



Behind a nondescript door at CIA headquarters, the agency has assembled a new counterterrorism unit whose job is to find al-Qaeda targets in Yemen. A corresponding commotion has been underway in the Arabian Peninsula, where construction workers have been laying out a secret new runway for CIA drones.

When the missiles start falling, it will mark another expansion of the paramilitary mission of the CIA.

In the decade since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the agency has undergone a fundamental transformation. Although the CIA continues to gather intelligence and furnish analysis on a vast array of subjects, its focus and resources are increasingly centered on the cold counterterrorism objective of finding targets to capture or kill.

The shift has been gradual enough that its magnitude can be difficult to grasp. Drone strikes that once seemed impossibly futuristic are now so routine that they rarely attract public attention unless a high-ranking al-Qaeda figure is killed.

But framed against the upcoming 10-year anniversary of the 2001 attacks — as well as the arrival next week of retired Gen. David Petraeus as the CIA's next director — the extent of the agency's reorientation comes into sharper view:

□ The drone program has killed more than 2,000 militants and civilians since 2001, a staggering figure for an agency that has a long history of supporting proxy forces in bloody conflicts but rarely pulled the trigger on its own.

□ The CIA's Counterterrorism Center, which had 300 employees on the day of the attacks, now exceeds al-Qaeda's core membership around the globe. With about 2,000 on its staff, the CTC accounts for 10 percent of the agency's workforce, has designated officers in almost every significant overseas post and controls the CIA's expanding fleet of drones.

CIA shifts focus to killing targets

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