guy outside is knocking lightly on the door and there is no answer,” The New York Times quotes an unidentified investigator as saying. “And then he hits the door stronger and no answer. There is never an answer.”

Eventually, the newspaper quotes the investigator as saying: “You can hear he is trying to smash the door down.”

The investigator, whom the newspaper said could not be identified because the investigation is continuing, said officials don’t know why the pilot left. He also

does not speculate on why the other pilot didn’t open the door or make contact with ground control before the crash.

Since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, airlines in the U.S. don’t leave one pilot alone in the cockpit. The standard operating procedure is that if one of the pilots leaves — for example to use the bathroom — a flight attendant takes their spot in the cockpit. It was not immediately clear if European airlines have adopted the same practice.

French officials gave no details from the recording on Wednesday, insisting the

cause of the crash remained a mystery. They said the descent was gradual enough to suggest the plane was under the control of its navigators.

“At this point, there is no explanation,” Jouty said. “One doesn’t imagine that the pilot consciously sends his plane into a mountain.”

French officials said terrorism appeared unlikely and Germany’s top security official said there was no evidence of foul play.

Helicopters ferried in rescue workers and other personnel throughout the day. More than 600 rescue workers and aviation investigators were on site.

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