



Justice4Yemen Pact
ميثاق العدالة لليمن

INFORMATIONAL BRIEF

OCTOBER 2023

Attack on al-Hamma IDP Camp During the Battle for Marib



Introduction

By December 2021, Houthi forces were nearly two years into their campaign to capture oil-rich Marib governorate from the internationally recognized government of Yemen and had reached the outskirts of Marib city. Previous rounds of fighting between the Houthis and government had caused widespread civilian displacements, which accelerated in the final months of the year as front lines rapidly shifted. The IOM reported on November 24, 2021 that more than 45,000 people in Marib had been displaced since September, many of them for the fourth or fifth time.¹ A documented pattern of Houthi artillery attacks on heavily populated areas, including IDP camps, contributed to these mass civilian displacements,² while statements by Houthi officials appeared to justify attacking IDP camps by claiming they were havens of military and terrorist activity.

Within this context, on December 9, 2021, two missiles struck the al-Hamma camp for internally displaced people on Marib city's southern outskirts, injuring a woman and her four children. In the aftermath of the attack many camp residents fled. The al-Hamma camp attack is therefore emblematic of the indirect harms that resulted from the repeated attacking of IDP camps during the battle for Marib—i.e., the mass displacement of

About the Yemen Human Rights Forensics Lab Plus (YHRFL+)

The goal of the Yemen Human Rights Forensics Lab Plus (YHRFL+) program is to increase recognition and protection of human rights in Yemen by empowering Yemeni civil society to champion justice and accountability through human rights documentation, reporting, and advocacy efforts. The YHRFL+ program is working to systematically document, preserve, corroborate, analyze, and report on evidence, obtained from a variety of sources, of human rights violations committed by all parties involved in the Yemeni conflict. Results of this analysis are summarized and presented in a series of investigative reports focusing on specific identified incidents of human rights violations. YHRFL+ also support efforts by Yemeni CSO partners to carry out strategic advocacy, community outreach, and victim and survivor engagement interventions locally and internationally.

About Justice4Yemen Pact Coalition

The Justice4Yemen Pact is a coalition of human rights organizations and civil society actors that are united for the promotion and protection of human rights in Yemen. The coalition's mission is to advocate for the rights of all Yemeni people, particularly those who are most vulnerable and marginalized. The coalition is committed to addressing the systemic human rights violations that have been plaguing Yemen through years of conflict and violence. The Justice4Yemen Pact works to empower Yemeni people to claim their rights, raise awareness of violations, and advocate for justice and accountability at local, national, and international levels. The Justice4Yemen Pact is guided by the principles of respect for human dignity, equality, justice, and non-discrimination. The coalition believes that by working together, its members can end impunity, provide meaningful support and redress for victims, and contribute to a more peaceful, just, and prosperous future for Yemen.

¹ "Alarming Rise in People at Risk Amid Ongoing Hostilities in Yemen's Ma'rib: IOM," IOM, November 24, 2021, <https://yemen.iom.int/news/alarming-rise-people-risk-amid-ongoing-hostilities-yemens-marib-iom>

² "Yemen: Houthis Attacking Displaced People's Camps," Human Rights Watch, March 23, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/23/yemen-houthis-attacking-displaced-peoples-camps>

vulnerable civilians amidst a dire humanitarian situation. An analysis of the flight trajectory of one of the munitions used in the al-Hamma camp attack, which is visible in contemporary news reports, indicates that it was likely fired from an area controlled by the Houthis.

The al-Hamma camp was easily distinguishable as a civilian object at the time of attack, as it contained makeshift shelters housing internally displaced people and a clearly marked IOM building. The nearest military point appears to have been located approximately 1.4km away. The attack thus violated the principle of distinction, the cornerstone of international humanitarian law (IHL) which requires warring parties to distinguish between military and civilian targets, and refrain from targeting civilian people or objects. The attack also likely violated the IHL principles of precaution and proportionality as no efforts were made to reduce harm to civilians or warn potential civilian victims.

There is ample open-source documentation, including three contemporaneous news reports,³ that show the al-Hamma camp was a clearly marked civilian object at the time of attack; that civilians were wounded in the attack; and that afterwards, many camp residents fled. The YHRFL+ program relied on these open sources for the present report as well as analysis from a team of open-source researchers who asked to remain anonymous. In addition, the YHRFL+ program interviewed a relative of the victims who was present during the strike, as well as Khalid al-Shajani, deputy head of The Executive Unit for IDP Camps Management in Marib, the Yemeni government agency that administers Marib camps. YHRFL+ thanks the Marib Dam Foundation for Social Development (MDF) for facilitating contact with interviewees.

