

Outrage after UK govt admits training Saudi pilots despite Yemen war crimes allegations

RT rt.com/uk/363784-uk-saudi-pilots-training-yemen/



The UK is still training the Saudi Air Force despite growing evidence of the Saudi-led coalition's crimes against civilians in Yemen, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon admitted, replying to an MP's question. The statement outraged the opposition.

Fallon was responding to the written [questions](#) asked by Stephen Doughty, Labor MP for Cardiff South and Penarth, on the UK involvement in the Yemen military intervention, when he admitted that *"UK has provided training to the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) both in the UK and in Saudi Arabia,"* in particular, to *"improve their targeting processes"* and ensure its better compliance with international law.

At the same time, Fallon [denied](#) that UK military has been involved in decision-making process in the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen, saying that UK *"has not provided training on political authorization of military operations."*

The revelation of the broader UK role in the controversial bombing campaign run by Saudi-led coalition in Yemen since March 2015, caused a sharp reaction from the UK opposition, with the Liberal Democrats' foreign affairs spokesman Tom Brake (MP for Carshalton and Wallington), urging the government to *"end its complicity in the murderous campaign"* in the country torn by the civil war between Houthi Shiite rebels and Saudi-backed Sunni government of the ousted president Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi.

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"It is shameful that the UK government is not only arming Saudi pilots, it is training them as well. The indiscriminate bombing of innocent civilians by Saudi Arabia in Yemen, in clear breach of international humanitarian law, is now well documented," The Independent [cited](#) Brake as saying.

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and NGOs have repeatedly called on the UK and US governments to halt arms sales to Saudi Arabia amid growing concerns the US and UK-produced weapons could be used in attacks on civilians. The demands to cut arms supplies have become especially vocal after the Human Rights Watch identified the munitions used in the attack on the crowded funeral ceremony in Yemen's capital Sana'a as US-manufactured *"GBU-12 Paveway II 500-pound laser-guided bomb."*



Human Rights Watch (HRW) came to the conclusion that the Saudi jets deliberately targeted the funeral, held to commemorate the father of a senior Houthi leader, after interviewing survivors of the tragedy that claimed lives of 140 people and left hundreds injured, calling the bombing a *"war crime."*

On October 13, Fallon listed Paveway among other precision-guided weapons that have been supplied by the UK and used by coalition forces in Yemen, while [responding](#) to a question by Brake. However, he refused to specify in what manner the weapons were applied.

"The location and timing of weapons used in Yemen is a matter for the Saudi-led coalition to comment on," he [wrote](#) the day before.

While the UK pledged to assist in the investigation and has conducted two training session in Saudi Arabia on the course of the investigation of the international law breaches in Yemen, the British government said it has not taken part directly in the investigation, leaving it to the Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT). However, the HRW cast doubt on the impartiality of the probe, saying that *"JIAT has not met international standards for transparency, credibility, and impartiality."*

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Last week, a report by JIAT stated that the strike was carried out by coalition without authorization of commanders, blaming a *"party affiliated to the Yemeni Presidency of the General Chief of Staff"* of providing a false lead, as it claimed the funeral was a *"gathering of armed Houthi rebels"* and *"insisted that the location be targeted immediately."*

The coalition subsequently issued an apology, saying the attack *"is not in line with the coalition's objectives."*



"The coalition command expresses its regret at this unintentional incident and the ensuing pain for victims' families," it said in a statement.

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)'s [estimates](#) from October 10, at least 4,125 civilians have been killed in Yemen and over 7,207 injured since the start of the bombing campaign, with the most of the civilian fatalities were due to the actions by the Saudi-led coalition airstrikes.

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Yemen: Military Intervention:Written question - 49029

Q

Asked by [Stephen Doughty](#) (Cardiff South and Penarth) [\[N\]](#)

Asked on: 17 October 2016

Ministry of Defence

 49029

Yemen: Military Intervention

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what (a) training and (b) specific operational advice has been provided to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on (i) political authorisation of military operations, (ii) targeting of aerial operations and (iii) after-action reviews on operations in Yemen in the last 12 months.

A

Answered by: [Sir Michael Fallon](#)

Answered on: 20 October 2016

As part of our ongoing Defence engagement with Saudi Arabia the UK has provided training to the Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) both in the UK and in Saudi Arabia, including International Targeting courses for RSAF personnel, to improve their targeting processes and to support International Humanitarian Law (IHL) compliance.


