

Exclusive: Saudi Arabia Admits Bombing MSF Hospital in Yemen — But Faults MSF

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Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the UN has admitted a "mistake" was made when Riyadh-led coalition jets bombed a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Yemen, but says the medical charity provided incorrect geographic coordinates for the facility, leading to the incident.

MSF, as the organization is known by its French acronym, reported on Tuesday that a hospital they supported in Haydan district in the northern Saada province was hit by several airstrikes starting at around 10:30PM local time on Monday. Initial blasts occurred outside the building, and all staff and patients were able to flee before it was destroyed by subsequent airstrikes. One MSF employee suffered minor injuries.

In a statement, MSF said that the hospital's GPS coordinates "were shared with Coalition forces. They are sent every week to the Coalition operations room, and the last time they were shared was on October 24." The organization also said that its logo had been painted on the facility's roof and was visible from the air.

However, in an interview with VICE News, Saudi Ambassador to the UN Abdallah al-Mouallimi called into question the charity's account, and appeared to fault MSF.

"The coalition forces tried to avoid the location that was given to them by Medecins Sans Frontieres, and they were targeting a field that was used by the Houthis for training and ammunition gathering," Mouallimi told VICE News, referring to the northern rebel group that, along with their allies, the Saudi-led coalition has targeted since March. "This [the hospital] was hit by mistake as a result of Medicins Sans Frontieres providing wrong coordinates of their location."

The ambassador's admission appeared to contradict earlier remarks by coalition spokesperson Brigadier General Ahmad Asseri, who, when asked by Reuters if their jets had hit the hospital, [said](#) "Not at all."

Mouallimi said the Saudi government was conducting an investigation into the incident "to examine the exact causes and the impact of the strike," adding "we will take all measures necessary to avoid such situations in the future."

"Clearly a mistake was made," said the ambassador.

MSF described the hospital, which served an area of around 200,000 people, as being "the only life-saving facility in the region." According to Miriam Czech, MSF project coordinator in Sadaa, the hospital was "99 percent destroyed."

On Tuesday, MSF said workers were still fearful of going near the site, as at least two ordnances dropped in the vicinity had failed to explode.



The MSF hospital allegedly hit by Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in the Haydan district of Yemen's northern Saada province on Monday night. (Photo via MSF)

Saada is a stronghold of the Houthis. The air war against the rebels has left large portions of the province destroyed, and caused the deaths of numerous civilians.

According to the UN, the majority of civilian deaths in Yemen, now totaling more than 2,355 since March, have resulted from airstrikes.

Earlier this month, Amnesty International released findings which indicated the coalition was violating international human rights law and committing war crimes in Saada.

The strike on MSF's hospital in Sadaa comes less than four weeks after US forces killed at least 22 people at an MSF hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan. President Barack Obama has apologized for that attack, but MSF has pushed back, calling for an independent investigation.



The MSF hospital allegedly hit by Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in the Haydan district of Yemen's northern Saada province on Monday night. Photo via MSF)

According to a report in the Associated Press, US Green Berets were aware the target was a functioning hospital.

In addition to the sale of tens of billions worth of armaments, the US provides the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen with vast logistical support and what it terms "targeting assistance."

American tanker jets also fly two sorties per day within Saudi airspace to refuel coalition jets prior to or after their bombing runs, like the one that hit MSF's hospital in Sadaa. American defense officials will not say if they are investigating any civilian death reports in Yemen, and refer reporters to the Saudi government.

The Saudi government, for its part, has provided no reliable data on casualties — or even airstrikes, for that matter — or evidence that it is carrying out proper investigations.



The MSF hospital allegedly hit by Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in the Haydan district of Yemen's northern Saada province on Monday night. (Photo via MSF)

On Tuesday, a spokesperson for UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said that every country in Yemen, including the US, should investigate reports of civilian casualties in the country.

Like the Kunduz attack, MSF said the airstrikes in Sadaa represented a violation of international law, and called for the coalition to provide information on how it happened.

"This attack is another illustration of a complete disregard for civilians in Yemen, where bombings have become a daily routine," said Hassan Boucenine, head of MSF's mission in Yemen, in a statement.

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In his comments to VICE News, Mouallimi said he wasn't trying to "blame" MSF for the incident, but reiterated that if it weren't for what he alleged was an error on their part, the airstrike wouldn't have taken place.

"We are just stating the fact of the situation," he said.

MSF enjoys wider access than other groups, including at times the UN, to many parts of Yemen. Earlier this week, it accused the Houthis of blocking vital shipments to the besieged city of Taiz, which has witnessed some of the worst fighting in recent weeks.

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