Incident Summary

Casualties and material damage

In the early hours of December 9, 2021,⁴ two missiles struck the al-Hamma IDP camp. Managed by IOM, the camp is located in Marib's al-Wadi district and was home to roughly 1,500 people at the time of the attack.⁵ One of the missiles landed near a makeshift shelter, propelling shrapnel into the shelter and injuring four children and their mother.

The mother suffered shrapnel wounds to her arm and thigh, she told al-Arabiya on December 9, 2021 (*right*). Her children suffered various shrapnel wounds, and one of them,



Victim shows her wounded arm and says four of her children were injured in the missile attack. Source: Al-Arabiya

³ "Houthi Fire Hits IDP Camps in Mareb," Independent Arabia, December 10, 2021, <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/284571/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A/%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AE%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%A8#Echobox=1639144156>; "The al-Hamma IDP Camp Which Houthi Militias Targeted with Two Ballistic Missiles," Al-Hadath, YouTube, December 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4vJhD7RRPM>; "Terrifying Houthi Bombardment on the al-Hamma IDP Camp in Mareb at Dawn," al-Arabiya, YouTube December 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hnTDcLpnag>

⁴ Victims and witnesses interviewed in the three contemporaneous news reports provided estimates of the time of impact ranging from 2:30am to 3:00am.

⁵ "Children Among Five Civilians Injured in Missile Attack on IOM-Managed Displacement Site in Yemen," IOM, December 9, 2021, <https://www.iom.int/news/children-among-five-civilians-injured-missile-attack-iom-managed-displacement-site-yemen>

an eight-year-old girl, was critically injured, according to a relative present during the attack. All victims survived, although pieces of shrapnel are still embedded in their bodies, the relative told YHRFL+ in a July 2023 interview.

Pictures published in a field report by The Executive Unit for IDP Camps Management show the adult victim, as well as the critically injured child receiving medical treatment after the attack (right).⁶



Adult and child victim visible in Executive Unit for IDP Camps Management report

Stills from three contemporaneous news reports show a V-shaped blood stain on a rug in the shelter's interior, where the children were sleeping at the time of the attack:



V-shaped blood stain on a rug in the structure's interior, in al-Arabiya (left), al-Hadath (center), and Independent Arabia (right) reports

As for material damage, “the metal fence they were [living] in was totally destroyed, none of the household items, furnishings, and containers they put their belongings in were useable anymore, and a number of their goats were injured by shrapnel,” said the relative interviewed by YHRFL+. Stills from news reports show small holes in the structure's exterior, and a cooking pot with a small hole:



Damage to the structure's exterior visible in the al-Arabiya (left) and al-Hadath (center) reports. A person is seen holding up a pot damaged by shrapnel in the Independent Arabia (right) report

⁶ “The Targeting of an IDP Camp (al-Hamma Camp, Marib Governorate),” Executive Unit for IDPs Camp Management, December 10, 2021, https://www.exuye.org/cmlib/uploads/2021/12/exuye-org-2021-12-12_18-41-14_691334.pdf

Attack prompts displacement from al-Hamma IDP Camp

Several camp residents interviewed in news reports at the time said they were planning to flee because of the attack; al-Arabiya filmed a man as he was loading his belongings into his car to leave (*top right*).⁷

Satellite imagery shows that many makeshift shelters disappeared from the al-Hamma camp between November 2021, and December 17, 2021, eight days after the attack, indicating that camp residents left (*middle and bottom right*).

"They totally vacated the area," said Khalid al-Shajani, deputy head of the Executive Unit for IDP Camps Management in Marib, referring to the al-Hamma Camp residents. "Later families returned, in stages. The number of families today is more than 250 families...but some of the current residents are different from the initial ones [present during the attack.] Some of those initial residents settled in the wadi, some in Marib city, whereas others returned to al-Hamma."

Perpetrator of the Attack

A team of open-source researchers, who wished to remain anonymous, analyzed the remains of the missile that landed approximately 90m from the makeshift shelter visible in contemporary news reports. The team concluded that the direction of the fire was likely from an area controlled by the Houthis [See Appendix A].

Additional documentation of munitions fragments from the attack, particularly from the second missile that is not visible in existing open-source accounts, could provide greater certainty as to the perpetrator. It should be noted that the munition fragment visible in news reports appears to be a BM-21 Grad missile, which is used by all warring parties in Yemen.



