

Accused of War Crimes, Saudis Investigate Themselves and Find No Wrongdoing

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Amid international calls for an independent inquiry into Saudi war crimes in Yemen, the Kingdom has investigated itself and found it has done nothing wrong.

Countries including China, the Netherlands, and Canada have [pushed forward](#) with a U.N. Human Rights Council draft resolution to establish an independent investigation into Saudi war crimes against civilians in the small war-torn nation of Yemen.

This week, Human Rights Watch also [accused](#) the coalition of committing war crimes.

Though these allegations have been circulating and documented for years, little has been done to stop the Saudi attacks, and the Saudis and their U.S. and Arab allies have worked to undermine efforts to uncover wrongdoing.

“The minimal efforts made towards accountability over the past year are insufficient to respond to the gravity of the continuing and daily violations involved in this conflict,” U.N. human rights chief Zeid Ra’ad al Hussein said in Geneva this week.

The U.N. has [documented](#) 5,144 civilian deaths, mainly from the Saudi-led coalition.

The Saudis said they did not object to the current push for an inquiry but claimed it was bad timing. [According](#) to Abdulaziz al-Wasil, Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Geneva:

“We have no objection (to) the inquiry itself, we just have a discussion about the timing. Whether this is the right time to establish an international commission with the difficulties on the ground, and we knew in advance that they will face tremendous obstacles in terms of access.”

In the meantime, the Saudi government has set up its own panel to investigate potential war crimes and misconduct. *Reuters* [reported](#) on the Saudi panel’s findings, noting it concluded that “a series of deadly air strikes largely [was] justified, citing the presence of armed militiamen at the homes, schools and clinics that were targeted.”

Reuters continued:

“The Joint Incidents Assessment Team said on Tuesday it had discovered mistakes in only three of 15 incidents it reviewed, and maintained the coalition

had acted in accordance with international humanitarian law. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has long been running the coalition fighting in Yemen as the country's defense minister, a title he still retains.”

The panel's legal advisor, Mansour Ahmed al-Mansour, told journalists this week that, in one example, the Saudi coalition struck a water welling drill after mistaking it for a ballistic missile launcher.

However, the Saudis have been criticized for their longstanding pattern of [targeting](#) critical infrastructures such as agriculture, warehouses, and hospitals – in far more than just fifteen incidents. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) [claimed](#) in early 2016 that the Saudis had attacked hospitals in more than 100 incidents, ultimately scaring Yemenis away from seeking medical help. The coalition has also been implicated in the cholera epidemic that has [infected](#) over half a million people since April.

The United States and the United Kingdom are complicit in this targeting of Yemen, which the Saudis view as a [proxy war](#) against Iran as they attempt to reinstate a former ruler who was ousted by Houthi rebels, a group they are now fighting. There is minimal evidence that Iran is backing the Houthis.

In addition to [arming](#) the Saudis with billions of dollars worth of weapons, which are being [used](#) to commit the alleged war crimes in Yemen, the western nations have [military officials in the Saudi command room](#) in control of air strikes.

British officials even [schemed](#) with the Saudis to paradoxically secure the repressive regime a spot on the U.N.'s human rights council. The U.S. remains a staunch Saudi backer at the U.N., as well, expressing opposition to the independent inquiry introduced this week.

Like the Saudis, the U.S. has [brushed off](#) civilian casualties at the hands of their military. In accusing the Saudis of war crimes this week, Human Rights Watch also [called](#) on U.S. lawmakers to curb the killing. They wrote:

“So far, the US government has been content to keep the weapons to Riyadh flowing so long as Saudi Arabia pretends it's been fighting a clean war. But its empty promises have proved devastating – and deadly – for Yemeni civilians.

“Congress should make clear the US is no longer willing to be complicit in Saudi war crimes.”

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