

# Yemeni war intensifies following Saudi bombing of funeral

Peter Symonds  
11 October 2016

The conflict in Yemen is escalating following the criminal strikes by Saudi war planes on Saturday on a packed funeral hall that killed at least 140 civilians and wounded more than 500. The attack has provoked widespread outrage in the capital of Sanaa, not only against Saudi Arabia and its Gulf State allies that have intervened aggressively in the country's civil war, but also against its backers—the United States, Britain and France.

The Saudi aircraft targeted the funeral of Sheikh Ali al-Rawishan, the father of Galal al-Rawishan, the interior minister in the Houthi-rebel led government in Sanaa. The interior minister and other political figures were among the dead and wounded. Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets on Sanaa on Sunday to condemn the strikes.

Ferea al-Muslimi, an analyst at the Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies, told Reuters: “Despite all the massacres that have happened in this war, attacking a funeral is unprecedented and crosses a major red line in Yemeni culture. The air strikes killed powerful people, and their tribes and families will be drawn closer to the Houthis as they all try to retaliate.”

Saudi Arabia has denied responsibility, but its disavowal lacks any credibility as the war planes of the Saudi-led coalition are the only ones flying over Yemen. The Saudi air force has carried out thousands of sorties over Yemen in a bid to oust the Houthi rebels and their ally ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh from Sanaa and is responsible for numerous atrocities. Most recently Saudi aircraft attacked a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders in August killing or wounding at least 30 people.

The Saudi attack threatens to widen the war not only in Yemen but by drawing in other countries, including the US, more directly. In a televised statement, Houthi

leader Abdulmalek al-Houthi said he had evidence that Saudi Arabia was responsible for the air strikes, adding: “The Saudi war crimes in Yemen have been committed with the American green light.”

Yesterday, the US navy said that two missiles had been fired from “Houthi-controlled territory” in the direction of one of its warships, the guided-missile destroyer USS Mason operating off Yemen in the strategic Bab al Mandab strait. The missiles missed the US destroyer and Houthi officials denied responsibility for the attack. The USS Mason is part of a three-ship deployment armed with cruise missiles and carrying US Special Forces.

Saudi officials claimed yesterday that its forces destroyed two ballistic missiles fired by Houthi militia—one at a military base in Taif in central Saudi Arabia, and the second at Marib in central Yemen, which is held by the Houthi's opponents loyal to Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi.

Hadi was installed as president in 2012 as part of a deal sponsored by the US and Saudi Arabia to end the upheavals that led to the resignation of his predecessor Saleh. The Houthis, who had boycotted the one-candidate election, moved against Hadi, seizing the capital and much of the north of the country. Hadi was forced to flee and currently resides in Saudi Arabia, which has been waging an air war since March 2015 to install him as their puppet. Saudi Arabia accuses the Shi'ite Houthis of being stooges for its regional arch-rival Iran.

In addition to thousands of air strikes, Saudi Arabia and its allies have mounted a naval blockade of Yemen, compounding the economic and social crisis facing the population. The country is the most impoverished in the Middle East, with one in five Yemenis in need of urgent food assistance and nine provinces on the brink

of famine.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon yesterday condemned the Saudi air strikes in Yemen on Saturday and called for an international inquiry into whether the attack constituted a war crime. He dismissed Saudi denials, saying: “Aerial attacks by the Saudi-led coalition have already caused immense carnage and destroyed much of the country’s medical facilities and other vital civilian infrastructure. Excuses ring hollow given the pattern of violence throughout the conflict.”

Ban declared: “Despite mounting crimes by all parties to the conflict, we have yet to see the results of any credible investigations. This latest horrific incident demands a full inquiry.” However, as Ban himself is well aware, no serious international investigation will take place, not least because an examination of Saudi Arabia’s role would also highlight the involvement of the US and its allies.

The US is not only selling billions of dollars worth of precision-guided bombs and other military hardware to Saudi Arabia but also supporting the air war in Yemen with intelligence, targeting data and aerial refuelling. The Pentagon has deployed military personnel to coordinate with their Saudi counterparts and sent Special Forces teams into Yemen to assist in Saudi operations. In all likelihood, the US knew of, and possibly even planned, last weekend’s air strikes on Sanaa.

American officials and the media have sought both to downplay and distance Washington from the latest Saudi war crime. According to the US State Department, Secretary of State John Kerry rang Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir on Sunday to express “deep concern” over the attack. He urged them to “take urgent steps to ensure such an incident doesn’t happen again.”

Washington’s muted response to the latest Saudi atrocity is another glaring example of gross hypocrisy as the US ratchets up its war of words against Russia over its alleged attacks on civilians in Syria. Just last Friday, Kerry launched another tirade calling for “an appropriate investigation of war crimes,” declaring: “This is a targetted strategy to terrorise civilians and to kill anyone who is in the way of their military objectives.”

The reckless US actions in both Syria and Yemen, as

well as its renewed war in Iraq, are creating a maelstrom of regional rivalry that threatens to engulf the entire Middle East and draw the major powers into direct conflict.



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