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'Unprecedented' civilian death toll in Yemen from US air strikes in 2025

Report says two months of bombing in 2025 resulted in almost as many civilian deaths as prior 23 years of US strikes



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A woman visits a graveyard on the first day of the Muslim Eid al-Adha festival in Sanaa on 6 June (AFP/Mohammed Huwais)

Alex MacDonald (/users/alex-macdonald)

Published date: 18 June 2025 10:52 BST | Last update: 9 months 3 weeks ago

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US (/countries/us) air strikes on Yemen

(<https://www.middleeasteye.net/countries/yemen>) have led to an "unprecedented" death toll in the country, according to a new report by a monitoring group.

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- US (/countries/us)
- Yemen

The report (<https://en.rump-yemen.airwars.org/operation-rough-rider>) suggests Trump's military campaign has killed almost as many civilians in 52 days as in the previous 23 years of US military action against Yemen.

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Trump, who prior to his election had promised an end to US involvement in Middle Eastern wars, has been backing Israeli attacks against Iran in recent days and ordered attacks against Yemen's Ansar Allah, commonly known as the Houthis.

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Between the first recorded US strike in Yemen in 2002 until the beginning of Trump's Operation Rough Rider campaign in March 2025, Airwars tracked at least 258 civilians allegedly killed by US actions.

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In just two months of bombing this year, which ended with a ceasefire in May, Airwars documented at least 224 civilians in Yemen killed by American air strikes.

Although the US claimed it was only trying to undermine the Houthis' military capabilities, Airwars said the high civilian casualty rate was increasingly becoming the norm in conflicts in the region.

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In January one attack on 17 April the US struck Ras Isa Port on the Red Sea, allegedly killing at least 84 civilians, including first responders from the Yemeni Red Crescent Society and Civil Defence (Yemen).

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children were amongst those killed.

Airwars executive director Emily Tripp told Middle East Eye it was crucial not to lose sight of the civilian victims of escalating warfare at a time of geopolitical strife. [Show details >](#)

"The news agenda is generally stacked against the stories of civilians in war - but how and where civilians were killed in Yemen is so important to understand, especially as the US is poised to intervene across the region," she said.

"The US is one of the most powerful militaries in the world - it sets the tone and the norms of war. If we don't pay attention to this deadly campaign, how can we hold our governments to account in the face of future escalation?"

Trump announced in May that in exchange for the US ceasing air strikes on Yemen, the Ansar Allah administration had agreed to stop attacking vessels travelling in the Red Sea, which it said it was doing in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza.

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The Yemeni group had targeted what it said were Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea since November 2023, and said that despite the ceasefire on attacks on Israel-linked ships

(<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2599873/middle-east>) and territory

(<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/7/yemens-houthis-say-attacks-on-israel-not-in-ceasefire-deal-in-any-way>) would continue.

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Wes Bryant, a US Special Operations veteran, told Airwars it was unlikely the administration had undertaken sufficient civilian harm mitigation measures during the Yemen campaign.

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“[For] each and every strike, there should be an equally weighted effort in civilian harm mitigation fitting with all of the doctrine and standards that we already have in place in the targeting process -

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from planning characterisation of the civilian environment before execution, to execution of the actual strike while in process,” said Bryant, who is also the former branch chief of civilian harm

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assessment at the Pentagon.

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“I'd say [it is] a near impossibility to do the level of civilian harm mitigation we've seen in other campaigns with this high intensity of a strike campaign in such densely populated urban areas with, again, no actual partner forces on the ground and very limited source intelligence on the ground.”

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The US also backed an air campaign launched by Saudi Arabia in 2015 against the Houthis, in support of the internationally recognised government, that killed tens of thousands of civilians. The war has largely ceased since a truce and prisoner exchanges in 2022.

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