The UK has supported the development of the coalition Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT) and delivered two training sessions in Saudi Arabia on the process for investigating alleged IHL violations. The UK has not been directly involved in investigations undertaken by the JIAT, has not provided any specific operational advice to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for operations in Yemen and has not provided training on political authorisation of military operations.

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Yemen: Military Intervention:Written question - 49030

Q

Asked by [Stephen Doughty](#) (Cardiff South and Penarth) [\[N\]](#)

Asked on: 17 October 2016

Ministry of Defence

 49030

Yemen: Military Intervention

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what (a) technical and (b) personnel support has been provided to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to investigate possible breaches of (i) targeting procedures, (ii) the rules of engagement and (iii) international humanitarian law on operations in Yemen in the last 12 months.

A

Answered by: [Sir Michael Fallon](#)

Answered on: 20 October 2016

It is important that all parties to the conflict in Yemen conduct thorough and conclusive investigations into all incidents where it is alleged that International Humanitarian Law (IHL) has been breached. We regularly raise the importance of compliance with IHL with the Saudi Arabian Government and other members of the military coalition.

The UK has supported the development of the coalition Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT) and delivered two training sessions in Saudi Arabia on the process for investigating alleged IHL violations. We have not been directly involved in investigations undertaken by the JIAT.

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Revealed: The UK is training Saudi pilots amid accusations of war crimes in Yemen

Exclusive: Liberal Democrats condemn the UK's 'complicity in this murderous campaign'

Rob Merrick Deputy Political Editor | [@Rob_Merrick](#) | Saturday 22 October 2016 |



The aftermath of an air strike that hit a funeral gathering earlier in October *REUTERS*

The Saudi Air Force is being trained by the British Government amid accusations that it is carrying out atrocities in neighbouring Yemen, it has emerged.

The Liberal Democrats – who uncovered the instruction being given, in both Saudi Arabia and the UK

itself – described the revelation as “shameful”.

Tom Brake, the party’s foreign affairs spokesman, called on the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to end the training immediately and for much stricter controls on arms exports to the oil-rich kingdom.



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UN experts say Saudi coalition violated law in Yemen attack

Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said the Royal Saudi Air Force was helped in order to “improve their targeting processes” – and, therefore, their compliance with international law.

But Mr Brake said: “It is shameful that the UK Government is not only arming Saudi pilots, it is training them as well. The indiscriminate bombing of innocent civilians by Saudi Arabia in Yemen, in clear breach of international humanitarian law, is now well documented. The Government must end its complicity in this murderous campaign.”

The training opens up a new front in criticism of Britain’s close links with Saudi Arabia – with the Saudis currently leading a coalition bombing campaign against Houthi rebels in Yemen – at growing humanitarian cost.

Earlier this month, air strikes carried out by the coalition’s air forces killed at least 140 people and injured up to 600 more at a funeral. A report by the Saudi-led coalition’s Joint Incidents Assessment Team (JIAT) admitted responsibility having promised an investigation into the incident, but blamed “wrong information” from allies of the internationally recognised Yemeni government, which it is supporting in the conflict.

“A party affiliated to the Yemeni presidency of the general chief of staff wrongly passed information that there was a gathering of armed Houthi leaders in a known location in Sanaa, and insisted that the location be targeted immediately,” investigators said in a statement at the time.

Saudi Arabia insists the coalition it leads keeps to international laws, with any incidents investigated.

Despite the accusations of alleged war crimes, Theresa May has defended selling arms to Saudi Arabia by insisting close ties “keep people on the streets of Britain safe”.

The admission that training is also taking place came in a written parliamentary answer obtained by Mr Brake from Mr Fallon.

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The Liberal Democrat demanded to know what training and advice had been given by the UK on authorising military operations and the “targeting of aerial operations” over the past year.

In reply, Mr Fallon wrote: “As part of our ongoing defence engagement with Saudi Arabia, the UK has provided training to the Royal Saudi

Air Force (RSAF) both in the UK and in Saudi Arabia, including international targeting courses for RSAF personnel, to improve their targeting processes and to support International Humanitarian Law (IHL) compliance.”

The Defence Secretary said the UK had also delivered two training sessions in Saudi Arabia on the process for investigating alleged IHL violations, under a joint incident team it supported.

But he added: “The UK has not been directly involved in investigations undertaken by the JIAT, has not provided any specific operational advice to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for operations in Yemen and has not provided training on political authorisation of military operations.”

