

Saudi coalition airstrike on hospital in Yemen kills at least 11

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The Saudi-led coalition added to its war crimes in Yemen by carrying out an airstrike yesterday afternoon against a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders (MSF), killing at least 11 people and wounding at least 19 others. As MSF had provided the GPS coordinates of the medical facility to all sides in the conflict, the targeting was deliberate.

With US backing and assistance, Saudi Arabia and its Middle Eastern allies have waged an illegal air war inside Yemen since March 2015, following the seizure of Sana'a, the capital, by Houthi Shiite rebels. The Saudi regime accused its regional arch-rival Iran of backing the Houthis and is seeking to reinstate the government-in-exile of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

Yesterday's airstrike on the Abs hospital in the northern Hajjah province is part of a deliberate campaign to terrorise the Houthi population in the north of Yemen. The Saudi-led war has killed more than 6,500 civilians and destroyed much of the country's social infrastructure, including some 250 medical centres, 800 schools and hundreds of electricity plants and fuel store houses.

Hospital director Ibrahim Aram told the *New York Times* by phone that three Yemeni MSF staff members—a guard, a logistician and an electrician—were killed in the attack. Another guard, an X-ray technician and a nurse had limbs amputated as a result of their injuries. Three foreign doctors suffered relatively minor injuries.

Ayman Ahmed Mathkooor, health director for Hajjah province, reported that the airstrike destroyed the hospital's emergency department. He put the death toll at 15 killed and 20 wounded. Health ministry official Ibrahim Jafari, who visited the site yesterday, told the *New York Times* that the emergency area had been full

of patients at the time and that many of the victims were badly burned. He said there were no military forces near the hospital.

Teresa Sancristoval, MSF emergency program manager for Yemen, said it was the fourth attack on an MSF-supported medical facility in Yemen during the past year. Other airstrikes hit Shiara Hospital in Razeq in northern Saada province on January 10, killing six people; Taiz Hospital in the city of Taiz on December 2; and Haydan Hospital in Saada province on October 26.

“Once again, today we witness the tragic consequences of the bombing of a hospital. Once again, a fully functional hospital full of patients and MSF national and international staff members was bombed in a war that has shown no respect for medical facilities or patients,” Sancristoval said in a news release.

Other aid agencies condemned the attack. “This was a horrific attack, killing sick and injured people and the medical staff desperately trying to help them. The world cannot turn a blind eye as the most vulnerable suffer in his conflict,” Sajjad Mohammad Sajid, Oxfam country director in Yemen, said.

The Saudi-led coalition told Associated Press its Joint Incidents Assessment Team was “aware of reports of an airstrike on a hospital in Yemen's northern Hajjah province” and had opened an investigation. The outcome will undoubtedly be another whitewash. A Saudi report, issued this month, claimed that the MSF hospital hit in October had been used by Houthi rebels for military purposes.

On Saturday, an airstrike on a school in Saada killed at least 10 children and wounded another 28, according to local officials and aid workers. MSF staff treated the victims, who were aged between 6 and 15. The Saudi military said the attack hit a militia training camp, but

provided no evidence to support its allegation.

US State Department spokeswoman Elizabeth Trudeau issued a low-key expression of concern over yesterday's airstrike. "Strikes on humanitarian facilities, including hospitals, are particularly concerning," she said. "We call on all parties to cease hostilities immediately. Continued military actions only prolong the suffering of the Yemeni people."

These remarks are utterly hypocritical. The US has backed the Saudi war to the hilt, deploying US military advisers and intelligence officers to coordinate with their Saudi counterparts and assisting airstrikes by providing targeting data and aerial refuelling. In May, the Pentagon announced the deployment of small Special Forces teams inside Yemen to support Saudi operations. The US has waged its own protracted and illegal drone war inside Yemen, nominally against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

Last week, the US State Department approved the sale of 150 Abrams battle tanks to Saudi Arabia—part of a package of American weaponry worth \$1.15 billion. The package includes a range of additional military hardware, including Galting guns, as well as extensive training for the Saudi military. US arms sales to Saudi Arabia, one of its key Middle Eastern allies, are worth an estimated \$20 billion annually.

The State Department's muted comments about yesterday's attack on a hospital are in marked contrast to the propaganda campaign by the US and international media over alleged atrocities by Russian and Syrian war planes against US-backed Islamist militias inside Syria.

The US military is responsible for the criminal attack on an MSF hospital at Kunduz in northern Afghanistan last October that killed 42 civilians. An AC-130 gunship unleashed its devastating firepower on the medical facility for more than an hour. Some victims were burned alive in their beds while others were mown down as they tried to flee. The Pentagon's final report, released in April, was a brazen cover-up which denied that a war crime was committed. None of the personnel involved faced criminal charges or a court martial.

Yesterday's airstrike on a Yemeni hospital is further evidence of an intensification of the Saudi-led war inside Yemen following the breakdown of UN-sponsored talks between the Houthi government and

the government-in-exile led by President Hadi. Backed by Washington and armed to the teeth with US weapons, the Saudi regime is determined to subordinate the country to its interests.



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