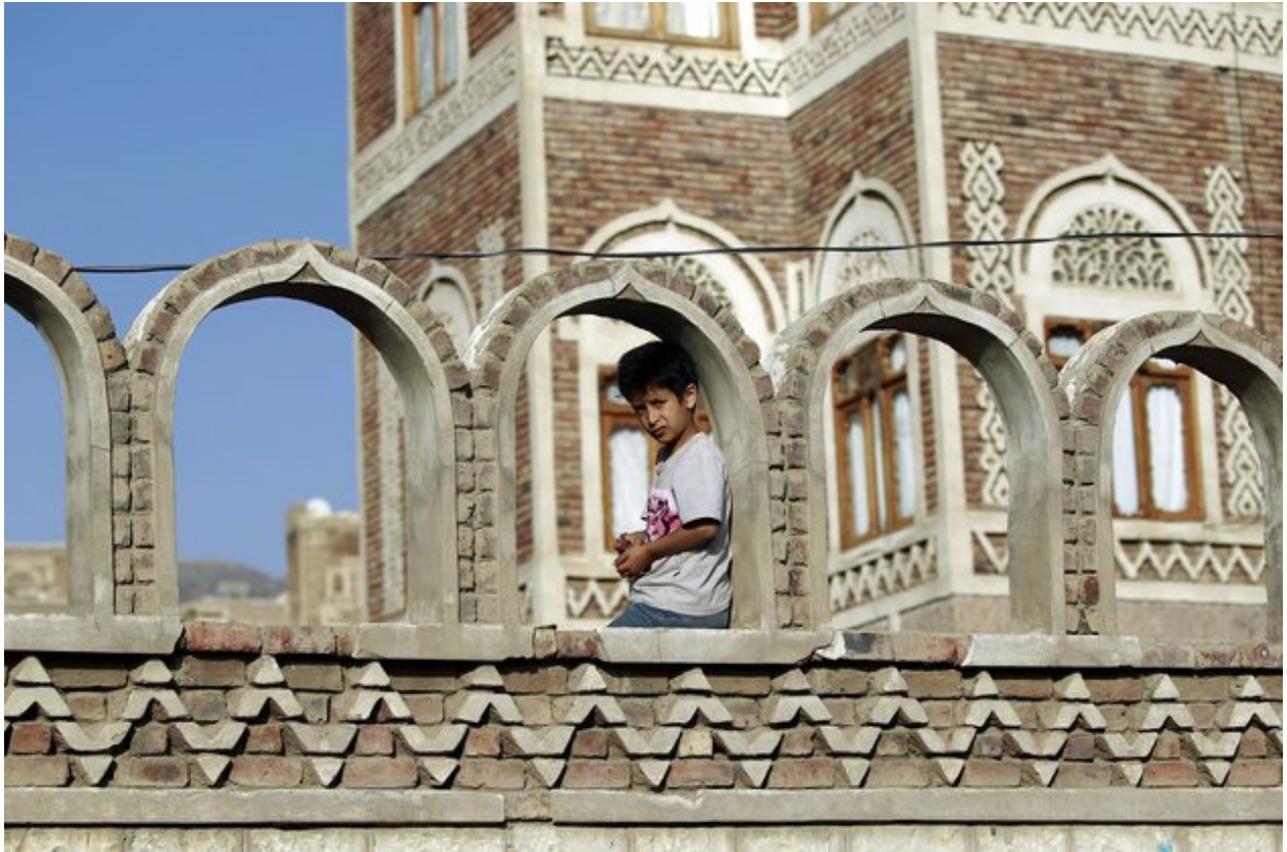


Yemen's War Through A Child's Eyes: 'I Saw My Mum Burning In Front Of Me'



A Saudi-led coalition launched airstrikes on Yemen in March to push back Houthi rebels.

Nine months of war in Yemen have left hundreds of children dead, and many more maimed or deeply traumatized by the ongoing violence.

A [report by international charity Save the Children](#) last week found that at least three children have been killed every day in Yemen since the conflict broke out in March.

A coalition of Gulf nations led by Saudi Arabia are fighting to reinstall Yemeni President Abed-Rabbo Mansour Hadi after Yemen's Houthi rebels and their allies seized the reins of government earlier this year. The United Nations [says](#) over 5,700 people have been killed in airstrikes and armed clashes since March, including more than 600 children.