Man loads car following al-Hamma Camp attack. Source: Al-Arabiya



Satellite imagery from November 2021. Source: Google Earth



Satellite imagery from December 17, 2021, showing camp structures have disappeared a week after the missile strike. Source: Google Earth

⁷ "Terrifying Houthi Bombardment on the al-Hamma IDP Camp in Mareb at Dawn," al-Arabiya, YouTube, December 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hnTDcLpnag>

Residents say Houthis to blame, referencing pattern of IDP camp attacks

Residents of the al-Hamma camp said in contemporaneous news interviews the Houthis were behind the attack. “This is our fourth displacement, every time we flee to a new place another Houthi missile reaches us,” a resident named Naji told Independent Arabia.⁸ “They might target us again. They’re looking for IDPs, looking for them to hit,” resident Salem told al-Arabiya.⁹

These interviewees were referring to a documented pattern of Houthi strikes on IDP camps during the battle for Marib.¹⁰ “From mid-2020 to the end of 2021, 46 IDP camps were targeted” by Houthi forces, said Khalid al-Shajani, deputy head of the Executive Unit for IDP Camps Management in Marib. “These camps were hit with artillery fire, ballistic missiles, even drones...women and children were killed, and injured—most camp residents are women and children, as well as the elderly.” Houthi officials issued a series of statements in March and April 2021 that appeared to justify strikes on IDP camps by claiming they were havens of military and terrorist activity (see Appendix C).

Apparent Breaches of International Law

Failure to distinguish clearly marked civilian object

The al-Hamma camp attack violated the principle of distinction, the cornerstone of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) that dictates certain people and objects enjoy protection against attacks during armed conflict by nature of their civilian status. All parties to an armed conflict are responsible for distinguishing between military and civilian targets and refraining from targeting civilian people or objects. Rule 7 of the Customary Rules of Humanitarian Law (ICRC) states that all civilian objects are protected from attack unless and only for such time as they are military objectives.¹¹

At the time of the December 9, 2021, missile attack, the al-Hamma IDP camp was easily distinguishable as a civilian object. The camp contained makeshift shelters housing internally displaced people, as well as a clearly marked IOM building (*right*). IOM employees had provided residents with shelter, essential relief items and water, sanitation and hygiene services since 2019.¹² “Families have fled for their lives and come to this site to seek safety from ongoing hostilities. Civilians should never be a target,” IOM Yemen’s Chief of Mission, Christa Rottensteiner, was quoted as saying in an IOM press release after the strike.¹³



IOM building clearly visible in the al-Hamma camp. Source: Al-Arabiya

⁸ “Houthi Fire Hits IDP Camps in Mareb,” Independent Arabia, December 10, 2021, <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/284571/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A/%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AE%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%A8#Echobox=1639144156>

⁹ “Terrifying Houthi Bombardment on the al-Hamma IDP Camp in Mareb at Dawn,” al-Arabiya, YouTube, December 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hnTDcLpnag>

¹⁰ “Yemen: Houthi Attacking Displaced People’s Camps,” Human Rights Watch, March 23, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/23/yemen-houthi-attacking-displaced-peoples-camps>; “Report on the Targeting of IDP Camps and Gatherings in Marib,” Ex.U.IDPs, March 22, 2021, <https://www.exuye.org/287>

¹¹ Rule 7, International Humanitarian Law Database, ICRC, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule7#:~:text=armed%20conflicts%20interpretation-Rule%207,.be%20directed%20against%20civilian%20objects>

¹² “Children Among Five Civilians Injured in Missile Attack on IOM-Managed Displacement Site in Yemen,” IOM, December 9, 2021, <https://www.iom.int/news/children-among-five-civilians-injured-missile-attack-iom-managed-displacement-site-yemen>

¹³ Ibid.

Google Earth satellite imagery dated November 30, 2021, nine days before the strike, shows the nearest apparent military site—including vehicles, earthen berms, and a cannon—was located approximately 1.4km south of the IDP camp (right).

Failure to observe proportionality and precaution

Even if the IDP camp had been the site of overt or covert conflict-related activity, all parties to the conflict in Yemen are additionally bound by the foundational customary concepts of proportionality and precaution. When targeting a military object, any attack must be proportional in terms of the advantage gained by the attack compared to the harm caused to civilians and must observe precautions to prevent unnecessary civilian harm. In this case, the attack caused multiple casualties as well as indirect harm to all civilians who left the camp. These civilian impacts indicate that even in the case the camp was a valid military target, the attack would likely be in violation of the IHL principles of proportionality and precaution because there were no efforts made to reduce harm to civilians or warn potential civilian victims.



