

Saudi-led coalition in Yemen strikes Sanaa, casualties reported

17/05/2019 20:41 by admin

The Sanaa strikes targeted nine military sites in and around the city, residents said, with humanitarian agencies reporting a number of casualties.

People inspect the site of an airstrike by Saudi-led coalition in Sanaa, Yemen, Thursday, May, 16, 2019. (AP Photo: Hani Mohammed)

Sanaa: The Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen carried out several air strikes on the Houthi-held capital Sanaa on Thursday after the Iranian-aligned movement claimed responsibility for drone attacks on Saudi oil installations. The Sanaa strikes targeted nine military sites in and around the city, residents said, with humanitarian agencies reporting a number of casualties.

Rubble filled a populated street lined by mud-brick houses, a Reuters journalist on the scene said. A crowd of men lifted the body of a woman, wrapped in a white shroud, into an ambulance.

Houthi-run Masirah television quoted the Houthi health ministry as saying six civilians, including four children, had been killed and 60 wounded, including two Russian women working in the health sector.

Medical charity Medecins Sans Frontieres said two hospitals it supports in Sanaa took in 48 injured and four dead people as a result of the strikes. Preliminary reports indicated five children were among those killed, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Yemen said.

A coalition statement carried by Saudi-owned Al Arabiya TV, said the Sunni Muslim alliance struck military bases and facilities and weapons storage sites with the aim of "neutralising the ability of the Houthi militia to carry out acts of aggression".

"The sorties achieved its goals with full precision," the coalition said. It had urged civilians to avoid those targets.

A later statement said "the possibility of an accident" had been referred to a body set up by the coalition to investigate claims.

One resident reported a strike near a densely-populated district, where flames and clouds of smoke could be seen. A car was half-buried under rubble and twisted metal on a street lined with bystanders.

"There was an air strike near us, in the middle of an area packed with residents between Hael and Raqas (streets)," Abdulrazaq Mohammed told Reuters. "The explosion was so strong that stones were flying. This is the first time our house shakes so much."

Sanaa has been held by the Houthi movement since it ousted the internationally recognised government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi from power there in late 2014. The coalition has previously targeted suspected drone and missile storage sites in the city.

Iran's Foreign Ministry condemned the strikes and called on international and human rights bodies "to act according to their responsibility to prevent the repetition of these crimes", the state news agency IRNA reported.

Iranian tools

Saudi Arabia's deputy defence minister on Thursday accused Iran of ordering Tuesday's armed drone attack on two oil pumping stations in the kingdom.

The terrorist acts, ordered by the regime in Tehran and carried out by the Houthis, are tightening the noose around the ongoing political efforts, Prince Khalid bin Salman tweeted.

The Houthis said they were responsible for the attack, which did not disrupt oil output or exports. The group denies being a puppet of Tehran or receiving arms from Iran, and says its revolution is against corruption.

The head of the Houthi's Supreme Revolutionary Committee denied that Iran directed the strike and said the movement manufactures its drones locally. Tehran also denies providing arms to the Houthis.

"We are not agents for anyone," Mohammed Ali al-Houthi told Reuters. "We make decisions independently and do not take orders for drones or anything else."

The coalition described the drone attack as a "war crime".

The United Arab Emirates said on Wednesday that the Western-backed coalition, of which it is a main member, would "retaliate hard" for any Houthi attacks on coalition targets.

The Sanaa air strikes and renewed fighting in Yemen's Hodeidah port that breached a U.N.-sponsored truce in the Red Sea city, could complicate peace efforts to end the four-year war that has killed tens of thousands of people, many of them civilians, and pushed the country to the brink of famine.

The coalition, which receives arms and intelligence from Western nations, intervened in Yemen in 2015 to try to restore Hadi's Aden-based government.

The warring parties agreed last December at U.N.-sponsored peace talks on a ceasefire and troop withdrawal deal in Hodeidah, a lifeline for millions of Yemenis that became the focus of the war last year.

The pact, the first major breakthrough in over four years, stalled for months amid deep suspicion among all parties, but special envoy Martin Griffiths secured some progress when the Houthis started withdrawing from three ports last Saturday.

Pro-coalition troops are expected to pull back as well under the deal once the two sides work out details for a broader phase two redeployment in Hodeidah, the main entry point for Yemen's commercial and aid imports and the Houthi's key supply line.

- Reuters