

Saudi-led coalition resume air strikes in Yemen

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The coalition of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia and backed by the United States resumed its brutal assault against Houthi militia targets throughout Yemen Sunday, following the expiration of a five-day ceasefire that began last week.

The stated goal of the Saudi-led air war is to reinstate President Abd Rabbuh Monsour Hadi, who fled the country for Riyadh in March, and push back the Houthi militia that, with the support of military forces loyal to former long-time dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh, has taken control of most of Yemen's western provinces.

A plea by a UN envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, that the five-day "humanitarian truce" should turn into a permanent cease-fire fell on deaf ears. The Saudi-led coalition rejected outright any extension of the truce to allow for the shipment and disbursement of further aid.

There were at least three air strikes reported Monday in the northern province of Saada, the stronghold of the Houthi rebels. Bombs were also dropped on the southern port city of Aden, where the Houthis and allied forces control the presidential palace and have been fighting for control of the airport and other key portions of the city.

Aden's health chief Al Khader Laswar reported Sunday that four people had been killed and 39 others had been wounded in fighting, including four women and two children. According to Laswar, 517 civilians and pro-Hadi fighters have been killed in the city since fighting began in March.

Saudi Arabia also resumed firing artillery shells and rockets across its southern border against Houthi outposts in northern Yemen. The Saudi military reported Monday that their forces had responded to mortars fired from Yemen at a military garrison in its southern Najran province.

US Secretary of State John Kerry, who praised the bloody war in Yemen earlier this month when he met with Saudi King Salman in Riyadh, blamed the Houthis for the resumption of air strikes. "We know that the Houthis were engaged in moving some missile-launching capacity to the border and, under the rules of engagement, it was always understood that if there were proactive moves by one side or another, then that would be in violation of the ceasefire arrangement," he told reporters on Monday.

From the beginning, the Obama administration has backed the assault on Yemen as part of its efforts to maintain control of the country, which occupies a key geostrategic position along critical oil transport lanes. Yemen has also functioned as a base for US drones in the region.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al Jubeir released a statement in which he expressed "regret that the truce did not achieve its humanitarian goals," and echoed Kerry's statement that the Houthis were at fault for continuing violence. Yemeni Foreign Minister Reyad Yassin Abdulla also placed blame on the Houthis for the failure to extend the halt in air strikes. "That's what we said before—that if they start again, we will start again," he told Reuters.

Abdulla told reporters that the resumed air campaign would avoid facilities necessary to the receipt humanitarian aid. "They will keep places for aid to come. They will keep places safe like Sanaa airport, Hodeida seaport, Aden seaport. We will encourage and support any humanitarian aid to come in," he said.

In fact, the Saudi coalition has repeatedly carried out air strikes on the civilian air strips in Sanaa and Hodeida as part of its efforts to enforce a no-fly zone since it began military operations in March. It has also enforced a punishing blockade of the country's ports,

which, taken together with the no-fly zone, has cut off Yemen's normal supply of food, fuel and medical supplies. As a result, as many as 20 million people, approximately 80 percent of the population, are going hungry.

Coalition bombs have been dropped on residential neighborhoods, a dairy factory in Hodeida, a refugee camp in northern Yemen and a warehouse containing materials for distributing clean water. The Saudi regime has admitted to targeting hospitals and schools, in violation of international law, because they claim they are being used by the Houthis to store weapons and stage attacks. More than 30 schools have been wrecked by air strikes, while the fighting has kept more than 2 million children from attending class.

The brief cease-fire has done little to ease the increasingly desperate conditions confronting millions of civilians in what was already one of the poorest countries in the Arab world. Residents of Saada and Aden reported that, in spite of the delivery of new aid into the country, the much-needed food and medical supplies had not been adequately distributed.

"There is still no fuel available and an extreme shortage of food," Ghassan Salah, a resident of Aden told the *Wall Street Journal*. "Some families have received [aid], some haven't. Government officials who are supposed to distribute it free sometimes sell it. Nothing has improved."

Civilians have borne the brunt of the assault, accounting for more than half of those killed and wounded. The UN estimates that in less than two months at least 1,820 people have been killed and 7,330 wounded in air strikes and fighting on the ground. Additionally, the US-backed, Saudi-led war has already displaced more than half a million people.



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