

SIX YEARS LATER, THE US CONTINUES TO FACILITATE SAUDI WAR CRIMES

Over six years ago, according to a State Department cable liberated by Chelsea Manning, the US ambassador to Saudi Arabia met with Prince Khalid bin Sultan to complain about all the civilians the Saudis killed in an airstrike on a health clinic. Prince Khalid expressed regret about the dead civilians. But the Saudis “had to hit the Houthis very hard in order to ‘bring them to their knees.’”

USG CONCERNS ABOUT POSSIBLE STRIKES ON CIVILIAN TARGETS

2. (S/NF) Ambassador Smith delivered points in reftel to Prince Khaled on February 6, 2010. The Ambassador highlighted USG concerns about providing Saudi Arabia with satellite imagery of the Yemen border area absent greater certainty that Saudi Arabia was and would remain fully in compliance with the laws of armed conflict during the conduct of military operations, particularly regarding attacks on civilian targets. The Ambassador noted the USG’s specific concern about an apparent Saudi air strike on a building that the U.S. believed to be a Yemeni medical clinic. The Ambassador showed Prince Khaled a satellite image of the bomb-damaged building in question.

IF WE HAD THE PREDATOR, THIS MIGHT NOT HAVE HAPPENED

3. (S/NF) Upon seeing the photograph, Prince Khalid remarked, “This looks familiar,” and added, “if we had the

Predator, maybe we would not have this problem.” He noted that Saudi Air Force operations were necessarily being conducted without the desired degree of precision, and recalled that a clinic had been struck, based on information received from Yemen that it was being used as an operational base by the Houthis. Prince Khalid explained the Saudi approach to its fight with the Houthis, emphasizing that the Saudis had to hit the Houthis very hard in order to “bring them to their knees” and compel them to come to terms with the Yemeni government. “However,” he said, “we tried very hard not to hit civilian targets.” The Saudis had 130 deaths and the Yemenis lost as many as one thousand. “Obviously,” Prince Khaled observed, “some civilians died, though we wish that this did not happen.”

If only the Saudis had more accurate targeting, Prince Khalid explained – not just satellite imagery from the Americans, but also Predator drones – such unfortunate accidents might not happen.

Six years later, over a year into Saudi Arabia’s latest war against the Houthis, now backed by US satellite imagery and a drone base on Saudi soil, the Saudis are still having unfortunate “accidents,” attacking at least the third of four MSF facilities attacked in Yemen in the last year (Saudis deny responsibility for one of these strikes).

A hospital supported by the international medical humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in northwestern Yemen was hit by an airstrike today, killing at least 11 people and injuring at least 19.

The attack on Abs Hospital, in Yemen’s Hajjah governorate, occurred at 3:45 pm

local time and immediately killed nine people, including an MSF staff member. Two more patients died while being transferred to Al Jamhuri hospital. Five patients remain hospitalized. The hospital, supported by MSF since July 2015, was partially destroyed, and all the remaining patients and staff have been evacuated. The GPS coordinates of the hospital were repeatedly shared with all parties to the conflict, including the Saudi-led coalition, and its location was well-known.

“This is the fourth attack against an MSF facility in less than 12 months,” said Teresa Sancristóval, MSF emergency program manager for Yemen. “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.”

“Even with a recent United Nations resolution calling for an end to attacks on medical facilities and with the high-level declarations of commitment to International Humanitarian Law, nothing seems to be done to make parties involved in the conflict in Yemen respect medical staff and patients,” Sancristóval continued. “Without action, these public gestures are meaningless for today’s victims. Either intentional or as a result of negligence, this is unacceptable.”

MSF calls on all parties, and particularly the Saudi-led coalition responsible for the attack, guarantee that such attacks do not happen again.

Congress is finally beginning to complain about these serial war crimes, with Rand Paul and

Chris Murphy attempting to block the latest \$1.5 billion arms sale to the Saudis, and Ted Lieu issuing this scathing statement in support of an effort to do the same on the House side.

I have tried numerous times to work with the Administration to stop the United States from assisting Saudi Arabia in their indiscriminate killing of civilians in Yemen. But when Saudi Arabia continues to kill civilians, and in this case children, enough is enough. Having served on active duty, one of my responsibilities was to teach the Law of War. I am also a graduate of Air War College. The indiscriminate civilian killings by Saudi Arabia look like war crimes to me. In this case, children as young as 8 were killed by Saudi Arabian air strikes. By assisting Saudi Arabia, the United States is aiding and abetting what appears to be war crimes in Yemen. The Administration must stop enabling this madness now.

Nevertheless, six years later, we're still getting this kind of lip service from the State Department.

QUESTION: All right. So just to clarify earlier what you said about Yemen in regards –

MS TRUDEAU: Yeah.

QUESTION: – to the hospital bombing this morning, you are – is it fair to say that you're not coming out and condemning the attack; you're saying we're raising concerns with the coalition?

MS TRUDEAU: No, of course we would condemn any attack that hit civilians. We're gravely concerned by any reports of civilian casualties. What we're saying is we've seen these reports. Of course we would condemn any strike

against a hospital.

QUESTION: Okay. Because, I mean, I've been hearing you all say for months now that we're raising these concerns with the Saudi-led coalition, but this is the fourth attack on an MSF medical facility in Yemen in the past year, let alone countless others on clinics and hospitals. Are you concerned that these sort of stern conversations aren't having the desired effect?

MS TRUDEAU: Well, what we would say – and we'd point you back to what we talked about earlier – is the Saudi-led coalition themselves have taken a look at these, they have done reports. One of those reports – I think one or two has been turned over to the UN. We've also called on them to make those reports public. And so there is more transparency in that accountability. We remain gravely concerned about civilian casualties anywhere in the world where they occur, and Yemen is no exception.

We've been (claiming to be) gravely concerned about Saudis bombing hospitals for six years now. Yet the only thing we do is throw more and more weapons at the Saudis to help them kill still more civilians.