

Saudi-led assault on Yemen continues despite ceasefire

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Airstrikes carried out by jet fighters from the Saudi-led, US-backed coalition continued to pound Houthi militia-controlled areas throughout Yemen on Monday. The assault came despite a multi-day cease-fire announced last week by the UN, which was supposed to go into effect on Saturday.

Bombs slammed into a residential neighborhood of the country's capital Sanaa, killing at least 21 civilians and wounding dozens of others. "Three missiles targeted the neighborhood, destroying 15 houses and killing 21 people and wounding 45 others," a resident told Reuters news service.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon stated that he was "very much disappointed" that the ceasefire had not come into effect over the weekend. Less than an hour after the ceasefire deadline on Saturday, Saudi-led airstrikes were reported in the city of Sanaa, as well as the provinces of Hajjah and Taiz. Clashes between Houthi militia fighters and opposition forces reportedly continued on the ground around the southern port city of Aden, resulting in numerous casualties.

Al Arabiya announced on Saturday that the Saudi monarchy had not received a request from the government of President Abd Rabbuh Monsour Hadi to halt its campaign of crushing airstrikes. This contradicted statements from the office of General Secretary Ban earlier in the week that stated that Hadi had "communicated his acceptance of the pause to the coalition to ensure their support."

Speaking to reporters over the weekend, Brigadier General Ahmed al Assiri, spokesman for the Saudi coalition, also stated that the Saudis would not abide by the UN ceasefire, since it lacked "mechanisms to implement the pause."

Riyadh recognizes Hadi as the country's legitimate

leader and is seeking to return his government to power. Hadi fled Yemen for Saudi Arabia in the face of a Houthi assault on his compound in the southern port city of Aden in March.

The Saudi-led coalition has been bombing Houthi targets throughout Yemen since late March with the stated aim of pushing the militias back from the territory they have seized. Supported by military forces loyal to former longtime dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Houthis have been on the offensive since September of last year, moving south from their northern stronghold of Saada to assert control over most of the country's western provinces.

The continuation of airstrikes in spite of the announced ceasefire follows the modus operandi of the Saudi-led coalition. The official end of airstrikes was announced in late April with the supposed initiation of a political process to end the conflict, only to see a continuation of daily bombing raids against both military and civilian targets throughout the country.

The latest so-called humanitarian pause negotiated by the UN was meant to allow for the delivery of desperately needed food, water, and medical supplies to the country's beleaguered population.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters on Monday that limited deliveries of humanitarian aid have been possible in the face the unrelenting assault. "Despite the continued air strikes, despite the fighting, our humanitarian colleagues and their partners were able to distribute some vital aid to the desperate people of Yemen," Dujarric stated.

Civilians have borne the brunt of the conflict in Yemen, making up more than half of the 3,000 people killed and 14,000 wounded since the end of March. Over a million people have been displaced from their homes by the unrelenting campaign of airstrikes as well

as ongoing fighting between competing factions on the ground.

Two separate airstrikes on July 6 targeted popular markets, resulting in mass civilian casualties. An afternoon missile strike on a livestock market in Fayoush, a northern suburb of Aden, killed at least 50 people and injured dozens of others. Later that evening a strike was carried out on a market in Joub, north of Sanaa, killing more than 60 civilians.

According to the UN, more than 80 percent of the country's 25 million people are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. UN officials have warned that without drastic intervention millions confront a looming famine. Diseases such as dengue fever are spreading rapidly, while there have been warnings of the return of the polio, which was officially eradicated within the country in 2006.

The Saudi coalition's domination over Yemeni airspace, made possible by American logistical support in the form of refueling planes and a joint coordination center in Riyadh, as well as a naval blockade of the country's ports, has severely limited the importation of food and medical supplies. Hospitals throughout the country are unable to function, having run short of medicine and fuel to run power generators, while millions lack access to clean water.



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