

US-backed Saudi war coalition shows “complete disregard” for civilian lives, MSF says

Saudi strikes destroy Doctors Without Borders hospital in Yemen

By Thomas Gaist
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Saudi air strikes completely destroyed a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) hospital in Yemen Monday night, marking the second major MSF facility to be destroyed this month. Six consecutive aerial attacks rocked the facility, known as the Haydan Hospital, beginning around 10:30 p.m. and continuing for over two hours, according to MSF staff.

“This attack is another illustration of a complete disregard for civilians in Yemen, where bombings have become a daily routine,” MSF's Yemen chief Hassan Boucenine said Tuesday.

“Yemen is in an all-out war, in which the population caught on the wrong side is considered a legitimate target. Markets, schools, roads, bridges, trucks transporting food, displaced persons' camps, and health structures have been bombed and destroyed,” Boucenine said.

The Saudi strikes against the hospital also destroyed a nearby girls' school and a number of civilian residences. MSF staffers wounded in the attacks were forced to wait out the night before fleeing to another medical facility the next morning.

Clear evidence indicates that the hospital was directly and deliberately targeted. The Yemeni hospital's coordinates had been “regularly shared” with the Saudi coalition and other military forces operating in the area, just as with the October 3 US bombing of an MSF hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan.

“The hospital's GPS coordinates were regularly shared with the Saudi-led coalition, and the roof of the facility was clearly identified with the MSF logo,” MSF wrote.

Just as with the Kunduz attack, human rights groups denounced the bombing as a war crime and accused the Saudi forces of deliberately targeting the medical site.

“The consecutive airstrikes show deliberate targeting of the medical facility,” Amnesty International Middle East chief Philip Luther said.

“There must be an independent investigation into why hospitals and their patients are being targeted,” Luther said. “The destruction of this hospital means the loss of vital humanitarian treatment for civilians across four directorates of northern Yemen.”

As in Kunduz, the entire facility was charred to the core by a protracted series of attacks. “Even 12 hours after the airstrike, I could see the smoke coming out of the facility. The inpatient department, the outpatient department, the maternity ward, the lab, and the emergency room are all destroyed. It was the only hospital still functional in the Haydan area,” another MSF representative said.

No fatalities have been confirmed from the attack. Countless deaths and immense suffering will nonetheless follow from the incident, which destroyed a medical center relied on by large numbers of Yemenis.

The destruction of the hospital will result in some 200,000 Yemenis losing their only access to modern medical facilities, according to MSF. The hospital had been treating an average of at least 200 war-wounded Yemenis per month, as part of MSF efforts that have treated more than 15,000 war-wounded since the Saudi onslaught commenced in May.

Yemen is already suffering under an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Nearly 9 million Yemenis are in “urgent need of medical help,” according World Health Organization Director-General Margaret Chan.

As of Wednesday, Saudi authorities had given no sign that they are even considering an investigation into the bombing of the medical center, MSF representatives said.

The Saudis and their US patrons will undoubtedly make

every effort to sweep the incident under the rug and prevent it from becoming a repeat of the Kunduz incident, which has provoked massive popular outrage worldwide.

The incident is only the latest atrocity to arise out of the US-backed war. Since the beginning of Operation Decisive Storm in March, the Saudi coalition forces, armed to the teeth with top-of-the-line US weaponry and directed by US military-intelligence officers, have aggressively targeted civilian areas and installations, including a panoply of wedding parties, humanitarian centers, residential sectors and other vital infrastructure.

More than 90 percent of those killed by the Yemen war have been civilians, according to a recent UN report, "State of Crisis, Explosive Weapons in Yemen." At 2,200, the confirmed civilian death toll in Yemen surpassed total war related deaths in every other country worldwide this year, as of September 2015. Fully 93 percent of those killed by air-launched explosive weapons have been civilians, according to the UN.

"Civilians are bearing the brunt of the violence in Yemen, and a population already suffering desperate poverty, insecurity, malnutrition and limited access to health and sanitation is now facing a severe humanitarian emergency," the UN wrote.

"The majority of explosive weapon use reported in Yemen has taken place in populated areas," the UN noted.

In a single Saudi strike against Sana'a documented by the UN, entire residential areas were flattened and some 400 people were injured. Saudi forces have repeatedly targeted crowded civilian marketplaces in the middle of the day, according to the UN researchers.

While the Saudi monarchy has drenched itself in blood by its actions in Yemen, ultimate responsibility for the slaughter lies with US imperialism.

Monday's strikes on the MSF facility were launched as part of a US-sponsored war aimed at driving out the Iranian-backed Houthi rebel militias that overthrew the US-backed President Hadi in a slow-motion coup d'etat earlier this year, sending Hadi into exile in Saudi Arabia.

Prior to the Houthi coup, the US set the stage for Yemen's total destabilization, waging a decade-long drone and commando war inside Yemen, building close ties to the Yemeni security apparatus and propping up a puppet regime run by longtime Yemeni dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh. With increasing ferocity in the years after 9/11, Washington orchestrated elaborate special forces missions inside Yemen, which it viewed as critical to maintaining its grip over the entrance to the Red Sea at

Bab-el-Mandeb.

The collapse of the Hadi regime in January 2015 came as another blow to Washington's regional policy. Rather than accept a political settlement, the US-backed Arab coalition has preferred to destroy Yemen as a functioning society and transfer large areas of the country, including large cities and military bases, into the hands of Sunni extremist groups including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Islamic State.

British Foreign Minister Philip Hammond issued a declaration of victory on behalf of the Saudi war on Wednesday, claiming that "the military phase of this campaign is coming to a close, as the coalition forces have established a dominant military position."

The Saudi leadership intends to "accelerate the political discussion" over Yemen, Hammand told the media after emerging from discussions with leading members of the Saudi royal family. UN Yemen envoy Ismail Ould similarly claimed last week that Houthi leaders were prepared to accept a settlement and withdraw their forces from some of Yemen's major cities.

Despite the rumors of a ceasefire, Saudi forces continued to pour weapons into the country on Wednesday, with reports of new air drops of military aid to Sunni Islamist militants battling against the Houthi rebels. The conflict is developing into a bloody stalemate.

"The conflict is totally deadlocked. There's no political solution around the corner and both sides are settling scores with each other with impunity as civilians are stuck in the middle," Yemen expert Farea al-Muslimi told Reuters on Wednesday.

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