Coalition airstrikes were responsible for almost [three-quarters of child deaths and injuries](#) in the second quarter of 2015, according to Leila Zerrougui, the U.N. special representative for Children and Armed Conflict.



The conflict has sparked a humanitarian crisis in the poorest country in the Arab world.

The ubiquity of death is shattering childhoods across Yemen, an impoverished nation with a [rich cultural heritage](#) and [thorny politics](#).

"I was playing in our garden when the missile hit my house ... I saw my mum burning in front of me," 7-year-old Raja'a told Save the Children. "Now I don't have a house or my family ... I don't like the war and I hate the planes."

Thousands of children in Yemen have been exposed to traumatic events during the conflict, the Save the Children report said. Many parents told the charity their children are plagued by nightmares, are afraid of loud noises, and cry when they hear planes overhead.

Children in the Yemeni city of Taiz have started playing a [game they call "one two three airstrike,"](#) in which they all throw themselves to the ground, Doctors Without Borders emergency coordinator Karline Kleijer wrote in the Guardian last month.

Even in between bombardments, children are still in danger from unexploded weapons on the streets. Yemen was already strewn with [thousands of land mines and explosive remnants of war](#) from previous clashes, and the current conflict has made the situation worse, according to Save the Children.

Human rights groups say the Saudi-led coalition is [using cluster bombs in its campaign](#), which are banned under international law because they endanger civilians by dispersing large amounts of unexploded bomblets.

"I was playing in the street and one of my friends found a strange thing on the ground. He took it and was playing with it when it started shooting fire," Mohammed, 10, told Save the Children. "People came to take us to hospital and later I found out that three of my friends had been killed, including my best friend."

At least four children were killed and over 50 were injured by land mines between late March and early June,

according to the Yemen Executive Mine Action Center, a partner of Save the Children that is working to help Yemeni families identify and avoid unexploded weapons.



Yemen was already coping with acute water shortages before the war broke out.

Meanwhile, it is increasingly difficult for wounded children to get medical care. Since the war broke out, over 600 hospitals have closed due to lack of staff, fuel or supplies, and at least 69 health facilities have been fully or partially damaged by fighting, according to the World Health Organization.

In one incident documented by Save the Children, the main pediatric hospital in the capital city of Sanaa was damaged by a nearby airstrike in September, forcing the relocation of many children being treated there. Several infants died when their ventilators cut out after the airstrike, according to the charity.

Children suffer particularly complex injuries from explosive weapons and require specialized treatment “because their bodies are smaller, more delicate and still developing,” the report said.

“It’s bitterly ironic that the very health facilities needed to treat injured children have often been damaged or destroyed by explosive weapons themselves,” Save the Children’s Yemen director Edward Santiago said in a statement.



Some 1.8 million children are at risk of malnutrition in the country.

Children are also particularly vulnerable to malnutrition and disease, the report warned. The war has exacerbated Yemen's already fragile humanitarian situation, as markets, agriculture and fishing are disrupted by conflict. The U.N. says [1.8 million children are at risk of malnutrition](#) in Yemen.

The war has also forced [thousands of schools to close](#), and hundreds of schools have been damaged by the fighting. Some school buildings are being [used as temporary accommodation](#) for families displaced by the conflict.

The violence has also [impeded international efforts](#) to end the recruitment of children as fighters in Yemen, a [long-standing practice](#) employed by Yemen's military and myriad armed groups operating in the nation, including the Houthi rebels, tribal militias and al Qaeda.



Amid the mounting civilian casualties, Saudi Arabia has [blocked efforts](#) at the U.N. Human Rights Council to launch an investigation into human rights violations by all sides in Yemen's war. The U.S. and [U.K. have defended](#) their military and intelligence support to the Saudi-led coalition.

"The international community's reluctance to publicly condemn the human cost of conflict in Yemen gives the impression that diplomatic relations and arms sales trump the lives of Yemen's children," Santiago said in his statement.

The United Nations has tried to broker a peace deal between the warring parties, and on Monday, Hadi [indicated his forces](#) and the coalition would observe a seven-day cease-fire starting on Dec. 15 to allow for peace talks. Meanwhile, al Qaeda and the Islamic State's local affiliates have exploited the chaos in the country to [step up](#) attacks, increasing fears about the long-term legacy of the war on this fragile nation.

"I feel so scared when I see weapons and especially when I hear the sound of planes up in the sky," 13-year-old Wahida told Save the Children. "This war is killing everything beautiful in my country."

All the names of children in the Save the Children report were changed to protect their identities.