Saudi Arabia has insisted its campaign in Yemen is being waged "in accordance with international humanitarian law, in a legitimate war of self defence, in a legitimate war to defend the legitimate government of Yemen".

Mr Brake said the latest revelation emphasised the urgent need for strict rules to require the Foreign Secretary to sign off personally any arms sales to countries such as Saudi Arabia.

His plan would see all 28 countries on the Foreign Office’s "countries of concern" list – which also includes China and Russia – denied arms without proof there was “no risk they’ll be used in human rights abuses”.

Mr Brake announced plans to bring forward a backbench Bill, hoping to win the support of both Labour and the Scottish National party for the crackdown. ●

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Yemen: Armed Conflict:Written question - 46338

Q

Asked by [Tom Brake](#) (Carshalton and Wallington)

Asked on: 14 September 2016

Ministry of Defence

Yemen: Armed Conflict

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the UK-supplied weapons are which are known to have been used in Yemen since January 2015.

 46338

A

Answered by: [Sir Michael Fallon](#)

Answered on: 13 October 2016

As at 12 October 2016 the following UK-supplied precision-guided weapons have been used in Yemen: Paveway, PGM500 (also known as the Hakim 2), Dual Mode Brimstone and Storm Shadow, along with ALARM (anti-radiation missiles).

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Yemen: Armed Conflict: Written question - 46337

Q

Asked by [Tom Brake](#) (Carshalton and Wallington)

Asked on: 14 September 2016

Ministry of Defence

 46337

Yemen: Armed Conflict

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the location and timing was of each known use of UK-supplied weapons in Yemen since January 2015.

A

Answered by: [Michael Fallon](#)

Answered on: 12 October 2016

The location and timing of weapons used in Yemen is a matter for the Saudi-led Coalition to comment on.

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Outrageous attack on funeral makes international investigation into Yemen even more vital – Zeid

GENEVA (10 October 2016) – Describing the attack on a funeral in Sana’a on Saturday as “outrageous”, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein on Monday reiterated his urgent call for an independent, international inquiry into alleged violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the country.

“Since the beginning of this conflict in Yemen, weddings, marketplaces, hospitals, schools – and now mourners at a funeral – have been hit, resulting in massive civilian casualties and zero accountability for those responsible,” the High Commissioner said. “This deadly attack comes just weeks after the UN Human Rights Council, for the second year in a row, dismissed my call to take decisive action to create an international, independent investigative body to look into extremely serious alleged violations of international law, including possible war crimes, in Yemen. The Human Rights Council’s inability to take decisive action by setting up an international investigation is contributing to a climate of impunity, and violations continue to occur on a regular basis. Such outrageous attacks cannot be allowed to continue.”

According to eyewitness testimony, hospital records and other information gathered by UN Human Rights staff, two airstrikes, about seven to eight minutes apart, hit the packed Al Kubra hall in Sana’a on Saturday afternoon. Hundreds of people were gathered at the well-known community hall for the funeral of the father of a senior official. It is unclear how many people were present but the hall has a capacity of up to 1,000 people. Witnesses described a hall packed with families, including children. A large number of political and military leaders affiliated with the Houthis and former president Saleh were among those present, and many were killed.

“The international community has a legal and moral duty to react robustly to the increasingly horrific levels of civilian casualties in Yemen, just as it has in many other situations,” Zeid said. “We take note of the recent letter sent by Saudi Arabia to the Security Council indicating its readiness to take corrective and appropriate measures to ensure accountability, including the release of the results of the ongoing investigations into this incident, in the near future.”

In total, since March 2015, at least 4,125 civilians have been killed and 7,207 injured in Yemen. The number of casualties has risen dramatically since the collapse of the cessation of hostilities agreement in August. During September 2016, 379 civilians were killed and injured. Already, in just the first ten days of October, the rate has tripled - with 369 civilian casualties. High Commissioner Zeid expressed serious concern that this latest incident could lead to a further escalation of hostilities and another steep

increase in civilian casualties.

High Commissioner Zeid also called on all States contributing to the conduct of hostilities in Yemen in any way to seriously reconsider their support to the parties to the conflict. He urged all sides to resume dialogue and to work towards a sustainable ceasefire.

ENDS

*For more information and **media requests**, please contact please contact Cécile Pouilly (+41 22 917 9310 / cpouilly@ohchr.org) or Ravina Shamdasani (+41 22 917 9169 / rshamdasani@ohchr.org) or Liz Throssell (+41 22 917 9466/ ethrossell@ohchr.org)*

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