Satellite images taken 9 days before the bombing show what appears to be a military site at the top of the hill (Al-Hamma), 1.4 km from the shelters damaged in the Al-Hamma IDP camp. Source: Google Earth

Recommendations

To the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**:

- Investigate the documented pattern of indiscriminate Houthi attacks on IDP camps during the battle for Marib and determine an appropriate course of action for accountability and redress.

To the **UN agencies, INGOs, and Yemeni NGOs working with displaced people in Marib**:

- Identify victims of attacks on IDP camps during the battle for Marib and refer them to appropriate medical and psychosocial support services. The al-Hamma Camp IDP attack illustrates that victims may have pressing medical needs years after the initial attack, including shrapnel embedded in their bodies.

To the **international and Yemeni NGOs working on human rights documentation in Yemen**:

- Train field researchers to safely preserve evidence in the immediate aftermath of an attack suspected to be illegal under international law—such as photos of untouched munition remnants—to establish patterns of such attacks by perpetrator, geography, and time frame.

Contact

Info@justice4yemenpact.org

Appendix A – Analysis of Missile Trajectory

The following analysis was provided by a team of open-source researchers who asked to remain anonymous:

The missile's penetration angle, as seen in the Independent Arabia video (*right*), appears to have an inclination that indicates the angle of arrival from two different directions. By watching this explanatory video,¹⁴ which is a cropped version of the original footage, it is possible to understand how the missile penetrated the ground and the direction from which it originated. Additionally, the video can help determine the north direction. Based on this non-specialized analysis and supported by shots from a clear angle, it is highly likely that the missile came from the western or southwestern direction.

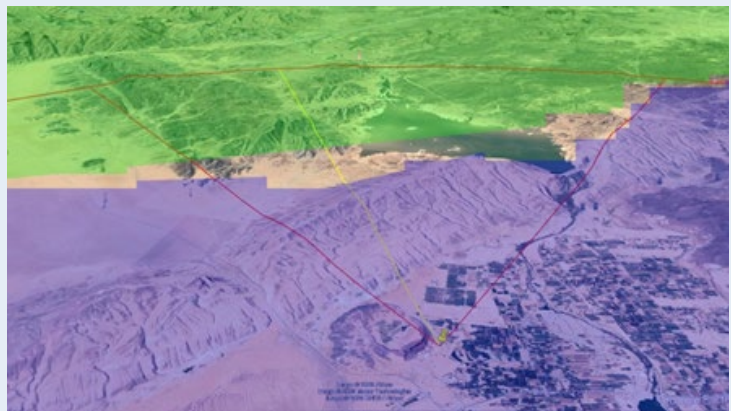


When a circle is defined from the missile's potential fall site with a radius of 21 kilometres (the maximum range of the Grad missile), the yellow path represents the closest launch possibility within the possible arrival triangle. As the image below shows, the direction of the fire was likely coming from the green area, controlled by the Houthis.

Purple: Area controlled by government forces

Green: Area controlled by Ansar Allah Houthi forces

Areas of control based on this contemporaneous analysis¹⁵ of the battle for Marib



¹⁴ Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Kn7v9UjVrSJ_x6w5mJgK0mvrSiy_QBFd/view

¹⁵ "Al-Balaq al-Sharqi, 8-12-2021," Wars and Maps Abduljabbar, YouTube, December 8, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21O6VEYKc_I

Appendix B - Analysis of Missile Type

The following analysis was provided by a team of open-source researchers who asked to remain anonymous:

The shape of the munition remains, as visible in the Al-Arabiya video,¹⁶ indicates that it belonged to a BM-21 Grad missile, as the distinctive shape behind the remaining iron rod matches the installation location of the Grad missile's fan blades:



¹⁶ "Terrifying Houthi Bombardment on the al-Hamma IDP Camp in Mareb at Dawn," al-Arabiya, YouTube, December 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hnTDcLpnag>

Appendix C – Statements from Houthi Officials Appearing to Justify the Targeting of IDP Camps

Statement #1 by Mohammad Abdul-Salam, Spokesman for the Houthi Movement, March 31, 2021

