

June 4, 2025 12:30AM EDT | News Release

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Yemen: US Strikes on Port an Apparent War Crime

April Attack Killed 80 Civilians; Aid Delivery Hindered



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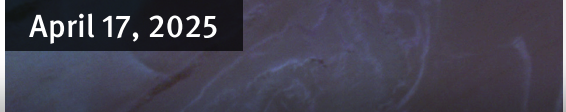
Human Rights Watch identified via satellite imagery multiple attack sites. The independent research group [Airwars](#) found that the strikes [killed 84 civilians](#) and injured over 150.

“The US government’s decision to strike Ras Issa Port, a critical entry point for aid in Yemen, while hundreds of workers were present demonstrates a callous disregard for civilians’ lives,” said [Niku Jafarnia](#), Yemen and Bahrain researcher at Human Rights Watch. “At a time when the majority of Yemenis don’t have adequate access to food and water, the attack’s impact on humanitarian aid could be enormous, particularly after Trump administration aid cutbacks.”

Sources in Yemen said that the Houthis have threatened and [reportedly arrested](#) people from areas hit by US strikes for speaking to the media or nongovernmental organizations, making it difficult to verify information about the strikes.

Human Rights Watch interviewed one person whose uncle was killed in the attack and two sources with knowledge of the destruction, including a staff member of Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies, an independent research institute. Human Rights Watch also analyzed satellite imagery, reviewed photographs and videos of the attack site, and assessed data published by the Yemen Data Project, another nongovernmental group, and Airwars. Human Rights Watch wrote to the US Defense Department on May 8 with preliminary findings but received no response.

Based on satellite imagery and other sources, the attacks on Ras Issa took place between the morning of April 17 and the morning of April 18. They destroyed fuel tanks and considerable areas of port infrastructure. Two sources said that several berths, the customs area, and cargo unloading facilities had been severely damaged or destroyed. Both sources said that initially after the attack, the destruction had significantly reduced the port’s operations. Port operations are still limited.



April 17, 2025



April 18, 2025

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April 17, 2025: Image © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. © 2025 Human Rights Watch **April 18, 2025:** Image © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. © 2025 Human Rights Watch

Satellite imagery comparison between the mornings of April 17 and 18, 2025, shows the locations of the strikes on Ras Issa Port. Fuel tanks are visibly destroyed, and possible fuel leaks appear in the sea.

Airwars identified 84 civilians who were killed in the attack through analyzing social media posts. Forty-nine were people who worked at the port, several were truck drivers, and two were civil defense personnel. Others may have been workers' family members. Three were identified as children. The list contained one person identified as a "colonel," but who was not necessarily a military member. The Hodeidah Branch of the government-owned Yemen Oil Company posted photographs of 49 employees they said were killed. Human Rights Watch has not independently verified the identities of those who were killed.

US Central Command said in an April 17 [statement](#) about the attacks: "Today, US forces took action to eliminate this source of fuel for the Iran-backed Houthi terrorists and deprive them of illegal revenue that has funded Houthi efforts to terrorize the entire region for over 10 years. ... The objective of these strikes was to degrade the economic source of power of the Houthis."

A United Nations spokesman [stated](#) that the secretary-general was "alarmed by reports of significant damage to the port infrastructure and of possible oil leaks into the Red Sea," and that at least five humanitarian workers were reportedly injured. In a satellite image collected on the morning of April 18, long trails that appear to be fuel leaks are visible from the location of strikes and extending into the sea.

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No information has been made public indicating that weapons or military supplies were stored at or delivered to the port, or that the oil, monitored under Resolution 2534, was being diverted to the Houthi military, which would make the US attack unlawfully indiscriminate. However, even if the attack were against valid military objectives, the harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure most likely made the attack unlawfully disproportionate. In addition to the civilian casualties, the damage to the port facilities would appear to inflict excessive immediate and longer-term harm for many Yemenis who rely on the Hodeidah ports for survival.

Under [international humanitarian law](#), serious violations of the [laws of war](#) committed by individuals with criminal intent are [war crimes](#). Commanders may be criminally liable under the principle of [command responsibility](#) if they knew or should have known about crimes their subordinates committed and failed to adequately prevent the crime or punish those responsible.

The US should credibly and impartially investigate this and other attacks in Yemen with civilian casualties in apparent violation of the [laws of war](#) and provide prompt compensation or “ex gratia” payments to civilians harmed. These include an April 28 attack on a [migrant detention center](#) in Saada that [killed dozens](#) of migrants and asylum seekers.

US airstrikes in Yemen began on March 15 and continued until May 6, when President Donald Trump [announced an end](#) to the strikes. The US Defense Department said it had carried out over [1,000 strikes](#) in Yemen between March 15 and April 29.

The US has been [implicated](#) in [laws-of-war violations](#) in Yemen since it began “targeted killing operations” in 2002 against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Those strikes continued [until at least 2019](#) and killed many civilians, including 12 people [attending a wedding](#) in 2013. To Human Rights Watch’s knowledge, the US has never acknowledged or provided compensation for civilians harmed in this or other unlawful attacks.

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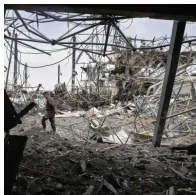
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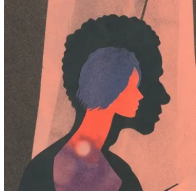
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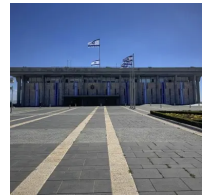
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