

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0533

March 2, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
U.S. Department of Defense
1300 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Kerry and Secretary Carter:

Thank you for your distinguished service and dedication to our nation. I am writing with regards to U.S. involvement in the Saudi Arabia-led Coalition (“Coalition”) airstrikes in Yemen, which according to recent reports has led to thousands of civilian casualties. I have serious questions about the Coalition’s operational conduct, the U.S.’s involvement with the Coalition, and the U.S. national security interests driving our actions in Yemen.

On September 29, 2015, I sent a letter to Gen. Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressing my concerns about media reports that Coalition airstrikes in Yemen—which have been supported by U.S. refueling, logistical assistance, intelligence and weapons—had demonstrated a trend of indiscriminate airstrikes that had resulted in widespread civilian casualties in homes, hospitals, schools, and mosques. In subsequent classified briefings with the Departments of State and Defense, I was left with the impression that the situation was going to improve.

Media and NGO reports since that time suggest that the Coalition’s conduct has not changed. A report released this week from Human Rights Watch accuses Coalition forces of airdropping cluster bombs on residential neighborhoods in Yemen’s capital, Sanaa, on January 6, 2016.¹ The Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary General has previously stated that the incident “may amount to a war crime.”²

¹ “Yemen: Coalition Drops Cluster Bombs in Capital.” Human Rights Watch. 7 Jan 2016.

<<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/07/yemen-coalition-drops-cluster-bombs-capital-0>>

² “Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Yemen.” United Nations. 7 Jan 2016.

<<http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=9370>>

Only days later, a Doctors Without Borders medical facility, Shiara hospital, was reportedly hit by a projectile, killing four civilians.¹ Just last week, airstrikes on a market in the Nehm district of Sanaa reportedly killed 40 people, primarily civilians.²

Having served on active duty in the U.S. Air Force, and as a graduate of Air War College, I understand that in the fog of war no battle plan will be executed perfectly. While both sides have been accused of abuses, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Raad al-Hussein, has said that a “disproportionate” number of attacks on civilians have come from the Saudi-led Coalition.³ As I previously wrote to Gen. Dunford, however, the apparent indiscriminate airstrikes on civilian targets in Yemen seem to suggest that either the Coalition is grossly negligent in its targeting or is intentionally targeting innocent civilians. For a U.S.-supported Coalition, both of these scenarios are wholly unacceptable. Last week, the European Parliament responded to the Coalition’s conduct in Yemen by voting for a European Union-wide arms export embargo against Saudi Arabia.⁴

I request that the Departments of State and Defense confirm the accuracy of these recent reports and provide an assessment as to whether the indiscriminate nature of the Coalition’s operations and the targeting of civilians have significantly changed since October 2015.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



TED W. LIEU
Member of Congress
House Oversight & Government Reform Committee
Subcommittee on National Security

¹ Henderson, Emma. “MSF hospital bombing amid Saudi-led airstrikes in Yemen prompts outrage over ‘worrying pattern of attacks to essential medical services.’” *The Independent*. 10 Jan 2016. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/msf-hospital-bombing-saudi-led-airstrikes-yemen-outrage-worrying-pattern-attacks-essential-medical-a6804796.html>>

² Patel, Romil. “40 Civilians Killed in Saudi Arabia Air Strikes on Yemeni Market.” *International Business Times*. 27 February 2016. <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/40-civilians-killed-saudi-arabia-air-strikes-yemeni-market-1546417>>

³ Anna, Cara. “UN: Most Attacks on Yemen Civilians from Saudi-led coalition.” Associated Press. 22 December 2015. <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/a538db45afe14ef1b28e1511a90b7267/un-most-attacks-yemen-civilians-saudi-led-coalition>>

⁴ Stone, Jon. “European Parliament Votes for EU-wide Arms Export Embargo Against Saudi Arabia.” *The Independent*. 25 February 2016. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/saudi-arabia-arms-export-embargo-european-parliament-eu-wide-arms-export-embargo-uk-a6895226.html>>