 محمد عبدالسلام
@abdusalamalah

لانحطاط نفسياتهم مع انهيار مواقعهم مرتزقة العدوان في مارب ومعهم عناصر القاعدة وداعش يتمترسون بمخيمات النازحين ويضعونهم في المقدمة لحماية المعسكرات في الخلف. إنهم وتحالف العدوان من ورائهم يتحملون كامل المسؤولية عن هذا التصرف الجبان وعن هكذا سلوك إجرامي أرعن

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6:59 AM · Mar 31, 2021

1,081 Reposts 101 Quotes 3,459 Likes 2 Bookmarks

“Due to their collapsing morale as their military positions fall, the Aggression’s mercenaries in Marib, alongside elements from al-Qaida and ISIS, are entrenching themselves in IDP camps and putting [the camp residents] at the front to protect their military bases in back. They, and the Aggression Coalition that supports them, bear the full responsibility for this cowardly act and careless criminal behavior.”

Statement #2 by Hussein al-Izzi, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Houthi Movement, March 31, 2021

 حسين العزّي
@hussinalezzi5

في سقوط أخلاقي وإنساني مروّع تسمح الأمم المتحدة للقاعدة وعلي محسن وميليشيات مايسمى حزب الإصلاح باتخاذ النازحين دروعاً بشرية إنهم ينصبون متارسمهم في اوساط المخيمات ويمنعون النازحين من المغادرة إلى مكان آمن بينما تلوذ الأمم المتحدة بالصمت تجاه هذه الفعل المنحط والجبان

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7:24 AM · Mar 31, 2021

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“A terrifying humanitarian and moral failure—the UN allows al-Qaida and Ali Muhsin and the militias of what’s called the Islah party to take displaced people as human shields. They are building barricades in the middle of the camps and preventing displaced people from leaving to a safe place. Whereas the UN is silent about this degenerate and cowardly act.”

Statement #3 by Adul Qader al-Murtada, head of the National Council for Detainees’ Affairs, March 31, 2021

 عبدالقادر المرتضى
@abdulqadermortd

تتمترس مرتزقة العدوان في جبهة مأرب بمخيمات النازحين وتحولها دروع بشرية لحماية معسكراتهم عمل إجرامي ومنحط. لكنه لن يوقف تقدم أبطال الجيش واللجان الشعبية. فمن إستطاعوا حماية صنعاء وأهلها في قننة عفّاش سيحمي هذه المخيمات ومن فيها..

[#مارب_تتحرر](#)

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11:52 AM · Mar 31, 2021

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“The Aggression’s mercenaries on the Marib front are entrenching themselves in displaced people’s camps and turning them [inhabitants] into human shields to protect their military bases, a criminal and depraved act.

But it will not stop the progress of the heroes of the army and the popular committees.

Those who were able to protect Sana’a and its people from the discord of Afash will protect these camps and whoever is inside them.”

#Marib is liberated”

Statement #4 by Abdul Muhsin Tawus, Secretary General of the High Council for Administering and Coordinating Humanitarian Affairs, April 2, 2021

 **ابوعادل طاووس**
@MohsenTawoos


اقدام تحالف العدوان ومرتزقته على التمترس في مخيمات إيداء الرء والخلفان والسويداء ومخيم الميل بمارب وتحويلها إلى ثكنات عسكرية واستخدام النازحين كدروع بشرية ومنعهم من الخروج إلى مناطق أكثر اماناً بعيدة عن مناطق الاشتباكات. تصرف اجرامي ينتهك المواثيق الدولية والانسانية

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1:50 PM · Apr 2, 2021

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“The Aggression and their mercenaries’ entrenchment in the camps of Idat al-Rah and al-Khalfan and al-Suwayda and al-Mil in Marib, and turning these camps into military barracks and using IDPs as human shields, and preventing them from reaching safer areas far from the clashes, is a criminal act that violates international humanitarian accords.

 **ابوعادل طاووس**
@MohsenTawoos

ندعو الامم المتحدة والمنظمات الدولية للتدخل العاجل والعمل على فتح ممرات إنسانية آمنة لخروج النازحين وإنقاذ حياتهم. وتدارك الكارثة التي قد تطال النازحين من قبل تحالف العدوان. كون المخيمات أصبحت ثكنات عسكرية لتحالف العدوان ومرتزقته،

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2:27 PM · Apr 2, 2021

We call on the UN and international organizations to intervene swiftly and work to open safe humanitarian corridors for IDPs to exit, to save their lives, and prevent the disaster that’s impacting IDPs because of the Aggression coalition. Seeing as the camps have become military barracks for the Aggression and its mercenaries.”