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AFP

Yemen says US exaggerates Al Qa'eda threat

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SAN'A // Yemen said today that US officials have exaggerated the size and danger of al Qa'eda in Yemen, and insisted that fighting the jihadist network's local branch remains San'a's job.

A Yemeni official has denied what he called "press leaks published in US and Western media that exaggerate the size of al Qa'eda and the danger that it poses to Yemen's stability and security," according to Saba, the state news agency.

An unnamed US counter-terrorism official had told AFP yesterday that the US was increasingly concerned about the threat posed by al Qa'eda in Yemen and that it was moving to pile pressure on the militants.

He said al Qa'eda affiliates had regrouped in Yemen and emerged as a "virulent" danger.

"They're not feeling the same kind of heat, not yet, anyway, as their friends in the tribal areas" of Pakistan, he said, adding that "everyone involved on our side understands that has to change."

The US official spoke after reports in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post* quoting US officials as saying that the new assessment of the threat raised the prospect of expanded US operations in Yemen, including CIA drone strikes.

The San'a official said: "Yemen insists that fighting terrorism in Yemen remains the responsibility of Yemeni security authorities.

"Yemeni forces, with the support of friends and brothers, are capable of bearing their full responsibilities in eliminating al Qa'eda elements," he said.

Yemen has intensified its military campaign against al Qa'eda in the Arabian Peninsula, also known as AQAP, since December, mainly after the Christmas Day botched attempt to blow up a US airliner by the Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who had spent time in Yemen.

The US administration has confirmed it is actively hunting Anwar Al Awlaqi, a US-born cleric in Yemen who has praised Abdulmutallab, and blessed a shooting rampage last year at Fort Hood in Texas by a Muslim US Army officer.