

# *Yemen Launches Big Offensive Against al-Qaida in South*

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Aden, April 29 (Xinhua-RHC) -- The Yemeni armed forces on Tuesday launched an all-out offensive against several al-Qaida hideouts in the country's southern regions of Abyan and Shabwa, a military official told Xinhua.

"The army troops, with military helicopter gunships and tanks, started attacking al-Qaida hideouts with a large offensive in Abyan's mountainous region of Mahfad and the town of Azzan in neighboring Shabwa province," the local military source said on condition of anonymity.

Local residents confirmed to Xinhua that they saw "heavy military convoys backed by armored vehicles and tanks travelling toward the Mahfad region."

High-ranking army officials and security commanders arrived in Abyan to lead the offensive against al-Qaida, which is to be supervised by the Yemeni Minister of Defense, Maj. Gen. Mohammed Nasser Ahmed, a government official told Xinhua, also on condition of anonymity.

Several al-Qaida-held sites in Abyan and Shabwa provinces in south Yemen are being targeted by "Operation Golden Swords," he said.

Tuesday's actions are a part of a large government assault and military mobilization with participation of over 1,600 soldiers across Shabwa and Abyan provinces, according the source.

Last week, Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi said "recent counter-terrorism operations targeted and killed over 60 al-Qaida- linked militants including a number of high value targets in Abyan and Shabwa provinces."

The Yemen-based al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has frequently staged revenge attacks on local targets, including military ones, and foreign missions in the impoverished Arab country.

The AQAP, which emerged in January 2009, is considered the most serious strategic threat to the Yemeni government and neighboring oil-rich Saudi Arabia.

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